



# TRIBAL POLITICS IN IRAN

Rural conflict and the new state, 1921–1941

Stephanie Cronin



## TRIBAL POLITICS IN IRAN

This innovative and important book challenges conventional political and scholarly approaches to understanding tribal politics in the Middle East, taking as its historical focus a country and a period where these politics were a site of intense conflict: Iran under Riza Shah. The book places the ‘tribal problem’ at the centre of Riza Shah’s state-building effort. Taking its cue from approaches developed by social historians such as Eric Hobsbawm, and from the Subaltern Studies school of South Asian history, the book offers a major critique of the elite nationalist version of the nature of the shah’s rule and of the historical role played by the tribal and nomadic populations.

The book challenges the conventional preoccupation with the Tehran regime and its version of modernity, shifting attention to the rural areas, and restores to the rural poor a sense of their own historical agency.

**Stephanie Cronin** is Iran Heritage Foundation Fellow at the University of Northampton. Her current work focuses on subaltern responses to modernity in the Middle East.



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1921–1941*

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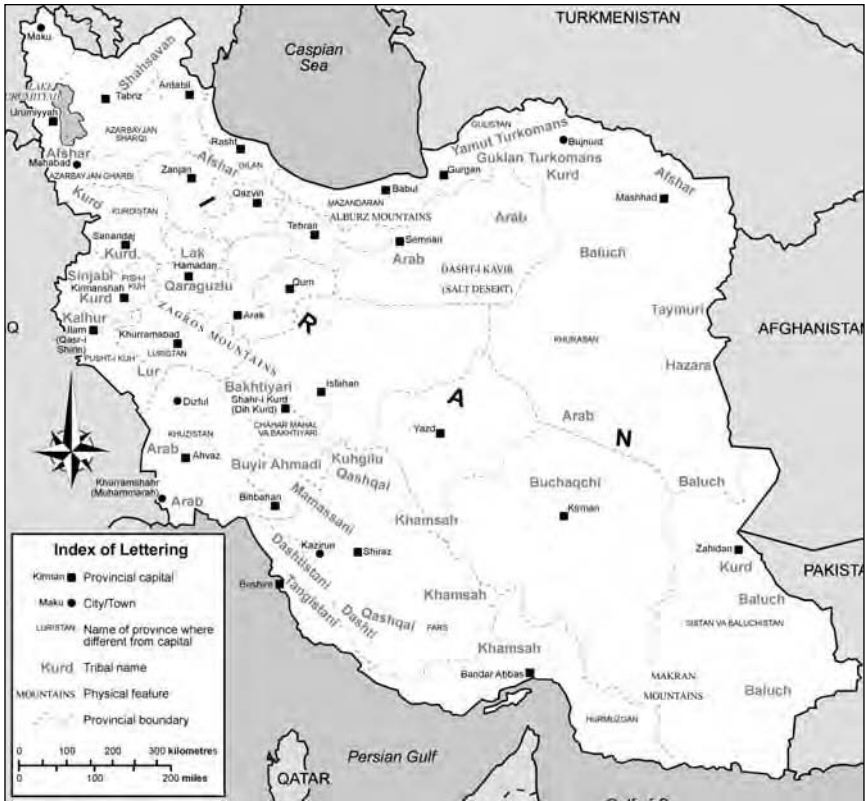
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Naturally, the responsibility for any errors of fact or judgement remains my own.

## Note on transliteration

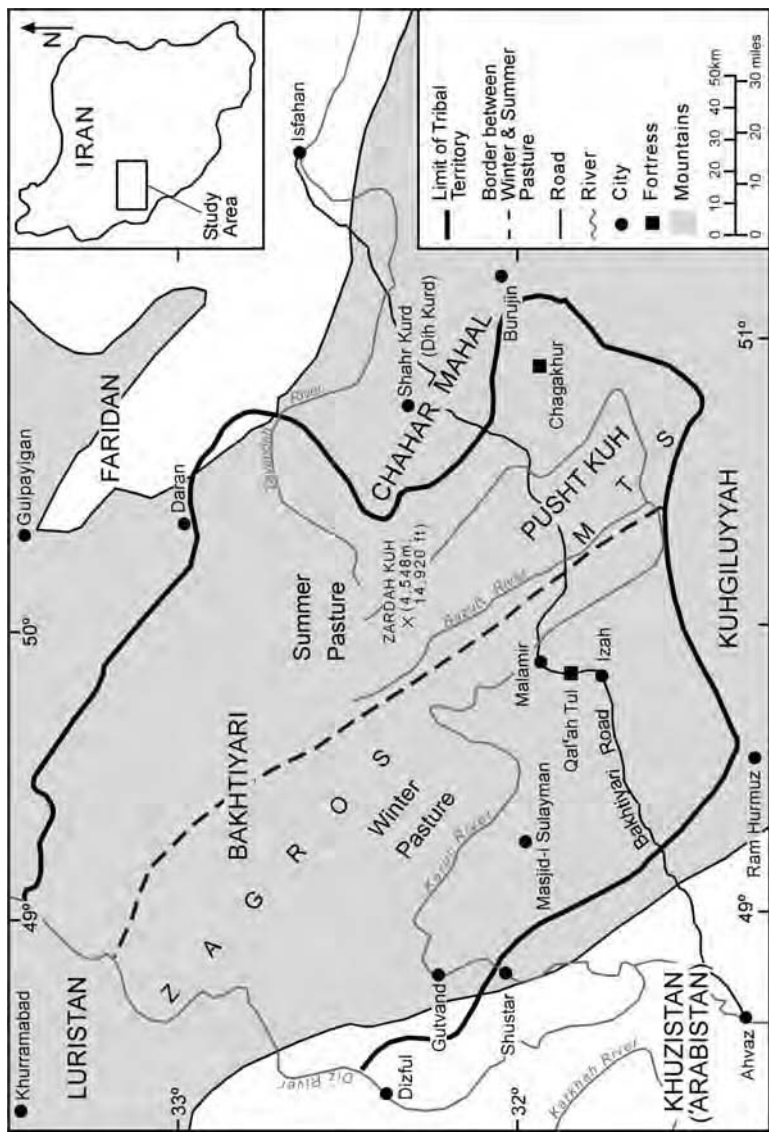
The system of transliteration employed in this book is a simplified version of that recommended by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*.

## MAPS



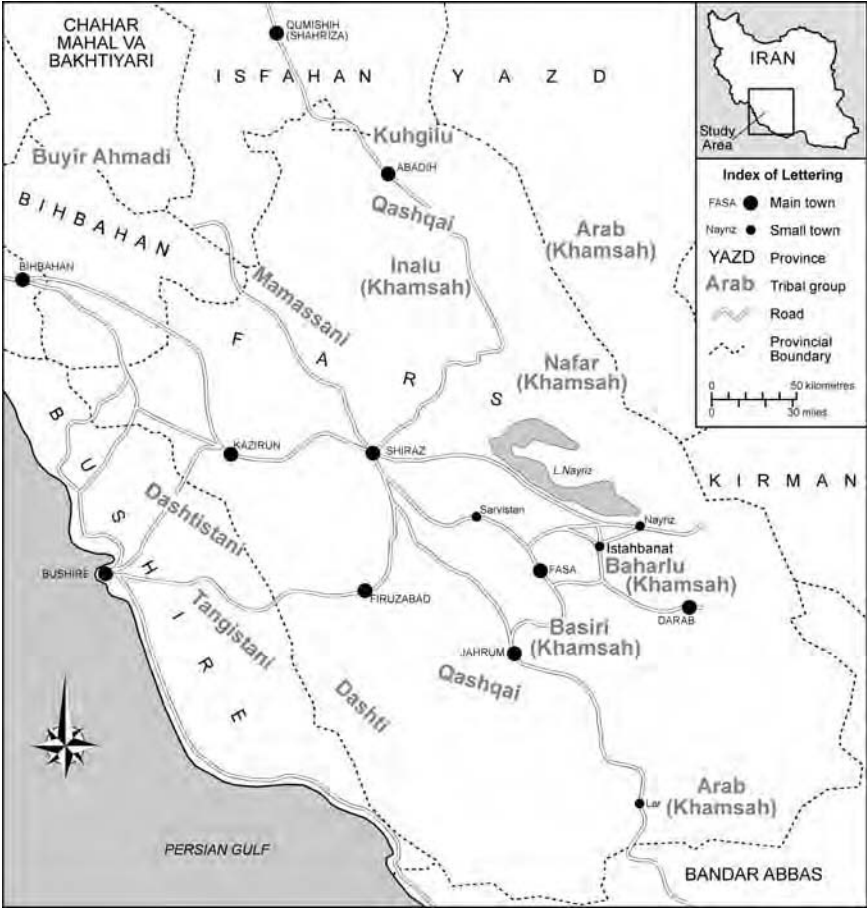
*Map 1* Map of Iran showing locations of principal tribal populations.





Map 2 Map of Bakhtiari. After Gene Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: a documentary analysis of the Bakhtiari in Iran*, Cambridge, 1983.

MAPS



Map 3 Map of Fars.



# GLOSSARY

- ‘adliyyah (vizarat-i ‘adliyyah)** the reformed, secular, ministry of justice  
**agha** a tribal leader, especially among the Kurds  
**amniyyah** rural gendarmerie  
**anjuman** a society, assembly  
**anjuman-i ranjbar** council of toilers, a peasant organization established in Kirman  
**basij** literally ‘mobilization’, a revolutionary militia  
**bastagan** those in receipt of *bastah kashi*  
**bastah kashi** system of cash payments made by khans to their followers  
**bunah** a peasant work team responsible for the cultivation of specified plots of land  
**farman** command, order, charter, decree  
**hakim** administrator, governor  
**hukumat** government  
**Ilbay** paramount chief, chief of an **Il**  
**Il** tribe, tribal confederation  
**ilbaygi** the deputy of an *ilkhani*  
**ilkhani** paramount chief of a tribe or a tribal confederation  
**kadkhuda** headman of village of tribal section, level below *kalantar*  
**kalantar** middle-ranking tribal leader, head of a tribal sub-group, the leading khan of a constituent tribe of a confederation  
**khan** a tribal leader  
**khankhanliq** the time of independent khans  
**khavanin-i buzurg** the great khans (of the Bakhtiyari)  
**khushnishin** village inhabitants lacking *nasaq* rights, usually casual labourers  
**Majlis** national assembly, council  
**maliyyah (vizarat-i maliyyah)** finance ministry  
**mosha’** agricultural cooperative  
**nasaq** a customary right to cultivate a subsistence plot of land  
**pasdaran** revolutionary guards

## GLOSSARY

- pizishk-i mujaz** a traditional physician with a licence to practice
- qiran** pre-1932 unit of currency
- qishlaq** winter quarters, winter pastures
- ra is-i maliyyah** provincial director of finances
- riyal** unit of currency replacing the qiran in 1932
- salam** royal reception
- Sazman-i Ittila 'at va Amniyyat-i Kishvar (SAVAK)** the shah's domestic intelligence and security service
- shabnamah** 'night-letter', anonymous broadsheet posted on city walls or other public places
- shura** council
- Sitarah-i Bakhtiyari** 'Bakhtiyari Star', political organization formed by junior khans of the Bakhtiyari
- tuyul** land grant, immunity from taxation
- ulama** muslim clergy
- vaqf** charitable endowment, usually of land.
- vizarat-i jihad-i sazandigi** ministry for rural development
- White Revolution** collective terms for reforms, especially land reform and female enfranchisement, implemented by Muhammad Riza Shah between 1961 and 1963
- yaylaq** summer quarters, summer pastures
- zakhayir-i inqilab** Treasures of the Revolution

# INTRODUCTION

The recent history of the Middle East shows clearly the continuing importance of tribally based politics. Indeed, such politics have even demonstrated a renewed salience, particularly in countries undergoing political crises such as Iraq and Afghanistan, where modern state structures have been weakened or destroyed and the state-building effort which characterized the twentieth century to some extent reversed. The chapters that follow try, through a series of concrete studies, to illuminate the often neglected or misinterpreted realities of tribal politics, taking as their historical focus an area and a period where these politics were a site of intense conflict: Iran under Riza Shah.

Iran's experience under the first Pahlavi shah is echoed in the histories of many other Middle Eastern countries in the same period. The template of modernization adopted in Iran was typical of the interwar Middle East. Governments of the left and of the right, monarchies and republics, including such diverse regimes as Turkey under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Afghanistan under King Amanullah, Central Asia under the Bolsheviks, even Iraq under the Sharifian officers, all embarked on programmes of authoritarian modernization, characterized by rapid social change and étatiste economic development. All attempted to suppress tribal power, to control nomadism and to extend state power throughout the countryside, and all attempted, to varying degrees, to incubate a society homogeneous and Europeanized in appearance and modern in modes of cultural expression. Iran's experience is of comparative interest also in more specific respects. The transformation of rural elites whereby they lost, abandoned or were deprived of their tribal power base, and became instead absentee landlords dependent on the state, was paralleled in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire which became the modern countries of Syria and Iraq. Similarly, the rise of a younger generation of the elite, eager to experiment with modern political organizations and ideologies, and ready to challenge the leadership of their own parents and the notable class in general, was an experience common to much of the interwar Middle East, notably Palestine, Syria and Iraq.<sup>1</sup>

For the nationalist elite of early Pahlavi Iran, the regime's military successes over tribal opposition, whether real or imagined, were welcomed and celebrated. These successes were interpreted as confirmation of their views of tribal power as hostile to modernity, archaic and outmoded, and of Riza Shah as the deliverer of Iran's national salvation. Their conceptualization of the 'tribal problem' communicated itself, in diluted form, to Western scholarship, which has been largely content to depict Riza Shah's tribal policies as regrettably brutal, but an unavoidable stage in Iran's progress and 'modernization'. The analysis presented below challenges the resulting conventional pieties in a number of ways. Taking its cue from approaches developed by social historians such as Eric Hobsbawm, George Rudé and E. P. Thompson, and from the Subaltern Studies School of South Asian history, it critiques the dominant nationalist version of Iranian tribal politics, a version that appeared in tandem with, and as a product of, modernist ideology in the late nineteenth century, acquired the backing of state power with the rise of the Pahlavi dynasty, endured till the revolution of 1979, and still survives in many quarters.

The 'tribal problem' in early Pahlavi Iran has conventionally been seen as a marginal issue, a matter of security rather than politics. This book, on the contrary, places this 'problem' at the centre of Riza Shah's state-building effort. The necessity of the subordination of the tribal leaderships to the authority of the Iranian state and the transformation of the nomads into settled agriculturalists had been part of mainstream reforming opinion since the nineteenth century. In his adoption of this programme Riza Shah was thus giving effect to long-standing demands of Iranian constitutionalism, and his regime accumulated much popularity on that account, the determination of the new regime to confront the challenge of tribal power contrasting favourably in nationalist eyes with the helplessness of its Qajar predecessor. In this respect Riza Shah's tribal policy may be seen as one element in his broader appropriation of the agenda of Iranian reform, and as constituting an essential thread in the narrative of Iranian secular nationalism elaborated under his auspices.

Although the general prescriptions framing Riza Shah's tribal policy, in particular nomadic settlement, were derived from earlier constitutionalist ideas, the regime's implementation of the policy was novel in several crucial respects.<sup>2</sup> In the character of its political motivation, particularly its desire to achieve specific national goals taking precedence over concern for the improvement of the actual condition of the groups affected, it was in harmony with the broad approach of the earlier reformers.<sup>3</sup> However, although the policy itself was not new, the speed and the methods of its implementation were unprecedented. In this respect, its tribal policy shed a revealing light on the nature of the regime as it passed through its second decade. Like another major reform of the same period, compulsory unveiling, mass nomadic sedentarization was imposed almost overnight and by brute force.

Indeed, the imposition of these two showcase reforms of the 1930s bore many of the same hallmarks. In both cases the regime's use of administrative methods and coercion, its reliance on diktats from the centre, its divorce from the realities on the ground, its indifference to or ignorance of widespread evasion through bribery and the corruption, incompetence or even hostility of local authorities charged with implementation, left a legacy of enduring popular hatred for the Pahlavi dynasty.<sup>4</sup>

Challenging the conventional orthodoxies surrounding the 'tribal problem' in Iran, the book argues that the nationalist elite's ideological formulation of the tribe-state dynamic was based on a fundamental misreading of the actual roles and attitudes both of the tribal elites and of the mass of the tribal populations, nomadic, semi-settled and settled. It argues, furthermore, that not only did the new state's adoption of an approach underpinned by assumptions of essential tribal hostility and based on a ready resort to coercion exacerbate the very difficulties that it was supposed to eliminate, but the political elite's enthusiastic approval of this solution to the 'tribal problem' was disastrous for the elite itself, contributing more than any other single factor to the growth of militarist and authoritarian political trends and paving the way for a decade of repression and dictatorship.

The book also challenges the conventional periodization of early Pahlavi Iran which has reinforced the notion of tribal disarmament and sedentarization as a gradual and inexorable process of pacification, albeit punctuated by bouts of extreme violence, a process advancing hand in hand with the wider objectives of modernization. The chapters below propose, rather, a more erratic narrative, with policies characterized by pragmatism, even arbitrariness, at both central and local levels, by abrupt reversals, sudden initiatives and equally sudden retreats, and overall dictated by *realpolitik* and the needs of the moment as much as by ideology or national strategy. Broadly speaking, the book sees three more or less distinct phases in Riza Shah's tribal policies. The first phase, in the first half of the 1920s, primarily involved the establishment of security and the taming of the ambitions and independence of the tribal khans and regional magnates, developments that were welcomed by both urban and rural populations, nomadic and settled alike, after the chaos of the preceding decade. The brief second phase lasted from 1927 to 1929 and saw the regime embark on a radical and rapid programme of political, social and economic change aimed not at the khans but at transforming the lives and position of the ordinary tribespeople, and which finally provoked eruptions of violent tribal opposition challenging the regime's very grip on power in parts of the country. The third phase encompassed the entire second decade of the regime's life and was characterized by a determination to eradicate the last vestiges of the power of the khans and of the pastoral nomadic way of life itself. This phase had two central pillars: the employment of the methods of political terror against the tribal leaderships, and forced sedentarization. The exile, imprisonment



and murder of many khans contributed to the wider decimation of the political elite that took place in the early 1930s and which, in turn, led to the shah's isolation and to the demoralization of his regime while the attempts to suppress nomadism produced massive levels of bribery and corruption among army officers and state officials without converting the nomads into agriculturalists. By the end of the regime's life, one of the main tangible results of its tribal policy seems to have been to have aggravated immeasurably the animosity towards the army and the Pahlavi dynasty harboured by large sections of the tribal populations.

The analysis that follows detects a profound divergence between the rigid ideological presumptions of the Iranian nationalism of the period regarding the tribes in general and nomadism in particular, and the highly pragmatic politics of the regime. In the early years of his power, Riza Khan's<sup>5</sup> military and political weakness obliged him, wherever possible, to reach accommodations with tribal leaders and, in the case of the most powerful, to coopt them permanently. After the southern tribal uprisings of 1929, however, the new shah's growing political isolation and his psychological deterioration undermined the basis for this pragmatism.

As well as distinguishing between the ideological predisposition of Iranian nationalism and the actual political behaviour of the regime during the different phases of its existence, the book also contests the conventional assessment, long accepted by nationalist opinion and Western scholarship, of the role played by the tribes, both elites and rank and file, in the tribe-state equation.

Tribal rebellions, in this and other periods of Iranian history, have often been seen as simple efforts to resist the imposition of the control and authority of the central state. The periodic tribal risings that punctuated the Riza Shah era, especially the widespread rebellions across southern Iran in 1929, are often cited as evidence of the eternal conflict between tribal chaos and state-imposed order, and specifically of the refusal of the tribal nomads to accede to the inevitable consequence of political and social development and the unavoidability of their subordination to the modernizing state. The book argues, however, that such risings were not displays of an unchanging hostility on the part of nomads towards central government. On the contrary, during the 1920s both the khans and the nomadic rank and file, the latter especially weary of the hardship caused by the anarchy of the previous two decades, had evinced a willingness to embrace the opportunity for security and peaceful change offered by the establishment of a strong central government. The tribal risings that took place must, rather, be explained as a reaction to the specific form that the modernity sponsored by the regime assumed. The harshness of military rule, the assault on living standards represented by the new fiscal and economic policies, the threat to social cohesion and cultural identity offered by conscription and the dress law, the consolidation of landlordism through the land legislation, all combined to

drive the rural poor to launch rearguard actions that were essentially defensive, directed against both the old and the new authorities and aimed at deflecting change that was perceived as damaging and unjust.

The book, therefore, rejects the conventional view that sees tribal society in its entirety as hostile to the new state and fatally damaged by its increasing hegemony. In its descriptions of the actual reaction of the tribal elites to the situation created by the rise of Pahlavi power and the manner of their interaction with the institutions of the new state, the book argues that, on the contrary, the successful establishment of the new order was crucially facilitated by the fact that many of the most important tribal leaders willingly, and sometimes enthusiastically, offered their support to the new regime. That this was so is illustrated most clearly by the ease with which the tribal magnates of southern Iran, Sawlat al-Dawlah of the Qashqai, Ibrahim Khan Qavam al-Mulk of the Khamsah<sup>6</sup> and the great khans of the Bakhtiyari, reached an accommodation with Riza Khan, only Shaykh Khazal of Muhammarah (Khorramshahr) failing to integrate himself into the new order.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, not only were many of the tribal khans ready to adapt themselves politically to the new state, but they were in many respects in the vanguard in adopting its ideological attitudes. That this was so is particularly illustrated by their enthusiastic endorsement and ready utilization of the land registration of the 1920s. Here a distinction must be made between the fate of individual khans and the transformation of the khans as a class. Certainly, individual tribal leaders fell foul of the regime, as indeed did many non-tribal figures. But the book argues that, although the khans were deprived of much of their tribal and regional political power by Riza Shah, their economic power and their successful transformation into members of the land-owning elite was accelerated and consolidated. In this their experience mirrored that of their non-tribal land-owning counterparts. Although Riza Shah's mania for land acquisition in the 1930s wreaked havoc among individual land-owning families, and the land-owning elite underwent some changes in personnel and composition, nonetheless land-lordism and the landlord class emerged from the early Pahlavi period not weakened but enhanced.

For traditional readings of the Riza Shah period, the retention of the post of minister of war by a Bakhtiyari khan, Sardar Asad, throughout the years when the regime was at its most aggressive in its tribal policy, and, indeed, when it launched a major military operation against the Bakhtiyari themselves, presents a paradox. When situated within the context outlined in this book, however, this apparent paradox may be readily explained. The inclination of a local elite such as the great khans of the Bakhtiyari to seek good relations with a rising central power, the approval of such an elite for policies that tended to enhance its own economic position, the struggle for personal political advantage within the elite, and the need to cooperate with

the new state to suppress challenges from subaltern tribal elements, make Sardar Asad's arrival in the government and his survival there until falling victim to the terror of the 1930s, not only comprehensible but entirely natural.

As well as charting the external political relationships of the tribal leaderships, the book also attempts to paint a nuanced picture of internal tribal politics, charting its complexities and the way in which internal tribal conflicts interacted with, and were exacerbated by, the rise of the new state. The conventional assumption, that a tribe or tribal confederation, or even its khans, had one common set of interests and the regime another, obscures the very real conflicts, of class, generation, and personal ambition, which permeated the tribal pyramid and which crucially affected the contours of the tribe-state dynamic.

The book contests the conventional nationalist view that tribal politics and the tribe-state dynamic can be understood by reference to the actions of the tribal leadership alone. On the contrary, the book stresses the intensifying stratification within the tribal populations, and the resulting emerging class consciousness, arguing that internal conflicts and the various challenges offered by subaltern tribal groups were of crucial significance in determining the way in which the khans and the new state interacted. In particular, it disputes the traditional assumption of the overriding importance within tribal communities of vertical ties of dependence and patronage, rather than horizontal ties of solidarity. The book is the first to discuss the nature and consequence of the growing divide between the tribal elites and the lower levels of the tribal pyramid, the middle-ranking and rising layers of *kalantars*, but particularly between the senior khans and the mass of ordinary nomads and cultivators. It further argues that this divide was not created, but was certainly greatly exacerbated, by modernization in general, and driven particularly by the political, economic, financial and cultural 'reforms' of the early Pahlavi period. Taking the Bakhtiyari confederation as a case-study, the book traces the contours of an increasing resentment on the part of the tribal rank and file to what they perceived as the political and economic oppression of the khans, relating this resentment to wider changes in politics and society, and specifically to factors such as their increasing proletarianization in relatively large numbers as workers in the oilfields. The book also highlights the generational conflicts that were slicing through tribal society, drawing out parallels with the generational fault lines that were typical of modern urban politics in Iran and in the wider Middle East generally in the interwar decades.

As a corollary to its insistence on the centrality of internal conflict in understanding tribal politics, the book argues that, by the 1920s, internal class divisions within tribes and confederations had become so acute, and the lack of any common interest between the khans and the rank and file so obvious, that there was no longer any possibility of the khans mobilizing

their own rank and file in defence of any corporate 'tribal' objective. On the contrary, the tribal leaderships frequently feared that their position, as hereditary rulers and as landlords, was in fact more threatened from below and within, from the ordinary nomads and sharecroppers, and from rising junior elites such as the *kalantars*, than from outside, i.e. from the external power of the state itself. This anxiety ultimately caused them to identify with the new state and, in their hope that the state would protect them against the economic and political demands of their own followers, rendered them helpless when the Pahlavi regime finally turned against them.

The early Pahlavi period in Iran has usually been seen through the prism of its state-building effort. Attention has been focused almost exclusively on the high politics of the Tehran elite and a positive or negative balance-sheet drawn up according to assessments of this elite's success in transforming Iran into a modern, independent nation-state in the European image. This preoccupation with the Tehran regime and its version of modernity has typically been accompanied, as the other side of the same coin, by an almost complete silence regarding other interests and perspectives. Little attempt has been made to elucidate either the historical narrative or the perception of their own experience of, for example, non-elite groups such as the urban poor, the emerging working class, or of any social category in the countryside. The authoritarian modernization imposed by the Riza Shah regime was aimed at transforming precisely these elements but it was neither received passively, nor opposed blindly, by them. Rather, the arrival of the new order evoked complex and multi-faceted responses from different layers and sectors of Iranian society.

This book attempts to shift attention away from urban politics to the rural areas. Furthermore, it has as one of its central concerns the fate of the rural poor, pastoral nomads, semi-settled and settled sharecroppers. Rather than accept the usual view of the period as one of stagnation in the rural areas, the book sees these years as a time when the world of the Iranian countryside began to feel the tremors of the arrival of modernity. In the 1920s and 1930s the state reached out for the first time and penetrated deeply into rural society in Iran, operating directly as an agent of change, neutralizing, marginalizing, and occasionally repressing traditional intermediary layers such as the ulama and provincial urban and rural elites, in its efforts to create a society owing allegiance primarily to the state itself and to the 'nation'. Broad economic forces, particularly the spread of capitalist relations, the beginning of industrial production, especially in the southern oilfields, and other developments such as the spread of print media and improved communications, also contributed to breaking down the isolation and conservatism of the rural areas and creating a new receptivity among their populations to political and ideological innovation.

As an extension of this analysis, the book challenges conventional assumptions of the passivity, political indifference and quietism of the rural

poor. Rather than see them as so much fodder for the execution of the state's military and fiscal policies, the book tries to restore to the rural poor, nomadic and settled, a sense of their own historical agency, describing how they generated a variety of active responses to the regime's initiatives and to the often negative impact on them of 'modernization' in general. The book also questions other scholarly shibboleths such as the supposed eternal and unbridgeable divide between settled cultivator and pastoral nomad, and the presumed archaic character of rural banditry.

Another myth that is frequently encountered in discussions of early Pahlavi Iran, and which is of great significance in any discussion of tribal politics, concerns the role played by Britain. Deeply involved both in bringing Riza Khan to power and in sustaining him during his rise to the throne and after, but also with decades-long ties and commitments to the Bakhtiyari khans, to Shaykh Khazal and to Qavam al-Mulk, Britain found itself in a complex and difficult position in the Iran of the 1920s. The book charts the rapid and ruthlessly pragmatic evolution of British policy under Percy Loraine, but also situates this evolution as one element within a major series of political realignments that took place in these years, all of which were conditioned by the rise of the new state. Although explaining how British support had been crucial to the consolidation of the economic and political power of all the major southern tribal leaderships, with the exception of Sawlat al-Dawlah Qashqai, the book avoids any depiction of the tribal khans as mere puppets, insisting on the primacy of their own collective and individual agendas and explaining the ways in which they sought to exploit British patronage in the furtherance of these agendas.

The book also questions the conventional picture of Riza Shah's tribal policies during the 1930s. There is general agreement that the policy of forced sedentarization constituted one of the darker episodes in the regime's life. Again rejecting the view of tribal policy as marginal to, and isolated from, the general development of national political life, the final three chapters establish a close connection between this onslaught on the tribal populations and the regime's slide into the use of the methods of political terror against the political and official classes in general. As far as the nomads themselves were concerned, the book questions the view that tribal settlement was largely accomplished by 1941. There are very few sources on which to base estimates of the extent of actual settlement, while the absence of accounts of the physical changes that would have been necessary to provide permanent housing for very substantial numbers of nomads is striking. Apart from some mention of the building of the new town of Tul-i Khusraw, which did arise as part of the settlement project, the British sources, for example, make no mention of any significant building programmes for former nomads. Certainly some settlement took place, a continuation of a process in train over the previous decades and probably inherent to nomadic societies. Yet the examination of such sources as may

be located gives rise to the strong impression that much migration still continued in the 1930s on the basis of an institutionalized system of bribery, such bribery however resulting in the catastrophic impoverishment of the nomads and contributing to their degradation as much as actual settlement. Where settlement was actually enforced, it did not succeed in turning the nomads into agriculturalists. Indeed, such an effort, which would have required the costly provision not only of buildings but of agricultural equipment and seed, was never really made. Rather, the nomads tended to sink into poverty and squalor. Furthermore, the book contests the view that, where systematically enforced, the policy was effective in ending nomadism. On the contrary, it is clear that when the regime collapsed in 1941, most of the forcibly settled nomads immediately resumed their migrations. The final chapters also argue that, far from being integral to the regime's general development and 'modernization' project, the policy of forced sedentarization was actually impelled by Riza Shah's desire to destroy the political and military power of the tribes by attacking the socio-economic basis of nomadism.

The forced sedentarization policy was ineffective in ending nomadism, and only fostered a hatred towards the Pahlavi dynasty on the part of some tribal groups such as the Qashqai which endured down to its overthrow. Nonetheless, during the two decades of Riza Shah's power, tribal politics in Iran had undergone a fundamental transformation. Yet this was due as much to profound processes of socio-economic and political change that long pre-dated Riza Shah's regime as to the latter's specific policies. After 1941 there was an appearance of a reversion to the former era, with the return of tribal khans to their regions and an attempt by them to recover their lands, reconstruct their ties with the British where these had existed, and to reassert their power on the old bases of kin loyalty and political autonomy. This was, however, to prove superficial and short-lived. Although Riza Shah himself had gone, the state that he had created remained essentially intact. The collapse of the authority and apparatus of the central government in the tribal areas was real but temporary and the state was gradually able to reassert itself.

Despite the repression of the 1930s, the political accommodation of the southern tribal aristocracies with the new state and their integration into a new, national socio-economic elite had become irreversible. From now on, tribal leaders were, with only brief exceptions, to confine the pursuit of their interests to the mechanisms and institutions of the modern state. The nomads and cultivators, for their part, increasingly detribalized and transformed into migrant labourers in the slums and shanty-towns of the developing cities and industrial workers in the oilfields, also began to form new collective identities and political loyalties that transcended kin and tribe in favour of class and nation.

Discussion about tribal history and politics in Iran has been beset by theoretical and ideological obstacles. Indeed, there is no consensus as to what precisely is denoted by the designation 'tribal'.<sup>8</sup> The account that follows adopts a simplified approach, deliberately extending the term to include settled cultivators as well as pastoral nomads, and employs a broad definition of a tribe as a cultural-linguistic and socio-political grouping which possesses a unifying descent ideology.

The study of tribal history has also encountered serious methodological difficulties. There is an overall lack of source material for tribal history and politics, and the material that does exist is often highly problematic. Usually generated by non-tribal sources, such material is often hostile and unreliable. Even where tribal leaders have left records of their own, such material is difficult either to corroborate or refute. Furthermore, it almost always focuses on the activities of tribal elites and research has, so far, failed to locate a significant body of documentation in which the tribal poor have, themselves, directly recorded and articulated their history.<sup>9</sup>

A brief survey of extant sources for the tribal history and politics of the Riza Shah period reveals the difficulties clearly. Since the 1979 revolution a small number of memoirs and other sorts of records, such as diaries, by tribal and military figures have become available that shed some light on specific aspects of the regime's tribal policy and the outlook of various prominent individuals.<sup>10</sup> Little has yet been published based on systematic research in Iranian archives, although future research of this kind promises useful results. There are some secondary Persian accounts of particular episodes while a growing interest in local and ethnic history has produced such interesting but short-lived experiments as the Bakhtiyari journal.<sup>11</sup> Taken *in toto*, however, this material is sparse, highly fragmentary and difficult to use for any analysis that hopes to penetrate beyond a discussion of state policy. The English-language secondary sources that deal with the tribes under Riza Shah all reflect the weakness of extant indigenous sources, and have been obliged to rely to varying degrees on British diplomatic archives supplemented, to some extent, by oral history.<sup>12</sup>

These methodological difficulties have resulted in the narratives contained in this book focusing on the Bakhtiyari confederation and, to a lesser extent, on the other major southern tribal confederations of the Qashqai and the Khamsah. Indeed, the Bakhtiyari are one of the few tribal groups for whom substantial quantities of material, albeit often non-indigenous, may be found. The British archives for this period are particularly rich for the Bakhtiyari and, to a lesser extent, for other southern tribes. Britain's profound political and diplomatic involvement in the internal life of the Bakhtiyari and in the khans' relations with the central government have resulted in the accumulation of substantial documentary sources charting the social, political, ideological and financial history of both the tribal

elite and various subaltern elements. The National Archives and the India Office Library have sometimes also preserved Persian documents both in the original and in translation. This is so with, for example, a number of *shabnamahs* and petitions and appeals to the authorities.<sup>13</sup> As well as the diplomatic and consular records, still under-used for Iran's domestic history, the archives of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company and the Imperial Bank of Persia remain completely unexploited resources. The long and carefully crafted summaries compiled by the British minister in Tehran for transmission to London may be supplemented by the reports and memoranda of a variety of British officials in the south, including the consuls at Ahvaz and Isfahan, the oil company's 'Bakhtiyari expert' Dr Morris Young, and the officials of the bank, all of whom knew and cultivated the khans over many years, becoming intimately acquainted with the day-to-day life of the confederation. The reports of the consul at Ahvaz, who often accompanied the tribes on their migrations, are of especial interest. The frank views and information contained in the records of the oil company and the bank, intended for internal consumption only and unalloyed by diplomatic language, also often cast a light on political realities not found in the diplomatic records. For example, delicate and consequential issues such as the Bakhtiyari khans' financial relationship with the oil company and the extent of Sardar Asad's indebtedness, are absent from the diplomatic correspondence, but appear obsessively in the private exchanges between officials of the bank, the company and the legation.

Such material must naturally be used with caution. It reflects the evolving agenda of the British diplomatic and commercial establishment in Iran and must be assessed within this context. The material relating to the first half of the 1920s, in particular, illustrates the growing desire of the British to divest themselves of their long-standing commitments to the traditional tribal authorities in southern Iran in favour of a closer and more harmonious relationship with the new regime of Riza Shah. An interesting by-product of this agenda was the generation of a quantity of material with an unusual focus on subaltern groups. British officials, stressing the deleterious and outmoded nature of the rule of the khans, enthusiastically highlighted any attempts by peasants and nomads to rid themselves of their tribal leaders. The lower classes also attracted attention for another reason. In the 1920s the British obsession with the supposed threat from Bolshevism was in full flood. This threat was conceived in terms both of an actual military attack from the Soviet Union, and, more importantly, in terms of the power of communist propaganda to incite supposedly gullible subaltern elements to violent rebellion in furtherance of Soviet objectives. Although to some degree a continuation, in a new form, of the old Anglo-Russian rivalry in Iran, the new fear of Bolshevism reflected the incipient dawning on the British of the extent and depth of hardship and exploitation suffered by the



Iranian poor, and their realization of the necessity of offering some palliative measures to pre-empt putative Bolshevik conspiracies. As a result of this new understanding, the lower classes and the poor of both the city and the countryside make ever-more urgent entrances into the British diplomatic records for the 1920s and 1930s.

Whatever its limitations, and however many the caveats surrounding its use, British archival material is one of the few substantial sources for the Riza Shah period. Its importance is revealed by the difficulties surrounding the task of reconstructing the history of the 1930s. Although rich for the 1920s, during the next decade the British records are of only sporadic use. As the regime tightened its grip, becoming more repressive with its nationalism veering into xenophobia, the informal contacts on which British officials habitually relied for intelligence shrivelled and their freedom of movement in the countryside and among the tribes vanished. As a consequence it is, in the current state of research, impossible to write more than impressionably about the centrepiece of tribal policy in the 1930s: forced settlement.

Methodological considerations have been important in making the Bakhtiari and the other southern confederations a focus of the narrative below. The southern confederations of the Bakhtiari, the Qashqai and the Khamsah were the largest in the country and their leaderships integrated into the new order most completely, while the political context was also particularly delicate, containing profound implications for Iran's relations with Britain and for its domestic oil industry. Yet the Bakhtiari confederation in particular is also worthy of attention in its own right. One of the largest tribal groupings in Iran, only equalled in size by the Qashqai, the Bakhtiari were involved more deeply in national history in the early twentieth century than any other tribal group and their presence at the centre of national political life was more striking. Furnishing cabinet ministers, including prime ministers, during the second constitutional period and throughout the years of the Great War, the khans were eclipsed by the coup of 1921. Nonetheless, by 1924 Sardar Asad, in a model of adaptation to the new environment later emulated by other erstwhile tribal leaders, had reappeared as a government minister.

The Bakhtiari confederation has been adopted as a template for an analysis of tribal politics for other reasons. It may particularly be taken as exemplifying processes of change taking place among rural and tribal populations in general in interwar Iran. Although these processes may have been more advanced in the case of the Bakhtiari, and may have been taking place at an accelerated rate, nonetheless they were, in many respects, typical of the evolution of tribal politics in general. The integration of the khans into the new national political and economic elite and their transformation from tribal leaders into landlords; their accommodation with the institutions of the new order; the growing rifts between the khans and the rank and file

and the sharpening of internal conflict; the ambiguous imperial embrace, are all features of the Bakhtiyari narrative that have a more general resonance for tribal politics in the Riza Shah period and, indeed, for subsequent decades.

Chapter 1 places Iran's 'tribal problem' in its historical context, and emphasizes its complex realities often obscured by the one-dimensional, security-based approach adopted by nationalist ideologues and echoed by Western scholarship. It surveys the new regime's tribal policies throughout the two decades of its life, contrasting its rigid ideological hostility with its actual political pragmatism, and charting the pattern and tempo of conflict. This chapter concludes with an assessment of the policy of forced sedentarization that was the centrepiece of tribal policy throughout the 1930s.

Chapter 2 discusses how the new state successfully subordinated a major tribal leadership, the great khans of the Bakhtiyari, within a few years in the early 1920s. By combining the cooption of one elite faction with the ruthless subordination of another, the regime neutralized any potential for unified opposition from the confederation prior to the launch of its radical modernizing drive in 1927–8. The chapter examines the methods, political and financial rather than military, by which the new state achieved its victory, highlighting the significance of the interaction between internal tribal power struggles and the strategies of players external to the confederation, specifically the new state and the British diplomatic and commercial establishment.

The following three chapters shift the focus of attention away from the new state and the tribal elites towards subaltern tribal groups. Chapter 3 looks at the tensions and conflicts that were gathering strength within the Bakhtiyari confederation and discusses the differing perspectives emerging among various increasingly self-conscious tribal groups and layers, including the younger generation of the Bakhtiyari elite, the khans of subordinate lineages, the middle-ranking tribal *kalantars*, the mass of ordinary nomads and the settled tribal tenant peasantry. It connects the internal changes fracturing the tribal pyramid to the wider, national, political and socio-economic changes that were everywhere undermining the rule of traditional elites.

Chapter 4 proposes a sustained examination of the attitudes of the new state towards the Iranian countryside, particularly the transformation wrought in rural relationships by the land legislation, and of the responses of the tribal poor, both nomadic and settled. Contrary to the assumptions of rural passivity, held by both Western scholarship and Iranian nationalism, the chapter discusses the ways in which tribal communities, in fact, generated a variety of active responses to the regime's initiatives, both on their own account and in combination with other social forces, aimed at defending themselves and resisting unfavourable changes in their relations both with their own khans and with army officers and state officials. The chapter

examines the factors that acted on the rural poor in their formulation of their responses: the changes in their own circumstances; their experiences as migrant workers in the oilfields; the new ideas transmitted both by members of their own communities who had been drawn into the urban milieu and by dissident elements of their own ruling elites. The chapter again takes as a template the case of the Bakhtiyari confederation. The processes transforming the Iranian countryside appear to have been particularly advanced in the south of the country and to have had a marked impact on southern tribal confederations such as the Bakhtiyari, perhaps as a result of these groups' extensive involvement as labourers in the oil industry and the advanced integration of their khans into the political and economic elite. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the 1930s when the most pauperized sections of particularly the nomadic poor, as economic conditions in the countryside deteriorated, resorted to banditry and smuggling as strategies of resistance and survival.

Chapter 5 looks at the succession of tribal nomad and peasant revolts that broke out in 1929 in response to the imposition of Tehran's radical reform agenda and which were directed against both the new state and against the tribal aristocracies, seen as beneficiaries of the new order, and provides an analysis of the reasons for, and the consequences of, their defeat. Most importantly, however, this chapter identifies the 1929 uprisings and the threat implicit in continued tribal political power as a key turning-point in the life of the new order, producing a severe deterioration both in the shah's personal state of mind and in the mentality and morale of the regime, and leading directly to the state's resort to the methods of political terror.

The final two chapters refocus on the state and the tribal elites. For nationalist opinion, and for Riza Shah himself, tribal leaderships such as the great khans of the Bakhtiyari and Shaykh Khazal had been fatally compromised by their association with the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. Chapter 6, using the archives of the oil company and of the other major British commercial institution in Iran, the Imperial Bank of Persia, charts the actual, rather than the mythical, course of the association between the tribes and the company, detailing both the company's remorseless and untrammelled pursuit of its own narrow interests, and the easily outmanoeuvred strategies of the Bakhtiyari khans. In particular, the chapter shows how the company, like the British legation, was both pragmatic and ruthless in its abandonment of the khans and its enthusiastic realignment with the regime in Tehran. In fact, far from exhibiting a history of perpetual antagonism, Riza Shah and the oil company were, in fact, successful in dovetailing their interests in many respects and, with the exception of the crisis over the renegotiation of the concession in the early 1930s, worked more or less harmoniously together.

Chapter 7 examines the regime's tribal policies through the prism of the downfall of the Bakhtiyari minister of war, Sardar Asad, and the harsh

## INTRODUCTION

repression directed at the southern tribal leaderships in general. It places tribal policy within the wider context of the crisis that engulfed the nationalist elite in the early 1930s and uses its discussion of this policy to reveal certain key features of the regime as it passed through its second decade.

The book concludes with an assessment of the impact of the Riza Shah period and of the long-term significance of the apparent resurgence of tribal politics that took place after his abdication. It examines the renewed efforts by Britain to reactivate tribal politics as a counterweight to growing Tudah influence in southern Iran in the changed context of the cold war, and also the reinvention, under British auspices, of the tribal problem in the south as an ethnic national problem. In a discussion of the Muhammad Riza Shah decades, the conclusion delineates the bifurcation that took place among the tribal populations throughout the country. This bifurcation led, in the case of the Kurds, to a transformation of tribalism into ethnicity, and elsewhere to detribalization and absorption into social classes and political organizations configured along national lines, consciously or unconsciously transcending regional, tribal or sectarian affiliations, both trajectories leading inexorably to the demise of tribal politics.

## TRIBE AND STATE

### The 'tribal problem' in Iran

For the new regime which came to power via the coup d'état of 1921, and the nationalist elite which supported it, the tribal problem loomed large in terms of practical politics and in terms of ideology. The previous decade and a half of revolution and war had seen a widespread and general reassertion of tribal power and much of the country had fallen under tribal control. In 1921, for the newly empowered Iranian nationalists, the suppression of the tribes was an indispensable element of their larger project: the construction of a modern, centralized state, with a culturally homogeneous population.<sup>1</sup> Their agenda was clear: the destruction of the autonomy and feudal authority of the tribal leaderships was to be closely followed by the subjection of the tribal populations to the unmediated power of the modernized state and their integration into settled society. From the very moment of seizing power in Tehran, the new regime embarked on a sustained effort to establish its military and administrative hegemony over the tribes, inaugurating a transformation in the relationship between the centre and periphery in Iran.

The extirpation of tribal power was of absolute centrality to the state-building effort of the early Pahlavi period. Like its contemporaries elsewhere in the Middle East, the nationalist elite in Iran insisted that sovereignty and independence were only possible on the basis of the complete disarmament of the civilian population and the concentration of physical power in the hands of the state. For this trend the establishment of a single national authority in Iran, which commanded the universal and direct allegiance of the population and which, alone, conducted relations with foreign powers, was essential to the country's political survival. According to this view, furthermore, the nomadic tribes were a source of domestic disorder and lawlessness; were indeed, the antithesis of modernity, the regime and its supporters, and indeed the settled population at large, situating the tribes as both primitive in themselves and as symbolizing Iran's backwardness. Riza Shah himself, like his contemporary Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, was especially sensitive to the image his country presented to the West and the archaic, exotic and picturesque appeal of the nomads for European visitors was especially galling.

### Historical context

The nationalist invention of the 'tribal problem' had its origins in the ideology of modernism which appeared among the Iranian intelligentsia in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> In their increasingly urgent search for explanations for Iran's apparent decline, especially in the face of the ever-more menacing Western presence, Iranian reformers came to locate the 'tribal problem' as a key weakness in Iran's development, an 'historical misfortune' and a 'legacy of the Turco-Mongol hordes'.<sup>3</sup> For such currents, and indeed for much of the urban population in general, one of the key tests for any effective Iranian government was its willingness and ability to undertake the eradication of this historical misfortune. Progress and development, order, political stability and national independence all required the suppression of the largely autonomous and 'feudal' tribal leaderships and the abandonment by the nomads of their migratory way of life. In fact, the sedentarization of the tribes was an element in the programmes of most of the political parties of the constitutional period.<sup>4</sup>

The novelty of the germinating nationalist view is often underestimated. Prior to the spread of such ideological prescriptions, tribal power in Iran had not been conceptualized as problematic. On the contrary, the Qajar dynasty itself, like its predecessors, was of tribal origin and tribal identities carried considerable status in society. In fact, even well into the nineteenth century the shah and his court had themselves functioned on a semi-nomadic basis, spending only the winter months in Tehran and moving to cooler climes for the summer.<sup>5</sup> Both khans and nomads were integrated into the political and military structures of the Qajar state and were seen as, and actually constituted, a vital component of its defensive power.<sup>6</sup> Irregular cavalry levies, furnished and commanded by the tribal chiefs, made up the most effective element of Iran's armed strength throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth centuries, while the khans' role in tax collection and the maintenance of rudimentary order was essential to the functioning of Qajar government.

The efforts at reform undertaken at various moments during the second half of the nineteenth century began to focus attention on the obstacle to centralization and national sovereignty represented by the independent military strength and local power-bases of the tribal chiefs.<sup>7</sup> Although traditional polities such as the Qajar state had tended to favour the consolidation of tribal entities, believing them easier to control, and had played a part in assisting the formation of the big confederations of the Bakhtiari, Khamsah and Qashqai, ideologues of modern nationalism increasingly defined the tribes as per se anachronistic and detrimental to the state-building project.<sup>8</sup>

The constitutional revolution of 1906–11 inaugurated an unprecedented effort at state-building and represented the culmination of nineteenth-century aspirations to political reform. But its actual overall effect was to

weaken the existing state structures without succeeding in replacing them with immediately viable national alternatives.<sup>9</sup> Into the social and political vacuum thus created stepped an assortment of tribal leaders. The ability of such leaders to exploit the opportunities offered by the disintegration of state authority was further enhanced by their frequent assumption of actual political and, especially, military roles during the constitutionalist wars. The absence of a regular army meant that both the constitutional regime and the ex-shah were obliged to call on tribal forces to act on their behalf. For example, the royalist forces who besieged the constitutionalist stronghold of Tabriz between June 1908 and May 1909 were mainly tribal in composition and were led by the former bandit, Rahim Khan Chalabianlu, who later formed a Tribal Union to resist the constitutionalists in Azarbayjan.<sup>10</sup> In late 1909 and early 1910 the force sent from Tehran against Rahim Khan by the newly restored constitutionalist regime also contained a strong tribal element, drawn from the Bakhtiyari and under the joint leadership of Sardar Bahadur Bakhtiyari and the famous Armenian constitutionalist, Yiprem Khan.<sup>11</sup>

But the most spectacular political advance achieved by any tribal grouping in these years was that made by the Bakhtiyari.<sup>12</sup> By allying themselves with urban constitutionalists, first locally, in Isfahan, and then in the capital, the khans were able to embark on a fundamental expansion in their sphere of activity, breaking out of the restrictions of their purely tribal and regional roles altogether. After they marched on Tehran in 1909 and played a key part in the restoration of the constitution, they were no longer obliged merely to try to forge links with elements close to power in the capital but were able themselves directly to penetrate the central state. By 1912, despite the collapse of constitutional government, the Bakhtiyari khans had reached the zenith of their power, holding the posts of prime minister and minister of war, and seven southern provincial governorships. So powerful and ambitious had they become that they were even suspected of plotting a coup to seize the throne.

Following the Russian ultimatum and the suppression of the Majlis in 1911, Iran experienced a decade of war and foreign military occupation. The consequent accelerating collapse of the central state inevitably led to the ever-more complete autonomy of the tribes and their continued aggrandisement of regional political and military power, and ushered in the prospect of national disintegration, regional secession and full and formal imperial control.

For Iranian nationalists, the tribal problem had become intertwined with fears for national survival. As well as disliking the centrifugal tendencies inherent in tribal resurgence, nationalist opinion specifically and fiercely resented the increasingly open foreign, especially British, patronage of the tribal leaderships. The British cultivation of tribal clients, galvanized by rivalry with Russia and fuelled by the growing commercial importance of southern Iran and the Persian Gulf, had begun to assume more substantial

dimensions towards the end of the nineteenth century, and received a new impetus in the early twentieth century with the discovery of oil in southern Iran and its successful commercial exploitation. Within a few years the existing links established by British diplomatic and consular officials with the Bakhtiyari khans and with Shaykh Khazal were reinforced by complementary and direct connections forged with the tribal leaders by the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC). By the early twentieth century, the Bakhtiyari khans, Qavam al-Mulk, chief of the Khamsah and Shaykh Khazal were all firmly wedded to British interests. Of the great southern tribal confederations, only the Qashqai remained outside the orbit of British influence. As Tehran's authority weakened further, after 1906 and again after 1911, so the British political and military investment in local powers in southern Iran grew inexorably.

The British, of all the imperial powers, had been most successful in their attempts to utilize the tribes in the furtherance of their own interests. However, they were not alone in such efforts. In the north of the country the Russians established some influence over the Shahsavans and were able, for example, to recruit extensively among them for the Iranian Cossack Brigade.<sup>13</sup> During the Great War, both the Allied and the Central Powers made concerted efforts to use the tribes as surrogates and proxies. The Ottomans raised levies among the Kurds in western Iran as part of their military effort, while the Germans based an entire strategy on the plans of Captain Wilhelm Wasmuss to disrupt the Allied war effort by inciting minor tribal khans around Bushire and encouraging the anti-British disposition of the Qashqai and certain dissident junior Bakhtiyari.<sup>14</sup>

At the end of the war Britain's position in Iran seemed stronger than ever, the Russian revolution having eclipsed its main imperial rival. Nonetheless, Britain immediately began to perceive new threats to its interests. The foreign secretary, Lord Curzon, advocated a strategy of consolidating British supremacy through the Anglo-Iranian Agreement, but was frustrated in this by a renewed and energetic Iranian nationalism, while the traditional British fear of Russia re-emerged in a transformed but even more virulent form with the establishment of Soviet power on Iran's borders. With the central government still impotent and Iran's military strength almost non-existent, Britain's links with its southern tribal clients assumed ever greater importance. Indeed, in the immediate aftermath of the Great War, British efforts to use the southern tribes to protect their strategic and commercial interests in Iran reached their high-water mark. Plans were drawn up for a Bakhtiyari statelet in the centre-south of the country, based on Isfahan, in the event of a Soviet military capture of Tehran, and the possibility was raised of an independent emirate for the oil-rich province of Arabistan under Shaykh Khazal.<sup>15</sup>

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had seen dramatic changes in the national and international contexts within which Iranian tribal groups conducted their politics. In these decades the tribes and tribal



confederations had themselves also been undergoing processes of change, resulting from both internal and external pressures. In the south, the magnetic pull of the British imperial presence transformed the position of the leaderships of the great tribal confederations. The great khans of the Bakhtiyari, Shaykh Khazal and the Qavami family all derived incalculable political and financial advantage from their British connections. Their political ascendancy within their tribal environments acquired a novel permanence and stability while their wealth increased exponentially, whether directly through oil revenues or through their enhanced ability to benefit from broad economic changes, such as the growing commercialization of land and the integration of southern Iran into the international economy. Even the anti-British Qashqai were affected by the process, the leadership of the family of Sawlat al-Dawlah stabilizing, paradoxically, in opposition to the imperial presence. Furthermore, the changing circumstances of the tribal leaderships inevitably wrought changes in their relationships with their followers, their absorption into the non-tribal urban elite opening up a greater gulf between them and the ordinary tribespeople with all the ensuing consequences for tribal solidarity and cohesion.

In other parts of the country, also experiencing the accelerated collapse of the state but lacking the pole of attraction provided by Britain in the south, the political environment produced different developments among the tribes. In the north, Russia had never established a degree of patronage over any of the tribal groupings comparable to that exercised by Britain in the south, and in any case Russian influence disintegrated completely after the revolution of 1917. In this period the Shahsavan khans in Azarbayjan, for example, in contrast to the confederational leaderships of the south, entered a period of fragmentation. The *ilbey* or paramount chief disappeared altogether and the tribes entered a chaotic period of *khankhanliq*, whereby independent tribal chiefs alternately cooperated and fought for local power and wealth.<sup>16</sup> In Luristan, isolated from direct imperial contact altogether, the various Lur chiefs retained their autonomy in entirety, avoiding both the advantages and the dangers of a unified and centralized leadership, and were thus able to deny their Iranian army control of the province until well into the 1930s.

The leaderships were not the only component of tribal society to undergo a transformation in these years. The nomads and peasants themselves, again especially in the south, were also changing profoundly in these years. Sometimes such changes among the tribal populations were in direct response to the alterations taking place in the attitudes and behaviour of their own leaderships. The embryonic class consciousness emerging among the Bakhtiyari, for example, was clearly provoked by their resentment at the rapidly growing political and economic power of their khans. Sometimes change was driven by broader political and economic developments: the effects of the land legislation; the impact on living standards of the pene-

tration of capitalism into the countryside with the spread of cash crops and a money economy; and the proletarianization of both nomads and peasants, whether as landless agricultural labourers producing cash crops for the international market, or as industrial workers in the developing oil industry. The rural population was also evolving due to a continuing, and even accelerating, process of nomadic settlement, produced by the inherent conditions of nomadic life, which was resulting in the establishment of communities of settled, but not detribalized, sharecroppers, such communities apparently possessing a potential for collective action that was less apparent among non-tribal peasants in Iran.

By 1921 much of the geographical area of the country was under tribal control.<sup>17</sup> This included not just vast swathes of rural Iran but also some towns and cities, the more or less permanent possession by the Bakhtiyari khans of the governorship of Isfahan being a case in point. Yet the pattern and nature of tribal life was enormously varied. Tribal populations might be nomadic, semi-nomadic or settled, or a combination of all three. Nomads might travel long distances for pasturage, or take part in much more limited migrations, sometimes indeed only moving into tents on the outskirts of their village.<sup>18</sup> In general, the nomads' standard of living tended to be higher than that of settled cultivators, and their relations with their khans were more consensual and less oppressive than those customarily prevailing between landowners and peasants. However, relations within and between tribal groups were often characterized by a degree of long-term hostility, severely limiting their potential for political action and leading to ambiguous and pragmatic attitudes towards non-tribal authority.

A brief picture of only the major tribal groupings in the areas in which they held sway in 1921 reveals the enormous complexity of the task facing the central government in its efforts to establish its own authority. Much of central-south Iran was under the control of the Bakhtiyari confederation. Fars was divided between the major confederations of the Qashqai to the west and the Khamsah to the east, with the smaller groups of the Mamassani, Buyir Ahmadi and Kuhgilu to the north of the province.<sup>19</sup> Shaykh Khazal of Muhammarah was the autonomous and de facto ruler of the oil province of Arabistan, and the Persian Gulf littoral was controlled by various Dashtistani and Tangistani khans. Luristan contained a variety of Lur tribes, lacking any centralized leadership, with the more or less autonomous region of Pusht-i Kuh on the frontier with Iraq controlled by the Vali of Pusht-i Kuh. Other tribally based, autonomous and more or less hereditary rulers in frontier regions included Sardar Iqbal al-Saltanah of Maku in north-western Azarbayjan, and in Khurasan, Sardar Muazziz of Bujnurd, *ilkhani* of the Shadillu Kurds, in the north-east, and Amir Shawkat al-Mulk, Amir of Qayinat and Sistan, in the south-east. All the areas west of Urumiyah up to the borders of Turkey were controlled by the Kurdish chief Ismail Agha Shikak (Simko or Simitqu), who was receiving help from the Turkish

nationalists and whose revolt had a nationalist and pan-Kurdish, as well as a tribal, character. Various Kurdish tribes controlled the Hamadan region and the Sanjabi and Kalhur Kurds ruled the areas around Kirmanshah. The Shahsavani controlled much of eastern Azarbaijan bordering the Soviet Union, and the Turkman steppe straddling the frontier with Soviet Central Asia was ruled by Turkman chiefs of the Gökhan and Yamut. Khurasan contained a variety of tribal groups, including Hazaras, Taymuris and Kurds, while much of south-eastern Iran was controlled by the Baluch leaders, Bahram Khan and Dust Muhammad Khan, the latter actually minting a coin with his own name on it, a traditional assertion of sovereignty.

### *The new regime's tribal policies*

This array of tribal power presented the new post-1921 regime with a range of difficulties. Various of the Kurdish tribes and their leaders, for example, were on the threshold of developing an ethnic, regional pan-Kurdish and quasi-national identity.<sup>20</sup> Their presence on both sides of Iran's borders with the new states of Iraq and the Turkish republic added to the challenge presented by the Kurds and threatened to destabilize the emerging regional order. Other tribal groups, the Turkmans on the border with Soviet Central Asia, Khurasani and Baluchi tribes abutting Afghanistan, also straddled Iran's international frontiers, posing problems for political control and national sovereignty. But for Iranian nationalists, the situation in Arabistan was especially sensitive. Here the potential imperial re-invention of Khazal as the ruler of another British-protected Gulf Shaykhdom and the cross-border tribal ties of the local Arab population combined to raise real fears in Tehran of the absolute loss of the oil-rich province. Tehran also continued to fear the general susceptibility of the tribes in the interior of the country to foreign manipulation. In purely domestic terms, the new post-1921 government found anachronistic and intolerable the defiance of their authority represented by the tribes' refusal to pay revenue and by their conduct of independent relationships with the British and, especially, with the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. The tribes' disruptive power and their perceived impediment to national development was also an irritant, as was particularly the case in Luristan, where the Lur groups obstructed for some years the building of roads and the railway and the economic integration of the interior of Iran with the Gulf ports.

Although the new regime which came to power in 1921 was essentially military in character, it was impossible for it to embark on a purely, or even mainly, military solution to the tribal problem. The institutions of the new state, especially its coercive instruments, were too weak. For the first half of the 1920s Riza Khan was forced to concentrate on a rudimentary military reorganization, while at the same time waging a series of bitter struggles with his political enemies in Tehran. Indeed, his position was often so

precarious that he was obliged to retain half the Tehran garrison in the capital at all times for political reasons.<sup>21</sup> The intricacies of defeating his political enemies while simultaneously undertaking the tasks of state-building and tribal pacification drove Riza Khan to adopt a pragmatic strategy of cooption towards the tribal leaderships, albeit a strategy backed up by an ever present threat of, and an occasional actual resort to, military force.

Despite its reputation, cultivated deliberately at the time and persisting in popular and scholarly perception thereafter, the new regime in fact had a general disinclination to tackle tribal insurgency by direct military campaigning. Although Riza Shah's skill in manipulating political conflict of every kind, including intra-tribal conflict, has been widely recognized, yet the pacification of the countryside in the 1920s and 1930s is still imagined, by both apologists for and critics of the regime, to have been largely, if not wholly, a military undertaking, enforced in the teeth of armed tribal resistance. In fact, direct campaigning, or even its threat, was only one, and in practice the least effective, method of tribal management utilized by the regime. Where the state resorted to military operations most readily, notably in the case of Luristan, results were most uncertain and the imposition of control most protracted and difficult. As the example of the Bakhtiari clearly shows, the regime achieved its objectives most completely and most easily where it was able to eschew military tactics and rely instead on exploiting the political and financial vulnerabilities of the tribal leaderships.

Of course, many military operations against different tribal groups were undertaken by the army, particularly in the 1920s.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, such campaigning was the army's sole military function in these years. Yet the army suffered from certain endemic and chronic defects and weaknesses which made the results of these engagements at best unpredictable.<sup>23</sup>

A particular difficulty with which the army was confronted in the 1920s was that the nomadic tribes were then much better armed than they had been in the past, the majority having acquired modern magazine rifles during and since the Great War. Indeed, the tribes were at least as well armed as the army itself, and only slowly, and as part of a major reorganization, was Riza Khan able to overcome the problems resulting from the army's deficiencies in armament and to ensure its definitive superiority.<sup>24</sup> A conventional army of the type then being constructed faced other disadvantages in tribal campaigning. Tribal territory was, for the most part, mountainous and devoid of good communications and this made military operations by regular troops difficult and prolonged in the face of determined opposition. There were also, in the circumstances prevailing in the country at the time, general organizational and political constraints upon the concentration of large numbers of troops for specific campaigns. The total strength of the army reached around 40,000 men by the mid-1920s, but owing to the difficulties of mobilization, the distances involved and the lack of transport, and the necessity for maintaining garrisons in the north

and east and retaining enough of the Tehran garrison to guarantee stability in the capital and the protection of the main lines of communications, the maximum that the regime had available for dealing with any tribe or group of tribes in this period was about 10,000 men. This was actually the number that was concentrated against the Kurdish tribal leader Simko in Azarbayjan in 1922. Any combination of tribal forces, or simultaneous outbreak of tribal insurrections in different parts of the country, presented the regime and the military authorities with grave dangers, as was demonstrated by the near collapse of government control in southern Iran in 1929.

In practice, the military capacity of the tribes was also limited and contingent, although their fighting strength was formidable.<sup>25</sup> They possessed no artillery or machine-guns, decisive weapons in tribal campaigning, and although they had acquired modern rifles, they suffered from endemic problems of logistics and supply. Ammunition was faulty and insufficient, and they lacked reserve stocks. They had no military organization other than that of being grouped into followings led by their own khans, and they would rarely fight outside their own territory or far from their own homes.

For both the military authorities and the tribal leaderships, therefore, the resort to force was an unattractive option and one, furthermore, that was almost always indecisive, leading only to a stalemate. The tribal campaigning that was undertaken by the army, largely a feature of the 1920s and early 1930s, was rarely a deliberate initiative of the regime but, rather, tended to be dictated by the need to respond to tribal defiance. The army, in fact, had a much more significant role to play in tribal management in terms of maintaining control once the submission of the tribes had been secured by non-military means. Wherever the regime established its political dominance over tribal leaderships, the army was instrumental in confirming and rendering permanent state control through the establishment of military government and the appointment of army officers in place of deposed chiefs and khans.

From the very beginning, the new regime's relative weakness produced a paradox in its strategies of tribal management and a degree of ambivalence in its attitude to the tribal leaderships, an attitude that typically combined a tactical accommodation with a deep and abiding mistrust. Its ideological predisposition was clear. Yet the complexities of tribal politics and its own military deficiencies obliged it, throughout the 1920s and into the early 1930s, even as tribal pacification campaigns were in full swing, to continue to cultivate tribal political support and to utilize and, occasionally, to rely on tribal military strength. Riza Khan had no hesitation in inciting the tribes against his own personal and political enemies, the regime of Colonel Pasyan in 1921 in Mashhad, for example, being overthrown by local Kurdish tribal forces, and in most of the major campaigns of the following two decades tribal levies were an important, and sometimes a decisive, factor in the army's fighting capacity.<sup>26</sup> The military authorities

might even, from time to time, re-arm previously disarmed 'friendly' tribes in order to use them in specific operations against local 'hostile' groups.

The regime's continuing need to exploit the military resources of the tribes went in tandem with a policy of coopting tribal leaders wherever possible. The government made repeated, though not always successful, attempts to transform tribal and minor regional chiefs into government officials by appointing them as governors of the areas they ruled by custom. During the 1920s the Sardar of Bujnurd, the Vali of Pusht-i Kuh, the Amir of Qayinat and Sistan and the Baluchi chief Dust Muhammad were each formally installed as local governors by Tehran, their actual tenure varying in duration and success from case to case. The chequered history of this policy is well illustrated by the fate of one local ruler, Sardar Muazziz of Bujnurd, the *ilkhani* of the Shadillu Kurds and the Turkman tribes in north-eastern Khurasan. On the arrival of the army in his territory he was first arrested and sent to Tehran, then, following a Turkman attack on the army, reinstated by the government in the hope that he would re-establish order. He was finally hanged, while still in occupation of his post, following a renewed Turkman rising.

For certain of the most important tribal leaders, the government deployed another tactic in arranging for the chiefs themselves or sometimes for their sons to become Majlis deputies. Sawlat al-Dawlah Qashqai, the Bakhtiyari khans, Qavam al-Mulk, and even the family of Shaykh Khazal, were all drawn closer to the new regime in this way. If sufficiently compliant, tribal leaders might also look to the regime for confirmation and support in their positions, the great khans of the Bakhtiyari, for example, continuing to hold the posts of *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi* well into the 1930s with full government backing.<sup>27</sup>

These offers of pragmatic accommodation were usually accepted and, indeed, fully reciprocated. Many tribal leaders enthusiastically embraced Riza Shah's patronage, partly to ensure their own survival, partly in order to benefit from the largesse that was the reward for political support, and partly because they, in fact, approved of many of the regime's policies, for example, its consolidation of landlordism. If the benefits of offering support were clear, equally clear were the dangers of withholding it. Recalcitrance might invoke military retaliation from the army, but it was more likely to be countered by Riza Khan's political manoeuvres, the pointed favouring of rival tribal sections and leaders or the use of a new, populist, tactic, the stimulation of opposition to the tribal leaders from lower levels of the tribal pyramid.

Occasionally, however, policies of pragmatism proved impossible or broke down and the regime found itself obliged to embark on sustained military campaigning. Such campaigning was mainly a feature of the 1920s and the very early 1930s. During the 1920s the most important of the army's tribal campaigns were those against the various Kurdish groups, in Luristan,

against the Turkmans, and in Baluchistan. Although the army was mobilized against Shaykh Khazal, the Arabistan crisis of 1924 was, in fact, resolved by political means, without fighting, and for most of the decade the south was free of armed tribal hostility on any substantial scale. From 1929 to 1931, however, the army was fully engaged in suppressing the widespread rebellions that broke out successively among the southern confederations, although these rebellions were finally brought to a close largely by political negotiation. After 1931–2 any remaining tribal resistance in the country was small-scale and fragmented, requiring essentially gendarmerie operations, and the government was able to place the army on a peace-time footing, sporadic operations thereafter continuing only in Baluchistan and Kurdistan.

Perhaps the most bitter, prolonged and bloody tribal campaign of the Riza Shah period was that waged against the tribes of Luristan in the south-west. Although purely an internal matter, and lacking the quasi-nationalist and trans-border dimensions of the Kurdish revolts, the Luristan campaign lasted more than a decade, from the early 1920s into the 1930s.<sup>28</sup> It found its first focus over the struggle to build a new road along the trade route linking central Iran with the Gulf port of Muhammarah via the towns of Dizful, Khurramabad and Burujird. Following the completion of the road, the area was the scene of a new conflict over the construction of the Trans-Iranian railway. For the Tehran regime, the road through Luristan to Muhammarah was a main artery of commerce, of key importance in national economic integration, and crucial to enfolding the oil-producing regions of the south-west securely within the national fabric.

The mortal struggle over the road and the railway, which endured over many years, entailed an enormous cost in human and economic terms to both sides. Yet the tribes of Luristan were not existentially opposed to the penetration of their region by the new state. On the contrary, there seems to have been a broad acknowledgement by both tribal leaders and the nomads of the changed context brought about by the advance of the new state, and a general willingness to come to terms with the rising power. Yet the possibility of a peaceful integration of Luristan seems to have foundered principally due to the military's ideological predisposition and its tendency to corruption, both of which were fully embodied in the army commander in western Iran, General Ahmad Agha Amirahmadi, who earned for himself in the course of these operations the soubriquet of the butcher of Luristan.<sup>29</sup> The frequent rebellions in the province, especially those in 1924 and 1925, were essentially the result of provocations arising from the army's implementation of the regime's tribal policy which vacillated, occasionally disastrously, between pragmatic conciliation and brutal repression. The risings of 1924 and 1925, for example, both occurred after periods of peaceful negotiation and tribal submission were suddenly and violently terminated by the army's treacherous execution of numbers of Lur chiefs who had surrendered

on a safe-conduct. The sting of resistance in Luristan was only finally drawn by the systematic employment from early 1930s of tribesmen as navvies by the Railway Syndicate.

Wherever the army embarked on tribal campaigning, the operations were characterized by a high degree of brutality, random violence and robbery. The army's own behaviour in this respect was aggravated by the participation of tribal levies who were invariably encouraged to fight by the prospect of plunder. Furthermore, military rule over tribal populations, wherever it was established, was extremely harsh, often provoking further resistance rather than ensuring compliance. The Qashqai, for instance, although apparently believing, initially at least, that the removal of their *ilkhani* would lead to an amelioration of their hardships, were exasperated beyond endurance by four years under a military governor and were finally driven to a rising in 1929. Not only was military rule itself always oppressive and often corrupt, but it was especially feared as it was invariably the harbinger of the arrival of tax officials, these officials travelling everywhere in the company and under the protection of the army.

If the political reality was often one of pragmatism and cooption, yet Riza Khan and the nationalist elite understood and presented the tribal problem differently in ideological terms. The nationalist discourse emphasized the imperative of confrontation, defined the tribes as presenting an existential threat to national survival, and insisted on the necessity of building up military strength and authoritarian state structures capable of containing and eventually eradicating this threat. The tribal problem was used to justify the primacy of the army in the national budget and the installation of military rule in the provinces, while the submission of tribal groups, however achieved in practice, was deployed to burnish Riza Khan's nationalist credentials and gather support for his wider agenda. The political elite and, indeed, the urban population in general were highly receptive to this discourse. The reaction of the nationalist press to the tribal attack on the army at Shalil in 1922 vividly illustrated the widespread view of the Bakhtiyari khans as pawns of the British and, a natural corollary of this view, Riza Khan and the army as champions of national independence.<sup>30</sup> In fact, the more the tribes could be presented as puppets and reactionaries, the greater the political benefit accruing to the regime. The victory over Shaykh Khazal in 1924, for example, produced an unprecedented outpouring of vitriol against the tribes and glorification of the army and its commander, and provided a springboard for Riza's bid for the throne the following year. By this stage, indeed, so firmly established was the elite's belief in Riza Khan as a national saviour that they were unable to resist a capitulation to the gathering forces of dictatorship.<sup>31</sup>

In the immediate post-coup period, the new regime in Tehran had first turned its attention to the north of the country. From late 1921 to 1922 the army defeated the political challenges offered by the Jangalis in Gilan,



by Colonel Pasyan in Mashhad, by Major Lahuti in Tabriz, suppressed the Kurdish rebellion led by Simko and began the pacification of the Shahsavan.<sup>32</sup> Although these were formidable challenges for the new army, yet their context was purely domestic, the Russian imperial presence having been first disorganized and then largely eclipsed by the 1917 revolution. In southern Iran, however, the regime faced complexities and difficulties arising not only from the size of the tribes and tribal confederations, the wealth, power and embedded political links of their leaderships, but also from the fact that British power and influence remained intact, and the clients and allies of the British retained, for the moment, all the protection of their imperial patron. Indeed, certain British interests in southern Iran, particularly its control of the oil industry and its role as a Persian Gulf power, were assuming increasing importance in the post-war world.

Nonetheless, the new regime was able progressively to extend its reach throughout southern Iran without the outbreak of any major military conflict until 1929. This achievement was due in large measure to its success in coopting the most important southern tribal leaderships, including the great khans of the Bakhtiari, Sawlat al-Dawlah Qashqai and Qavam al-Mulk of the Khamsah, and in neutralizing challenges from those it was unable to win over, particularly the Shaykh of Muhammarah. This success was, itself, largely due to the kaleidoscopic political rearrangements brought about by the changing attitude of Britain, the imperial patron of these leaderships.

The fundamental shift in British policy that occurred during 1923–4 was a crucial determinant for the evolution of tribal politics throughout this entire period.<sup>33</sup> Although British officials had been instrumental in bringing Riza Khan to power in the coup of 1921, their influence in Tehran had thereafter diminished rapidly and visibly. After the fall of Sayyid Ziya<sup>34</sup> in May 1921, which the British minister in Tehran, Norman, had been unable to prevent, the enmity between Curzon and the new Iranian government of Qavam al-Saltanah and Riza Khan was palpable. With its influence under apparent challenge in Tehran, Britain again fell back on its relationships with the southern tribes. Curzon was a strong advocate of the maintenance of these relationships, as was most of the British consular establishment in the south, many of whom shared Curzon's Indian background. Just as Britain had, in the pre-coup period of early 1921 and fearing a Soviet occupation of Tehran, proposed a Bakhtiari-ruled statelet in the south, so now too the notion of relying on the Bakhtiari to protect strategic southern interests re-emerged. British officials held discussions about possible methods of strengthening the confederation politically and militarily, including the raising of a force of Bakhtiari levies under British officers.<sup>35</sup>

Percy Loraine, who arrived in Tehran as the new British minister in December 1921, eventually began a fundamental reassessment of British policy which, together with his personal admiration for Riza Khan, was to culminate, by 1923–4, in the abandonment of Britain's friends in southern

Iran in favour of good relations with the central government. Until his departure from Iran in 1926, all Loraine's efforts, both formal and informal, and including the facing down of members of his own consular establishment in the south, were directed towards achieving the peaceful submission of Britain's tribal clients to the new regime in Tehran.<sup>36</sup>

For the first year and a half of Loraine's tenure, he had remained doubtful about Tehran's centralizing policies. He did nothing to discourage the tribal leaderships' formation of a Southern League, the objective of which was to resist politically, and potentially militarily, the encroachment of the new state. He had opposed Riza Khan's military advance into Arabistan, urging the Bakhtiyari khans to do everything they could to stop the troop movement, and the unresolved ambiguity of his policy contributed in no small way to the Shalil crisis. However, the unfolding of this crisis impressed him with the strength of nationalist feeling and the determination of the new regime and convinced him that it was not possible for Britain to hold to an attitude of neutrality in the struggle between Riza Khan and the southern tribes. During the months over which the crisis was played out, Loraine decisively moved into Riza Khan's camp. Loraine, still with a residual sense of responsibility towards the khans, did not wish to see them crushed altogether and played a vital role in mediating between them and Riza Khan. Yet he, together with the consuls at Isfahan, and Ahvaz and Dr Young of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, consistently put pressure on them to submit to the government and finally facilitated their capitulation by arranging for a secret loan from the oil company with which they could pay the compensation demanded by Riza Khan.

Loraine was also instrumental in ensuring the peaceful submission of Shaykh Khazal.<sup>37</sup> Although certain British officials in the south continued to nurse a distrust of Riza Khan and strongly advocated maintaining the old pro-tribal policy, Loraine imposed support of Tehran on the entire diplomatic and consular establishment. At first, he attempted to persuade, and then finally compelled, the Shaykh to submit to Tehran, in particular restraining the southern tribes, especially the Bakhtiyari, allied to the Shaykh in the Southern League.

Nor could the tribal leaderships any longer look to their patron, the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, for protection. In fact, Loraine's reorientation of British policy was proceeding in tandem with a sea-change in the attitude of the oil company. Although both Shaykh Khazal and the Bakhtiyari khans had derived immense benefit, both financial and political, from their links with the company, these very links were responsible for turning them into a symbol of foreign meddling and a popular target of nationalist opinion, and encouraging the hostile attentions of Riza Khan himself. In the new circumstances of the 1920s, company officials in Ahvaz, like the legation in Tehran, were increasingly inclined to accept the new regime as the real and legitimate power in southern as well as national affairs.

Glad to be able to divest itself of Shaykh Khazal, as a result of Tehran's actions in 1924, the company found itself more and more frustrated by its entanglements with the Bakhtiyari khans. When Riza Shah finally acted against them, the company enthusiastically joined the chorus of nationalist denunciations.

As Loraine's new approach clarified and crystallized, so too the more astute among the tribal leaderships also grasped the direction of change and hastened to build bridges to the rising power in Tehran. Britain's reputation as a reliable source of protection had already been damaged by the actions of their protégé, Sayyid Ziya, in imprisoning members of the old elite. The gravitational pull now exercised by Riza Khan's increasing dominance meant that influential families began to find their former links to the imperial power embarrassing and manoeuvred to realign themselves. Even a figure so closely identified with British interests as Qavam al-Mulk, had, as early as January 1922, markedly begun to lose his belief in the value of a British connection and to fall back on his own local resources to maintain his position.<sup>38</sup> Over the next few years, Qavam was to be extremely successful in reinventing himself as a loyal courtier of Riza Shah and a pillar of the new order in southern Iran. Sardar Asad Bakhtiyari was equally adept, not only realigning himself away from Britain and towards the new regime, but using this manoeuvre to assure his personal ascendancy over his rivals among the other senior khans of the Bakhtiyari confederation. Sawlat al-Dawlah Qashqai also took advantage of the changing context by emphasizing his anti-British past to appeal to Riza Khan and to nationalist opinion in general. Those tribal leaders who failed to make the necessary shift with sufficient speed and decisiveness, however, most notably Shaykh Khazal, risked being eliminated altogether as figures of national, or even of local, significance.

By successfully making the transition from tribal leader to courtier or Majlis deputy, such figures maintained for themselves positions of power and influence. Yet the character and foundation of their power was changing in a subtle yet inexorable way. By attaching themselves to the regime on an individual basis, they began to become fully integrated into the political elite in the capital, their roles as tribal and regional leaders being correspondingly diminished, their political links with their followers shrivelling as surely as were their social and cultural ties. It is this process, of integration into the Tehran elite and of identification with the regime, that explains the paradox presented by Sardar Asad's continued occupancy of the post of minister of war throughout the years of brutal tribal pacification.

### **The new shah and the tribes**

The first half of the 1920s had been characterized by a prolonged period of power struggle within the elite. During these years Riza Khan engaged

simultaneously in coopting, curbing and occasionally eliminating the tribal leaderships, and in waging a series of mortal battles with his political enemies in Tehran. In 1924 he was thwarted in his presidential ambitions by an anti-republican coalition of his political opponents in Tehran.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, by the end of the following year, having secured a base for his power within his own creation, the new army, and posing as the sole guarantor of national unity and independence, he succeeded in engineering his accession to the throne. In his presentation of himself as the instrument of national deliverance, his programme of tribal pacification, disarmament and subjugation had been an important element.

During the first year of the new shah's reign, the imposition of novel political and constitutional arrangements provoked widespread discontent in the shape of political dissent, tribal revolts and army mutinies.<sup>40</sup> These movements, however, had neither the hope nor the means of forging themselves into an effective challenge to the new order and the fledgling regime survived. After the consolidation of the military-monarchical dictatorship in 1926-7, Riza Shah and his supporters, especially the triumvirate of Abdulhusayn Taymurtash, minister of court, Firuz Mirza, minister of finance, and Ali Akbar Davar, minister of justice, grasped the opportunity to embark on a programme of rapid and forced state-building, introducing, to that end, many of the reforms long advocated by the constitutionalist intelligentsia. In an ideological context conditioned by a secular nationalism deriving from European templates, and within increasingly authoritarian state structures, Riza Shah moved against foreign influence, sought to position Iran securely within the emerging interwar nation-state system, and launched a raft of domestic policies aimed at remodelling Iran along Western lines.

The regime now turned its attention away from the tribal leaders to the tribal populations themselves. Not only were the elites no longer the main target of the regime's tribal policy but they were now, rather, enlisted as the principal instruments of its execution. In these years several major pieces of legislation were enacted that promised to have, cumulatively and in the long term, a profoundly negative effect on the lives of nomads and peasants. In 1926 the first steps were taken towards implementing conscription. As the military authorities encountered broad opposition in the towns and cities to the recruiting of conscripts, they redirected their efforts to the countryside, where the settled population was incapable of resistance against the combined onslaught of the military authorities and their own landlords. Although the army, fearing resistance, made no general effort to take conscripts from the nomads until well into the 1930s, the latter's apprehension at the measure, and at its preliminaries, the census and the registration of births and deaths, was widespread and profound.<sup>41</sup> Other measures followed the Conscription Law. In December 1928 the Majlis passed the Uniform

Dress Law, which threatened the symbolic expression and reproduction of tribal identity; in 1928 and 1929 extensive legislation was passed concerning the registration of landed property and title deeds, undermining the tribespeople's customary rights to pastures; and during 1927 a policy with which Riza Shah was to become particularly identified, and for which he attracted implacable hostility from the tribes, also began to be discussed in earnest: the prohibition of pastoral nomadism and the forced settlement of the nomads on the land and their conversion into agriculturalists.<sup>42</sup> Taken together, these measures, unlike the intra-elite struggles of earlier years, represented a direct social and economic assault on the rural poor, both settled and nomadic.

The implementation of this radical agenda between 1927 and 1929 provoked immediate opposition, and sometimes resistance, from a range of social groups. At first the provincial cities were wracked by bitter struggles against conscription and the clothing reform. Then the upheavals spread to the rural areas. In 1928 discontent, which had simmered for several years among the settled Bakhtiyari peasants in Chahar Mahal erupted into an organized anti-landlord movement that attracted national attention. Although this movement was suppressed by the army, the following year saw southern Iran convulsed by a series of nomad and peasant uprisings in what became the most serious rural crisis faced by the regime in the two decades of its existence.

The unrest that gripped much of the Iranian countryside during 1929 resulted both from the novelty of the regime's agenda and from its energetic and authoritarian approach. It was directed not only against the new policies but also against those, tribal khans as well as state officials, most closely identified with them. The risings were nowhere led by the senior khans, who were at best ambivalent towards, and sometimes totally opposed to, the tribal insurgencies, but by junior, subordinate and minor khans and *kalantars*.

The nomads and peasants were unable to sustain their military defiance of the new order and the leaderships of the risings were politically outmanoeuvred by the regime acting in concert with its allies among the tribal elites. Internally divided, defensive and backward-looking, and lacking the urban and intellectual allies crucial to national political success, the tribal discontent so dramatically demonstrated during 1929 proved unable to coalesce into a unified or sustained challenge to the new order. On the contrary, Riza Shah, having begun to implement many of the demands of reformist opinion, still retained a degree of support among the nationalist intelligentsia which was, in any case, temperamentally disinclined to ally itself with tribal forces, unless in the most exceptional circumstances. Indeed, Riza Shah had based much of his nationalist appeal precisely on his promise to suppress tribal political and military power.

The uprisings of 1929, although defeated, had a defining impact on Riza Shah and on the direction of his regime. The near collapse of government authority across much of southern Iran produced a qualitative deterioration in the shah's morale. Shaken by the extent and the depth of the crisis, he began to be overtaken by fear for his own life and for the survival of his new dynasty, both of which he believed to be threatened by a constellation of opponents including the tribes themselves and their putative allies among the British, and individuals and groups within the very elite that staffed the political, military and bureaucratic institutions of the new state. In the summer of 1929, at the height of the tribal rebellions, the shah visibly began to lose confidence in the loyalty of even, and perhaps especially, his closest supporters, and the first signs appeared of what was to become a reign of terror, sweeping through the elite in the early 1930s and cutting down friends and enemies alike. In June 1929 Firuz Mirza, the minister of finance, was arrested and thus became the first of the shah's key civilian supporters to fall victim to a process that was to end in the death, imprisonment or exile of most of the shah's loyal officials, including Taymurtash, the minister of court, and Sardar Asad, the minister of war.

### **Nomadic settlement**

The programme of tribal disarmament, pacification and settlement had been part of the modernist vision since the late nineteenth century. Now, however, in the hands of an increasingly autocratic and isolated ruler, tribal policy was turned into a weapon of political, social and cultural repression and control. Furthermore, as the regime had entered on the second decade of its life, its tribal policy had become inextricably entangled with certain other preoccupations, even obsessions, which exercised an ever greater hold on the shah. In each of these obsessions, the southern tribal leaderships had been allocated a role. Their very existence heightened the shah's anxiety for his own safety and the security of the new dynasty, aroused his suspicions of his own key supporters whom he feared might collude with tribal military strength and hastened his resort to the methods of political terror. The tribal leaders' vast estates tormented his burgeoning mania for land acquisition; their links with the oil company offered a channel for his frustration at his own failure to establish fuller control over Iran's oil resources; and their British connections aggravated his fear of foreign interference and his morbid anxiety about the image Iran presented to the West.

As well as casting a shadow over the bureaucratic and military elite, the rebellions of 1929 also sealed the fate of the southern tribal leaders themselves. In 1932–3, in mortal fear of any remnants of tribal opposition, hungry for their lands, and determined upon a policy of forced sedentarization, and clothing his actions in nationalist depictions of the khans as feudal and as puppets of the British, the shah turned decisively against the

southern khans. Their political destruction, already largely accomplished, was now followed inexorably by their actual physical elimination and, with this, the southern tribal leaderships were permanently removed as a factor in national political life.<sup>43</sup> To complete his eradication of any vestige of tribal power within the political system or within national institutions, in 1934 the shah abrogated the law providing for the election by each of the major tribes of a tribal Majlis deputy, arguing that the tribal population of Iran was an integral part of the larger population and should participate in the election of Majlis deputies together with, and in the same way as, the general population.<sup>44</sup> In future Majlis elections, there were no longer to be special ballot boxes for the tribal vote.<sup>45</sup>

Yet by now, so completely had the khans severed themselves from the tribal pyramid that this repression in the capital evoked no response from the tribes in the south. With the removal of the leaderships and with military officers controlling the apex of the tribal confederations, the regime was able to embark on a major experiment in social engineering: the settlement of the nomads and the suppression of the migrations. The confederations themselves, fragmented, partially disarmed and leaderless, were no longer capable of mounting the large-scale revolts of the past and the only response available to them in the face of the political repression, economic hardship and forced settlement of the 1930s was a retreat into banditry.

Although statistical data are sparse, it seems clear that during the 1930s the rural poor, under the impact of the regime's economic policies and the international depression, experienced a steady deterioration and, finally, a catastrophic collapse in their already low living standards.<sup>46</sup> Even the staples of tea and sugar, subject to massive domestic taxes, about 600 per cent *ad valorem*, were now beyond their reach, they could not afford oil for lamps for their huts and were clothed always in rags.<sup>47</sup> By the mid-1930s reports were increasingly frequent in which observers recorded their shock at the conditions they witnessed, both in the rural areas and in the towns that provided a haven to those fleeing the impoverished countryside. The towns and cities experienced an explosion in the number of beggars, refugees from the surrounding rural areas, and the general poverty even produced a noticeable increase in prostitution.<sup>48</sup> Yet the suffering of the settled peasants paled in comparison with that of the forcibly sedentarized nomads who seem sometimes, especially in remote areas such as the Turkman steppe, to have been reduced to actual starvation.<sup>49</sup>

Nomadic sedentarization had been part of mainstream reforming opinion since the nineteenth century. Yet although conceptualized as a desirable step in national development by the urban elite, the policy was actually implemented in the late 1920s and 1930s with almost no preparation and with little or no regard for its consequences for pastoral productivity or for its cost in human suffering. The brutal and corrupt methods by which the policy was enforced bequeathed a legacy to the late 1930s and early 1940s

of economic dislocation and political bitterness, while those who suffered the greatest hardships – for example, the Qashqai tribes – were never again to be reconciled to the Pahlavi regime.

As a concrete policy, the prohibition of pastoral nomadism and the conversion of the nomads into agriculturalists had begun to be discussed in earnest in the Majlis during 1927, as part of the newly stabilized regime's major reform push. The policy appears to have been considered first on a practical level as part of the solution to the problems the army was encountering in Luristan. By 1928 the government was actively attempting to induce the Lurs to settle, and was building walled villages for them, although apparently at this stage with little success. By 1928 the shah made it clear that this policy was to apply generally to the nomadic tribes. The Lurs were also the first target of another new tribal policy: the forcible relocation of nomads away from their tribal areas. Efforts to remove the Lurs en masse away from the vicinity of the new road and railway in the late 1920s were soon followed in the early 1930s by the forcible deportations of various Kurdish groups from their pastures on the frontier regions.<sup>50</sup>

Nomadic settlement was not, in itself, a new phenomenon. On the contrary, a tendency towards spontaneous settlement appears to have been a typical feature of nomadic life; nomads, because of their relatively healthy way of life and other demographic factors, typically produced population surpluses, these surpluses being obliged to settle when unable to find pasture land.<sup>51</sup> Such developments had had the effect of creating tribal settlements on the nomads' territories or the khans' lands, settled populations in villages which remained, however, tribal in organization and subordinate to the khans.<sup>52</sup> This kind of spontaneous settlement seems to have been taking place at an accelerated pace in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The sedentarization policy imposed in the 1930s was novel in two respects: first in its forcible character and, second, in its motivation, which was often crudely political. Although the policy was undoubtedly popular among the nationalist elite, and even the urban population in general, the methods employed in its realization by the army and the interior ministry produced consequences unimagined by the early reformers of the constitutional period. The authoritarian approach, the corruption, the lack of planning, and the speed of implementation combined to produce hardship in the tribal areas on an unprecedented scale. Rather than assist and accelerate the natural process of settlement, which was in any case already in train among the nomads, the regime opted for an administrative diktat to be imposed suddenly and enforced brutally. Indeed, the employment of such a degree of coercion in pursuit of an experiment in social engineering was entirely novel in the country's history. As the policy was imposed more generally throughout the 1930s, particularly on non-compliant tribes such as those of the Qashqai confederation, it became clear that the regime was largely



indifferent to the overwhelmingly negative economic consequences of the prohibition of nomadic pastoralism, but intent on the destruction, once and for all, of the confederations as unified entities and as repositories of political and military power.

Yet the policy of tribal settlement still remains to some extent an enigma. The sparsity of sources for the 1930s makes reconstructing the history of that decade difficult in general, while the unfolding of events in the rural areas remains almost completely obscure. Although the scholarly literature has tended to accept the regime's assertions about its activities at face-value, accepting an assumption of the successful implementation of full-scale settlement, yet there is a general absence of physical evidence of the massive building programme that would have been necessary to achieve this result. There was certainly sporadic evidence of the construction of individual huts and small hamlets, and the town of Tul-i Khusraw arose directly out of the settlement programme. But it is still astonishing that comprehensive sedentarization could have proceeded without attracting any sustained attention from, for example, the British consuls still scattered across the country.

It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, especially in light of the widespread corruption that characterized the army and bureaucracy during the 1930s, that the extent of settlement was much less than has been supposed, with the migrations often continuing more or less as usual after the bribing of the authorities. Much of the money allocated by the government for the construction of permanent dwellings also seems to have vanished into the pockets of corrupt officials. Although the regime remained committed in ideological terms to the objective of forced sedentarization during the 1930s, its overall degeneration sapped its energy and its ability to persist with the measure in a systematic way. The policy was imposed in practice in a much more erratic and piecemeal manner than has generally been understood by the literature, and there were very substantial variations in the degree to which, and the methods by which, the nomads were obliged to settle.

It was in 1932, after the final military defeats of the southern tribes, that the government launched its major settlement drive. The ministry of the interior took over responsibility for the policy from the army, which had been experimenting with it in Luristan, and a new department was created to devise and oversee a comprehensive plan for nomadic sedentarization. The interior ministry formed building commissions to examine conditions in the tribal areas and make recommendations for settlement, while in its budget for 1932–3 and for 1933–4 the government allocated one million *riyals* for tribal settlement.<sup>53</sup>

Yet the building commissions' recommendations seem often to have been overruled in favour of punitive decisions about settlement sites and little or none of the allocated funding reached the nomads. In practice, the main

method employed to enforce settlement was the simple expedient of using the army to block the migration routes, the government taking no other practical steps, for example, the provision of agricultural training, implements or seed, to aid the conversion of the nomads into peasants.

The settlement policy immediately ran into serious difficulties. Its disastrous consequences, both for the nomadic and semi-nomadic populations and for the rural economy in general, became immediately apparent and tribal leaders and government officials were acutely conscious that the rapid and comprehensive settlement of large numbers of nomads was unworkable. The building commission experts had already specifically concluded that the settlement of entire tribes under existing conditions was impossible, although it is not clear that such reports ever reached the shah. The regime's doctrinaire tribal policies appeared to be running into the sand and the government was obliged to retreat. Owing to the immense practical and political difficulties, the restrictions on migration were eased, in theory temporarily, in the summer of 1933 and the nomads migrated as usual. The interior ministry then introduced a significant modification to the policy by appointing officials responsible for registering flocks which, accompanied by a few shepherds, would be permitted to move from pasture to pasture after the majority of nomads had settled. Thereafter, the settlement policy seems to have been implemented sporadically, with great variation depending on local circumstances and the energy or corruption of local civil and military authorities.

Across southern Iran the treatment meted out to the nomads differed greatly from tribe to tribe. In general, those tribal groups whom the regime considered the least politically important and the least threat, and who evinced a degree of cooperation with the authorities, fared the best.

Hardship among the Bakhtiyari was considerable. In the latter part of the 1930s stone hamlets began to be built in the Bakhtiyari summer pastures, every two or three houses with a *kadkhuda* over each.<sup>54</sup> As elsewhere, the nomads were allowed to send only one man and one woman with each flock from pasture to pasture, while the remainder of the family were obliged to live permanently in the houses and accordingly suffered greatly from disease and the extreme cold of the winter.<sup>55</sup> Many had been forced to settle at altitudes approaching 1,800 metres.<sup>56</sup>

The Qashqai were among the tribal groups whose experience of forced sedentarization was harshest. The *kalantars* who had joined the rebellions of 1929–32 were exiled and detained in Tehran and, in some cases, executed. Many tribes were ordered by the authorities to settle in areas specifically chosen as climatically and physically unsuitable.<sup>57</sup> Their only escape from disease and even starvation was by the payment of large bribes to officials and army officers to be allowed to continue with the migrations, and many did, indeed, adopt this course which, however, led equally to their impoverishment. In 1937 the army struck a devastating blow against the

numerically large and still migrating Qashqai tribes of the Kashkuli, Darrahshuri, Shishbuluki and Farsimadan (75 per cent of the total Qashqai population) by holding them up as they were returning to their winter quarters. On this occasion alone, the nomads suffered the loss of many thousands of sheep, goats, cattle and horses.<sup>58</sup>

Of all the Qashqai tribes, the Kashkuli perhaps suffered the most in these years. They had actively supported the 1929 rebellion and their khans were exiled. The nomads were then offered three alternatives: permanent settlement in the winter quarters, where they faced ruin in an arid area which experienced blistering heat in the summer months and where they would be vulnerable to disease; settlement in the summer quarters, where their flocks would perish in the cold; or the payment of huge bribes to corrupt government officials and army officers.<sup>59</sup> In practice, they had little option but to pay the bribes and thus found themselves completely impoverished. The tribes gradually disintegrated and the nomads scattered, many settling in poverty and squalor in the winter quarters.

The constituent tribes of the Khamsah confederation, on the other hand, never suffered any oppression comparable to that meted out to the Qashqai. The contrast was marked. The Khamsah did not possess the political importance of the Qashqai, nor did they offer the same potential threat to the security of the region, therefore the army did not 'consider it necessary to kick them while it held them down'.<sup>60</sup> The Khamsah khans were not arrested or exiled by Riza Shah and the constituent tribes were, to some extent, left to themselves during the 1930s on condition that migration ceased, although sections of especially the Basiri impoverished themselves by paying bribes to government officials in order to continue their migrations. However, those who ceased to migrate did not take up farming, even though the government did not prescribe any specific area for their settlement and certain groups were able to settle on some of the best agricultural land in the province. Indeed, they maintained their aversion to agriculture. Although the local peasants reaped good crops, wherever the Khamsah settled their crops were indifferent and their villages blighted by squalor and poverty. During the settlement very many sheep, goats and horses were lost and the numbers of the tribes were depleted by death and social disintegration but, although the financial demands of the government were a strain on the tribal economy, conditions never became desperate in the Khamsah villages.

The experiences of the Khamsah were echoed by tribal populations across Iran. Like the southern tribes, the Shahsavan of Azarbayjan, for example, seem generally to have welcomed the peace and prosperity promised in the 1920s. They had been disarmed and pacified early in the decade and any political or military challenge neutralized. They seem, consequently, to have been treated relatively leniently during the period of forced settlement. They appear to have been allowed to settle where they chose, although they were

also occasionally encouraged to settle in areas that were unsuitable for farming owing to inadequate water supplies. In fact, they usually added themselves to existing villages where they lived a parasitical existence, refusing to take up agriculture and adding to the exploitation of the local peasants. Among the Shahsavans, as for the southern tribes, the settlement policy appears to have been imposed only intermittently, with many suspensions and much evasion through bribery. Nonetheless, its underlying dynamic in northern Iran was similar to that in evidence in the south. The concentration of land ownership, particularly in the hands of tribal chiefs, continued apace while the dispossessed and pauperized nomads and peasants fled to the towns of the region.<sup>61</sup>

The programme of compulsory settlement was abruptly terminated by the crisis that overtook the shah's regime with the Anglo-Soviet invasion of August in 1941. With the collapse of the political framework that supported it, the policy too collapsed, leaving little apparent trace. The period of its enforcement had been brief, six or seven years at most, and less in the case of many nomadic groups, while its impact had been ameliorated by the enormous corruption accompanying its implementation and the political retreats to which the authorities were obliged to resort in the face of the sheer impracticability of the task they had set themselves.

Nonetheless, the shah's tribal policies, including forced settlement, had undoubtedly reinforced trends already under way within tribal society, accelerating centrifugal tendencies and deepening the alienation of tribal society from the khans. However, in the Riza Shah decades, and in the decades to follow, it was economic development that provided the motor for the transformation of tribal society: the push of the commercialization of land, the penetration of the cash economy and, after land reform, the spread of agri-business, coupled with the pull of the growing industrial and urban sectors. In fact, the nomads were never to be turned, en masse, into peasants. Rather, they and the peasants were to suffer the same fate, either reduction to the condition of a landless proletariat employed as labourers in the new agro-industrial projects, or forced off the land altogether into industry and as migrants to the cities.

# THE NEW STATE AND THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TRIBAL LEADERSHIPS

## The great khans of the Bakhtiyari

In 1921 much of south-central Iran was controlled by the *khavanin-i buzurg*, the great khans, of the Bakhtiyari tribal confederation.<sup>1</sup> The great khans of the Bakhtiyari had become among the wealthiest and most powerful of the tribal leaderships. As well as their domination of the confederation and its territories, the great khans had, as a result of their contribution to the restoration of constitutional rule in 1909, established themselves as a factor in national politics and had also since then come to dominate the governments of several provinces ringing Bakhtiyari. Furthermore, they had become extremely wealthy, particularly in terms of landed property, as a result of their monopoly of tribal leadership, the spoils of office and their British connections.

Nonetheless, despite their political influence and their wealth, they succumbed easily to the new power in Tehran. With the reversal of British policy brought about by Percy Loraine in the early 1920s, they forfeited the support of their imperial patron. They were demoralized by a series of financial blows, particularly the indemnity imposed after the 'Shalil incident' and the arrears of taxes demanded by Dr Millspaugh, the American Administrator-General of Finance.<sup>2</sup> Then, in the mid-1920s, the endemic and enervating factionalism and rivalry that had beset relations between the senior khans was finally and fatally transcended by a new and permanent political schism that saw Jafar Quli Khan Sardar Asad taken into the cabinet and made minister of war and the rest of the khans reduced to political marginality and impotence.<sup>3</sup>

### **The *khavanin-i buzurg* before 1921**

Riza Shah's overarching strategic objectives towards the great khans of the Bakhtiyari, and the methods he employed to achieve them – the threat, if not the actual deployment of military force, the weapon of the tax demand,

the encouragement of fissiparous tribal sub-groups and the patronage of dissident factions within the leadership – were entirely in keeping with the regime's treatment of other tribes. The internally generated centrifugal pressures, although undoubtedly more advanced within the Bakhtiyari, were also shared by other tribal groups in this period of rapid historical change. The interaction of the Bakhtiyari and the new Pahlavi regime was, however, in certain respects unique. One of the key factors explaining the relative ease with which Riza Khan was able to establish control over the Bakhtiyari is to be found in the character of confederal leadership as it had emerged since the late nineteenth century. The Bakhtiyari confederation was unusual in its possession of a relatively large, centralized and collective leadership, consisting of the sons and nephews of Husayn Quli Khan Ilkhani, who had first unified the Bakhtiyari tribes in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries these ruling Haft Lang khans of the Ilkhani and Haji Ilkhani families, the *khavanin-i buzurg*, consolidated their control of the Bakhtiyari confederation and then ensured their permanent and unchallengeable political and financial ascendancy by cultivating links with the British official presence and the oil company.<sup>5</sup> Their access to wealth and power again increased dramatically as a result of their role in the restoration of constitutional rule in 1909.<sup>6</sup>

Like the Bakhtiyari, other tribal groupings in southern Iran appear to have acquired greater stability, particularly in terms of their leaderships, in the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries. It was in this period that Shaykh Khazal of Muhammarah and the Qavamis of the Khamsah, as well as the great khans of the Bakhtiyari, established themselves as permanent features of the political landscape. This was undoubtedly largely due to the imperial context. These leaderships were successful in replacing their fluctuating and unstable links to Iranian power sources with durable and profitable ties to the immensely powerful British imperial presence. British support artificially promoted and maintained these leaderships, and guaranteed their permanent political and economic ascendancy, causing them to ossify and become impervious and unresponsive to internal pressures, thus destroying the traditional equilibrium and balance both within the tribal groupings themselves, especially between the leaderships and subordinate layers, between the tribal leaderships and Tehran, and between the various elements across southern Iran. By the early twentieth century the position of the great khans of the Bakhtiyari, for example, no longer depended on their capacities as tribal leaders, or the success of their political relations with local, regional or central Iranian authorities, but entirely on their links with the British. This was to have serious consequences for their ability to sustain themselves in the very different political context of the 1920s.

The specific formation of the Bakhtiyari leadership presented a striking contrast to the political expressions of other confederations and tribes in southern Iran. On the one hand, the historical development of the large

confederations of the Khamsah and the Qashqai had produced leadership residing, in a more or less stable and permanent way, in a single individual, Qavam al-Mulk and Isma'il Khan Sawlat al-Dawlah respectively, while Shaykh Khazal had achieved a particularly secure personal ascendancy in Arabistan.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, fragmented tribal groups with considerable internal autonomy, such as the Lurs and the Kuhgilu, had avoided the political danger of any centralized leadership at all. The great khans of the Bakhtiyari, however, constituted a leadership that was both numerically large and theoretically collective, and which was accordingly uniquely and fatally vulnerable to internal factionalism and, therefore, to external manipulation.

Prior to 1909 the great khans had played the roles of tribal chiefs, military leaders, landlords, governors and tax-collectors in their own and nearby regions.<sup>8</sup> They mediated within the Bakhtiyari and between the tribes and the central and provincial government. They collected the tribal taxes, furnished the shah with cavalry when requested, adjudicated in disputes within the confederation and coordinated the migration. During 1908–9 the great khans embarked on a fundamental expansion in their sphere of activity, an expansion that was to have enduring consequences for themselves and for the confederation as a whole. Allying themselves with the Isfahani constitutionalists, in early 1909 the khans seized control of the town and Samsam al-Saltanah became the first Bakhtiyari governor-general of Isfahan. Later in the year they marched on Tehran and played a key part in the restoration of the constitution. They thus broke out of the restrictions of their purely tribal and provincial roles and were no longer obliged merely to try to forge links with elements close to power in the capital but were able themselves to penetrate the central state directly. By 1912, despite the collapse of constitutional government, the Bakhtiyari khans had reached the zenith of their power. Samsam al-Saltanah, of the Ilkhani faction, was prime minister and Sardar Muhtasham, of the Haji Ilkhani, was minister of war. Bakhtiyari khans also held seven southern provincial governorships, of Isfahan, Kirman, Kashan, Yazd, Sultanabad, Burujird and Bihbahan with Kuhgiluyyah.

This magnification in the opportunities available to the khans was of fundamental significance in determining both the future internal development of the confederation and the course of the relationship between the great khans and the central government. Following the constitutionalist victory in 1909 the senior great khans left the tribal territories for Tehran or one of the provincial capitals. They rapidly abandoned their nomadic way of life and adopted urban manners and mores. Although they had always been major landowners, they now also acquired considerable property in Isfahan and Tehran. They thus forfeited the independence from state control which their physical inaccessibility had hitherto guaranteed them and, in a development heavy with significance for the future, placed themselves

within the reach of any new power that might establish itself in the capital. They became absentee landlords first and foremost, indistinguishable from the urban elite in general.

The permanent removal of the senior khans from the tribal environment had two consequences of particular importance. First, it meant that responsibility for governing Bakhtiyari was relegated to the younger generation of khans. This further exacerbated internal rivalries and dissensions, as the younger generation from whom acting tribal governors could be drawn was considerably more numerous than the elder. Second, the khans' absence and the general transformation in their position had negative implications for the continued legitimacy of their authority over the tribes. The gulf between the great khans and the rest of the confederation, in terms of wealth, political power and cultural orientation, had widened dramatically and was continuing to grow both quantitatively and qualitatively, weakening the links of the tribal hierarchy. A further danger lay in the fact that although the great khans had managed to arrogate supremacy within the confederation exclusively to the Ilkhani and Haji Ilkhani families, they had devised no method of regulating relations between themselves and of mitigating the factional rivalries and intrigues to which they had always been prone and which worsened proportionally as the opportunities for wealth and power increased.<sup>9</sup>

Although not apparent to the khans at the time, the years 1911–13 represented the peak of their power. Although they had dominated the government in that period, they had held back from the widely feared coup and had never taken control of the state. Following the resignation of Samsam al-Saltanah and Sardar Muhtasham from the cabinet in 1913 and the expulsion of the Bakhtiyari troops from Tehran by the newly formed Government Gendarmerie later in the same year, the influence of the khans in the capital and over the government quickly waned. The senior great khans, resident in Tehran and unable and unwilling to fall back on their southern power base, completed their transformation into an integral part of the urban elite, relying, like that elite, principally on their incomes as absentee landlords, the confederation no longer the central focus of their interests and responsibilities.

The political transformation of the role played by the great khans of the Bakhtiyari had been accompanied, had indeed been made possible, by an economic transformation. The political superiority established by the Ilkhani and Haji Ilkhani great khans in the late nineteenth century had been steadily reinforced by a continuing improvement in their economic position. Their wealth had always been considerable and included government salaries for their appointments as *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi*, revenues from *tuyuls* and from farming the confederation's taxes. But a source of income of crucial importance was their ownership of land outside Bakhtiyari, especially in the adjacent districts of Chahar Mahal, Faridan and Barburud, in



Kuhgiluyyah, and in Arabistan. Landlordism among the khans was not a novel development. From the late nineteenth century onwards, however, the landholdings of the great khans increased substantially and they were quickly transformed into landlords first and foremost. As the century turned, the great khans continued to expand their land-owning in the south-west.<sup>10</sup> The khans' own flocks were now of decreasing, even minimal, importance as a factor in their wealth.<sup>11</sup>

From the beginning of the twentieth century the khans' wealth was substantially augmented by incomes from non-tribal sources. These included the tolls they levied on the Bakhtiyari road, built by the Lynch Brothers between Isfahan and Arabistan and opened in 1899, and the money they received from the D'Arcy Concession for providing guards for the oilfields after 1905 and their dividends on their shareholdings in the Bakhtiyari Oil Company, formed in 1909.<sup>12</sup> After 1909 the great khans made huge financial gains from the salaries and perquisites they received as cabinet ministers and provincial governors. From 1915 onwards they also received direct subsidies from Britain in return for their support during the First World War.

Their fostering of links with powerful and strategically placed individuals and groups outside Bakhtiyari had always been crucial to the political success of the great khans. Prior to the late nineteenth century these external links had been constructed exclusively with elements within the Iranian environment. From then until the mid-1920s, however, the relationship of overriding importance to them, a relationship that possessed a stability, durability and power unknown to their previous networks, and which changed the balance in their dealings with all other indigenous groups, was their link with the British. From this relationship they derived incalculable political and financial advantage.

In the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries southern Iran was of growing strategic and economic importance to the British Empire. In the context of an absence of any effective Iranian state authority and an increasingly aggressive Russian attitude, the British became increasingly entangled in commitments to local elements whom they hoped and believed would guarantee and protect their interests, the most important of these being the great khans of the Bakhtiyari and the Shaykh of Muhammarah.

The British commitment to the great khans deepened over time. As well as broad considerations of imperial defence, Britain had various local interests which inclined them to cultivate the Bakhtiyari. The earliest of these interests were commercial. The Bakhtiyari controlled the Ahvaz–Isfahan trade route, of especial importance to the British trade with and through southern Iran. The consuls at Ahvaz and Isfahan, on the south-western and north-eastern extremities of Bakhtiyari country, soon became deeply involved in tribal affairs and the British legation played a key role in the negotiations over the Bakhtiyari (Lynch) road. The discovery of oil in commercial quantities in the Bakhtiyari winter pastures in Arabistan made

the khans even more important. Finally, as Russian control grew in northern Iran, so Britain attempted to consolidate its influence in the south. In the context of increasing Russian influence in the capital and at court, it even appears that Sardar Asad may have received British encouragement to march on Tehran in 1909.<sup>13</sup>

As the British investment in the great khans grew, so they began increasingly to depend on the great khans as guarantors of their interests and expended much time and effort in defending and supporting them, both in Tehran and in Bakhtiyari itself, against external and internal critics and enemies. British officials made repeated, though largely unsuccessful, attempts to stabilize tribal authority by introducing administrative formulae that would unify and strengthen the leadership of the great khans and render them, and therefore the areas over which they ruled, less vulnerable to disruption from within and challenge from without. The discovery of oil in their territories engendered a particular intimacy between the Bakhtiyari khans and the British, and consequently produced a distrust of the khans on the part of Tehran nationalists of corresponding strength.

The outbreak of the First World War, and the receptivity of the southern tribes, including the younger Bakhtiyari khans, to German blandishments, placed new strains on the cohesiveness of the Bakhtiyari leadership and drew the British even further into offering formal protection and guarantees to their clients among the senior great khans. In late 1915 and early 1916 an agreement was negotiated between the British and the senior khans, whereby the khans agreed to protect British interests in the south in return for British support vis-à-vis both the central government and their rivals within the confederation, and direct subsidies to the *ilkhani* and the *ilbaygi*.<sup>14</sup> The equilibrium between the central government, the khans and the British was now all but destroyed, and Tehran was rendered largely irrelevant in the arrangement of affairs in the south. The appointment of *ilkhani*, for example, was now approved by the British minister rather than conferred by the shah. Although the agreement itself was ostensibly secret, the character of British-Bakhtiyari relations which it embodied was universally understood and confirmed the nationalist view of the khans as British puppets.<sup>15</sup>

By their control of a ring of towns stretching from Sultanabad (Arak) in the west, through Isfahan and as far south as Bihbahan, and to Yazd and Kirman in the south-east, the Bakhtiyari khans had achieved a huge enlargement of their sphere of interest in south-west and south-east Iran, and a defensive encirclement of their tribal heartland. The khans had acquired these governorships through consistent British support, periodically giving rise to fears in Tehran of a potential bid for an independent, pro-British Bakhtiyari statelet. In the chaos of the years immediately following the First World War, these areas were actively mooted as the possible basis for an independent Bakhtiyari southern state. Especially in late 1920 and early

1921 British officials, notably Sir Percy Cox in Baghdad, put forward various concrete proposals for preserving British influence in southern Iran through the mechanism of a Bakhtiyari-ruled statelet in the event of a Bolshevik invasion of the north. Riza Khan's coup of February 1921 put an end to such schemes.

### ***The khavanin-i buzurg and the new regime***

During the summer of 1921, although Riza Khan had established himself in control of Tehran, the authority of the central government barely extended beyond the capital. As well as the political challenge presented by provincially based radical movements, that of Colonel Muhammad Taqi Pasyan in Mashhad and the Jangalis and their Bolshevik allies in Gilan, there had been, as a result of the collapse of central authority during the years of revolution and war, a widespread reassertion of tribal activity and approximately three-quarters of the country was under tribal control.<sup>16</sup> The situation in the north was most urgent and compelling and commanded the first attention of the new power in Tehran. By late 1921/early 1922 the army was consolidating its position throughout north, north-west and north-east Iran and the authority of the central government was being imposed in the wake of military control.

At the time of Riza Khan's coup in 1921, southern Iran, unlike the north, was relatively quiescent. Although the central government had little or no enforceable authority and the tribes and tribal confederations lived in conditions of practical autonomy, yet there were no active challenges in the form of open tribal rebellions or radical separatist movements. Another factor suggested caution. In northern Iran the Russian presence had been first disorganized and then largely eclipsed by the 1917 revolution. In the south, however, British power and influence remained intact, and the clients and allies of the British retained, for the moment, all the protection of their imperial patron. Indeed, certain features of the British presence in southern Iran, particularly its control of the oil industry and its role as a Persian Gulf power, were assuming increasing importance in the post-war world. Accordingly, Riza Khan's advance southwards, although relentless, was a slower and more delicate operation than had been his military occupation of the northern provinces.

Riza Khan himself had little or no personal knowledge of southern Iran. Indeed, he first set foot there only at the end of 1922. For him the south was a region that had been lost to Iran, where Iranian sovereignty did not prevail, where British power was supreme, and where oil, a vital national resource, was in foreign hands. Accordingly, he harboured a particular enmity towards those local leaderships, particularly the Bakhtiyari khans and Shaykh Khazal of Muhammarah, whom he considered responsible for having invited in, and who most benefited from, the British presence. Not only were these and other traditional elements outside central control, as represented

by their armed strength and their refusal to pay taxes, and impediments to the achievement of modernity and national unity, but they constituted a permanent fifth column, and were a perennial danger to the integrity and political independence of the Iranian state. The ultimate destruction of these leaderships and the reorientation of their followers towards the new Iranian authorities, the elimination of direct British involvement in local politics, the establishment of Iranian sovereignty over the oil fields and the assertion of an Iranian presence in the Gulf, were essential steps in the realization of Riza Khan's wider agenda.

Having turned his attention towards southern Iran only at the beginning of 1922 Riza Khan had, by the end of the following year, largely succeeded in destroying the political independence and freedom of action of the Bakhtiyari khans, and had substantially diminished both their prestige and their wealth. Long before launching any frontal assault on tribal power, which he was later to do through the policies of disarmament, conscription and settlement, Riza Khan had reduced the Bakhtiyari khans to a condition of impotence, and most of them to docility also. By fanning the flames of an endemic internecine discord, Riza Khan produced with the ruling families a chronic and debilitating, almost fratricidal, strife. Relying on the support of a small minority of khans to control the tribes, he confined the majority of the tribal leadership to grumbling passivity, leaving them discontented yet incapable of coherent resistance.

Riza Khan's first step was to attempt to extend peacefully the reach of his army, initially to the towns of the south and then throughout the tribal territories. Although the situation in the south demonstrated little of the urgency of the centrifugal northern provinces, nonetheless Riza Khan became, as 1921 progressed, anxious to bring the region under his military control as quickly as possible and paid close attention to the formation of the southern division. In January 1922 he sent the first troops from Tehran to Isfahan to establish the new southern division, as he had already established north-western, western and eastern divisions. He appointed an old comrade from the Cossack Brigade, General Mahmud Ayrum, to divisional command and Ayrum went immediately to Isfahan with a staff and a detachment of ex-Cossacks to begin organizing his force. The organization of the division was gradually extended from Isfahan throughout the region. A military presence was established in Shiraz and an officer was sent to Yazd to establish military control there and to begin collecting recruits. By the end of May 1922 the Isfahan garrison numbered more than 1,000 men with 135 officers. During the summer the division continued to extend its control into outlying districts and officers with small parties of men were sent to various towns, including Faridan, an area abutting Bakhtiyari proper, where the great khans were substantial landowners, and to Shushtar and Muhammarah, in the domain of Shaykh Khazal, to establish military posts and begin recruiting.<sup>17</sup>

As Riza Khan began to consolidate his position in Tehran following his expulsion of Sayyid Ziya, and to extend his military control in the north and east after his successes against the Jangalis and Colonel Pasyan, it quickly became clear that a fundamental change had occurred both in the nature of political power in Tehran and in the character of the relationship between the centre and the provinces. As 1921 wore on, this new reality permeated the consciousness of the Bakhtiyari khans who began openly to express their fears that the central government was launching a systematic attack on Bakhtiyari influence. As the first concrete sign of this trend they pointed to their being deprived of the provincial governorships outside their tribal territory which they had been accustomed to fill since their victories in the constitutional wars. In the months between the coup and the end of 1921, they lost the three of these towns farthest from Bakhtiyari, Sultanabad, Yazd and Kirman.

By the end of 1921, even before the arrival of the new army in Isfahan, the khans had become openly extremely bitter about the attitude of the central government and were declaring themselves ready to resist any encroachment by Riza Khan to the utmost of their strength. They pressed British officials for reassurance of their full political and moral support, asking to be supplied with weapons if necessary, and particularly urged on Loraine, the British minister, their view that Britain, which had placed a financial embargo on Iran earlier in the year following the exile of Sayyid Ziya, should not resume supplying funds to a government that would use them to destroy Bakhtiyari influence.<sup>18</sup>

The establishment of a military presence in Isfahan early in 1922 was regarded by the khans as a particularly serious intrusion and aroused their profound apprehensions. They had come to regard this provincial capital as an outpost of their own territory, one or other of them having occupied the post of governor-general there since they first captured control of the town in 1909. Although Sardar Ashja Bakhtiyari still remained governor-general for the time being, nonetheless the visible presence of the central state and the army, combined in the newly arrived person of General Ayrum, incontrovertibly augured a diminution in his own position.

Along with Isfahan the Bakhtiyari khans still retained, at the beginning of 1922, the governorship of Bihbahan and Kuhgiluyyah. The Bakhtiyari khans regarded both Isfahan and Kuhgiluyyah as gateways into their own territory and as especially important to the maintenance of their autonomy. Yet during the course of 1922 they lost first Bihbahan and Kuhgiluyyah and then, by the end of the year, Isfahan also, not a single provincial governorship remaining to them.

The khans' loss of Bihbahan and Kuhgiluyyah was due to their clumsy attempt to utilize a traditional, but now outmoded, manoeuvre. Early in 1922 the government, as part of its general drive to raise revenue through enforcing the payment of taxes, requested the Bakhtiyari khans to resume

paying the Kuhgilu taxes into the central treasury. The khans, in common with other elite landowners and tribal chiefs, had, during the slow collapse of Qajar authority, gradually ceased making regular remittances of revenue to the treasury. Indeed, for some time they had paid virtually no taxes at all. Now, however, the new authorities in Tehran suddenly demanded from the khans not only the current Kuhgilu taxes but also arrears for the past ten years.<sup>19</sup> The khans insisted that they had spent all the Kuhgilu taxes on maintaining security. Nonetheless, Tehran persisted in its demand and the khans then declared, in what was undoubtedly a tactical manoeuvre, that they had no alternative but to renounce the administration of Kuhgilu and to leave it to the central government to make their own arrangements for controlling and taxing the tribes. They informed the government of their decision but also, at the same time, complained to Loraine through the British consul-general in Isfahan that this action was not of their seeking and that they had been forced into it by the government. Sardar Ashja Bakhtiyari, governor-general of Isfahan, also, in a veiled threat, warned the consul-general that the safety of the Bakhtiyari road would be affected, the consul-general commenting that the khans were possibly counting on this to obtain the intervention of the British legation on their behalf.<sup>20</sup> In April Loraine duly drew the attention of the minister of finance to the danger to British trade on the Bakhtiyari road if the Bakhtiyari governor resigned.<sup>21</sup> In the past such a hint from the British minister would have been sufficient to produce the compliance of the government. Now, however, it had little effect, the government seeming only too happy to accept the Bakhtiyari abandonment of Kuhgilu. Indeed, in engaging in this ploy, the khans made the two mistakes that they were to make repeatedly over the next few years. First, they underestimated the resolve and growing capacity of Riza Khan to dispense with incorrigibly recalcitrant intermediaries such as themselves and to assert direct military control and, second, they overestimated the ability and willingness of the British to defend their interests.

By July, just prior to the Shalil incident, the khans were sustaining the fiction that they were indifferent to the Kuhgilu governorship, saying that the government should either send a strong governor from Tehran, which they persisted in believing it could not do, or else assist them to maintain order themselves by supplying them with weapons. The fiasco at Shalil put an end to any hope that this manoeuvre might succeed. The central government had already signalled its determination to make the Bakhtiyari khans' relinquishment of Kuhgiluyyah permanent. Immediately upon receiving their formal resignation, the government had suggested to the governor-general of Fars that the governorship be reincorporated in the administration of his province, where it had been located prior to its acquisition by the Bakhtiyaris.<sup>22</sup> In early 1923 Riza Khan appointed an army officer as governor of Bihbahan<sup>23</sup> and, at the end of 1923, the government duly decreed

that the districts of Bihbahan and Kuhgiluyyah were to be included in future in the ordinary provincial government of Fars.

In their loss of Bihbahan the khans demonstrated their misunderstanding of the new forces gaining ascendancy in Tehran and their failure to comprehend the necessity of adapting to the changing balance between the centre and the periphery and between the new authorities and the traditional elites and local leaderships. They were unable to grasp the notion that the central government no longer wished for, and was ceasing to need, an accommodation with them, but was in fact aiming at their ultimate removal. They held fast to their traditional tactics of manoeuvre, intrigue and bluff. These tactics had served them well in the past, when they were powerful and permanent players in provincial politics whom the government, lacking the power to coerce, was obliged to placate, but such tactics were wholly inappropriate in dealing with their new opponents.

Meanwhile, in southern Iran the signs of change were multiplying. The assertion of the presence of the central authority and the ascendancy of the military authorities were becoming increasingly apparent. In the south, as throughout the country, friction was developing between the military and the established civil authorities, represented in Isfahan by General Mahmud Ayrum and Sardar Ashja Bakhtiyari respectively, leading everywhere to a diminution in the sphere of civil government and in Isfahan to an additional source of pressure on the Bakhtiyari khans.<sup>24</sup> In a specific challenge to tribal authority and income, an officer arrived in Isfahan from Tehran to supervise the military policing of the southern roads and began to establish posts along the main highways.<sup>25</sup> This clearly signalled the end of the control of the roads throughout the south by the tribes, for whom the collection of tolls and the protection of caravans had been a lucrative source of cash, and heralded an especial blow to the Bakhtiyari khans, who collected tolls on the Bakhtiyari road under the concession granted to them by the shah in 1897.

By the early summer of 1922 the discontent and resentment of the Haft Lang khans was running higher than ever. Gathered in their summer homes in Chahar Mahal after the spring migration, the khans were openly looking to Britain for both political and material support against the central government, and specifically for arms and ammunition, and, to this end, were cultivating sympathetic local British officials in the south. The British consul at Ahvaz, visiting Chahar Mahal as part of his annual tour of Bakhtiyari, was allowed to hear a 'certain amount of vague talk' about a coup d'état against Tehran, and was given hints that such an action would leave British influence predominant in Iran under a Bakhtiyari administration at the cheap price of perhaps 10,000 rifles with ammunition and a few machine-guns. The consul, however, was unreceptive to these hints, declining to take them seriously as indications of either the real intentions or present capacities of the khans.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Shalil incident and the loss of British patronage**

In August 1922, determined to halt Riza Khan's efforts to establish his own full control throughout southern Iran, the khans secretly organized an attack on an army detachment at Shalil on the Bakhtiyari road. The Shalil incident, as it became known, was to have disastrous consequences for the political and financial position of the khans.

Since the beginning of 1922 Riza Khan had been steadily extending his military organization southwards, to Isfahan, and then to Shiraz, and it was clear by the spring of that year that he intended to establish central authority and military control all the way down to the Persian Gulf, beginning with the installation of a military garrison in Arabistan, the domain of Shaykh Khazal of Muhammarah. It was, in fact, the issue of Riza Khan's determination to send troops to Arabistan, rather than any attack specifically on themselves, which was to be the downfall of the Bakhtiyari khans.

The suppression of the autonomy of the Shaykh of Muhammarah, symbolized initially by the state's assertion of its right and power to collect taxes, was an essential step for the nationalist regime in Tehran. Shaykh Khazal had for many years deprived the treasury of its dues, although in this he was not different to the elite in general, who had comprehensively and systematically taken advantage of the state's powerlessness to evade the payment of tax. Khazal, however, represented a different and greater threat to Tehran. On several occasions earlier in the century the British had given Khazal written assurances of their support for his autonomous position. British support grew even firmer after Percy Cox was appointed Resident in the Persian Gulf in 1915 and converted Arabistan into a virtual British protectorate.<sup>27</sup> Iranian nationalists feared that Arabistan would secede altogether and become another independent oil-rich Gulf shaykhdom under British protection. These fears, provoked by Arabistan's apparent trajectory, profoundly informed the context within which Tehran's re-conquest of southern Iran took place.

Riza Khan was determined to end the autonomous position of traditional local rulers such as the Shaykh of Muhammarah, to integrate their fiefdoms and their populations into a modern, centralized state, and particularly to end their capacity to involve foreign powers in Iranian domestic politics. Although the control that he intended to establish would be military in character, Riza Khan habitually began his attack on such figures with a weapon furnished by the civil authorities. The government's right to enforce the payment of taxation was enshrined in legislation and sanctioned by the Majlis. Riza Khan repeatedly used the issue of revenue collection to provoke a confrontation between his enemies and the civil authorities, which he was then able to resolve by military action, actual or threatened.

The demand for the payment of revenue, including large accumulations of arrears, was Riza Khan's chosen weapon and he used it with devastating



effect in the south, against both the Shaykh of Muhammarah and the Bakhtiyari khans. In February 1922 the Iranian government, showing an unprecedented determination, reopened the question of the amount of arrears and future levels of revenue payments due from the Shaykh of Muhammarah. Khazal, however, was obdurate, and he thus provided the government with legal grounds for resorting to the coercive measures to which Riza Khan was in any case inclined, and in April the government announced that it intended to send troops to Arabistan to enforce the collection of revenue.

The Bakhtiyari khans, observing the general demeanour of the Tehran authorities, saw the writing on the wall for themselves, and responded readily when Khazal looked around for allies. Shaykh Khazal and the Haft Lang khans had, over the previous decades, forged an intimate and complex, though often far from harmonious, relationship. Their interests were inextricably intermingled, the Bakhtiyari winter pastures were located in Arabistan, a small segment of the Bakhtiyari road fell within the shaykh's jurisdiction, the shaykh and the khans were large landowners in the same areas and possessed ties of intermarriage. However, periods of friendship born of mutual self-interest between the shaykh and one or other of the Bakhtiyari factions were frequently punctuated by bouts of overt hostility. Now, however, in the face of Tehran's new assertiveness, Khazal and the khans met at Dar-i Khazinah between 29 April and 2 May. The meeting was apparently friendly and the khans sent a telegram to Samsam al-Saltanah in Tehran informing him that they had settled all their outstanding differences with the shaykh. Another meeting at Ahvaz produced a formal document which stated that Khazal and the Bakhtiyaris would cooperate in every respect, although both would continue to serve the Iranian government faithfully and loyally.<sup>28</sup> This was an important step towards the emergence of the so-called Southern League.

The Southern League took shape during 1922 essentially as a response among the tribal leaderships of the south to Tehran's new centralizing drive. The Shaykh of Muhammarah and the Bakhtiyari khans formed the nucleus of this alliance and they attempted from time to time to draw in also the Vali of Pusht-i Kuh, Qavam al-Mulk, the chief of the Khamsah, and perhaps also Sawlat al-Dawlah. The League, however, had no formal existence; indeed, it amounted to little more than a temporary, ad hoc and partial understanding, based on an awareness of a common danger. Although the League possessed little real substance, rumours about its existence, particularly allegations that it had been formed under British auspices with a view to the ultimate partition of Iran and the assumption by Britain of a controlling influence over the southern rump, caused great resentment and agitation in Tehran, especially in the press, and were fully accepted by Riza Khan himself.<sup>29</sup>

The predisposition among nationalists to draw these conclusions about British sponsorship of southern tribal activity was, to a large extent, based on political reality. Until 1924 certain British officials in the south, A. P. Trevor, the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, and especially E. G. Peel, the consul at Ahvaz, eagerly advocated grasping the opportunity offered by the shaykh's defiance to restrain and perhaps even cause the fall from office of the supposedly anti-British Riza Khan.<sup>30</sup> In Tehran, however, Loraine was very far from the view that Britain should organize this kind of movement in the south. From the moment of his arrival in Iran Loraine had begun to rethink British policy. His re-evaluation of Britain's interests in the rapidly changing post-war world, together with his personal admiration for Riza Khan, was to culminate, in 1923-4, in the abandonment of Britain's traditional friends in the south in favour of good relations with a strong central government in Tehran. By the early summer of 1922, however, Loraine had not yet clearly arrived at this conclusion and the unresolved ambiguity of his policy contributed in no small way to the Shalil crisis.

Throughout the first half of 1922 there had been no shortage of indications regarding Riza Khan's intentions towards southern Iran and on 17 July, officially in response to a request by the governor-general of Arabistan to be supplied with a small bodyguard, the government suddenly ordered a detachment of troops from Isfahan to proceed to Shushtar in northern Arabistan. No prior announcement was made of this troop movement, nor were the Bakhtiyari khans officially informed of its departure, even though the troops marched along the Bakhtiyari road, directly through Bakhtiyari territory. The detachment, under the command of a Colonel Hasan Agha, numbered 274 of all ranks, including 12 officers. Notwithstanding the modest objectives proclaimed by the prime minister for this action, namely the provision of a bodyguard for a local official, nonetheless it was widely recognized for what it actually was, a dramatic development in the realization of Riza Khan's project of bringing the whole of the country under central military control, and ensuring the collection of revenue. The government was determined to obtain a military footing in Arabistan as a first step in the reduction of the autonomy of Shaykh Khazal.

The shaykh himself was naturally greatly perturbed by this development and the troop movement also produced a dramatic reaction in Tehran. Loraine immediately launched a coordinated effort to stop it. Although a sea-change in British policy was already under way, Loraine was not prepared for such an abrupt and peremptory military intrusion into southern Iran. He personally had received no warning of the troop movement and, when he had ascertained that the Bakhtiyari khans in Tehran also knew nothing, he informed Riza Khan that he believed this to be a grave error of judgement and that the arrival of government troops in Arabistan would cause havoc and disruption and would endanger important British and Iranian interests in the oilfields.<sup>31</sup> On 20 July Loraine requested advice from

the Foreign Office. In a discussion of the available options, he noted the possibility of dropping a hint to the Bakhtiyari to stop the passage of troops, 'which they would certainly take'.<sup>32</sup>

Meanwhile the prime minister, Qavam al-Saltanah, responded to Loraine's opposition by temporizing, but Loraine was not reassured. He immediately sent for two of the leading Bakhtiyari khans then in Tehran, Sardar Jang and Samsam al-Saltanah, and explained the situation to them.<sup>33</sup> The khans themselves were predictably appalled, forecasting the worst possible consequences if the troops were not stopped. They gladly agreed with Loraine that the interests of the British, the Bakhtiyari and Shaykh Khazal were identical and accepted Loraine's suggestion that both they and the shaykh should support Loraine in his efforts to impress the government with their strength of feeling and that they should all bring as much pressure to bear as possible, using every peaceful means, to secure the government's abandonment of its decision. The khans then proposed the use of force to stop the troops, Loraine making the fateful reply that this must be 'absolutely the last resort and ought not to be necessary'.<sup>34</sup> Sardar Jang and Samsam al-Saltanah also readily agreed to Loraine's suggestion that they telegraph to the khans in the south telling them to send the government official protests and also that they ask the governor-general of Isfahan, Sardar Ashja Bakhtiyari, to keep them informed on a daily basis of the progress of the detachment. They also telegraphed through Loraine to Shaykh Khazal urging on him the necessity of their acting together.

The next day Loraine reinforced the khans' urgings on Khazal, telling him in a confidential message that he had discussed the matter thoroughly with Sardar Jang and Samsam al-Saltanah and that he and they must bring every peaceful pressure to bear on the government to give up the idea of stationing troops in Arabistan. He also again added ambiguously that it was 'undesirable, and should not be necessary if we all work together', for the khans 'to stop the detachment by force though of course they could do so'.<sup>35</sup>

The significance of Loraine's apparently casual remarks to Sardar Jang and Samsam al-Saltanah and to the shaykh were not lost on the Foreign Office (FO) or on the India Office, or on the khans themselves. On 27 July the FO informed Loraine that on no account should he commit Britain to 'embarrassing obligations towards the Bakhtiyaris' which would result should force be used, even if only in the last resort,<sup>36</sup> while next day India insisted that the Bakhtiyaris should be disabused 'of any impression they may have gained that we would countenance their using force against the Persian government, even in the last resort'.<sup>37</sup> Loraine, however, appears to have done nothing to correct any impression that he may have created upon the khans, only distancing himself from the implications of his remarks after news had been received of an incident in the south.

The Iranian army detachment that had left Isfahan bound for Shushtar, via the Bakhtiyari road, was apparently not expecting trouble. It had marched

from Isfahan on a peace footing, accompanied by the families of officers, baggage, etc., and had no advanced or flank guards. On 2 August it was suddenly attacked in the Laghamgir Pass near Shalil in Luristan, losing about 115 killed and a similar number wounded or missing, and all its weapons, animals and baggage.<sup>38</sup> The attackers then raided and burned the Shalil caravanserai. The Iranian officers and men who survived, and the officers' wives, were stripped even of their clothing and left to try to make their way back to Isfahan as best they could. They walked for three days in this condition until the shattered remnant was finally encountered by some Bakhtiyari khans who offered them hospitality and cared for them. In the meantime, a party of 60 cavalry with two machine-guns had left Isfahan to evacuate the wounded and stand by the unarmed retreating survivors. On 8 August about 40 or 50 unwounded or walking individuals arrived at Isfahan without rifles and equipment and in borrowed civilian clothing. The officers of the detachment who had survived were thrown into prison on their return to Isfahan by order of the War Minister, Riza Khan, to be tried by court-martial on charges of having failed to take proper military precautions on the march.<sup>39</sup> The dishonourable treatment accorded to the troops and civilians after the attack was regarded locally as showing the strong hatred of the army and the troops apparently felt the humiliation so keenly that they were only with difficulty prevented from instant and random retaliation.<sup>40</sup>

It was immediately clear that this was not simply a spontaneous and isolated raid by tribal or bandit elements. The assailants had not been large in number, not more than 50 and perhaps as few as 30, and the organization and daring of the attack, which was conducted during daylight hours, and the systematic stripping of arms, munitions, food, clothing and transport, indicated careful planning. Furthermore, for two months prior to the attack and immediately after it, the Bakhtiyari road was safe for caravans, the guarding arrangements along the road, for which the khans were responsible, functioning normally.<sup>41</sup>

The first indications were that the attack at Shalil had been carried out by Kuhgilus. The *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi* of the Bakhtiyari themselves assiduously fostered this idea, reporting to the governor-general of Isfahan, Sardar Ashja Bakhtiyari, on 3 August, the day after the attack, that 30 men believed to be Kuhgilus had been responsible.<sup>42</sup> But the survivors, on their return to Isfahan, insisted that their attackers had been Bakhtiyaris.<sup>43</sup> This accusation unleashed a storm of nationalist anger and bitterness against the Bakhtiyari and against the British, who were accused of complicity. The Bakhtiyari were denounced as traitors and murderers in the press and in the Majlis and by the population at large, and the press clamoured for the summary execution of the khans and the mobilization of a large military force to punish the tribes.<sup>44</sup> The specific allegation that the British had instigated the attack in order to prevent troops from being sent to Arabistan and were aiming at the partition of the country was repeated everywhere.<sup>45</sup>

In an immediate response to the Shalil incident the war minister took a number of minor measures. He summarily dismissed from the army six Bakhtiyari officers then serving in the Tehran division and all Bakhtiyari khans still serving in government positions were removed from their posts, with the exception of the governor-general of Isfahan, who was not expected to remain long. He also began preparations to reinforce the military position in the south. A detachment of 150 infantry and 50 cavalry left Sultanabad for Isfahan on 11 August, and a detachment 1,200-strong of the Tehran garrison was also ordered to hold itself in readiness to leave Tehran for Isfahan. Riza Khan also attempted to manipulate political alignments in the south in his favour and to heighten the vulnerability and isolation of the Bakhtiyari by sending a mission of two colonels from Tehran to effect a reconciliation between Qavam al-Mulk of the Khamsah and Sawlat al-Dawlah of the Qashqai.

The Bakhtiyari khans appear to have been taken aback by the ferocity of the reaction from Tehran. They had grasped neither the new appeal of Riza Khan for nationalist circles, nor the extent of their own unpopularity in the same circles, their role in the restoration of the constitution having long been obliterated by their subservience to the British, their having come to share with Shaykh Khazal the reputation of being instruments of British power in the south. Nonetheless, they suddenly became conscious enough of Riza Khan's personal hostility and were now keen to deflect the anger and vengeance of Tehran and to avoid an open conflict with the government.<sup>46</sup>

The *ilkhani*, Amir Mufakham, compiled a detailed report about the Shalil incident, which he sent to the government, adding that the Bakhtiyari themselves had organized a party to pursue what he insisted were the Kuhgilu attackers. According to the *ilkhani*, the Bakhtiyari had recovered part of the equipment of the detachment after a sharp fight, with many killed on both sides. The *ilkhani* also, in a blatant attempt to make political capital out of the episode, took the opportunity to point out that the khans' warnings to the government during the last six months regarding the danger of not restraining the Kuhgilu had passed unheeded and he expressed his astonishment that the khans were not given any warning of the passing of the detachment which would have enabled them to clear the road. Although the government snubbed Amir Mufakham, neither acknowledging nor answering his report, yet the khans were undeterred. They let it be known that if approached by the government they would renew their offer to subdue the Kuhgilu themselves, provided one of their number was confirmed as governor of that territory and Biqbahan.<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile, the tension in Tehran and Isfahan over the Shalil incident had begun to spark off wider clashes between the army and the Bakhtiyaris. The army had marched into the Barburud district, where the khans were substantial landowners, and had burnt Bakhtiyari-owned crops and villages and taken hostages, enflaming local tribal opinion.<sup>48</sup> These reprisals of the

military authorities at Barburud had their own counterpart in Bakhtiyari action. In mid-September two minor khans with a force of Bakhtiyari attacked and destroyed the village of Chughurt, including its government stores.<sup>49</sup> In this way the local conflict threatened to escalate into a general confrontation between the army and the Bakhtiyari. The khans also apparently tried to draw closer to the Shaykh of Muhammarah, to prepare with him common measures of defence against any attempt by the central government to wreak retribution for Shalil, and perhaps also to obtain weapons through him.<sup>50</sup>

The attack at Shalil provided Riza Khan with the opportunity to plot a crushing blow against the Bakhtiyaris. He was not, however, able to act immediately. He was still uncertain regarding British attitudes and, in any case, the army was then fully occupied in its operations against the Kurdish chief, Simitqu, in Azarbayjan, and had been mobilized to its full strength for this campaign. Riza Khan also apparently decided to postpone a showdown with the khans as the political situation in the capital was becoming increasingly unstable and his own position was weakening dangerously.

Friction between Riza Khan and the civil authorities, including the cabinet and the Majlis, over the issue of funds for the army had been growing for many months and had already led to Riza threatening that he would close the Majlis if it refused to accept the military budget. After the Shalil ambush Riza had, again, specifically asked for more funds for the army and the cabinet had again hesitated. Meanwhile, popular discontent at the increasing power of the army and at Riza Khan's dictatorial methods was becoming more widespread and openly expressed. Towards the end of September Riza Khan, finding himself embroiled in a burgeoning conflict with the Majlis, resorted to a tactical resignation, producing a generalized crisis.<sup>51</sup> The army offered the War Minister its backing and, amid fears of a coup, a compromise was hastily worked out between Riza, the prime minister and the president of the Majlis. As this crisis subsided it became clear that the War Minister had emerged with his position greatly strengthened.<sup>52</sup>

Nonetheless, in these circumstances Riza Khan and the Bakhtiyari khans indicated their readiness to embark on negotiations. Riza Khan continued to use the opportunity presented by the widespread anger at the khans to whittle away at their position. By the end of the year the khans had lost all their governorships outside Bakhtiyari itself, including the prized governor-generalship of Isfahan, their personal retainers had been forbidden to carry arms, certain Bakhtiyari officers had been dismissed from the army and, in a move especially resented by the khans, the military authorities had begun recruiting in Bakhtiyari-owned villages and among the Chahar Lang Bakhtiyari tribes.<sup>53</sup>

Although the khans had realized that the army could take no immediate action against them, nonetheless they remained uneasy regarding Riza Khan's attitude. Therefore, one of the most senior khans resident in Tehran,

Sardar Jang, on behalf of all the khans, began negotiations with the government and with Riza Khan personally. These negotiations resulted in his being asked to carry out a commission of enquiry to investigate the Shalil incident in company with a representative of the ministry of war, while the government promised to restrain the military. Sardar Jang, as usual, consulted Loraine about the advisability of such a commission of enquiry and received his full approval. Loraine advised Sardar Jang to use the opportunity to produce, in cooperation with the army officer, a report that would exonerate the khans and lead to a conclusion of the episode.<sup>54</sup>

In the meantime, Sardar Jang was evidently ready to do everything he could to conciliate the government and he agreed with Riza Khan on removing the Bakhtiyari governor-general of Isfahan, Sardar Ashja. Riza Khan was determined on this step and Sardar Jang, realizing that the position of Sardar Ashja was untenable, in mid-September sent him a telegram informing him that the government wished him to resign and urging him to do so.<sup>55</sup> The khans appear to have still cherished the hope, perhaps encouraged by Tehran, that another of their number would be appointed to Isfahan in place of Sardar Ashja. However, in November General Mahmud Aqa Ansari, Amir Iqtidar, an ex-Cossack colleague of Riza Khan and one of his staunchest supporters, who had been military governor of Tehran the previous year, was appointed as his replacement. The khans had now lost forever their last provincial governor-generalship and control of Isfahan had passed to a military officer who was to show a marked hostility towards them during his entire tenure of the post.

Although Sardar Jang had been appointed to carry out a commission of enquiry, the khans remained extremely anxious concerning Riza Khan's ultimate intentions and tried to extract promises of protection from the British minister. Loraine, however, although he reassured the *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi* that he had the interests of the Bakhtiyari at heart, merely advised them to do their best to make Sardar Jang's mission a success and suggested that they meet Riza Khan when the latter travelled south to greet the then shah, Ahmad Shah,<sup>56</sup> on his return from Europe. The khans, continuing to attempt to cling to the vestiges of British protection even as the British themselves were in the process of changing sides, remained full of apprehension.

Loraine, although keen to keep what he described as his 'attitude of neutrality', was in fact assiduous in the khans' interests in Tehran and worked hard to reconcile them with Riza Khan and to bring about a peaceful resolution of their conflict.<sup>57</sup> He was apparently genuinely unaware of the depths of hostility and duplicity on both sides and of the machinations in which each was engaged, and seemed to believe that it was still possible to arrange an enduring compromise and accommodation between them. After sending pacificatory messages to the *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi* and to Sardar Jang, he made similar appeals to Riza Khan through Havard, the Oriental

Secretary at the British legation, and Riza Khan, in turn, reassured Havard that he was quite content to leave the investigations in Sardar Jang's hands, and that he had no intention of attacking the Bakhtiyari. In order to reinforce the hope of a settlement Loraine and the various concerned British officials in the south, including the Isfahan consul-general, the Ahvaz vice-consul, and Dr Morris Young, for many years the APOC's intermediary with the khans, brought every pressure to bear on the khans to meet Riza Khan in person. The khans themselves, however, remained intensely suspicious, their fears unassuaged, and it was only under the strongest British pressure that they agreed to a meeting.<sup>58</sup>

On the evening of 16 November three of the khans, Sardar Jang, Amir Mujahid and Shihab al-Saltanah, came into Isfahan on behalf of the *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi* to see the War Minister, but they did not find the meeting reassuring. Sardar Jang told the British consul that the khans' continued to distrust Riza Khan and to believe that his actions belied his friendly words and that, in reality, he was doing all he could to belittle their influence and lessen their prestige. Sardar Jang returned to the many grievances still rankling in the khans' minds, especially the governorships of Isfahan and Kuhgilu; Riza Khan's orders that their armed retainers should no longer carry weapons; the recruiting of soldiers in the Chahar Lang Bakhtiyari villages and the attempts of the War Minister and the military authorities to estrange the Chahar Lang from the Haft Lang Bakhtiyari, particularly by enlisting the former in the army; and the treatment of their peasants at the hands of recruiting officers who had extorted money and beaten the villagers and stolen their property. Sardar Jang also especially complained of the attitude of the Chief of Staff of the Southern Division towards the Bakhtiyari. The khans believed that this officer put on them the blame for all the acts of brigandage in the neighbourhood, while his communications to the press on the subject of the Shalil incident had angered them greatly.<sup>59</sup>

Their meeting with Riza Khan had clearly done nothing to diminish the khans' many resentments, while some of the junior khans harboured even stronger feelings. Apparently, Amir Mujahid had proposed to the other khans that the War Minister be assassinated as he travelled down to Bushire to meet the shah. Sardar Zafar later admitted that when the khans met Riza Khan and the shah near Isfahan as they returned to the capital they would have kidnapped Riza but for the presence of the shah. Sardar Zafar added that it had been a bitter moment when they let him go on his way.<sup>60</sup>

Nonetheless, Sardar Jang continued his efforts to arrange a settlement of Shalil and by December he believed that he had arranged terms that would allow the affair to be liquidated. He had struck a deal with the War Minister whereby the khans would borrow 10,000 *tumans* from the Imperial Bank of Persia which they would then pay to the General Officer Commanding at Isfahan, General Ayrum, for distribution to the victims of Shalil and their families. They would pay this compensation in view of the fact that the



attack had taken place on their territory.<sup>61</sup> In return, the War Minister had agreed to publish a vindication of the innocence of the Bakhtiyari in the affair. Furthermore, Sardar Jang, on his return to Tehran, would pay a further sum of money to Riza Khan personally once the latter had, in his own words, absolved the Bakhtiyari.

Riza Khan, however, had no intention of allowing the khans to regain their political equilibrium. He was well aware of the conflicts among the khans and began to exploit systematically their family quarrels with the objective of destroying them from within, and his task was made easier by elements among the khans themselves. So deep was the enmity within the Bakhtiyari ruling elite that a faction of khans, led by Jafar Quli Khan Sardar Asad, was actively willing to side with the War Minister against the Haft Lang majority in order to secure an advantage over its rivals. Riza Khan apparently had an old military campaigning friendship with Sardar Asad<sup>62</sup> and, in late 1922 and early 1923 he devised and began to implement a scheme to use him, together with his younger brother Amir Jang, and their uncle, Sardar Muhtasham, to undermine and weaken the khans' efforts to defend themselves. This factional alignment cut across the old divisions between the Ilkhani and Haji Ilkhani families, Sardar Asad and Amir Jang of the Ilkhani allying with Sardar Muhtasham of the Haji Ilkhani, against the majorities of their own families. These three khans were, in fact, already on bad terms with the rest of both ruling families and they eagerly embraced the War Minister's patronage. It was, indeed, Sardar Asad's younger brother, Sardar Bahadur, a cavalry officer, who had begun, to the horror of the majority of the khans, recruiting for the army in Chahar Mahal.<sup>63</sup> The majority of the khans were unable or unwilling to effect a reconciliation with Sardar Asad's faction, and thus Riza Khan was ultimately able to break the khans' influence and prestige as a tribal body.

In Tehran, meanwhile, negotiations about Shalil, far from being easily concluded, dragged on and the General Staff avoided accepting a final settlement. Sardar Jang had several, apparently friendly, meetings with the War Minister but no actual progress was made towards a liquidation of the affair. Loraine immediately grasped the significance of the fact that Riza Khan's procrastination was coinciding with a new outbreak of the Bakhtiyari family quarrels, and he realized that the War Minister was determined to take full advantage of the khans' disunity to humiliate them and weaken their power. Accordingly, he decided to put all the pressure he could on the khans to sink their differences and present a solid front. In the latter half of January he spoke to a gathering of all the khans then in Tehran in Sardar Jang's house. When they complained that they were threatened by the War Minister, Loraine told them bluntly that they could only protect their own interests if they were united and that division would be fatal to themselves and to the confederation. He also insisted on the necessity of their being on good terms with the government, warning them that if they were

in conflict it would be impossible for Britain to take sides, and expressed his view that the work of consolidation that Riza Khan was carrying out was necessary and useful and that the Bakhtiyari should be true to their traditions of service to the state and help him in it. On a picturesque note, Loraine concluded that, if they had to live in the river, it was best to be friends with the crocodile.<sup>64</sup>

Nonetheless, relations between the khans in the south continued to deteriorate and a serious quarrel, enflamed by the War Minister, erupted. The pro-Riza Khan faction first denounced, then openly campaigned against, the incumbent confederational chief, the *ilkhani*, and his deputy, the *ilbaygi*, finally succeeding in forcing the resignation of both.<sup>65</sup> This faction then frustrated the khans' efforts to agree on successors and the confederation was left without any formal leadership for the next three and a half months, throughout the heightening political crisis.

Despite Loraine's warnings, the dissensions between the khans were continuing to widen and, therefore, he summoned another meeting of all the khans present in Tehran, at Samsam al-Saltanah's house, in the middle of February. He repeated the arguments he had used on the previous occasion, adding that the absence of any properly appointed tribal governors in Bakhtiyari specifically threatened British interests, as there was nobody officially responsible for the guarding of the oilfields or for the security of the roads. He warned the khans that unless prompt measures were taken to rectify this state of affairs, he would make an official complaint to the government.<sup>66</sup>

For the next month and a half the khans resolved nothing, while the consequences of their disagreements were increasingly displayed in Sardar Jang's negotiations with the War Minister, the prospect of a settlement becoming more remote every day. The latter's attitude towards the khans and his claims on them quickly stiffened, the request of 20,000 *tumans* as an indemnity, to which Sardar Jang had agreed in December, becoming a demand for 480,000 *tumans* practically as a fine. The Haft Lang majority khans, although aware of the worsening situation, were unable to formulate a coherent response. They announced that they neither could, nor would, pay the sum demanded, practically defied the War Minister to do his worst, talked freely of armed resistance, and, at the same time, importuned Loraine to protect their interests.<sup>67</sup>

Riza Khan's own position had been considerably strengthened by his success in persuading Sardar Asad and his clique to side openly with him. The overt defection to the War Minister's camp of this small faction of khans, who had apparently been specifically tempted by the incentive of avoiding paying any share of the proposed indemnity, had also particularly embittered Bakhtiyari dissensions. Loraine complained that no language that he could use was able to convince the khans of the obvious connection between their disunity and the behaviour of the War Minister and that

although he took every opportunity of impressing this on them, both individually and collectively, and that on each occasion they agreed with what he said, yet they did nothing.

In their behaviour since Shalil, the khans had misjudged both the wider political context and Riza Khan personally, apparently expecting that they might succeed in either outwitting him or in buying his silence and acquiescence in a settlement. By the spring of 1923 these strategies were clearly failing and the prospects for a settlement seemed more remote than ever. On 30 March, presumably as a conciliatory gesture, Samsam al-Saltanah raised the issue of Bakhtiyari disarmament, informing the shah that the Bakhtiyaris were willing to be disarmed, provided neighbouring tribes were disarmed first.<sup>68</sup>

At the beginning of April, however, the whole situation changed dramatically. By the end of March it was becoming clear that Riza Khan's attitude was hardening definitively and that he was preparing to take action to force the issue. After the army's success in Azarbayjan against Simitqu the previous August and the recent submission of the Shahsavans, he now felt confident enough actively to contemplate serious military action against the Bakhtiyari. On 27 March he held a conference at army HQ, attended by his five senior staff officers, to discuss a campaign in the south.<sup>69</sup> A force of 1,500 infantry was already under orders to proceed to Isfahan and the fact that they were for operations against the Bakhtiyari was an open secret among the officers of this force. Brigadier Amanullah Jahanbani, the Chief of the General Staff, had already been sent to Isfahan to report on the Bakhtiyari situation and, when leaving Isfahan to return to Tehran, he made a stirring speech to the assembled officers enjoining them to spare no efforts in putting matters right in the south and promising rewards and decorations to all who distinguished themselves in the service of their country.<sup>70</sup>

On 2 April the crisis broke into the open. Riza Khan informed Loraine that he had proof of the khans' complicity in the Shalil incident. In fact, he told Loraine that he had enough documentary evidence to hang all of them, that he had only refrained from strong measures against them the previous autumn because of Loraine's advice and in order to avoid a disastrous internal conflict, and that he had not divulged the evidence earlier because if it had become widely known public opinion would have driven him to take armed action.<sup>71</sup>

Loraine, although furious at the position in which he found himself, immediately launched an attempt to limit the damage both to the khans and to British credibility. He embarked on a round of interviews with the khans themselves, with the War Minister, with the prime minister, the minister for foreign affairs, the shah, and various intermediaries. In particular, Loraine tried to mobilize the shah in the khans' defence, eventually managing to extract from him a promise of full support. The shah agreed to speak to the War Minister, saying that a conflict with the Bakhtiyaris was unacceptable

and that an amicable settlement must be found. The shah, however, in mortal fear of Riza Khan, was a broken reed. At a meeting on 12 April he found the War Minister impervious. His efforts at persuasion failing, the shah apparently declared that he would rather abandon his throne than continue the conflict with the Bakhtiyari with its disastrous consequences. The shah later reported this exchange to Loraine, asserting that he would stand firm if the British supported him although adding that, in his opinion the Bakhtiyari would have to make considerable payments to settle the matter. Loraine gave the shah's message to Sardar Jang who responded that the Bakhtiyari were willing to pay reasonable compensation but were unable to raise even 50,000 *tumans*.

While Loraine engaged in this flurry of activity, the khans themselves did little. In exasperation, he complained that the khans seemed to think that an omnipotent British minister could get them out of trouble while they folded their arms, left their territory without anyone properly responsible for guarding the oilfields and the roads, and pursued their own squabbles. He again tried to get the khans to compose their disagreements and told Sardar Jang that the khans should, besides relying on the British minister, explore other avenues of reconciliation, for example, through the prime minister, Mustawfi al-Mamalik, and the shah, both of whom were well disposed towards the Bakhtiyaris and wary of the War Minister.<sup>72</sup>

Meanwhile, Riza Khan was continuing his military preparations and on 12 April he held another council to discuss operations against the Bakhtiyari. The War Minister's determination to resolve the issue, by force if necessary, was causing consternation and alarm in the capital. Not only the shah, but also the prime minister, Mustawfi al-Mamalik, and the minister for foreign affairs were keen to put a brake on the War Minister. The shah, bolstered by British support, continued to stick to his ground and in another interview with the War Minister expressed strong objections to this treatment of 'his faithful tribes', and also tried to exploit the hesitation evident on the part of some members of the government, saying that he could not approve any measures except on the collective advice of the cabinet.<sup>73</sup> The shah then pleaded with Loraine to continue his efforts to dissuade the War Minister but warned him against giving any impression of making threats. Loraine duly again met Riza Khan and again urged reconciliation and that Riza refrain from measures likely to provoke the tribes.

The crisis still showed no sign of abating and on 24 April, under intense pressure and finally confronted by Riza Khan's assertion that he possessed documentary evidence, Sardar Jang and Samsam al-Saltanah admitted their involvement in the Shalil incident. Sardar Jang confirmed that the khans had, indeed, incited the Kuhgilu to obstruct the passage of the troops but claimed that they had told them not to shoot unless shot at first, but the troops had opened fire and the Kuhgilu had then replied. Sardar Jang and Samsam al-Saltanah admitted that they had telegraphed to the *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi* that

they had promised the British minister to stop the troops going to Arabistan and that all means must be used for that purpose. This telegram had immediately fallen into the possession of the War Minister.

The khans' confession produced an indignant reaction from Loraine. He insisted that all his action up to this time had been based on the genuine belief that the khans themselves had been innocent of any complicity in the Shalil incident. He complained that by concealing from him the true facts of the case, the khans had obtained the support and sympathy of the legation under false pretences and that their mendacity had placed him in a false position which, for political reasons, he had been compelled to try to maintain. He bewailed 'the extreme difficulty of navigating in this sea of duplicity, treachery, mendacity, and concealed purposes'.<sup>74</sup> Nonetheless, although he said that his belief in the khans' innocence had first been 'rudely shaken' and then 'completely destroyed'<sup>75</sup> by Riza Khan's revelations and the khans' subsequent confessions, and it was certainly politic for him to maintain this stance publicly, yet these protestations were, to some extent at least, lacking in candour and intended rather to exculpate himself in the eyes of his Foreign Office superiors. Indeed, on 7 April, the FO had reminded him that the original policy of the use of force by the Bakhtiyari 'was not entirely excluded by you'.<sup>76</sup> The fact that his conversation with the khans in which they proposed the use of force, a conversation that had immediately rung alarm bells at the FO and India, was immediately followed by a well-organized attack on the Bakhtiyari road, must have aroused Loraine's profound suspicions. He later admitted that he had, in fact, had his doubts about Bakhtiyari innocence, but had allowed himself to be reassured by the khans.

As April drew to a close the Bakhtiyari crisis remained acute. No reinforcements had yet been sent south but the War Minister insisted he was in earnest about military action. Emphasizing his confidence of success he said that he had secured the cooperation of other southern tribes including the Qashqai, the Khamsah, the Kuhgilu and even the Chahar Lang Bakhtiyari, but he added, in a thinly veiled threat, that he wished to carry through the operations without the murder and pillage from which tribal irregulars could not be restrained.

Riza Khan's intransigence was causing havoc within the government. The prime minister, Mustawfi al-Mamalik, whose daughter was married to Sardar Jang's son, was particularly unhappy with the line being pursued and remonstrated with Riza, eliciting a furious response. Neither the prime minister, let alone the shah, were now capable of exercising any influence whatever over their War Minister. Loraine was also convinced that 'the line of least resistance' was for the khans to pay up. Yet he was still uncertain as to whether and where they would find the money. Furthermore, he was despondent about the khans themselves, describing them as completely demoralized and as having collectively disintegrated as a result of their

family quarrels. These quarrels had, indeed, reached an unprecedented level of bitterness as a result of the open defection of Sardar Asad's faction to the War Minister's camp. At the end of April, as if in evidence of their helplessness, the khans, in what Loraine described as the 'extremity of their folly', finally declared that they had failed to agree among themselves regarding who should be the new *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi*.<sup>77</sup> Then, paralysed by their own dissensions, they requested the government itself to make the appointments.<sup>78</sup> This effectively turned the appointments over to Riza Khan himself who had apparently already promised Sardar Asad's faction that the tribal governors would be chosen from among them. The same day, in a dramatic development in the south, the army entered and occupied Chahar Mahal, taking over several of the khans' homes, their families fleeing to the hills.<sup>79</sup>

Meanwhile, in Tehran, Loraine had abandoned his efforts to conciliate Riza Khan through personal meetings and instead embarked on an exchange of letters, warning Riza openly that if the security of the oilfields was threatened Britain would intervene directly. Riza replied in two letters to Loraine, dated 1 and 3 May, summarizing his position.<sup>80</sup> He wrote that the khans were aware that the incident that had occurred in Bakhtiyari was an insult to the honour of the army that could not be removed by a cash payment. A fine, however large, could never recompense the army for this incident. Nevertheless, he continued, in order to maintain peace, order and security in the country, a cash payment would be accepted on condition that the fine was large enough to be equal to the restoration of the honour of the army. Riza complained that the khans abused their friendship with British officials and that they sought advantage for themselves by adopting a policy of procrastination. In an implicit threat he expressed regret that the khans were allowing this 'most favourable moment' to pass without making good use of it. He reminded Loraine that the public and the press in Tehran and the provinces had become violently excited about this matter, the popular view being that the employment of force was essential to the fulfilment of justice, and that for the government, the employment of force was also the easiest remedy. He alone, he wrote, had kept in view the safety and order of the country, and, contrary to public expectation, had agreed to accept a cash payment. The fine, therefore, had to be 'in proportion with the honour' of the army, so that he would not have cause to fear public opinion. More to the point, perhaps, as far as Loraine was concerned, were the brief but definite reassurances Riza gave that the ministry of war had already considered and made arrangements for the protection of the oilfields.

It was now becoming clear that the crisis had peaked and the defeat of the khans, although not yet actually accomplished, was nonetheless inevitable. There was no longer any serious risk of armed resistance from the tribes in the south owing to the dissensions within the Bakhtiyari leadership, the pro-Riza faction among the khans now attaching itself ever more

firmly to the government. The tribes in the south were without their principal leaders, who were all in Tehran, and would either collapse or be divided by intrigue if they tried to engage in military operations under these circumstances. Furthermore, there was nothing to prevent the War Minister from arresting all the khans in Tehran should they attempt to mobilize the tribes in the south. He could even resort to a forced sale of their properties in Chahar Mahal and Tehran, should the khans prove still recalcitrant. Whichever path Riza were to choose, the khans were practically powerless.

The khans themselves still seemed to have little idea of the true dimensions of their difficulties, particularly the extent to which their relationship with the British had been damaged. Loraine, for his part, believed he had little option but to continue his efforts on the khans' behalf and that the matter was fining down to a question of the actual sums the khans would have to pay. He decided to try to get the khans out of trouble 'as cheaply as possible' and began discussing the matter with the APOC. The company was anxious at all costs to avoid fighting in the vicinity of its operations and declared itself ready to make a loan to the khans in order to ensure the cessation of Riza's military preparations. However, the company insisted that its involvement in the transaction must be kept secret and, in particular, must not be divulged to Riza Khan. Loraine then again turned to the shah who was given to understand that the khans' gratitude for his assistance in arranging a settlement would be expressed in financial terms. The khans, assured of a loan from the oil company, had made an offer of 150,000 *tumans* and the shah, propped up by Loraine, found the courage to intercede and urged Riza to accept.

The situation remained extremely tense for several days until the war minister informed the khans that he was prepared to accept 150,000 *tumans*. The khans immediately approached the APOC for a loan, Loraine used all the persuasion he could muster to urge the prime minister to accelerate the definitive liquidation of the conflict and the shah received 50,000 *tumans* as a present from the Bakhtiyaris for his part in achieving a peaceful settlement. On 23 May, a secret loan of £30,000 from the APOC was paid on behalf of the khans directly from the Imperial Bank of Persia to the ministry of war in full settlement of the Shalil incident.

The appointment of khans from the pro-Riza faction as tribal governors, Sardar Muhtasham as *ilkhani* and Amir Jang as *ilbaygi*, was simultaneously confirmed. Sardar Asad was made governor-general of Khurasan. This faction was also completely exonerated from all complicity in the Shalil incident<sup>81</sup> and was absolved of any share in the fine. In this way the ascendancy of the pro-Riza faction among the khans was complete. Sardar Asad, in particular, benefited from his alliance with Riza Khan. In 1924 he was taken into the cabinet, as minister of posts and telegraphs, becoming minister of war in 1927, a post he retained until his fall from favour in late 1933.

Riza Khan had now succeeded where the British and the khans themselves had failed and had stabilized the apex of the tribal pyramid, having brought about a decisive breach among the senior khans by permanently coopting Sardar Asad to the side of the government and imposing a crushing financial penalty on the majority tribal leadership. This apparently permanent triumph of Sardar Asad meant an end to the conventional uncertainty and instability inherent in the former, collective, Bakhtiyari leadership. From 1923 to 1933 Sardar Asad constituted the sole, but enduring, Bakhtiyari presence at the centre of power, the majority of the khans abandoning any pretence at a national role.

### **The *khavanin-i buzurg* and Dr Millspaugh**

No sooner had the khans capitulated to the War Minister's demands over the Shalil settlement, however, than the government brought fresh pressure to bear on them in the form of a bill from Dr Millspaugh, the American Administrator-General of Finance, for arrears of revenue amounting to the enormous sum of 2.3 million *tumans*.<sup>82</sup> The American Financial Mission, headed by Arthur C. Millspaugh, had arrived in Iran in the autumn of 1922. Millspaugh had immediately embarked on a thorough and fundamental overhaul of the financial administration. A large number of new taxes were introduced, all tax exemptions granted by the Qajar shahs, including those conferred as a reward for services to the state, were cancelled, and Millspaugh also publicly identified particular individuals whom he identified as guilty of gross delinquency in the payment of taxes.<sup>83</sup> Among the most important of the latter were the Bakhtiyari khans who, accordingly, suddenly found themselves turned into a test-case for the new Financial Mission. For Millspaugh the enforcement of the payment of taxes, including arrears, was vital to the restructuring of Iranian finances. For Riza Khan, however, the demand for the payment of revenue, including large accumulations of arrears, constituted, as well as a symbolic assertion of authority, a powerful weapon in his immediate struggle with refractory elements among the old elite, and he used it with devastating effect throughout the south.

The ministry of finance had originally demanded 2.3 million *tumans* from the khans but, under British pressure, re-examined the case and reduced this figure to 1.5 million *tumans*, offering the khans the option of paying in instalments spread over a number of years. Nonetheless, the khans reacted with appalled incredulity. Sardar Jang, as usual, appealed to Loraine for advice, insisting that the money claimed was far in excess of what the khans could possibly owe, and that in any case there were very substantial sums that ought to be offset against this total. According to Sardar Jang, these counter-claims consisted of the remission of revenue in respect of services rendered to the government by the khans at their own expense, particularly for their armed assistance in the constitutional wars, and as



compensation for Bakhtiyaris killed in these wars, and were supported in some cases by royal *farmans* and other documents.<sup>84</sup>

Loraine made the British position clear. Although he promised he would work towards a fair and reasonable assessment of the khans' arrears, he warned the khans that there was no question but that they must now accept their financial obligations towards the government and must come to a proper agreement with the ministry of finance regarding both the settlement of arrears and the future payment of revenue. This was exactly the same advice that he was then giving to Britain's other protégé in the south, Shaykh Khazal of Muhammarah. Loraine specifically advised Sardar Jang to prepare a statement of the revenue that the khans admitted to be owed by them to the government and to produce the various *farmans* and other documents to which he had referred, in order that the whole question might be discussed and resolved at a conference between the khans and the Administrator-General of Finance.<sup>85</sup> At the same time, Loraine did his best to moderate the attitude of the ministry of finance, urging Dr Millspaugh to be conciliatory towards the khans and not to reject their counter-claims without careful consideration.

The khans, however, were unused to the formal, legalistic approach recommended by Loraine. Rather, they attempted to resist the Administrator-General's demand with their habitual tactic of procrastination. They tried to argue that the government owed them money rather than vice versa, and generally resisted the spirit of Loraine's advice, showing a marked tendency to evade rather than accept what the government insisted were their obligations.<sup>86</sup> It was only when Peel, the British consul at Ahvaz, arrived in Tehran for his annual visit to the capital that the khans, at his insistent prompting, took any definite steps to prepare a financial statement. Peel also, at Loraine's request, had a number of meetings with the American official who was handling the case, and presented the khans' argument that the ministry's claim was inaccurate and that their ability to pay was strictly limited.<sup>87</sup>

The khans themselves still took few practical steps in their own defence and, in particular, failed to make any official reply to the Administrator-General's letter which had contained the original demand. They were clearly unprepared for the speed and decisiveness with which the ministry of finance would act when officials of the revenue department, supported by the army, promptly seized a number of private estates owned by the khans. This sudden and drastic action had its intended effect. Although the khans first engaged in a bout of protracted haggling among themselves, punctuated by threats that they would throw themselves on the mercy of the shah, they nonetheless eventually wrote to Dr Millspaugh nominating Sardar Jang and the *ilbaygi*, Amir Jang, to represent them in discussions with the ministry of finance. A number of conferences duly followed, in which Peel played a crucial role in assisting the khans in the presentation of their case,

and the American Administrator-General finally agreed to accept in full settlement the sum of half a million *tumans*, 50,000 *tumans* in cash at once, and the balance in yearly instalments.<sup>88</sup>

### Conclusion

Their acceptance of the Shalil settlement and of Millspaugh's tariff for revenue repayment signalled a new docility on the part of the great khans. Their bid to play, as tribal leaders, a national role had effectively ended with the coup of 1921, although their eviction from national politics was partly obscured by the rise of Sardar Asad as a favourite of the new shah. The advance of the new state institutions throughout southern Iran continued to strip them of their tribal and local roles and advantages. Their capture of the governorship of Isfahan in 1908–9 had been a triumph for the khans, signalling their entry into urban politics and their securing of control over the region. Their loss of this governorship in 1922 was equally significant, heralding their displacement by the modern bureaucracy and, especially, the army. Although they had managed, for the time being, to hold on to their governorship of Chahar Mahal, a town they regarded practically as part of Bakhtiyari, this too they finally lost in 1928.

By the late 1920s the great khans had lost all of their power, most of their influence and a considerable proportion of their wealth. Their sources of income had shrunk drastically and they had, in fact, become chronically indebted. They had lost all their lucrative provincial governorships, they were no longer allowed to collect road tolls from merchants passing through their territory, they were obliged to give large presents to the new shah for the retention of their posts of *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi* and their efforts to assert their new-found rights as landowners had even brought them into direct conflict with Riza. Their authority was now limited solely to their chieftainship of the Haft Lang tribes and even this was disputed by the raft of reforms introduced by the regime in the mid to late 1920s. For example, the new ministry of justice, the *adliyyah*, began to undermine the patriarchal dispensation of justice by the khans within the tribes, removing offenders from tribal jurisdiction to trial and prison in Isfahan and refusing the chiefs' offer of blood money, while Millspaugh's financial reforms had turned the khans from tax-farmers into little more than officials of the ministry of finance.

Their British patrons had been acutely conscious of the difficulties and dangers resulting from the khans' internal warring and had made strenuous efforts, both in the pre-1921 years and in the early 1920s, to persuade or oblige the khans to settle their differences. In 1919 the khans, with British assistance and under British pressure, had drawn up the so-called 'Commission Agreement'. This agreement, restating the equal rights of the two ruling families, amounted to an attempt to regulate and limit, in an institutionalized way, the conflicts between the khans. Between 1921 and

1923 several efforts were made to make the Commission Agreement work. In 1922 in particular, the senior khans tried to reach agreement between themselves over their internal organization, the administration of the tribes, and the collection and expenditure of their revenue. These efforts, however, too half-hearted to overcome the difficulties of the new situation, came to nothing. Futile in terms of promoting accord among the elite, such efforts, furthermore, worsened relations between the ruling families and the rest of the tribal population, the latter concluding that the khans, no longer able to earn their position by their abilities and qualifications, were now depending on a 'sordid family arrangement' to ensure that all the available pickings were reserved for the ever-increasing numbers of their own immediate relatives.<sup>89</sup> After 1923 the khans' rapid loss of income and perquisites and their increasingly restricted field of activity, coupled with the ascendancy of Sardar Asad and the loss of interest by the British, made attempts at internal compromise such as that embodied by the Commission Agreement increasingly irrelevant.

Factional struggles were, of course, characteristic of tribal leaderships, and within the Bakhtiyari confederation conflict between the two branches of the ruling family, the Ilkhani and the Haji Ilkhani, was endemic and had been for many years the single most disruptive factor. By the early 1920s, however, this relatively coherent and stable factionalism had splintered and spread. It was no longer confined to relations between the family branches but had emerged within each branch itself. Thus, rivalries between the khans not only became intensified and embittered but acquired an instability and unpredictability that they had not previously possessed.

The opportunities for the acquisition of wealth and power that had opened up to the Bakhtiyari khans as a result of their role in the constitutional revolution and of the discovery of oil in their territories had greatly aggravated the internal conflicts to which they were, in any case, prone. Although the expansion of opportunity in the post-1910 period had intensified rivalries among the senior khans, its contraction in the early 1920s brought no amelioration, rather provoking a prolonged, indeed terminal, crisis. The rapid shrinking of available employment for the khans outside Bakhtiyari, especially the loss of lucrative official appointments, naturally increased the competition for what remained and led to a general worsening of relations within the tribal leadership as a whole. In this context the struggle between the khans over the spoils from the oil company was lent a new sharpness and desperation.

The struggle between individual senior khans and their cliques for political power and financial gain was only one of the internal conflicts undermining Bakhtiyari in the 1920s. In these few years dangerous and overt schisms threatening confederational cohesion were developing with greater or lesser rapidity on several levels. An intergenerational conflict erupted among the leading families; the long-standing alienation of the tribesmen

from the khans worsened to the point at which it began to threaten serious political consequences; the endemic resentment of subordinate tribal groupings such as the Chahar Lang and the Janaki at Haft Lang domination resulted in their eventual secession; and the peasantry in Bakhtiyari-owned villages resorted to open revolt against their khan landlords.

## CHALLENGES FROM WITHIN AND BELOW

### Junior khans, nomads and peasants in Bakhtiyari

The great khans of the Bakhtiyari had been placed on the defensive by Riza Khan's seizure of power and, from 1921 onwards, were clearly retreating politically. By the end of 1923 their defeat and the ascendancy of the new regime had been graphically demonstrated by the character of the final settlement of the Shalil incident and their capitulation following the shock of their confrontation with the ministry of finance.

Yet the downfall of the khans was not solely due to the irresistible ascendancy of the nascent state power, nor to their own worsening rivalries. Processes were advancing within the Bakhtiyari confederation itself that augured the end of traditional tribal organization and relationships and which were rendering the rule of the great khans obsolete. The authority of the great khans began to encounter challenges from various internal sources. An intergenerational conflict erupted within the leading Haft Lang families themselves, resulting in the formulation, by the younger khans, of a novel and radical solution to the problem of weakening Bakhtiyari cohesion and the ossification of tribal leadership – the establishment of a reformist political party based explicitly on concepts of Bakhtiyari ethnic identity. The confederation itself collapsed when the resentment of the minor khans of the Chahar Lang subdivision at Haft Lang domination, encouraged by Riza Khan, broke into the open and resulted in the secession of the Chahar Lang. The alienation of the senior Haft Lang khans from the tribal milieu, a process in train since 1909, had produced a general attenuation of tribal loyalties, and encouraged both the emergence of a middle-ranking layer of tribal leaders, known as *kalantars*, as the focus for tribal leadership and an increasingly vocal resentment on the part of the tribal rank and file at what they perceived as the political and economic oppression of the khans. The emerging, albeit still unsophisticated, class consciousness of the tribespeople was reinforced by their proletarianization in relatively large numbers as workers in the oilfields and by the emergence of yet another direct threat to the khans' position – the rapid spread in the late 1920s of a radical anti-landlord movement among the settled Bakhtiyari peasantry in

khan-owned villages. The demystification of chiefly authority in the eyes of the tribespeople was further accelerated by the khans' rapid loss of function to the new modern state institutions.

During the 1920s the rule of the great khans and, indeed, the Bakhtiyari confederation itself, was disintegrating under the pressure of a number of internal dynamics. These internal fractures and challenges forced the khans, in order to survive as an elite, to try, however reluctantly, to accommodate themselves to, and to seek support from, the new regime in Tehran. The Bakhtiyari khans' inability to defend themselves against the Pahlavi regime clearly stemmed partly from their perception that their position, as hereditary rulers and as landlords, was more acutely and immediately threatened from below and within than from outside, i.e. from the external power of the state itself. After a brief and muddled attempt at resistance the tribal leadership, between 1923 and 1933, largely cooperated with the regime, to which it was openly subservient, in an attempt to preserve for itself a definite, even if much reduced, role.

### **The junior Haft Lang khans**

An early challenge to the hegemony of the senior khans came from within the Haft Lang elite itself, from the younger generation of khans. In fact, for some years before and throughout the 1920s the leadership of the *khavanin-i buzurg* was riven by a generational conflict of a new type, with ideological and political, as well as personal, dimensions. This conflict, although it had first arisen in the post-1909 situation, and thus, in origin, pre-dated the contextual transformation wrought by Riza Khan's coup, was brought to a head by the tensions and crises erupting in Bakhtiyari as a result of the assertiveness of the new regime.

The hostility displayed by the younger generation of Haft Lang khans towards their elders had three principal causes. It resulted, first, from the consistent exclusion by the senior khans of the numerous younger generation from any position of power either within or outside Bakhtiyari. The resulting resentment of the younger generation was dangerously aggravated by the rapid shrinkage of opportunity available to the Bakhtiyari elite after the 1921 coup.<sup>1</sup> After this date the immediate and visible decline in Bakhtiyari power and influence caused the younger khans' general insecurity and uncertainty about the future to increase exponentially. The second cause of the conflict, undoubtedly related to the first, was the widespread dissatisfaction of the younger generation at what they perceived as the general incompetence and failure of their elders and their awareness of the threat this represented to the survival of a Bakhtiyari entity. The third source of conflict between the junior khans and their seniors arose out of an increasingly desperate struggle for control over collective confederal resources, especially land and income from Bakhtiyari oil interests.

For the younger generation, as much, if not more than for the senior khans themselves, the overall diminution of employment opportunities represented a threat to their ability to acquire and maintain status, influence and wealth, and their competitiveness with, and resentment towards their elders and their general insecurity and uncertainty about the future increased accordingly. The younger generation of the Bakhtiyari tribal elite was numerically considerably larger than previous generations. As a result of their increasing wealth, after 1909 the khans' families had grown greatly in size and their sons were, by the early 1920s, reaching an age at which they would normally expect positions of importance. However, even the senior khans had been forced back into Bakhtiyari in the search for position and they keenly resented and steadfastly resisted the efforts of the large number of junior khans to find places for themselves.

In the chaotic conditions prevailing in southern Iran during and immediately after the Great War, the younger generation of Haft Lang khans appear to have developed a certain consciousness of themselves as a group, and they shared a perception of the deterioration in the circumstances of the Bakhtiyari and the need for reform and regeneration. The cohesion of the junior khans, and their determination to act to effect change was increasingly evident throughout the summer of 1921 and in September assumed a visible and organized form. They openly formed an association or party among themselves called the Bakhtiyari Star, *Sitarah-i Bakhtiyari*, and published in Isfahan a pamphlet that outlined the programme of this association.<sup>2</sup> The party possessed a motto, 'God, Freedom and Our Country', a banner of red and grey, and a badge consisting of a star, a scale, a pen, a scythe, a hammer and a sword. The pamphlet was immediately distributed both in the city and in the Bakhtiyari country.

The programme of the Bakhtiyari Star Party contained a large number of organizational proposals and political demands. The organizational proposals were sophisticated and the political demands of an advanced and fairly radical character. The introduction to the programme placed a strong emphasis on the desirability of progress, speaking of the 'high ambitions' of man for the 'prosperity and freedom of the world' and 'the amelioration of the living conditions of the inhabitants of the globe'. It lamented that the ancient and glorious land of Iran was entangled in misery and misfortune, a state of affairs that it significantly attributed first to Tehran, second to the cleverness of foreigners, and finally to the failures of the local elites, and it concluded by stating that the object of the Bakhtiyari Star Party was 'to enlighten the province of Bakhtiyari . . . which has hitherto remained in darkness, with the rays of happiness, tranquillity and freedom'.

The main body of the programme began by making various recommendations for the political organization of Bakhtiyari. It advocated the establishment of a central assembly (*anjuman*), to deal with all questions

of importance and also the establishment of assemblies in the districts and among the tribes. The assemblies were to be elected by universal suffrage although representatives had to be educated. Elections were to be secret, equal, direct and universal.

The programme went on to make a number of demands regarding the political, social and cultural advancement of Bakhtiyari and for the establishment of general democratic freedoms. These included: the abolition of distinctions, ranks and titles; security for people in their homes; freedom of speech, of writing, of thought, of forming associations, of the press; separation of religion from the state; compulsory primary education for both boys and girls; free compulsory primary education for the children of the poor, both boys and girls; technical, scientific and industrial schools for both boys and girls; compulsory military education for compulsory military service when the state required it; compensation to be paid to anyone illegally arrested or sentenced; public sanitation, medicines and doctors to be free to the poor.

A second chapter was devoted to proposals regarding land and agriculture. It began by demanding the abolition of any financial revenues that were modifications of slavery and the abolition of forced labour. In a clear echo of the proposals of the Democrat Party put forward during the constitutional period, the programme proposed that the democratic assemblies of the Bakhtiyari themselves assume control of all forests, pasture lands, *vaqf* lands and mines, and husband these resources for the benefit of the whole community of Bakhtiyari, while the next article stipulated that proprietors should only own land in reasonable proportions, so that Iranian democracy might be safeguarded.

There then followed several articles proposing measures aimed at improving the lot of the peasantry. These included fixing fair rents for the lease of land; compensation for natural disasters such as floods or droughts; and the establishment of agricultural schools. The next section of the programme dealt with workmen and labour and made similar sorts of recommendations. These included the eight-hour day; a day's holiday on Friday; no work at 'unusual hours'; no child labour; no hard and strenuous tasks to be given to women; two months' paid maternity leave for women; wages to be fixed by a council consisting of representatives of the workmen and of the employers and of the central assembly; and the supervision of industrial relations by the provincial assemblies. Subsequent articles also advocated respect for the rights of women, and specifically insisted that inheritance should be according to the laws of Islam, noting that at present nothing was given among the Bakhtiyari to female children.

The programme thus set out exhibited certain remarkable features. The articles calling for the limitation of land ownership and linking such limitation to the preservation of Iranian democracy, and proposing the collective ownership of natural resources, and the demands for the establishment of



formal institutions of democratic self-government, struck at the heart of both the political power of the khans within the tribe, and the basis of their wealth. Furthermore, there was, in the programme, a clear and strong awareness of identity and the Bakhtiyari Star was both explicitly and implicitly an ethnically based party. The first article of the section entitled 'General Principles' stated unambiguously that only Bakhtiyaris might enjoy membership of the party. The introduction emphasized the differences between the various peoples of Iran and their different stages of cultural and political development, and insisted on the need for separate and autonomous development, while another article insisted that each tribe separately should be allowed to enjoy internal liberty and autonomy.

Two issues immediately arise concerning this document. The first concerns the general significance and wider meaning of the Bakhtiyari Star project. The second concerns the origins of the political ideas that the programme expressed and the route by which these ideas had been transmitted to the junior khans.

The younger generation of khans was more clearly and more acutely aware than their elders of the weakening of traditional tribal ties. They themselves had been profoundly affected by the different environment that the Bakhtiyari elite had come to inhabit, having grown to maturity in the cities of Isfahan and Tehran, divorced from the tribal way of life and without intimate knowledge of their followers, and they keenly felt their own irrelevance to tribal life. They observed the emergence of a new tribal leadership in the form of a layer of middle-ranking *kalantars*, who lived alongside the ordinary nomads and increasingly carried out the everyday duties formerly reserved for the khans. They also perceived the alienation of the tribesmen from the khans and the consequent danger to their own leadership. They realized the essential need to carve out a new and plausible role for themselves, distinct from the discredited rule of their elders. If the existing situation continued they would never be able to oust their seniors, but would be obliged to wait for their own succession by seniority of age. But they feared that, when eventually their time arrived, they could claim little legitimacy in customary tribal terms and the tribes would no longer want or need them.

In the *Sitarah* may be seen the junior khans' attempt to reorganize Bakhtiyari on a new, modern basis. Instead of asserting their authority as tribal khans, they would now do so as political leaders, preserving for themselves both their own leadership and the loyalty and allegiance of their constituency, mobilizing the rank and file on a democratic and radical basis. The junior khans believed the degeneration of conditions in Bakhtiyari to be a result of the stranglehold of a corrupt and ossified leadership and the general thrust of the programme was strongly democratic. This radicalism was a weapon against their elders, with democracy used to engage the rank and file against the authority of the khans, and with legitimacy conferred

by modern ideals that acted as a counterweight to the pull of traditional loyalties. The *Sitarah* would also undertake a redefinition of Bakhtiari ethnicity. This would be made overt and would be no longer a tribal sense of belonging based on kin and genealogy, but a modern, quasi-national identity.

Interesting as they are, the individual provisions of the programme may be less important than its overall intentions: to guarantee a leadership role for the detribalized Haft Lang families; to preserve Bakhtiari distinctiveness and to construct a new identity for the Bakhtiari; to interpret the needs of the population, to articulate the necessary social change, and to introduce a mode of political activity that was capable of carrying the tribal population and its leadership through the transition to modernity.

The junior khans had largely grown up in the cities of Isfahan and Tehran where many had received a modern education. They had extensive experience of Europe, through travel or, in some cases, through an English education in missionary schools in Isfahan. It was inevitable that they would, in these environments, imbibe the nationalism and social reformism prevailing among the educated urban elites during the constitutional and post-constitutional years.<sup>3</sup> The *Sitarah* programme was, in many respects, typical of this outlook and there is some evidence of concrete links between the junior khans and local urban reformers such as Kay Ustuvan Khan Mutamid, the president of the Isfahan branch of the *Kumitah-i Ahan*, the Iron Committee, who seems to have suggested to them some of the programme's main features.<sup>4</sup> The influence of European social-democratic thought on the programme is clearly evident, perhaps as mediated through the newly established Soviet presence in Isfahan and the local radical press.<sup>5</sup>

The programme's concern for the lot of the peasantry and the conditions of workmen is particularly surprising, in that it emanates from a class of landowners, and has little direct relevance to nomadic life. It indicates the extent to which the junior khans had moved away from the tribal and nomadic milieu; there was, indeed, nothing in the programme that related directly to the needs of pastoral nomadism. The programme was entirely and recognizably the product of modern urban traditions of political reform. It is also possible that demands relating to the conditions of industrial employment, such as the eight-hour day, may have been raised as a direct consequence of the experience of many Bakhtiari tribesmen of working in the oilfields.

The Bakhtiari Star, with its objective of constructing a modern identity for the Bakhtiari and articulating the need for, and direction of, political and social change, contained a clear challenge to the traditional rule of the senior khans. The reaction of the latter was predictable. They began their counter-attack by severely criticizing individual points contained in the programme and ended by denouncing the younger khans as Bolsheviks.<sup>6</sup>

The younger khans were stung by these accusations and were keenly aware of the damage they could do to their efforts. They quickly produced a revised version of the programme of the Bakhtiyari Star. Sardar Fatih, now chairman of the group, made strenuous efforts, though without success, to persuade the British that it was based on proposals for reform put forward by British officials themselves. Although the revised programme possessed interesting, if minor, amendments, for example, a supporting reference to the *Shari'ah* was inserted into the article stipulating respect for the rights of women, the general tenor of the document and its concrete proposals remained substantially unchanged, and the hostility of the senior khans unassuaged.

The *Sitarah* continued to exist throughout the summer of 1922, under the leadership of Sardar Fatih, and held secret meetings in Dih Kurd, the provincial capital of Chahar Mahal, some of the junior khans putting a great deal of hard and serious work into the organization. Although attaching great theoretical importance to generalized reform, they concentrated their efforts on minor improvements and obliged the reluctant senior khans to undertake some improvements to local roads and communications.<sup>7</sup> However, the senior khans' uncooperativeness and cynicism successfully frustrated any broader social changes that the junior khans attempted to initiate.

The eruption of the Shalil crisis in mid-1922 and the ensuing assault by the regime on the khans temporarily submerged the discontent of the junior khans and the *Sitarah* then sank without trace. Nonetheless, the junior khans remained unreconciled to the rule of their elders and to the confederation's increasing subordination to the central government, and certain of them continued to play an oppositional role in internal tribal politics, a generational fault line continuing to split the confederation throughout the decade.

In addition to its ideological and political ramifications, the bitterness between the senior and junior khans was further exacerbated during the 1920s by an increasingly desperate personal dispute over access to, and control of, material resources, especially land and incomes and revenues from the confederation's oil interests.

From the constitutional period onwards, notions of absolute private property and personal ownership had acquired a new and rapidly increasing salience among the Iranian elite. In the evolution of their attitudes to ownership, of tribal pastures and of other confederational assets such as revenues from oil production, the senior Bakhtiyari khans, too, displayed a growing attachment to the concept of private property and a ruthless determination to assert their new-found individual rights against all other tribal claimants, including the junior khans and the nomadic and settled tribal rank and file.

Throughout Iran the tribal khans and aghas, no less than other members of the elite, exploited the new land registration legislation to register as their personal private property land that had hitherto been treated as a collective tribal resource. In the case of the Bakhtiyari, the resentments thus generated were aggravated to an acute degree by the opportunities for quick

profits offered to the khans by the APOC's need to buy and rent land for its drilling operations. As a result of the spread of the mentality of private ownership, and on the basis that they owned the land beneath which the oil was found, the senior khans also asserted their exclusive and personal right to the royalties produced by the Bakhtiyari oil shares.

The junior khans were not prepared to tolerate their exclusion from any share in the ownership of tribal resources, nor were the mass of ordinary nomads ready to accept this rupture with the conventions of tribal collectivity. Throughout the 1920s the junior khans engaged in a protracted campaign against their seniors over the fate of the confederation's oil shares,<sup>8</sup> while a clumsy attempt by the seniors to take advantage of the new land registration law to register in their own names land belonging to the junior khans finally turned the accumulated resentments of both junior khans and tribal rank and file into overt rebellion.<sup>9</sup>

### The Chahar Lang

During 1923 another fault line within the Bakhtiyari tribal confederation had begun to rupture. The confederation consisted of the two major lineages of the Haft Lang and the Chahar Lang and, during the late nineteenth century, the Chahar Lang had drifted into subordination to the Haft Lang and its khans had found no place within the Ilkhani/Haji Ilkhani ascendancy.<sup>10</sup> In the early 1920s Riza Khan's primary targets among the Bakhtiyari were the ruling great khans of the Haft Lang whose autonomy and power he wished to weaken and undermine. Accordingly, he adopted a policy of conciliation towards the subordinate Chahar Lang Bakhtiyari tribes, attempting to drive a wedge between the two branches of the confederation. In the early summer of 1923, while the crisis over the Shalil incident was still unresolved, Riza launched a campaign that had as its objective the removal of the Chahar Lang from the authority of the Haft Lang *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi*. As in the case of his overtures to Sardar Asad, he again met with an enthusiastic response. Elements among the Chahar Lang, led by the formidable Bibi Maryam and her son, Ali Mardan Khan, were eager to seize the opportunity to break away from the control of the Haft Lang khans and pressed Riza Khan to adopt a policy of complete separation.<sup>11</sup> Ali Mardan Khan had begun writing articles in the Isfahan press vilifying the Haft Lang khans, and the Chahar Langs, instigated by Riza Khan's officers, had also sent telegrams of complaint against the Haft Lang khans to the Majlis and other high authorities in Tehran.<sup>12</sup> The Tehran government duly ordered the separation of the Chahar Lang tribes, numbering some 2,000 families, from the Bakhtiyari *hukumat* (government), and placed them under their own *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi*, who were made completely independent of any central tribal authority, and the Bakhtiyari confederation, unified since the mid-nineteenth century, collapsed.

The minor Chahar Lang khans were elated at the new prospects that they believed had been opened up for them by Riza Khan's actions, prospects that appeared to include their staking of a claim to a share in the largesse of the oil company. A British oil company official described how one such chief, Mahmud Khan of Dalan, could barely conceal his delight and satisfaction at the difficulties of the Haft Lang khans and was 'considerably excited' at the prospect of freedom from the Bakhtiyari *hukumat*.<sup>13</sup> Mahmud Khan was apparently determined to take advantage of the War Minister's support to avenge what he considered to be the wrongs done to his family over the past 80 years and he announced the Chahar Lang khans' intention of putting forward their claims to the government for all the lands and tribes previously owned and controlled by them, including especially land at Malamir, Masjid-i Sulayman and Tambih, areas of immensely inflated value as they were now the sites of oil company operations, and which had been sold to the company by the Haft Lang khans.<sup>14</sup>

As 1923 progressed, it became clear that the centrifugal tendencies endemic in the tribal confederation were being given considerable general impetus by Riza Khan's attacks on the ruling khans, whose influence and prestige had been dealt heavy blows. In particular, the legitimacy of the new pro-Riza Haft Lang *ilkhani*, Sardar Muhtasham, and the *ilbaygi*, Amir Jang, appointed at the height of the Shalil crisis, had been undermined by the circumstances surrounding their installation. So compromised were they that, from the moment they took office, the new *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi* had found the greatest difficulty in enforcing their authority and holding even the Haft Lang tribes together, their political control crucially weakened as Haft Lang elements in conflict with the *hukumat* were now able to take refuge with the Chahar Lang.

Sardar Muhtasham and Amir Jang were acutely aware of the difficulties of their position. Even though the new *ilkhani*, Sardar Muhtasham, had received his post because of his membership of the pro-regime faction among the khans, yet he had been unable to ignore the unwelcome and dangerous dynamic of this new government policy of breaking up the tribal confederation. In May, immediately upon his appointment and even before his departure south, Sardar Muhtasham expressed his anxiety to Loraine, complaining that the separation of the Chahar Lang would cause the disintegration of the confederation and would reduce Bakhtiyari to chaos. Sardar Muhtasham tried to persuade the War Minister to order the re-establishment of the authority of the Haft Lang khans over the whole of Bakhtiyari, but without success.

Over the next few months the Haft Lang *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi* repeatedly threatened to resign unless Riza Khan restored their authority over the whole of Bakhtiyari, yet, in response to these threats and to ardent appeals from both the Haft Lang khans and the British about the danger of chaos and anarchy among the tribes and especially in the vicinity of the oilfields,

Riza Khan merely insisted that only the Chahar Lang themselves could decide whether to submit to the Haft Lang khans.<sup>15</sup> When the Haft Lang attempted to reassert their authority by force and fighting broke out between them and the Chahar Lang, Riza Khan, far from supporting the Haft Lang governors, whom he had himself just installed, rather sent a small body of troops to support the Chahar Lang chiefs in their autonomy.

The Chahar Lang khans were confident that they had the support of the War Minister in their struggle with the Haft Lang *hukumat*. In response to Loraine's remonstrations regarding the dangers of the situation, Riza Khan stated that he had promised the Chahar Lang khans that their submission should only be by their own consent, that it had been up to the Haft Lang *hukumat* to come to a satisfactory arrangement with the Chahar Lang chiefs but that the latter had refused absolutely to return to Haft Lang authority.

The Chahar Lang movement for autonomy was now irreversible and their region of Faridan eventually became an independent administrative district. Yet the Haft Lang khans were immediately faced with a new threat. The centrifugal tendencies within the confederation having been stimulated by the Chahar Lang success, another sub-division, the Janaki, also began to demand their autonomy. Fighting a losing battle, the Haft Lang khans began to despair. Amid renewed threats of resignation, they decided to acquiesce in the separation of the Chahar Lang, provided the Janaki khans remained under their control. During the first half of 1924 the centrifugal forces within Bakhtiyari unleashed by Riza Khan continued to cause chaos. The success of the Chahar Lang having further diminished the already battered authority of the *ilkhani* and encouraged the Janaki, the Janaki khans themselves came to Tehran to present their case, again receiving direct encouragement from the government. Later in the year they, too, achieved their separation from the *hukumat*.

### The pastoral nomads

One of the most important factors prompting the junior Haft Lang khans to try to develop new political strategies and initiatives had been the increasing, and increasingly obvious, alienation of the mass of ordinary tribespeople from chiefly rule. By the early 1920s the khans' ties with, and their influence over, the tribes were rapidly weakening. The senior khans were losing, indeed were abandoning, their tribal base from which they had historically derived their strength and which had always been the source of their power.

By the early 1920s the hostility felt by the Bakhtiyari tribal rank and file towards the great khans of the confederation was both increasing and increasingly openly expressed. The migratory Bakhtiyari, like their settled kin among the sharecroppers of Chahar Mahal, manifested a vivid resentment at the actions and behaviour of their khans. Such discontent was not

new, it was rather probably endemic.<sup>16</sup> However, it had only grown into an acute phenomenon since the constitutional years of 1908–11, when the khans had begun to play a national role and to acquire both great wealth and the trappings of office. Since that time the nomads' dissatisfaction had steadily intensified. By the beginning of the Pahlavi period these feelings showed no sign of abating but had reached such a pitch that the tribal hierarchy was threatening to disintegrate under the pressure.<sup>17</sup>

As a result of the khans' gains in power and wealth arising from their role in the restoration of the constitution in 1909, a gulf had opened up between them and their nomadic followers, and the distance separating them, in cultural, political, economic and even purely geographical terms had since continued to widen. The fathers of the senior khans had been, in every respect, tribal chiefs. They had stayed with their families in black goat-hair tents, migrating each spring and autumn with their followers. They lived intimately with their tribesmen and derived legitimacy from the quality of their leadership. By the 1920s, however, the khans had long since ceased to accompany the tribes. They had settled down in what their followers regarded as palaces, which they had built in Chahar Mahal, a province adjacent to, but quite distinct from, Bakhtiyari. Many of them had taken up a more or less permanent residence in Tehran, and only rarely visited Bakhtiyari. Their wives had adopted veiling in imitation of town-dwellers. They no longer shared their people's lives as their fathers had done and their position as leaders, arbitrators and rulers no longer depended on their abilities and experience but was artificially maintained by their wealth and the ties they had cultivated with the British diplomatic and commercial presence.<sup>18</sup>

The nomads keenly resented all these developments. Like the settled Bakhtiyari cultivators, they formulated their grievances in terms of an older, idealized version of rights and legitimacy. They repeatedly complained of the injustice of the senior khans. They argued that it was by exploiting tribal ties that the khans had persuaded them to take up arms and leave their homes to fight in the constitutional wars and win for them their national eminence. Having won for the khans their high positions the tribespeople now believed themselves entitled to a share of the new power and wealth in the same way as they were customarily entitled to shares of resources in Bakhtiyari itself. They felt cheated by the growing disparity between themselves and their khans, who now lived in grand houses, sent their children to Europe, and governed provinces, and they considered the reciprocal basis of tribal life to have been violated. They accused the khans of appealing to their sentiments of Bakhtiyari solidarity when convenient, but of going back on this principle when it came to dividing the spoils.<sup>19</sup>

The khans, now politically powerful and with vastly increased wealth, had found it convenient to dispense with the customary tribal division of resources. However, aware of the necessity of maintaining a hold over their

followers, the khans had substituted for the old tribal divisions a system of cash payments known as *bastah kashi*, their followers becoming *bastagan*.<sup>20</sup> These efforts by the khans to propitiate the Bakhtiyari tribespeople had not, however, been successful. Now separated from their khans by an ever-widening gap in status, power and landed wealth, the tribespeople refused to be satisfied purely by cash payments and constantly reiterated their entitlement to a more equitable division of resources. In spite of being *bastagan* and in receipt of cash subsidies from the khans, the tribal rank and file openly complained of the khans' neglect of their responsibilities and their failure to devote even a fraction of their resources to the elementary social needs of their people.<sup>21</sup> A particular grievance related to the condition of the Bakhtiyari road. This road, kept in good repair by the fathers of the present khans who were themselves in the habit of migrating along it, had since been completely neglected, with the consequence that it had deteriorated to the point where the spring and autumn movements of the nomads were seriously hindered.

The tribespeople had long ago abandoned any qualms they might once have felt about openly criticizing and denouncing the khans. As early as 1910, for example, sickened by the extortion and oppression of the khans then occupying the official positions of tribal governors (*ilkhani* and *ilbaygi*), the tribes had taken the highly unusual, and perhaps even unprecedented, step of uniting and sending a petition to the other khans in Tehran requesting the removal of the governors, and threatening a rising. Their demand had been granted and both the governors were removed.<sup>22</sup> By the early 1920s, what one sympathetic British official described as a 'process of awakening' appeared to be taking place within the confederation which showed itself in the tribespeople's overtly expressed discontent and disloyalty, and also specifically in their efforts, albeit tentative and inchoate, to have themselves recognized, particularly by the British, as a factor in Bakhtiyari, and to make their voices heard when the British negotiated with the khans.<sup>23</sup>

The disillusionment felt by the tribespeople towards their khans was fully reciprocated.<sup>24</sup> The khans' wealth was now mainly drawn from their landholdings and their oil interests, the posts of *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi* were of importance mainly due to the access they gave to land sales and oil revenues, while their own flocks were a negligible factor. The khans, their transformation into absentee landlords and their absorption into the traditional urban elite now largely complete, were finding their responsibility for their followers increasingly burdensome. This was especially so because of the increasingly expensive system of *bastah kashi*. By 1921 the greater part of the Bakhtiyari revenues, as well as the tolls on the Bakhtiyari road, were being spent on keeping the *bastagan* quiet. By the early 1920s their *bastagan* no longer served any useful purpose for the khans, who found them only a drain on their resources and they were highly receptive to suggestions that the *bastagan* be disarmed and dissolved.<sup>25</sup> In 1925 they



seized the opportunity presented by the regime's disarmament drive to try to rid themselves of their *bastagan*.

During the 1920s, broad social, economic and ideological changes were transforming the context within which khans and tribespeople negotiated their relationships. The land legislation was accelerating change in the countryside and the experiences of nomads and peasants as migrant labourers in the oilfields was revolutionizing the outlook of both the migrants themselves and their extended families with whom they remained in constant contact.<sup>26</sup> However, in the case of the Bakhtiyari, a number of specific issues further contributed to the alienation of the tribespeople from their khans. For example, many Bakhtiyari were employed by the khans as guards at the oilfields, and, in accordance with a widespread practice whereby Iranian officials skimmed off a percentage of their subordinates' wages, the khans kept for themselves more than half of the money that they received from the oil company to pass on as wages to these guards. The tribal guards, however, found this practice less and less tolerable, especially as they were now able to see with their own eyes the oil company's own practice of paying wages in full without any such deductions.

The mass of nomads were also angered at the khans' failure to take any action that might mitigate the effect of some of the regime's more worrisome policies. Although the nomads had broadly welcomed the better security established in the first half of the 1920s, from mid-decade measures began to appear from Tehran that caused more apprehension. The first of these was disarmament, unpopular because it was imposed erratically, and first upon the most docile, leaving those disarmed defenceless against their still-armed enemies, and also because of the symbolic significance of a weapon and the status it bestowed on its owner, and its necessity to the nomadic way of life. By the mid-1920s, however, so attenuated had become the connections tying the khans to their followers that the tribal leadership was not only unable and unwilling to take action in defence of the latter's interests but actually acted as an instrument of the regime in imposing its will.

In the summer of 1925, after the submission of the Shaykh of Muhammad, Tehran initiated a major drive to disarm the civilian population throughout the south.<sup>27</sup> But rural disarmament was a complex and difficult task and the military authorities met with only mixed success, imposing the policy mainly on the settled communities, while leaving much of the nomadic population with its weapons. The major southern tribal confederations of the Qashqai and the Khamsah escaped or avoided disarmament at this time, and even the Chahar Lang Bakhtiyari succeeded in retaining their weapons, but the Haft Lang were forced to surrender a large proportion of their rifles, largely because of the active cooperation of their khans with the regime.<sup>28</sup> Immediately Riza Khan had declared his intention to begin disarmament in the south, he had begun negotiations with the *ilkhani* regarding the implementation of the policy, Riza asking the *ilkhani* whether he needed

troops to help him, the *ilkhani* declining. In fact, the senior Bakhtiyari khans, unlike other tribal leaderships, welcomed the measure and cooperated readily with the government.<sup>29</sup> The policy was implemented in Bakhtiyari only and entirely by the khans themselves, without any outside intervention, either civil or military.

Although by cooperating with the regime in the execution of its policy of disarmament, the khans reduced the financial burden of maintaining their *bastagan*; in so doing, they also lost one of their remaining pillars of influence among the tribes.

During the 1920s, the Bakhtiyari nomads' feelings of resentment and injustice were also being sharpened by the interrelated issues of land ownership and the khans' monopoly of dealings with the oil company. The changes taking place as a result of the land legislation were again, as with the settled Bakhtiyari, a crucial issue.<sup>30</sup>

The pastoral nomads were dismayed at the land registration laws, particularly those of 1928, and both they and the junior khans of the confederation were angered at the hardening attitudes of the senior khans and the actions of the latter in using the new laws to convert tribal pastures into their own private property. Although this process, and the resulting resentment, was under way throughout Iran, it aroused especial bitterness among the Bakhtiyari. Indeed, it had been simmering since the early years of the century when the khans had first begun selling tribal pastureland to the APOC. The land was needed by the company for the expansion of its drilling operations and had consequently become extremely valuable. However, the senior khans kept control over the land sales, and the very large amounts of money thus produced, entirely to themselves, with the junior khans and the tribespeople excluded completely from any share or benefit. This was so despite the fact that, according to the company, their agreement with the khans definitely contained provision for compensation to be given, through the senior khans, to the tribespeople, whether settled or nomadic.<sup>31</sup> The company argued that it paid the khans for the land, but it was then up to the khans to hand over the money to the dispossessed tribespeople or to provide them with equivalent holdings elsewhere. The tribespeople were well aware of this, and repeatedly demanded a share of the profits from the sale and rent of tribal land to the company. Just as they disputed the senior khans' personal ownership of tribal lands, so the lower levels of the tribal pyramid also disputed the khans' exclusive appropriation of royalties from shares given to them by the oil company.

The senior khans' arrogation to themselves of the full ownership of tribal lands caused outrage within the confederation. In the latter part of the decade, the nomads followed with great attention the course of the khans' dispute with the Chahar Mahal peasants, and anger at their own dispossession by the senior khans contributed materially to the outbreak of a tribal rebellion in 1929.

### The settled peasantry

From the mid-1920s, the khans began to experience another type of challenge to their position, this time in their capacity as landowners. In 1924 settled Bakhtiyari sharecroppers in one or two villages in Chahar Mahal had begun to display open discontent and to take anti-landlord action. In 1928 this became an open revolt when the peasants in a large number of the khans' villages rejected the khans' authority, claimed that the land and the water belonged to God, and that the produce of the land belonged to those who worked the land, namely, themselves.<sup>32</sup> They refused to pay anything to the khans or to give them the share of the produce customarily due to them.<sup>33</sup> This movement rapidly developed and a committee was formed that began to give direction to the sharecroppers' actions. The committee adopted a programme of a rather radical complexion<sup>34</sup> and from this point on the hostility of the sharecroppers towards their landlords, the Bakhtiyari khans, took on a more organized form. Nonetheless, the movement remained peaceful and defensive, only threatening violence when it was, itself, threatened.

The peasant committee was composed chiefly of ex-servants of the khans, who had been dismissed by the khans for various reasons in the past and who had visited Isfahan and Tehran and 'imbibed new ideas of freedom and equality, which they proceeded to impart to the villagers'.<sup>35</sup> The committee was particularly active in helping the peasants launch actions against the khans in the newly established secular *adliyyah* courts.<sup>36</sup>

In the context of the political struggle then going on between the regime and the khans, the government seems to have perceived the peasant movement as an opportunity further to strike at the position of the khans. The peasant movement derived some real impetus from its receipt of definite official encouragement, and the khans found themselves, temporarily at least, powerless against their peasants, who received a consistently sympathetic hearing from the authorities. The khans themselves were refused any official help against the peasants, and any action the khans tried to take resulted in appeals by the peasants, assisted by the village committee, to the new *adliyyah* courts. The prestige of the khans was dealt a further blow when they were, in the middle of their conflict with their peasants, deprived of their last remaining non-tribal official position, the governorship of Chahar Mahal itself.<sup>37</sup>

During the early summer of 1928 some of the Chahar Mahal committee went to Tehran and were actually received by the prime minister. At this point, however, the government, reflecting on the possible implications of its stance, began to retreat and sent a commission to Chahar Mahal to investigate the conflict. This commission examined the peasants' grievances and the khans' title to the land in dispute, and in July submitted their report which, in regard to almost all the villages, was in favour of the khans. The peasants nevertheless refused to accept the decisions of the commission,

with the result that Tehran replaced the newly appointed civil governor of Chahar Mahal with a military officer, who was authorized to use force if necessary to oblige the peasants to abide by the decisions of the commission and to pay the landlords what they claimed. The military governor was determined to carry out his instructions, and with his help the khans again began to receive from their peasants the payments in kind and cash to which they believed themselves entitled as landowners.<sup>38</sup> Although the government had initially supported the peasants as a tactic to weaken the Bakhtiyari khans, an awareness appears quickly to have spread through the land-owning elite at large and to Riza Shah himself of the danger of any permanent peasant success against the khans, especially in stimulating peasants elsewhere to try to emulate their actions. It was probably only this danger that induced the shah finally to uphold the khans' rights as landowners.

The khans themselves, however, had been thoroughly cowed by their experience and now confined themselves to seeking to obtain only what they considered the minimum of their dues. The khans were further worried by the fact that the Bakhtiyari nomads, although they had not been involved in the sharecropper rebellion, had nonetheless followed it with close attention. The khans feared the possibility that the seditious ideas animating the peasantry might also lead to trouble among the nomads. Such a development was by no means unlikely given the political radicalism periodically expressed by some of the younger khans, the resentment of the rank and file, and the latter's inchoately but insistently expressed demand for a more equitable division of resources. There was no doubt that the nomads were being influenced to some degree by their contact with the ideas circulating among the peasantry of Chahar Mahal as well as by their experiences in the new industrial environment of the oilfields.

By the end of 1928 the movement among the Bakhtiyari sharecroppers of Chahar Mahal had been crushed. The following year, however, saw southern Iran convulsed by a series of peasant and nomad uprisings, led by junior khans and *kalantars*, in what became the most serious rural crisis faced by the regime in the two decades of its existence.

## THE NEW STATE AND THE RURAL POOR

In the two decades between his arrival in power in 1921 via a coup d'état and his abdication in 1941, Riza Shah presided over a period of profound political, economic and social change in Iran, unprecedented in its scope and in its pace. Although his regime drew much of its support, at least in its first decade, from the urban political elite and the nationalist intelligentsia, and its state-building effort was primarily oriented towards the urban populations and focused on industrial development, nonetheless the early Pahlavi period was a time of profound change for rural Iran. Throughout the countryside, the rural poor, nomads and settled peasants were profoundly affected by the upheavals unleashed by the regime's choice of authoritarian state-building and modernization based on European models. Both nomads and peasants suffered materially as a consequence of the general development policies implemented by the new state and by the khans' and the landowners' adoption of the new state's ideological outlook, especially its attitude towards private property, and the resulting efforts by rural elites to assert their personal and absolute ownership over resources hitherto held collectively or contingently.

Contrary to the conventional assumptions of rural passivity, held by both Western scholarship and Iranian nationalism, nomad and peasant communities in fact generated a variety of active responses to the regime's initiatives, both on their own account and in combination with other social forces, aimed at defending themselves and resisting unfavourable changes in their relations with landlords and state officials. These responses varied in both character and duration. Tribal sharecroppers formed committees and made collective bids to improve the terms of their contracts with landowners, in at least one case generating a movement that affected a number of villages and lasted over several years. Nomads and peasants presented petitions to the Majlis and to the shah outlining their grievances and asking for redress, took their complaints to the press, and occasionally managed to launch actions against their landlords in court. In the late 1920s, as the regime entered a radical phase of rapid centralization and Westernization, sections of the still armed and mobile nomadic tribes, supported by a

groundswell of peasant resentment, launched uprisings directed against both the new authorities and their own aristocracies. During the 1930s, as the weight of the new state became heavier, those to whom the option was available developed a strategy of avoidance based on an almost institutionalized system of bribery, while the most pauperized sections of particularly the nomadic poor, as economic conditions in the countryside deteriorated, resorted to banditry and smuggling as strategies of resistance and survival. The rural poor appear to have been influenced in formulating these responses by the changes in their own circumstances, by their experiences as migrant workers, and by new ideas transmitted both by members of their own communities who had been drawn into the urban milieu and by dissident elements of their own ruling elites. These processes appear to have been particularly advanced in the south of the country and to have had a marked impact on southern tribal confederations such as the Bakhtiyari, perhaps as a result of these groups' extensive involvement as labourers in the oil industry and the advanced integration of their khans into the political and economic elite.

### **Methods and theory**

Efforts to excavate the experience of the rural poor in Iran have been beset both by methodological difficulties and by theoretical and ideological obstacles. Although it has been argued recently that a critical re-reading of traditional texts may yield material with which to reconstruct the history of non-elite groups, both in Iran and elsewhere in the Middle East,<sup>1</sup> yet it remains clear that the sparsity of sources constitutes a serious problem. Archival research in Iran, itself a recent phenomenon, has so far failed to locate significant documentation in which the rural poor have themselves directly recorded and articulated their history.<sup>2</sup> Theoretical and ideological assumptions have also hindered and distorted research into the responses of the rural poor in Iran to the 'top-down modernization' that characterized the early Pahlavi period. Western scholarship has been largely uninterested in the conditions of the rural poor in Iran and its indifference was reinforced by the inclinations of the nationalist elite in power in Iran till 1979.<sup>3</sup> The Pahlavi elite, overwhelmingly urban with its economic base remaining in absentee landlordism until the land reform of the early 1960s, was eager to embrace, in this respect if in no other, Marx's characterization of the peasantry as so many sacks of potatoes.<sup>4</sup> The inclinations of both scholarship and politics have, therefore, tended to combine to resist any notion of peasants and nomads as active agents in the broad historical processes of which they were central components, but have, rather, preferred to see the rural poor purely as so much fodder for the execution of the state's fiscal and military policies.

This perspective has been predicated on certain assumptions, often possessing a strong mythical element, which have further served to obscure the realities of rural conflict. Among these assumptions are notions of rural passivity, fatalism and deference; of the overriding importance within rural communities of vertical ties of dependence and patronage, rather than horizontal ties of solidarity; and of the eternal and unbridgeable divide between settled cultivator and pastoral nomad. There has also been a general reluctance to penetrate the social reality behind the continued prevalence of phenomena such as rural banditry. Such activities have been submerged within a discourse of 'modernity', and have been, when visible at all, invariably depicted as merely criminal and archaic, doomed to diminish in mathematical proportion to the advance of the new state institutions.

Rural discontent and unrest have traditionally been conceptualized purely in terms of actual peasant rebellion, usually prolonged and fairly large-scale, typically accompanied by a campaign of violence against landlords and the slaughter of their agents. In Iran, with the partial exception of the Caspian provinces, this dramatic dimension of rural protest has been largely absent.<sup>5</sup> The lack of widespread and violent peasant uprisings in Iran, in the twentieth century and earlier, has encouraged an assumption that the peasantry was most inclined to resort to a strategy of passive endurance, 'a certain technique of fatalism',<sup>6</sup> a strategy mitigated by occasional flight, either to more remote regions or, later, away from the land altogether, and, until this option was closed down in the late 1920s, partial or complete renomadization.

Regarding the inter-war decades in particular, although a time when profound changes were affecting rural Iran, scholarly research has, in general, been largely content to see the countryside and its population through the eyes of urban nationalism, as a vast hinterland primitive in outlook and mired in stagnation. Even sympathetic accounts of the hardships and privations of rural life in this period have tended to depict the peasantry as passive, apathetic and apolitical or conservative, and the nomads as purely reactionary in themselves and as tools of their equally reactionary khans. Certainly, a superficial reading of the available sources initially reinforces the conventional impression of resignation, endurance and deference towards land-owning and bureaucratic authorities on the part of the rural poor, even, and perhaps especially, in the face of the worsening and finally catastrophic conditions throughout much of the countryside.<sup>7</sup>

Recent scholarship, however, has challenged both this general historical assumption of peasant passivity in Iran and the notion that rural resistance only or most importantly manifests itself through sustained and violent rebellion.<sup>8</sup> In an early attempt to explain the general absence of peasant rebellion in Iran, Farhad Kazemi and Ervand Abrahamian emphasized that such an absence should not be taken to imply an acceptance of the established order. On the contrary, they drew attention to evidence of the intense

hatred for the landlord which the peasant only dared express privately and obliquely and the prevalence of village riots and local protests, and the utilization of 'weapons of the weak', including concealment of the crop, tax evasion, withholding rents, the protection of outlaws, and even the taking of sanctuary in town mosques.<sup>9</sup> In her recent study of the constitutional period, Janet Afary has uncovered significant rural dimensions to the radical activism of the period. These included peasant protests and strikes, petitions and letters by and on behalf of the peasants to newspapers and Majlis delegates, the formation of rural *anjumans*, and actual rebellions in the more prosperous areas of Gilan and Azarbayjan.<sup>10</sup> In an account of the land reform of the early 1960s, Mohammad Gholi Majd has documented extraordinary levels of anti-landlord violence and peasant seizure and occupation of landowners' estates, while Ahmad Ashraf and Shaul Bakhash have both discussed the struggles that broke out over land in the years immediately after the 1979 revolution.<sup>11</sup>

Interest in early Pahlavi Iran, however, has tended to remain focused on state policy and very little research has been carried out into the actual impact of the legislative, political and economic changes of the period on the rural population in general.<sup>12</sup> No study has been undertaken, for example, of the effect of the land legislation of the 1920s on the rural poor. We do not know to what extent peasants and nomads may have tried to register claims to smallholdings and pastures, as no examination has been made of the land registry or court archives and, although we have sufficient fragmentary evidence to show that peasants occasionally succeeded in taking their disputes with landlords to the new courts, we possess no systematic and coherent understanding of the legal processes within which conflicts with landlords took place.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, despite the still primitive state of research it is clear that, as Afary and Majd have observed in relation to the upheavals of the constitutional and 'White' revolutions, so too the rapid changes of the early Pahlavi period evoked a range of active responses from the rural poor themselves, both settled cultivators and pastoral nomads. There is considerable evidence to suggest that they both acutely perceived the significance of the changes in their circumstances, and attempted to intervene to defend themselves and modify the terms of their relationship with landlord and state. They resented the enhancements of private property rights and even occasionally rejected in principle the very foundation of landlord power.

### **The agrarian structure**

The early Pahlavi period was a time of profound change in the Iranian countryside. During these years, although there was substantial overall population growth and a degree of shift to the urban and industrial sectors, the vast majority of the Iranian people continued to live in the rural areas.



The rural population was made up of an elite of tribal khans and landlords and a mass of tribally organized pastoral nomads, semi-settled cultivators and, the largest group, settled peasant cultivators, both tribal and non-tribal.<sup>14</sup> Landlords of any size were almost always absentee and urban-based, and even the khans were increasingly divorced from their nomadic followers, successfully integrating themselves into the urban elite. The settled peasantry was, in particular, also highly stratified internally, and consisted of a small number of peasant proprietors, sharecroppers who had a customary right (*nasaq*) to cultivate a subsistence plot of land, and a growing number of landless agricultural labourers (*khushnishin*) who had no such right. The distinction between those who possessed a *nasaq* and those who did not was acute.<sup>15</sup> Set against the growing stratification were mechanisms that tended to promote solidarity, such as the *bunah*, a peasant work team organized to carry out agricultural tasks.<sup>16</sup> Sometimes, too, tribal ties persisted among the settled peasantry. The rural population faced dramatically varying economic and social conditions, ranging from the increasing penetration of capitalist relations to the persistence of slave raiding and trafficking on areas abutting the Gulf coast.<sup>17</sup>

Although the nationalist elite, itself an almost exclusively urban phenomenon, was little interested in agricultural development or the needs of the countryside, yet the rural population was profoundly affected by the legal, economic, political and social changes of the period. The legislation concerning land ownership transformed the context within which landlords and cultivators, and khans and nomads, conducted their relations. These legal changes, combined with the economic policies adopted by the regime, especially the decision to raise internal resources for development through indirect taxes, namely monopolies on tea and sugar, drove down living standards and resulted in widespread pauperization. The state's rapid modernization drive, including measures such as conscription, which fell most heavily on the settled peasantry, and nomadic settlement, with its devastating effect on the pastoral economy, complicated and made vastly more burdensome the rural poor's relationship with urban and official Iran.<sup>18</sup>

The new regime of Riza Shah, in accordance with its broad modernist approach, adopted étatiste economic policies and concentrated its efforts on the development of modern industry and the construction of nationwide systems of communication, roads, ports and, most grandiosely, the Trans-Iranian railway. Its concerns regarding the rural areas were largely focused on the establishment of security and the enforcement of political compliance. The land-owning classes, however, had become, since the previous century, increasingly preoccupied with the need to clarify and consolidate their rights over their property, especially their landed property. During the 1920s and 1930s this older landed elite was reinforced by groups and individuals associated with the new regime, including the upper echelons of

army officers and Riza Shah himself, who rapidly translated their new political power into landed wealth. Together these groups embarked on a process of solidifying and enhancing landlordism throughout Iran. Riza Shah, personally becoming the largest landowner in the country, constructed a regime that was solidly pro-landlord and a Majlis dominated by landlords passed legislation consolidating their rights.

Since the nineteenth century an overall trend had emerged towards the clearer recognition of absolute private property in land, a trend that was accompanied by the inexorable commercialization of land.<sup>19</sup> These developments were driven by Iran's increasing involvement with the international economy, the resulting shift to cash crops and the increasing profitability of agriculture. The constitution of 1906 explicitly recognized the inviolability of private property and, after 1921, the new Pahlavi state passed legislation that deepened and enhanced these processes. Beginning in 1922, and then in a cluster between 1928 and 1932, the Majlis passed laws providing for the legal registration of property and title deeds while the new Civil Code reinforced concepts and notions of absolute ownership of land. Landlordism also prospered on the basis of other legislation during these years. After 1924 the richer landlords were able to benefit from the sale of state lands, and the abolition of the land tax in 1934, and its replacement by a tax on products of the land, shifted the burden of taxation from the landowner to the peasant.<sup>20</sup>

In tandem with its overall failure at renovation, the Iranian state had, in the nineteenth century, formulated no land legislation to address the existing chaos in land tenure, despite the example of the Ottoman Empire which had in 1858 passed a comprehensive Land Law.<sup>21</sup> By the early twentieth century, property rights in Iran remained often contingent, unclear, complicated and disputed.<sup>22</sup> The establishment and enforcement by the state of new legal concepts governing private property was not a straightforward matter and it appears to have been precisely as a consequence of the regime's efforts to clarify property rights through legislation that many disputes over land ownership came to a head. The character and extent of such disputes between the shah himself and members of the land-owning elite have recently received attention,<sup>23</sup> but the consequence of the legislation in producing and aggravating conflict between landlords and peasants and between khans and nomads, is less well known. One example of the complicated contests that arose in the 1920s, provoked by the registration laws, is provided by the case of the Bakhtiyari khans. At the same time as they faced a bitter conflict with their sharecropping tenants over land ownership, the khans embarked on two further prolonged struggles as a consequence of their efforts to assert their personal ownership over pasture lands. One struggle was with their own tribal followers, who claimed collective ownership, the other with the shah himself, who successfully insisted on state ownership of tribal pastures.<sup>24</sup>

### Struggles over property rights

One of the major issues animating rural activism has been, in all historical circumstances, peasant land-hunger. Since the interwar decades in Iran was a period in which attitudes towards private property, and actual patterns of landownership, were transformed, questions naturally arise concerning the attitudes of the rural poor to the land legislation of the time. Indeed, the best documented example that has survived of peasant activism in this period details their rejection of landlord claims of ownership. Not only the settled peasantry, but the pastoral nomads, too, rejected, overtly and sometimes violently, their khans' assertion of their absolute and personal ownership of tribal pastures. In fact, the entire Riza Shah period may be seen as one characterized by struggles over land, sometimes covert and subterranean, sometimes open, struggles into which many disparate and conflicting elements entered, sometimes on their own behalf and sometimes in uneasy alliance. These struggles took place within the elite, principally between the shah and other landowners, but also between the elite and various subaltern rural groups, including peasants and pastoral nomads, both sides utilizing a wide range of legal and extra-legal methods: the courts; petitions and appeals to the authorities; collective disobedience; arbitrary state and landlord violence and peasant resistance; and armed uprising.

Rural protest in the early Pahlavi period did not, however, centre only on control and ownership of land. There is evidence also of resistance to the growing financial, military and cultural impositions of the new state from peasants and the semi-settled, as well as in the better-known form of armed nomad rebellion. The land registration legislation was perceived as threatening by both peasants and nomads. Similarly, the new policies of conscription, disarmament and the introduction of state monopolies on cash crops such as opium and tobacco, provoked intense hostility among peasants and nomads alike, sometimes separately but occasionally, in defiance of conventions speaking of their essential conflict, in cooperation. Furthermore, although peasant hatred of their landlords may be assumed as elemental, it also appears that the changes of the period resulted in an accelerated development of class consciousness among the tribal nomads. As tribal cohesion disintegrated in face of the assertion of the power of the new state, the vertical ties of patronage linking khan and nomad gave way to a sense of disillusionment and betrayal on the part of the nomadic population and occasionally to a sense of real class hatred towards their khans. Finally, as conditions in the countryside deteriorated, the most marginal and pauperized among the rural poor abandoned collective action altogether and increasingly resorted to banditry as an individual or small-scale strategy of avoidance and resistance.

### Landlords and tenants

Although ideas of land reform had circulated during the constitutional period, such notions were rejected by the post-1921 regime.<sup>25</sup> Rather, early Pahlavi Iran experienced the reverse of a land reform, seeing an acceleration of the concentration of ownership in fewer and fewer hands. The land registration legislation inaugurated a concerted land-grab by the elite in general and, most spectacularly by the shah himself, who possessed sufficient political and military resources to make himself by far the largest individual landowner in the country. Although the shah's personal mania for land acquisition was often at the expense of individual elite families, his regime was clearly a landlord regime and both landlordism and the land-owning class as a whole emerged from these years with their position strengthened and placed on solid legal foundations.

In general, the changes that enhanced the position of the landlords were, directly or indirectly, at the expense of the peasants and pastoralists and the assertion of their new rights by landlords and khans had a deep impact on their relations with their peasants and their nomadic followers. Although superficially appearing only to confirm and legalize existing arrangements, in fact the legislation allowed landlords to establish outright and absolute ownership of landed estates to which their title was doubtful or even non-existent, where previously ownership had been vague, contingent and theoretically temporary. The rich and influential were successful in registering land in their own names even where the peasants claimed to have titles to the land in question, and in converting possession acquired by force into an absolute title,<sup>26</sup> the rural poor, whether settled cultivators, or semi-nomadic or nomadic pastoralists, losing whatever customary rights they may have believed themselves to have possessed in relation to the land they worked. The peasantry also appears to have lost a variety of broader customary rights, for example, concerning remission of obligation to the landowner in times of natural disaster.

The consolidation and enhancement of landlordism under Riza Shah was not, however, accomplished without a struggle and these years provide examples, fragmentary but tantalizing, of resistance from both the settled and the nomadic rural poor. Of course, the evidence for peasant activism is sparse and regionally uneven. Such data as exist are largely drawn from British diplomatic archives and reflect the British interest in southern Iran. However, it is likely that neither the sparseness of the evidence nor its regional concentration reflects the true incidence of peasant activism but, rather, the particular character of the available source material. That the only trace of a movement as extensive and of such duration as that among the settled Bakhtiari of Chahar Mahal may now be found in a single report by a British consul and a brief Persian account, indicates that an absence of sources does not necessarily indicate an absence of movements.<sup>27</sup>

Nonetheless, on the basis of such fragmentary evidence as has been located to date, it is possible to begin to reconstruct an account of a case of a peasant resistance movement of considerable local significance that was able to maintain itself over a period of several years. It is reasonable to assume that the reactions of the Bakhtiyari peasants were not unique. Although their movement is the only well-documented and sustained one to have come to light so far, it has a parallel in a similar episode that occurred in the south-eastern province of Kirman at around the same time, and of which traces may be found in the diaries of the British consul.<sup>28</sup>

The only sustained peasant movement of the Riza Shah period of which a picture of any detail exists is that which arose in the mid-1920s among the settled peasantry of Chahar Mahal, a rich agricultural region on the fringes of the Bakhtiyari summer pastures. The peasants were themselves of Bakhtiyari origin, and their landlords were the great khans of the Bakhtiyari confederation. A process of sedentarization had been under way since the late nineteenth century among pastoral nomads throughout Iran, including the Bakhtiyari, and these recently settled clans, although they had given up their nomadic way of life, still retained their tribal networks. Such tribal settlements seem to have possessed a readier solidarity than non-tribal peasant communities, and this may have facilitated a higher level of communal action. In fact, most of the extant examples of peasant resistance from this period, including that of the settled Khamsah in 1929 and the semi-settled Surkhi between 1926 and 1929, as well as the Bakhtiyari, arose from such communities of tribally organized cultivators.<sup>29</sup> It may be that such recently settled tribal societies remained attached to the older communal traditions typical of pastoral nomadism, and brought with them to their settlements an idealized memory of more democratic tribal customs. They may have been less accustomed to the relations prevailing between landlord and peasant, typically harsher and more distant than those between khan and nomad, and less inclined to tolerate the assertion of private property over communal ownership. Indeed, the very strength of existing horizontal ties and communal solidarity, persisting in changing conditions, seems to have encouraged collective action and an anti-landlord consciousness, and even to have grown in importance as the social and economic distance between themselves and their khan landlords increased.

The context for the emergence of a peasant movement on this scale, one that was able to leave an archival record, was provided by the ongoing struggle between the Bakhtiyari khans, the landowners in this case, and the new state. This conflict within the elite, and particularly the encouragement that the state initially gave to the peasants against the khans, opened up a gap that allowed the movement to grow and take shape. Briefly flourishing before the shah took fright at its implications, this movement allows a glimpse of what was, perhaps, the real attitude commonly held by peasants

towards their landlords, an attitude typically concealed by the customary deference imposed by their usual powerlessness.

It may be argued that the Chahar Mahal movement was simply another chapter in an endemic struggle between sharecroppers and landowners over their respective shares of the crop, perhaps representing an assertion, in a favourable political conjuncture, of persistent subaltern notions of legitimacy and rights. It appears that such struggles had been intensifying since the late nineteenth century, in tandem with the growing commercialization and profitability of agriculture, with landlords exerting ever-stronger pressure on their peasants in the effort to extract a greater surplus in the form of an increased share of the crop. It may also be argued, however, that this movement demonstrated certain novel features stimulated by the rapidly increasing salience of modern concepts of private property in land.

The Chahar Mahal movement did not express itself in modern ideological terms. Its categorical rejection of the landlord's claim to a share of the produce of the peasants' labour is striking but this rejection was neither random nor arbitrary but, rather, appears to have been based on the peasants' interpretation of their rights under customary sharecropping contracts. Typically, such contracts took notional account of five elements in dividing the crop: land, water, draught animals, seed and labour. The produce, at least in theory, was divided according to one share per provider of each element.<sup>30</sup> Providing the animals, seed and labour themselves, the peasants refused to accept the landlord as provider of the remaining two, land and water, preferring to view these as bestowed by God, and therefore denied the landlord any share of the crop. This may well have been a view about legitimate claims traditionally held by sharecropping peasants which they had previously never possessed the power to articulate, or it may have been a new interpretation, provoked by the novel and menacing assertion, by landowners and the state, of their own absolute rights to private property. Although the Chahar Mahal movement may have begun as simply a routine struggle between landlords and sharecroppers, yet the coincidence of the spread and radicalization of this movement in 1928, exactly as the new land legislation was passed by the Majlis, is striking.

Although the movement among the Bakhtiyari peasants of Chahar Mahal was the most prolonged and well organized of the period, it was neither isolated nor unique. Coterminous with the beginning of the Chahar Mahal movement a similar, though more obscure struggle broke out between sharecroppers and landlords in the south-eastern province of Kirman.<sup>31</sup> In Kirman town the peasants had established a council of their own called the *anjuman-i ranjbar* (council of toilers).<sup>32</sup> As in the case of the agreements in Chahar Mahal, so, according to the practice in force at Kirman, the produce was divided between landowner and peasant according to a fixed division. A peasant who worked on land owned by a landlord received 30 per cent of the produce for himself in exchange for the labour and

animals necessary for cultivation, while the remaining 70 per cent went to the landowner who provided seed and water and claimed ownership of the land. From the beginning of the cultivation year, the first day of autumn, 21 September 1924, the sharecroppers represented in the *anjuman-i ranjbar* made a concerted attempt to increase the share of the crop they were able to retain. In this case, however, the political context was different and the option of exploiting local power struggles was not available. The peasants' effort failed, their movement collapsed and they were obliged to resume working according to the old agreements. Nonetheless, their agitation galvanized another dimension of rural conflict. A rural stratum even lower and more impoverished than themselves, the agricultural labourers (*khush-nishin*), who lacked the sharecroppers' cultivation rights and who were employed casually and seasonally by the latter, appear to have been stimulated to make demands for higher wages, in cash and kind, and refused to work for the peasants when their demands were rejected.<sup>33</sup>

### **Rural ideology and consciousness**

During the 1920s the world of the rural poor was being profoundly shaken both by the rapid political and economic changes of the period and by the ideological innovations that accompanied them. The isolation of the rural areas was breaking down, new ideas were circulating more widely and reaching even small provincial towns and villages, and penetrating ever-more subaltern social levels. Broad economic forces were beginning to transform the position of the peasantry and, together with the new policies of the regime such as military and labour conscription, were leading to much greater contact between the countryside and the town. The commercialization of land continued apace, further worsening the condition of the small peasantry who increasingly lost, through apparently impersonal economic forces, any small parcels of land they may have actually owned, reducing them to struggling for sharecropping rights or even to complete landlessness. The sharecropping peasant was also deeply affected by the dramatic shift taking place towards the production for export of cash crops such as opium, cotton, tobacco and silk, and the development of market and monetary relationships in the countryside, and their own frequent transformation into wage-labourers. In some parts of the country, direct monetary exchange between merchants and peasants was becoming common, and there was an increase in pre-harvest sales of crops, whereby merchants made cash advances to producers. All these developments were invariably accompanied by a rise in rural indebtedness, increasing stratification within rural communities and a growth in landlessness and immiserization. These processes, however, were uneven and traditional subsistence sharecropping, with payment in kind, persisted alongside the intrusion of the market economy.<sup>34</sup> In general, however, rural areas were being drawn inexorably into

the political, economic and ideological orbit of the provincial urban centres. An especially significant development was the growing pattern of labour migration, especially in the inter-war decades, for southern Iran. The developing crisis in the countryside, among the peasantry but in a sharper form among the pastoral nomads, produced the beginning of a flight from the land, encouraged where employment could be found in the new industrial enterprises, particularly the oilfields and the Trans-Iranian railway.

In the midst of these upheavals, the rural poor were increasingly exposed to new ideas. Frequently, these new ideas emanated from the modern state itself and from elements among the nationalist elite. The land legislation of the 1920s and early 1930s was accompanied by rapid and profound changes in ideas about the nature of ownership and the rights attached to private property. Not only the landed elite, but the peasantry, too, seem to have been affected by these new ideas and to have been stimulated to consider, and perhaps reassess, their own position. As well as promoting sharpened concepts of private property, these years also saw the greater diffusion of discussions, which had begun during the constitutional period, about the beneficial effects of ameliorating the lot of the peasantry and of land reform. One striking example of the widening circulation of such ideas, again drawn from the Bakhtiyari, comes with the appearance of the *Sitarah-i Bakhtiyari*, the Bakhtiyari Star, an organization established at the beginning of the 1920s by the younger generation of khans.<sup>35</sup>

The Bakhtiyari Star formulated a comprehensive programme of political and social change, including provisions for land reform. These ideas had their immediate source among elite reforming circles in Isfahan and Tehran, and their origins in the ideas of the old Democrat Party. During the 1920s such ideas were being disseminated among wider, non-elite circles through a number of channels. They reached the Bakhtiyari sharecroppers and nomads as a result of direct transmission by dissident members of the tribal elite, the junior khans, and the fact that the programme was produced under the imprimatur of the junior khans may have added to its legitimacy in the eyes of the tribally organized settled and nomadic Bakhtiyari.

Another important route for the diffusion of new ideas was the growing contact between villages and towns. There had always been some degree of contact between even the most remote villages and provincial towns and between nomads and urban marketplaces. Now, however, not only was the level of contact increasing and changing, but the small market towns and provincial cities were, themselves, undergoing a transformation. Easier and quicker communications and travel within the provinces, between provincial capitals such as Isfahan and Shiraz and Tehran, and even with the world beyond Iran, reproduced in provincial life and at deeper subaltern levels the intellectual ferment that had gripped the elite intelligentsia since the constitutional period.



In the context of this growing national integration, the national and provincial press was of particular significance for the spread of new ideas, at least until the mid-1920s when harsher censorship began to take effect. In these years, although literacy was still very restricted, a critical and independent press flourished in the capital and in the major provincial cities and even the smaller towns. The spread of print media, begun in the late nineteenth century, had accelerated rapidly during the constitutional period, aided by a freer political environment, a small but real growth in literacy, and the wider availability of crude printing methods. By the early 1920s, the press was playing a role of central importance in shaping an emergent public opinion and in giving expression to popular political attitudes. The relative smallness of a fully literate readership did not inhibit the multiplication of newspapers. In 1921–2 in Tehran, for example, where barely one tenth of the population of some 300,000 could read or write, licences were issued for upwards of 200 newspapers.<sup>36</sup> A similar phenomenon was taking place in the provinces. Shiraz in the early 1920s possessed nine or ten newspapers, each of which printed 300 to 400 copies per week, although the literate throughout the entire province of Fars only amounted to about 2,000 people.<sup>37</sup> The circulation of press reports and opinions was not, of course, limited to those able to read and with the means to purchase a newspaper. Free reading rooms had been established in many provincial cities and newspapers were often distributed free, even among the tribespeople.<sup>38</sup> Articles might be read aloud in bazaars and marketplaces for the benefit of the illiterate, providing a focus for popular discussions. Peasants and nomads coming to town to sell produce, to buy commodities, or for any other social or religious purpose, would thus be readily exposed to the contents of the newspapers and able to transmit by word of mouth their contents, or versions thereof, further throughout the rural areas, the tradition of oral communication through extended family and tribal networks still remaining strong. An even more significant medium for the poorer classes were the anonymous broadsheets (*shabnamahs*, literally night-letters) which frequently appeared posted on city walls or circulated in bazaars. These publications, freed by their anonymity from legal constraints or the fear of retribution, articulated directly and sometimes menacingly the grievances and demands of the oppressed. The expression of both specific and general threats was a noteworthy feature of a typical *shabnamah*.<sup>39</sup> Both the ‘respectable’ press and the *shabnamahs* shaped and expressed, in different ways and to different degrees, the attitudes of the poor. A further potent ingredient contributing to the emerging subaltern discourse was the prevalence of rumour. Although often distorted and even fantastical, rumours often expressed in a distilled and essential way the concerns of the powerless, and had, furthermore, the capacity to spread like wildfire, often being instrumental in sparking off local protests, both in the towns and in the countryside.<sup>40</sup>

Another channel for the propagation of new ideas in provincial Iran was offered by the Soviet consulates which established themselves in a number of cities in the early 1920s. Although Soviet officials carried out a certain amount of official propaganda work, their direct influence was limited.<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, general ideas associated with the Soviet system seem to have received an impetus from their presence and from their casual and informal contacts with the urban and rural poor. The Russian foreign trade officials and their Iranian employees in Qazvin, for example, did not purchase direct from local merchants, but went out to the villages and bought direct from the peasants, with whom they were apparently in the habit of having chats and exchanges of views.<sup>42</sup>

The impact of the increased contact between the urban and rural areas can be seen clearly in the case of the Bakhtiyari peasants of Chahar Mahal. Although they expressed their opposition to their landlords by reference to an apparently traditional worldview, yet their movement, and especially its leadership, actually derived a great deal of its impetus from the changing political context, from the availability of greater personal independence and mobility and from improved access to a range of radical ideas circulating in southern Iran in these years. This is strikingly illustrated by the role played by the ex-servants of the khans, who formed the committee that provided leadership for the movement and formulated a programme. These individuals constituted a factor that was of crucial importance in the emergence of this movement. Having visited the cities of Isfahan and Tehran, they provided a conduit through which new ideas were able to reach the peasants in the villages and they had acquainted themselves sufficiently with the institutions of the new state to help the peasants in taking their cases to the *adliyyah* courts.

### Migration and proletarianization

Another key influence on the rural poor of southern Iran, both the pastoral nomads and the settled peasantry, was labour migration, and especially their increasing proletarianization in relatively large numbers in the oil industry. The hired, unskilled labour in the oil industry in the south, a nascent 'Iranian proletariat', was mainly drawn from the pauperized and landless rural poor, both peasants and nomads.<sup>43</sup> Other, urban, sources, which have typically provided recruits for newly developing industries, such as artisans in the collapsing handicrafts industry and the mass of the city poor, seem to have contributed very little to the development of this working class. A crucial characteristic of these new workers in the southern oilfields was that a majority preserved their ties with their village or their tribe, where their families remained, continuing to engage in agriculture or pastoralism.

The southern oil industry was a major crucible for the formation of an indigenous Iranian working class. In 1925 Iran possessed fewer than 20

modern industrial plants, of which only five employed more than 50 workers.<sup>44</sup> The Anglo-Persian Oil Company, however, employed large and growing numbers of labourers, who worked collectively in modern industrial conditions. In 1919 the company employed nearly 4,000 Iranian workers. By the next year this had doubled to nearly 8,500, and by 1922 had reached 18,500.<sup>45</sup>

The 1920s saw an acceleration of the process by which the rural poor in southern Iran began to be transformed from pastoralists and agricultural cultivators, dominated by their khans and landlords, into wage-labourers in the industrial conditions of the oilfields, semi-organized into unions and exposed to modern political ideas. The labour migration to the oilfields can be identified as a specific factor of crucial significance in the transmission of radical ideologies to both the rural and urban lower classes of the south. The Bakhtiari, settled and nomadic, appear to have been affected most intensely by this process. The number of Bakhtiari employed in the oilfields was particularly large. According to the oil company itself, by the 1920s most of its labourers were Bakhtiaris.<sup>46</sup> The new confidence of the former nomads and peasants, now transformed into industrial workers employed directly by the APOC and freed from dependence on the patronage of their khans or the power of their landlords, had its effect on hierarchical relationships within the Bakhtiari confederation and across southern Iran in general, and specifically on the stimulation of class antagonisms. New ideas of equality and political emancipation emanating from the migrants to the oilfields appear to have provided an impetus both for the development and rapid spread of the anti-landlord movement among the Bakhtiari peasants and for the crystallization of an emerging, albeit still unsophisticated, class consciousness among the nomads.

There are clear comparisons between the processes at work in southern Iran in the 1920s and those operating in Azarbayjan two decades earlier when large numbers of impoverished peasants migrated to Baku to become workers in the oilfields.<sup>47</sup> Many of these Azarbayjani migrants maintained continuous contacts with their own communities in Iran and these peasants-turned-workers became typical transmitters of urban unrest and political ideas,<sup>48</sup> playing a pivotal role in the introduction of social-democratic ideas into northern Iran, their influence traceable to the small towns and even the villages.<sup>49</sup>

### **Pastoral nomads against the khans**

The existence of a substantial measure of hostility and resentment on the part of peasants towards their landlords may be assumed as a given, whatever the degree of its concealment and submergence beneath a customary and politic deference. In the case of the attitude of the nomads towards their khans, however, a view has tended to prevail that has emphasized the

pre-eminence of vertical ties, binding subordinate layers to the tribal leadership through a hierarchical arrangement of patronage and dependence, characterized by mutual, though unequal, responsibilities and obligations. For much of the tribal population in the 1920s, however, such a description of the khan–nomad relationship seems to have constituted an idealized norm or an historical myth, against which the reality was increasingly found to be lacking. Again, the contours of these resentments can be traced particularly clearly in the case of the Bakhtiyari, although similar processes producing a similar disillusionment may be discerned among a wide range of tribal groups throughout Iran.<sup>50</sup>

In 1928 the movement among the Bakhtiyari sharecroppers of Chahar Mahal was finally suppressed. The following year, however, saw southern Iran convulsed by a series of peasant and nomad uprisings in what became the most serious rural crisis faced by the regime in the two decades of its existence. Even in the late 1920s, after several years of attempted disarmament, the nomads still retained an option that the peasantry did not possess, that of armed rebellion. Yet although the uprisings of 1929 in the south were, indeed, largely predicated upon the involvement of the armed and mobile nomadic populations, in certain areas, notably Kirman province, they also provided the context for renewed manifestations of resistance by settled tribal communities.<sup>51</sup>

Although each of these tribal groups had its own specific concerns, they shared certain major underlying grievances with each other and with the settled peasants. They were angry at the new state's far-reaching fiscal and military impositions and alienated by its cultural policies, they resented the land legislation, and, in many cases, they were also ready to grasp an opportunity to rid themselves of their own tribal/landlord aristocracies.

Indeed, for much of the 1920s, the nomads had seemed eager to embrace the hope, offered by the apparently inexorable extension of Tehran's authority, of ridding themselves completely of their great khans. Rather than expressing their dissatisfaction with their leaders simply by shifting allegiance from one khan to another, as in the past, the nomads now, with the encouragement of the new state and nationalist opinion, began to reject altogether the rule of the khans. As in the case of the Chahar Mahal peasants, so too here the role of the new state was crucial in providing political space for these developments. Although Riza Khan had proved adept at coopting individual khans, his regime was determined on a long-term strategy of destroying the autonomy and power of the tribal leaderships. This strategy demanded the severing of the remaining ties that connected the senior khans to their tribal base. In furtherance of this objective the regime, and the nationalist elite that supported it, adopted a populist tactic that it had used elsewhere with great effect, and began to stimulate opposition to the *ilkhani*s from the lower levels of the tribal pyramid.<sup>52</sup>

The use of such populist tactics was a crucial element in bringing about the collapse of the Bakhtiyari confederation<sup>53</sup> and was also used to considerable effect against the leadership of the Qashqai. In 1925, when Riza Khan finally decided to act against Sawlat al-Dawlah and his family, he began to organize a two-pronged campaign, in the nationalist press and among Sawlat's many enemies within the confederation. Nationalist opinion had remained deeply suspicious of all the tribes and had been outspoken in its criticisms of the 'imperialist' and 'feudal' khans of both the Bakhtiyari and the Qashqai. An article from the *Shafagh-i Surkh* in April was typical in its attack on Sawlat, whom it accused of having committed many crimes and of having shed the blood of many innocent persons for the sake of his own avariciousness. The article called on Riza Khan to break the power of such tribal chiefs, observing that in the case of the *ilkhani* of the Qashqai there would be no difficulty as the subordinate khans would readily cooperate with the government in getting rid of him.<sup>54</sup> Shortly after this article appeared, the minor khans of the Qashqai sent telegrams to the Majlis and the prime minister making bitter complaints against Sawlat, and expressing the hope that he would not be allowed to return to a position where he could continue to oppress them.<sup>55</sup> Having thus prepared the ground, Riza Khan, in due course in August 1925, removed the *il Khaniship* from the family of Sawlat al-Dawlah, replacing the then *ilkhani*, Nasir Khan, Sawlat's son, with a military governor. Sawlat himself offered no resistance, while the tribes in Fars accepted the change, initially at least, with indifference and even a certain amount of relief.<sup>56</sup>

The nomads' acquiescence in the spread of the new state's power changed, however, after 1927–8, when the regime launched a radical programme of modernization and centralization. Unlike the intra-elite political and constitutional struggles of the earlier years, these measures, including conscription, dress laws, nomadic settlement, land registration, and the establishment of government monopolies on opium and tobacco, represented a direct social and economic assault on the rural poor, both settled and nomadic.

The rural risings of 1929 were provoked by the sudden introduction of these radical measures, and were directed both at resisting the measures themselves and at removing those deemed responsible for them. None of the risings were led by the most senior tribal khans, now linked to and dependent upon Riza Khan and the new state, but by junior, subordinate and minor khans and *kalantars*. The risings were often, indeed, directed at least as much against their own khan/landlord aristocracies, seen as beneficiaries of the new order, as against the state.

The anti-senior khan character of the risings is clearly evident in the case of the Bakhtiyari, where the leadership was provided by a number of junior Haft Lang khans, together with the Chahar Lang khan, Ali Mardan Khan. In the case of the Qashqai, the revolt was directed at the military governor

installed by Tehran after Sawlat's deposition and one of the demands was for Sawlat's return. However, although members of the former *ilkhani*'s family associated themselves with the uprising in its later stages, they were not its moving spirits, who seem rather to have been the Qashqai *kalantars*, who were now closer to the tribal populations in their daily lives, and who had less of a direct stake in a closer association with the central government. An anti-landlord dynamic is also particularly evident in the uprisings in eastern Fars. For the populations of this region, especially the Khamsah tribes, settled and nomadic, the multiple rural crises of 1929 appear to have offered an opportunity for them to try to rid themselves altogether of the principal landlord in the region, the Khamsah chief Qavam al-Mulk. This region saw the most concerted efforts at coordinated action between settled cultivators and pastoral nomads, facilitated in this case by the fact that they were often kin, of common Khamsah tribal origin.

There was some degree of coordination between the Bakhtiyari and the Qashqai tribes, and both groups, and the Khamsah, put forward similar demands: that the conscription and the dress laws not be applied to them, and for the abolition of the census department, the department for the registration of title deeds, and the government monopolies.<sup>57</sup> These demands were defensive, aimed at protecting the tribes from the novel impositions of the government which were popularly perceived as unjust. The tribes explained their resistance in terms of their desire for fair treatment and for a cessation of the violations of their rights. They strongly rejected the notion of themselves as rebels against duly constituted authority, seeing themselves, on the contrary, as the victims of illegitimate oppression. Their outlook found typical expression in a petition that a group of Qashqai *kalantars* arranged to be handed in to the British consulate in Shiraz on 7 June. In their petition the *kalantars* stressed their loyalty to the government and their past readiness to assist the army in its campaigns and specifically singled out the oppressiveness and greed of the military governors as the cause of their discontent. They complained that they had been asking for justice for three months but had been ignored. Although the main body of their petition was conventional enough, the *kalantars* concluded with a request of unusual ideological audacity. In a vivid illustration of the speed at which their world was opening up, they requested that the British consul communicate their petition to the League of Nations.<sup>58</sup> Even General Shaybani, charged by the shah with the restoration of order in the south, seemed, in the wording of his offer of amnesty and pardon, to accept that the *kalantars* and the tribesmen had certain legitimate grievances and acknowledged their appeal for justice.<sup>59</sup>

By the late summer–autumn of 1929 the rural uprisings in the south had largely exhausted themselves and the government, through a combination of military force and broad but temporary concession and compromise, was beginning to re-establish its authority.<sup>60</sup> These uprisings, in fact, constituted

the last significant collective rural opposition of the Riza Shah period, their defeat ushering in a decade of extreme hardship throughout the countryside. The rural poor, both peasants and pastoralists, found themselves disarmed, heavily taxed in order to provide revenue for the regime's prestige projects, the Trans-Iranian Railway and the army, and increasingly vulnerable to labour and military conscription. Nonetheless, during the 1930s the rural poor, although avoiding confrontation with the authorities, continued to employ a range of strategies in efforts to ameliorate their circumstances.

### **Banditry as resistance**

One major strategy of survival and resistance adopted by the rural, especially the nomadic, poor was banditry. In pre-modern Iran, banditry had possessed a symbiotic relationship with such rudimentary forces of law and order as existed on a local level. *Amniyyah* or road-guards, for example, employed by local governors or tribal khans, and recruited from among the nomads, might often moonlight as the very bandits they were supposed to apprehend, and governors might be in league with bandits, whose plunder they would share. With the arrival of modernity and the new state in the 1920s, however, this relationship, and the social framework that supported it, collapsed. The consolidation of a state bureaucracy and the establishment of a modern army, with officials and officers arriving in provincial postings from far afield and without local connections, and the introduction of defined and fixed legal codes, meant an end to the easy permeability of the border between the forces of law and the outlaw.

By the 1920s, banditry in Iran was generally perceived as a survival from the past, from a period characterized by the weakness and disintegration of state authority, the backwardness and isolation of the countryside, and the uncontrolled power of the tribal khans and their armed followers. According to this view, with modernization and national integration, banditry, already an anachronism, would easily be suppressed. In fact, however, the Riza Shah decades saw not the gradual disappearance of banditry but, rather, a change in its character. The successful advance of the new state in the first half of the 1920s did, indeed, produce a decline in rural disorder of all kinds. But from the mid-decade on, especially in the face of the worsening conditions in the countryside from the late 1920s, banditry underwent a widespread recrudescence. The rural pauperization resulting from the regime's development policies, the disruption and disintegration of tribal organization by state centralization, the fear of the new military authorities placed over the tribes, and enforced settlement and the collapse of the pastoral economy, all tended to force the fringes of tribal society into permanent banditry. Despite the preoccupation of the authorities with security and control in the countryside, banditry persisted throughout the 1930s,

constituting a strategy whereby impoverished rural, especially nomadic, elements, sometimes allied to other marginal figures such as army deserters, continued to evade and defy the new state. Such banditry was neither a survival from the pre-modern era nor an anachronism but, rather, was created by, and constituted a response to, conditions of rapid and authoritarian modernization and rural social disintegration.

The re-emergence of banditry from the mid-1920s as a consequence of tighter state control and the regime's political and economic policies may clearly be seen in the case of the Qashqai tribes, bandits such as Mahdi Surkhi being transformed from outlaws into leaders of rural rebellions. Again, a striking feature of the rural crises of 1929 was the extent and character of the participation of substantial groups of bandits. The Bakhtiari and Khamsah uprisings, for example, vividly demonstrated the organic link and community of interest between the peasant cultivators, the nomadic tribes and their fringes of bandits.<sup>61</sup>

The introduction of conscription in 1925, and its inexorable enforcement throughout the countryside, added a new character to the panoply of rural outlaws, that of the army deserter. Although familiar from Ottoman history, the deserter, a quintessentially modern figure quite distinct from the local off-duty road-guard, was not a traditional feature of Iranian banditry, owing to the absence of forced enlistment and a regular army. Yet, by the late 1920s, the fugitive from the army, with some military experience, had become a specific and serious threat to rural security. Examples include the ex-gendarme Sayyid Farhad, active in Kashan in the late 1920s, and the army deserter Colonel Grigur. The case of Grigur is particularly interesting. An Armenian, Grigur held a command in the Armenian squadron, a self-contained unit within the new army, composed exclusively at all levels of Armenians. This squadron was one of the crack units of the new army and saw a great deal of active service. It was particularly important in the pacification campaigns in Luristan, where it acquired a reputation for brutality. Grigur was a close associate of the senior commander in the area, General Amirahmadi, and fell victim to a plot hatched by Amirahmadi's enemies. He was accused of trying to smuggle opium and was sentenced to imprisonment, but deserted. He thereupon became leader of a group of bandits that began to operate in tandem with the tribal rebels among the Lur nomads whom he had formerly been charged with suppressing. Grigur's band launched a series of daring attacks on the Lurs' principal targets, the army and railway surveyors preparing the route for the Trans-Iranian railway, and even, in the course of a successful raid on a large convoy of cars and lorries, captured the American consul and vice-consul, before Grigur, himself, was captured and imprisoned.<sup>62</sup>

Banditry of the types discussed above was quite distinct from the tribal customs of raiding and sheep-lifting, customarily limited and contained and



endemic to pastoral environments. Rather, it signified the consolidation of relatively stable and permanent bandit groups, deemed outlaws by the authorities, divorced from their tribal contexts and hierarchies but remaining in varying degrees of contact with local populations. This contact might be very close and supportive, especially where ties of kin existed, but might also be deeply antagonistic and exploitative. Both settled and nomadic communities often gave succour to bandits, but where succour was refused, the bandits' treatment of 'hostile' villages might be extremely brutal.<sup>63</sup> Everywhere, however, the popular discourse contrasted the power of the bandit with the weakness and cowardice of the gendarmerie, probably reflecting the resentment of the rural poor at the corruption and oppressiveness of the authorities.<sup>64</sup>

The bandit has often been depicted, both in popular discourse and in scholarship, as a representative and a champion of the rural oppressed.<sup>65</sup> Certainly, banditry of the types described above constituted a strategy of rural survival and occasionally resistance, but it was essentially defensive, manifesting little overt political direction. The phenomenon of 'social banditry', of banditry articulating a programme of political and social reform, is much rarer in Iran.<sup>66</sup> Social banditry has been particularly associated with areas that possessed a strong tradition of peasant rebellion. Although Iran has, in general, lacked such rebellions, they have been found to some extent in the Caspian provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran, and here, indeed, they produced repeated instances of social banditry in the 1920s.<sup>67</sup> In 1922, for example, two former followers of Kuchik Khan's Jangali movement, Sayyid Jalal and Karbalai Ibrahim, separately became active as bandit-rebels in the Jangal of Gilan.<sup>68</sup> Each collected small numbers of adherents and appears to have attempted to resurrect the Jangali movement among the local peasantry. Karbalai Ibrahim's band reached about 300 and they managed to take control of Kasma, Kuchik Khan's former base, and two neighbouring villages before the band was suppressed by the army and Karbalai Ibrahim publicly hanged in Rasht. Sayyid Jalal also collected about 200 armed men, including some deserters from the army, and began establishing his control over Gilani villages. Many villagers began to offer him their support as a result of the reprisals on non-combatants to which the army frequently resorted. Within a few months, however, Sayyid Jalal too was captured and executed. In 1925 another bandit-rebel, Haydar Khan, emerged in Gilan, and by 1926 several bands of brigands were active in the Jangal. One of these bands was led by an officer-deserter from the army, Ibrahim Khan, and contained a number of officer and soldier deserters. Ibrahim Khan had ambitions of becoming a second Kuchik Khan, and issued orders to villages in the area in which he was operating that taxes were to be paid to him, claiming in a manifesto that his organization was directed against those traitors who were assisting the British to gain control of Iran. However, his band was suppressed by the army in October.

During the 1930s banditry continued to threaten rural security, tribal fragments being driven to this resort by political opposition, social disintegration and economic hardship. In the 1930s banditry itself underwent a mutation into smuggling which developed on a massive scale in response to the new state monopolies on foreign trade and on cash crops such as opium and tobacco and, especially, the massive domestic taxes, about 600 per cent *ad valorem*, imposed on staples such as tea and sugar.

### Law and petitions as resistance

The rural poor also continued to try to exploit such opportunities as they could find to persuade and put pressure on the authorities. One strategy involved the use of the new modern courts of law. The tribal cultivators of Chahar Mahal had displayed both a readiness and an ability to take their grievances against the landlords to the new *adliyyah* courts. Little is known about the extent and scope of peasant efforts to use the courts in this way, and it is certainly correct that, in practice, the peasant had 'less easy access to the courts and less ability to put his case' than had the landowners.<sup>69</sup> Nonetheless, there is fragmentary evidence to suggest that the peasant resort to this option may have been more common than is usually supposed. In addition to the case of the Bakhtiyari, the complaints of the great Hamadani land-owning family of Qaraguzlu, for example, although obviously greatly exaggerated, nonetheless seem to substantiate this notion. In 1933 these landowners told a British official that their peasants were 'completely out of hand, and appeal to the police and the law courts at every turn whenever the landlord attempts to assert his rights or declines to sanction some extravagant improvement'.<sup>70</sup>

Peasants and tribespeople also continued to make extensive use of a strategy common to urban protests: the presentation to powerful figures and institutions, especially the Majlis and the shah, of petitions outlining their grievances and asking for redress. These petitions suggest a strong sense on the part of the rural poor of natural justice, of the recognition of conditions for the exercise of legitimate authority and of their own rights. Such petitions habitually couched their appeals in the language of legitimacy and justice and protested against their violation by a usurping power. The petition presented by the Qashqai *kalantars* to the British consulate in the midst of the 1929 uprising vividly expressed this mentality. Another typical example comes from Luristan. In 1924, after a number of Lur chiefs were murdered by the commander of the army in western Iran, even though they had surrendered themselves on his promise of a free pardon given on a sealed Quran, the Lurs wrote to the Majlis saying that they were loyal Iranians but had been forced to fight by the actions of the commander of the western army division.<sup>71</sup>

With the regeneration of the institution of the monarchy after 1925–6, and the decline in significance of the Majlis, the shah became increasingly the focus of petitions and appeals. This also reflected a belief widespread among the poorer classes, and even among some of the elite, that the shah was not aware of the true situation of the peasantry but that their suffering was the fault of incompetent or unjust officials. A corollary of this belief was the hope that, if only these injustices might be brought to the notice of the shah, he would ensure that they would be rectified. As a result of these notions, very large numbers of petitions were submitted to the shah. The shah's increasing inaccessibility, resulting from his fear of assassination, meant that these petitions would usually have to be forwarded through official channels. When the shah visited Kirmanshah in 1930, for example, 600 petitions were submitted asking for his help or for the righting of various wrongs.<sup>72</sup> Sometimes, however, in line with an older tradition, petitioners would make desperate efforts to approach the shah in person and appeal to him directly.<sup>73</sup>

With its radical phase over by the early 1930s, the regime entered a period of demoralization and with its attention focused on political security, a strategy of avoidance became possible in the rural areas. Some of the newly settled nomads hid their tents in ravines and simply bided their time, abandoning their new huts once the military had moved elsewhere.<sup>74</sup> Some of the harshest effects of the policy of settlement, in particular, were mitigated by the extensive use of bribery. During 1936–7, for example, the governor-general of Fars, Abulfath Dawlatshahi, in collusion with the local senior military commander, General Zandiyyah, took 700 *riyals* per family from the nomads of Fars, who were then allowed to migrate as usual, while reports were sent to Tehran that they had all been settled in houses. Both were dismissed and arrested. Following this, in September 1937 three officials responsible for the administration and settlement of the Qashqai and Khamsah tribes in Fars were also dismissed. They had apparently sent reports to Tehran stating that a large number of houses had been built for the tribes. A senior army officer sent from Tehran to inspect the district found that their reports were untrue and that no account could be given of a sum of one million *riyals* which had been allotted to Fars for tribal settlement.<sup>75</sup>

Nonetheless, where avoidance was impossible, isolated acts of violent resistance also continued to occur. Although by the 1930s the official policy of disarmament had been comprehensively imposed on the Bakhtiari, many rifles had been hidden rather than surrendered. In the summer of 1937 news surfaced of an attack by Bakhtiari on a party of census officials. The tribesmen beat the officials badly with the clubs that they had begun to carry since disarmament, and the officials had to be rescued by a detachment of 50 gendarmes. Thereupon, the tribesmen appear to have retrieved their rifles and the local village was besieged by the authorities, with Bakhtiari snipers blocking off all access and the village isolated.<sup>76</sup>

### Conclusion

The widespread acceptance, within Iran and beyond, of the nationalist discourse regarding early Pahlavi Iran has obscured both the nature of the impact on the rural poor of the upheavals of the period, and the persistent realities of rural conflict.

The authoritarian modernization of the Riza Shah decades profoundly affected the rural poor, both settled and nomadic. The context within which peasants and nomads negotiated their relations with their khans and landlords was directly affected by the property registration legislation; their living standards were driven down by the resulting commercialization of land, which encouraged landowners to extract ever-more surplus value from their tenants, as well as by the general development policies adopted by the regime, and their social and cultural values were undermined by the nationalist elite's reform agenda. The state's decision to concentrate financial resources on prestige projects such as the Trans-Iranian railway meant a failure to extend services such as health and education into the countryside, peasants and nomads receiving little or nothing in return for their enormously increased taxation. Yet the changes of the period also affected the rural poor in other, more positive, ways. The growing national integration increased contact between rural and urban areas, the reach of the press grew, and the ideological context was transformed by both national and international developments.

Not only has the impact of the regime's policies on the countryside been underestimated but it is equally clear, contrary to the conventions of scholarship, that the rural poor did not remain passive in the face of this onslaught on their standard of living and way of life. Rather than resign themselves to hardship and oppression, various categories of the rural poor, both settled peasants and nomads, actively devised strategies of resistance. Such strategies were directed against their own khans and landlords and against the new state, and often against the combined power of both the traditional and the new authorities. The activism of the rural poor, however, was often fundamentally defensive, aimed not at transforming material conditions but, rather, at deflecting change which, owing to the choices of the regime, was perceived as damaging and unjust.

The mobilization of the Bakhtiyari sharecroppers in Chahar Mahal, for example, was directed, in the first instance, against their khan landlords, and appears to have been provoked by the novel and aggressive assertion by the khans of their own absolute ownership of the land. However, the khans' action in making these assertions was a result of the new state's own legislation, and the example of the shah himself. Although Riza Shah lent the sharecroppers some initial support, albeit temporary and tactical, it was his own policies that were encouraging landlord action, and the sharecroppers' movement finally found itself confronting both the khans and the state

and was eventually suppressed by the army. Although radical in its rejection of the landlords' authority and claims of ownership, the Chahar Mahal sharecroppers' movement seems, nonetheless, to have been essentially defensive. A similar sharecroppers' movement in Kirman also shows that such peasants were as eager to safeguard their own, relatively privileged position, as holders of *nasaq* rights, against the landless *khushnishin*, as they were to challenge the landlords. The case of Kirman suggests again that such sharecropper movements tended to be primarily concerned with the protection of their own position, and vulnerable to collapse when confronted with demands for improved conditions from a rural stratum even more impoverished than themselves.

Again, the nomad uprisings also appear to have been primarily defensive, designed to ward off the attentions of the new state, and were directed against the khans insofar as the khans had identified themselves with, and acted as agents of, that state. The nomads typically combined resentment both at the actions of the khans in asserting land rights, and at the new state as the guarantor of those assertions and as the bearer of wholly new social and economic obligations. Although nowhere led by the senior khans, these uprisings also often indicated a bid for leadership by junior or subordinate elite elements, either younger khans, in the case of the Bakhtiyari, *kalantars* in the case of the Qashqai, and middle-ranking leaders of tribal sub-sections in the case of the Khamsah. As with the Chahar Mahal sharecroppers, the nomads, too, justified their defiance by appeals to natural justice and by demands for the restoration of the *status quo ante*.

Overall, the Riza Shah decades were a period of defeat for the rural poor. Unable to link up with urban opposition, and unable to generate on their own account a political challenge to the regime that transcended their own sectional interests, the settled and nomadic poor bore the full brunt of modernization. Although Riza Shah had appropriated in certain respects the agenda of Iranian nationalism and constitutionalism, nonetheless he absolutely rejected the notion of land reform as a crucial element in national progress. In fact, his policies were rather the opposite of a land reform, in that they clarified and consolidated the private property rights of landlords and, together with the regime's general economic policies, led to an ever-greater concentration of ownership.<sup>77</sup> The key development in rural Iran during the Riza Shah period was the consolidation and growth of large absentee-owned estates. Reactionary rather than conservative in its impact on the countryside, Riza Shah's rejection of land reform was heavy with consequences for the future, bequeathing to his son, Muhammad Riza Shah, the tasks of confronting the political power of the class of large landowners and attempting to secure a stable social base for the regime in the countryside.<sup>78</sup>

## RURAL RESISTANCE

### The tribal uprisings of 1929

In 1927, following the stabilization of his new dynasty, Riza Shah launched a programme of radical secularizing, centralizing measures and, in the years that followed, enforced the new policies aggressively, often through the use of the army.<sup>1</sup> His regime's programme was essentially that formulated by the intelligentsia of the constitutional period, and was popular with the nationalist elite. However, when imposed upon the population at large it provoked widespread hostility and, occasionally, active defiance.

#### **The reform agenda**

The period 1927–8 saw the introduction and determined enforcement of the key measures that came to symbolize the era. In 1927 the first sustained attempts were made at the implementation of the census registration and conscription, the judicial system was reorganized along secular lines, the first major effort was made at mass tribal relocation, in Luristan, while a generalized policy of nomadic settlement began to be formulated, and work began on the Trans-Iranian Railway. In 1928 a civil code was introduced, capitulations were abolished and the Majlis passed the Uniform Dress Law and effective legislation for the registration of title deeds to landed property and real estate. The same year the opium monopoly, one in a series of étatiste economic measures, was introduced, to be followed the next year by the tobacco monopoly. This major reform drive coincided with the ascendancy of the shah's principal lieutenants, Ali Akbar Davar, Firuz Mirza and particularly Abdulhusayn Taymurtash.<sup>2</sup>

These measures were central elements of the nationalist drive to create a strong state capable of governing a modern and homogeneous society. Yet wherever they were imposed, they were experienced by the general population as highly oppressive. The fiscal and military reforms weighed especially heavily, the draining of money and manpower from the provinces resulting in few reciprocal social, infrastructural or educational benefits. Accordingly, opposition to the new state's agenda erupted at intervals over the years 1927–9 throughout the provinces, in various towns and cities, and

among different rural groups. It was led, in general, by middle-ranking clerics and the guilds in the urban centres and by junior tribal khans and aghas in the countryside.

The first half of the 1920s had been essentially a period of power struggle within the elite, the political changes of these years possessing little social content. However, once the outstanding constitutional and political issues had been resolved in favour of the establishment of a military-monarchical dictatorship, the regime was able to embark on a programme of far-reaching and profound modernization. The driving force behind this programme was the triumvirate of Taymurtash, Davar and Firuz, and between 1927 and 1929 the new state was at its most dynamic and confident. In many of its individual reform measures, as well as in its overall direction, the new regime was giving effect to long-standing demands of Iranian constitutionalism, and it accumulated much nationalist support on that account, the activism of the new state contrasting sharply with the passivity and helplessness of its Qajar predecessor. However, the increasingly dictatorial character of the regime had a profound effect on the manner in which it implemented its reform agenda. Preferring rapid and radical change imposed by force over a slower pace of change encumbered by any democratic process, the regime's key personnel, heavily influenced by the martial temper of Riza Shah himself, developed a commandist approach, seeking to impose their will across vast geographical areas and intricate social contexts by diktat, backed up by the threat of military intervention. These methods produced in civilian officials, and especially in army officers, a tendency to underestimate, and sometimes even deliberately to minimize, the complexities and difficulties of their task, and often provoked and aggravated opposition as much as or more than the reforms themselves.

The legislation of the second half of the 1920s affected directly and profoundly the lives and daily experience of wide layers of the population. Informed by the nationalist elite's overall objective of incubating a society Europeanized in appearance and modern in social and cultural mores, the innovations of these years were often devastating in their impact on non-metropolitan, non-elite groups, and tended actually to worsen the lot of the poor and to increase the gulf between the elite and the rest of the population. Conscription, for example, a long-standing demand of the constitutionalist intelligentsia, was enforced initially and primarily on the poor, the better-off easily able to purchase exemption.<sup>3</sup> The dress laws were welcomed by the educated, modern elements in the cities, who were in any case in the process of adopting Western fashions, but were anathema to provincial clerical and tribal elements, who felt their role and identity undermined, and to the poor everywhere, who found the new sartorial requirements beyond their means and who lacked any cultural understanding of the new styles of clothing. The new secular law courts, which the western states found so

appealing, were in reality more expensive, less accessible and less familiar to the mass of the population than the old judicial system administered by the ulama in the cities and by the khans for the tribal populations. The legislation providing for the registration of land and property benefited landlords and khans, who were able to register in their names land to which their title was dubious;<sup>4</sup> the introduction of state monopolies on crops such as opium hit hard the peasant cultivators and also the large numbers of small shopkeepers and pedlars who depended on trading in opium sap;<sup>5</sup> and tribal disarmament and settlement, although unopposed by the great khans who were already being absorbed into the urban elite, threatened the foundation of the nomadic and semi-nomadic way of life.

Popular opposition, and then resistance, to the imposition of these dramatic changes first erupted in an urban context although Tehran, where the state's new mechanisms of control, the police and the army, were most effective, saw only brief episodes of protest. The cities and towns of the provinces, however, were the sites of major confrontations between local populations and the representatives of the modernizing state, chiefly the military and the political elite.

The succession of challenges offered to the new regime and its radical reform agenda began in the provincial urban centres of the south. In the latter part of 1927 the towns of central and southern Iran, especially Isfahan and Shiraz, were gripped by a mass movement of opposition to conscription. The following year Tabriz manifested profound and violent hostility to both conscription and the clothing reforms. Finally, in 1929, with government authority barely intact in the provincial towns, a succession of tribal and peasant revolts broke out. One by one, the rural areas of western, southern, south-central and south-eastern Iran erupted into rebellion. The most prolonged and serious of these rebellions were those in Fars and Isfahan, among the Qashqai, the Khamsah and the Bakhtiari, the south almost slipping out of government control altogether. But, although for the duration of the uprisings only a shadow of Tehran's authority remained, even in the cities of Isfahan and Shiraz, and although the tribes were able to wrest temporary concessions from the government, they, like the urban opposition that had preceded them, failed to arrest the long-term centralizing drive of the regime.

### **The tribal response**

The urban protests of 1927–8, and their suppression, had been watched closely by the nomadic and semi-nomadic tribal populations, themselves alarmed by Tehran's radical version of modernity. With the military authorities still engaged on the brutal enforcement of their control in Tabriz, and the opposition to conscription and the imposition of the Pahlavi hat<sup>6</sup>



still fresh, the first tribal rising against the new order broke out in Azarbayjan. Towards the end of 1928, restlessness had become apparent among the Kurds in the area south-west of Lake Urumiyyah, where the Tabriz military authorities had apparently begun an attempt to enforce the abandonment of tribal dress in favour of the new hat, backing up this attempt with the employment of threats and menaces. The Kurdish tribes generally resented the closer control that the local authorities were attempting to establish, and feared the disarmament and conscription as well as the uniform dress, especially the despised Pahlavi hat, which they perceived would inevitably follow. In January, when Mulla Khalil, a local religious leader, issued a proclamation calling on the tribes to resist these innovations by force of arms, his appeal met with an immediate response among the Kurdish tribes in the areas of Sauj Bulak-Urumiyyah and Tabriz, and the revolt even began to take on a pan-Kurdish and nationalist complexion.<sup>7</sup> The Mangur, the Mamish and certain other tribes under their own khans, collected a force which, by the end of January, was estimated at 15,000 men. This force, under the overall leadership of Mulla Khalil, drove the army out of the town of Sardasht and besieged the garrison in Sauj Bulagh, attacking the *maliyyah* building in that town. The Kurds defeated the army in a series of engagements but lacked the cohesiveness to take advantage of their military superiority.

In Tabriz itself, the military authorities faced a delicate situation. Their forces were depleted by the needs of the Kurdish front and their control of the city was tenuous. It appeared, furthermore, that the rebellion might easily and quickly spread throughout the Kurdish areas. The army commander in Tabriz, General Husayn Khuzai, was anxious to negotiate a settlement and, accordingly, on 15 February, he offered the Kurds an amnesty. This, however, held little appeal for the Kurds. Khuzai also ordered the release of two important Mangur chiefs who were imprisoned in Tabriz. These two leaders, however, promptly joined the rebels and took an active part in the ensuing fighting. Intermittent fighting and negotiation continued until June when the Kurdish forces, finding themselves unable to obtain assistance from broader tribal groups, weakened by a shortage of ammunition, and fearing for the safety of their families and homes, retreated into the mountains, their leaders taking refuge in Iraq.

But it was in the south that the tribal uprisings assumed their most dangerous dimensions. The epicentre of the southern tribal uprisings was located in the province of Fars.<sup>8</sup> In the spring of 1929 first the Qashqai and then the Khamsah rose against the central government. Some of the smaller tribal groups, especially the Kuhgiluyyah, as well as independent brigand chiefs and their bands joined in the movement, and the whole of Fars quickly became engulfed in conflict. At the beginning of June the movement spread northwards, to the province of Isfahan, where some

sections of the Bakhtiari, principally the Chahar Lang with a sprinkling of the Haft Lang, also broke out into rebellion.

Although each of the tribal groups had its own specific concerns, the insurgents shared certain major underlying grievances. The tribal populations throughout the south were angry at the attempts made by the government to disarm them, they were embittered over the ever-increasing taxes they were forced to pay by the officials of the finance department, they hated the new dress law, feared the growing reach of the conscription commissions, and the imposition of the census registration which was their preliminary, resented the interference and corruption of the local military authorities, suffered from the establishment of new government monopolies on commodities such as opium and tobacco and were apprehensive at the activities of the department for the registration of title deeds and at rumours of forced sedentarization. The example of the Qashqai, who had suffered particularly at the hands of rapacious military governors in the three years since their former *ilkhani*, Ismail Khan Sawlat al-Dawlah, had been deposed, was especially unsettling.

### **The new regime and the tribal leaderships**

The years of Riza Khan's rise to supreme power, 1921–5, essentially a period of intra-elite power struggles, were also the years in which he undertook the subjugation of the political leaderships of the great tribal confederations. By 1925 Riza Khan had coopted, neutralized or removed all the great tribal leaders and regional magnates. Yet the new regime had not encountered systematic hostility from either the tribal aristocracies or the nomadic populations. Although the army had occasionally embarked on a military solution to tribal recalcitrance, most notably in relation to the Lurs, or political repression, for example in the case of the Sardars of Bujnurd and of Maku, many of the most important tribal leaders had willingly, and sometimes enthusiastically, offered their support to the new regime. This was particularly true of the tribal magnates of southern Iran, including Ismail Khan Sawlat al-Dawlah of the Qashqai, Ibrahim Khan Qavam al-Mulk of the Khamsah, most of the great khans of the Bakhtiari, and Ibrahim Shawkat al-Mulk, Amir of Qayinat and Sistan, only Shaykh Khazal of Muhammarah failing to come to an accommodation with Riza Khan. Far from being hostile to Riza Khan's new order, these southern tribal leaders, as an integral part of the elite, were generally ready to embrace the nationalist vision of the modernization of Iran.

The relatively advanced centralization of the great tribal confederations of Fars and Isfahan meant that the attitude of their leaderships was decisive in terms of Tehran's ability to extend its effective control over the entire region. This contrasted starkly to the situation in Luristan, where the absence

of any overall leaders with whom the state could deal produced endemic military conflict for more than a decade. As the southern leaderships not only offered no resistance to the new regime but actively sought its patronage, so accordingly the Qashqai, Khamsah and Bakhtiyari tribes remained more or less peaceful and the provinces of Fars and Isfahan tranquil.

From the early 1920s Sawlat al-Dawlah, Qavam al-Mulk and many of the great khans of the Bakhtiyari had done their best to assimilate to the new order, in line with the natural inclination of tribal aristocracies to seek good relations with the ascendant central power. Qavam al-Mulk was transformed from a figure whose British connections had made him an object of the deepest suspicion to Tehran into a staunch advocate of the new order in the south and a courtier of the new shah, Sawlat al-Dawlah became a Majlis deputy admired in nationalist circles, while in 1927 Jafar Quli Khan Sardar Asad Bakhtiyari was made minister of war.

Not only did individual tribal leaders attempt to win personal political advancement by courting Riza Khan, but the tribal aristocracies as a distinct social layer were rapidly becoming assimilated into the urban elite. Most of the great khans of the Bakhtiyari, for example, had settled permanently in the cities of Isfahan and Tehran, their wealth mainly drawn from their revenues as absentee landlords and their dividends from the oil company. During the early years of the century all of the southern tribal aristocracies, the Bakhtiyari khans, the Qavamis of Shiraz and the family of Sawlat al-Dawlah, had greatly increased their landholdings and all had to some extent adopted the outlook of the landlord class. The tribal populations themselves also apparently welcomed both the increased order and security that was gradually being established during the early 1920s, and the decline in power of their tribal khans. The tribespeople were increasingly inclined to see the khans as irrelevant to their everyday lives and actually oppressive. The management of day-to-day tribal affairs, including the organization of the migrations, had become largely the responsibility of the *kalantars* and *kadkhudas* and the nomads had become aware that the khans were not essential to the continuance of their pastoral socio-economy, which experience had proved functioned perfectly well without them. The continued extension of Tehran's control and the reduction, or even loss, of the great khans' traditional tribal roles and responsibilities seemed therefore inevitable and even to some extent desirable both to the khans themselves and to the nomads.

Although the southern tribal leaderships had, broadly speaking and with only a few exceptions, cooperated with the new regime in Tehran, yet with their history of imperial patronage, political autonomy, reputation for the pursuance of their own interests and fractious unreliability, they could never provide a solid foundation for the construction of the new order in the south. Riza Khan, in particular, was especially vulnerable to perennial suspicions of their disloyalty or treachery. For the regime, the ultimate removal of the

tribal aristocracies from their *ilkhaniships* and the establishment of direct central government over the tribes was a logical step in the progress towards the establishment of its own complete and unmediated control over the entire country. Furthermore, since the army had been the principal mechanism by which Riza Khan had enforced his power, and the appointment of military governors was a frequent occurrence both in the capital and in the provinces, it was inevitable that the tribal *ilkhanis* would be replaced not by civilian state officials, but by army officers.<sup>9</sup>

### The Qashqai

In 1925, after the submission of the Shaykh of Muhammarah, and with the other southern leaders, Sawlat, Qavam and the great khans of the Bakhtiari, acquiescent and safely resident in Tehran, Riza Khan moved to bring the southern tribal populations under closer and more direct state control. During the summer the military authorities launched a major, although only partially successful, attempt to disarm the rural population and in August, while the disarmament campaign was in full swing, the Qashqai became the first major southern tribal grouping to experience direct military control. Riza Khan removed the *ilkhaniship* from the family of Sawlat al-Dawlah, replacing the *ilkhani*, Nasir Khan, Sawlat's son, with a military governor, an army captain. Sawlat himself offered no resistance and the sudden disappearance of their hereditary *ilkhani* apparently evoked only a certain amount of relief among the Qashqai themselves.<sup>10</sup>

The establishment of direct military control over the Qashqai produced no improvement in their conditions. On the contrary, the arrival of a rapacious and corrupt military governor, and the increasingly oppressive demands of the officials of the finance department who now everywhere accompanied the army, was a turning point in the pacification of Fars. The tax collectors demanded higher revenues and collected them more efficiently and regularly while the military governor proved to be both brutal and predatory. Within a year conditions in Fars had begun to deteriorate rapidly. The imposition of the new financial and military order began to lead to a disintegration of tribal cohesion and the appearance of banditry among pauperized and marginalized tribal groups. Numbers of tents deserted their tribal units, hiding themselves in various parts of the province, more or less as outlaws.<sup>11</sup>

From 1925 onwards the activities of the Qashqai military governor and the finance officials began to create conditions in Fars that were quite beyond the capacity of the army to contain, and security in the countryside worsened rapidly. The tribal leaders were also finding their lives increasingly circumscribed and constrained. Although Qavam and the Bakhtiari khans still formally remained heads of their confederations, yet they, as well as Sawlat and his sons, were obliged to reside in Tehran, and only allowed

to leave if given explicit permission. In fact, they all found themselves virtual prisoners, under the close and constant supervision of the police.

By 1928 the province of Fars had become the scene of serious disorder and the military authorities were losing control of the roads. As well as deep discontent among the Qashqai, there had also been a resurgence of disaffection among the major tribes in north-western Fars, the Buyir Ahmadi and the Mamassani. There was general insecurity on all the routes leading to Shiraz with frequent robberies on a much greater scale than at any time since the new army and *amniyyah* had first begun to establish their control in 1922. The situation was especially bad on the Bushire–Shiraz road, where various bands of robbers were operating.<sup>12</sup>

The army's difficulties in Fars were mounting day by day but the Southern Division was experiencing internal problems of its own. Within the army as a whole, the introduction of conscription had resulted in an influx of reluctant and untrained recruits, while the army high command was in a state of extreme disorganization. In 1927 the new shah, out of his fear of his senior generals, had begun abolishing divisional organization within the army. In 1927, following its commander's disgrace, the Central Division, the most important division in the army and the primary source of reinforcements for the provincial divisions in their times of need, had been split up into its constituent regiments. Early in August 1928 General Mahmud Ayrum, who had held command of the Southern Division without interruption since its creation in 1921–2, was removed and the southern command broken up, the division being dissolved into four separate and independent brigades of which Fars formed only one.<sup>13</sup>

By 1928 the military government of the Qashqai was also reaching a crisis. In August 1928 the Qashqai military governor, Captain Abbas Khan Nikbakht, had been arrested and imprisoned on charges of extortion and oppression. But when a new commander, General Shahbakhti, took over the Fars Brigade, one of his first acts was to release Nikbakht from prison, and in January 1929 he reinstated him as military governor.<sup>14</sup> This highly provocative move led to the Qashqai uniting against Nikbakht's return. Nikbakht was completely unable to reassert his authority or even to reach Firuzabad in the Qashqai winter quarters.

The first three months of 1929 saw the Firuzabad region of Fars descend into chaos. Not only was the army losing control of the roads, but the authority of the local governors in the small towns of the province was undermined and unsustainable in the face of the increasing tribal control of the rural areas. By early spring 1929 many sections of the Qashqai, encouraged by their success in resisting the reinstatement of Captain Nikbakht, and fearing taxation per capita of their flocks and that the military wished to stop the migrations and settle them on the land, were slipping into outright rebellion under the leadership of their *kalantars* and Ali Khan, a half-brother and former adversary of Sawlat al-Dawlah.

At this point the government, either unaware of or indifferent to the inflammable situation prevailing throughout Fars, took the reckless step of removing Qavam as head of the Khamsah, which also immediately broke out into rebellion. Fighting was now breaking out throughout the province, with the Qashqai in the environs of Shiraz itself, the Khamsah to the east and the Buyir Ahmadi in the north, and the army began to face the danger of being militarily overwhelmed. In Tehran, although Sawlat insisted that the rebellion had been due solely to the oppression of the Qashqai military governor, he and his eldest son were arrested and imprisoned, a step that infuriated the Qashqai still more.<sup>15</sup>

Despite its difficulties, the army in Fars still advocated a military solution but the civil authorities, always at loggerheads with the military, opened negotiations with the Qashqai.<sup>16</sup> At the beginning of May the Qashqai *kalantars*, under the nominal leadership of Ali Khan, held a meeting with the governor-general, Akbar Mirza Sarim al-Dawlah, and presented a list of conditions that they wanted the central government to accept before they would submit.<sup>17</sup> These conditions were:

- the release of Sawlat al-Dawlah from prison in Tehran;
- the appointment of Sawlat or, failing him, of his elder son, Nasir Khan, as *ilkhani* of the Qashqai;
- the Qashqai not to be deprived of their arms;
- conscription not to be applied to the Qashqai;
- the law of uniformity of clothing not to be applied to the Qashqai;
- the census department and the department for the registration of title deeds to be abolished.

The government found the Qashqai conditions quite unacceptable but adopted a policy of temporizing, continuing to negotiate while mobilizing all available military resources. By the end of May the army in Shiraz numbered about 8,000, and in early June General Habibullah Shaybani fought his way into Shiraz from Tehran to take command. His forces, however, were obliged to remain concentrated in Shiraz while the army's control throughout the rest of Fars disintegrated.

Although Ali Khan, Sawlat's half-brother, had assumed a nominal leadership of the Qashqai rebellion, in reality the moving spirits seem to have been the *kalantars*, who were much closer to the tribal populations in their daily lives, participating in the migrations, and who were less integrated into the elite and more loosely connected to the central government. An example of their role and their outlook can be found in the petition which a group of them arranged to be handed in to the British consulate in Shiraz on 7 June. The signatories were five *kalantars* of the Qashqai Kashkuli, Darrahshuri and Farsimadan tribes. In their petition the *kalantars* stressed their loyalty to the government and their past readiness to assist the army

in its campaigns and specifically singled out the oppressiveness and greed of the military governors as the cause of their discontent. They complained that they had been asking for justice for three months but had been ignored and they concluded with the unusual request that the British consul communicate their petition to the League of Nations.<sup>18</sup>

In an effort to re-exert some control over the situation in Fars, Riza Shah appears to have decided to revert to the use of Sawlat and his family, and towards the end of May he sent Sawlat's younger son, Malik Mansur Khan, to Shiraz by aeroplane and released Sawlat and his elder son, Nasir Khan, from prison.<sup>19</sup> This step, however, backfired, as Malik Mansur Khan, on reaching the tribal encampments, immediately threw in his lot with the insurgents, providing a dynamic and charismatic new leadership for the revolt.<sup>20</sup> By mid-June, the situation had become very dangerous from the government's point of view. The Qashqai had been able to attack the Shiraz aerodrome and put two military planes out of action. The roads between Isfahan and Shiraz and Shiraz and Kazirun were cut, the *amniyyah* having either deserted or been evacuated. The garrison still remaining at Kazirun was isolated and in some danger. The telegraph line between Shiraz and Kazirun, and between Shiraz and Isfahan had been not just cut but in many places destroyed, and for some time a small wireless telegraph set at Shiraz was the only means of communication with the outside world. A good deal of fighting was taking place in the areas surrounding Shiraz and, by 25 June, the people of the city were braced for a tribal attack, Shaybani preparing the defence of the town by means of pickets of troops at strategic points.<sup>21</sup>

The army in Fars was aware of its weakness and the Tehran government was terrified of the political consequences of the fall of a major southern city to tribal forces. Accordingly, on 25 June, General Shaybani, apparently in an attempt to sow dissension among the Qashqai, proclaimed an amnesty. The amnesty acknowledged the complaints and grievances of the Qashqai *kalantars* against their former military governor and promised a pardon to all who surrendered.<sup>22</sup> Very few of the khans, and then only some of the less important ones, availed themselves of this offer, but under cover of the amnesty some envoys came in to negotiate. Alternate bouts of fighting and negotiation then ensued. The army had been signally unable to defeat the Qashqai in the field but the tribes were also in need of an accommodation. They lacked unity and cohesion, and had exhausted their ammunition, while their families and flocks were clearly suffering, with high mortality among their young children.<sup>23</sup>

The deadlock continued until 9 July when an eruption among the Bakhtiari to the north introduced a new factor into the Qashqai-government equation and Tehran was obliged to capitulate, at least for the time being. The government had already tried to use Sawlat's family, in the person of Malik Mansur Khan, to restrain the Qashqai, without actually relinquishing control over Sawlat himself. On 10 July, Riza Shah decided to send Sawlat

himself back to the tribes in the hope that he might calm them and restore order. Sawlat's arrival in Shiraz transformed the situation. He immediately persuaded three of the most powerful sections of the confederation to move to their summer pastures and, by the end of the month, the hostile tribesmen were rapidly dispersing and road and telegraph communications were gradually being restored.<sup>24</sup> Although a large part of the Qashqai refused to leave their winter quarters, despite the appalling conditions, Sawlat was able to dissuade them from further active hostilities. However, Sawlat's return also produced another effect, as it seems Riza Shah intended.<sup>25</sup> His reappearance in Shiraz was deeply unwelcome to many elements of the Qashqai, who resented his close links to the regime, and serious dissensions quickly developed. A particularly bitter disagreement soon emerged between Sawlat and the erstwhile leader of the rebellion, his half-brother and long-standing rival, Ali Khan.<sup>26</sup>

Sawlat, although not officially appointed *ilkhani*, nonetheless exercised all the powers of that post. As the summer drew to an end he organized the Qashqai's southwards migration, and arranged for the collection of the Qashqai taxes, allowing a finance official to accompany the tribes to their winter quarters.<sup>27</sup> The Qashqai, themselves, seemed satisfied that they had achieved the purpose for which they rebelled. They had not been defeated by the army, the military governor was gone, threats of conscription and Pahlavi hats had evaporated, and they retained their arms.<sup>28</sup>

### The Bakhtiari

The most important factor in Tehran's decision to compromise, at least temporarily, with the Qashqai was the outbreak of an uprising to the north in Isfahan, among sections of the Bakhtiari.<sup>29</sup> By late June and early July there were clear signs of impending trouble in Bakhtiari and, within a few days, the centre of gravity of the tribal uprisings had shifted from Shiraz to Isfahan where the tribes seemed encouraged by the news they had heard of the risings in the south and were determined on a trial of strength with the army. At this stage the province of Isfahan was almost empty of troops, the army having concentrated all its available resources in Fars. During early July several hundred troops, mostly raw recruits, left Tehran for Isfahan and, following the accommodation with Sawlat, reinforcements also arrived from Shiraz.

Having apparently held meetings with the Qashqai, the Bakhtiari rebels put forward many of the same demands: that the Uniform Dress Law and conscription not be applied to them, and for the abolition of the census department, the department for the registration of title deeds, and the government monopolies.<sup>30</sup> The Bakhtiari revolt, however, although it shared many of the same concerns as the other tribal uprisings, nonetheless had its own specific character.



Although the ordinary tribespeople were concerned about conscription and Pahlavi hats, the junior khans who comprised the leadership of the uprising had their own specific objectives vis-à-vis both the senior khans and the Tehran government. Unresolved and bitter disagreements had, for many years, poisoned relations between the senior Bakhtiyari khans and the younger generation of junior khans. The junior khans resented and despised their seniors both because of their political complacency and because of specific concerns such as their mismanagement of the Bakhtiyari oil revenues. A final straw seems to have been provided when a number of the senior khans resident in Tehran took advantage of the new registration laws to place in their own names landholdings to which the junior khans had claims. An important element of the Bakhtiyari revolt was, therefore, the continuing discontent of the junior khans at the rule of their elders, who were now living the lives of absentee landlords in Tehran and divorced from tribal affairs. A number of junior Haft Lang khans, notably Sardar Fatih and Sardar Iqbal, together with the Chahar Lang khan, Ali Mardan Khan Chahar Lang, put themselves at the head of a growing feeling of tribal revolt at government oppression to lead a movement that was as much directed against the senior khans as at Tehran.<sup>31</sup>

There is also some evidence, however, that certain of the younger khans had more ambitious objectives and hoped to use the rebellion to realize fundamental change not just within Bakhtiyari but in the regime at Tehran itself. Sardar Fatih, for example, apparently drew up detailed plans for the capture of Isfahan and Tehran and for the deposition of Riza Shah.<sup>32</sup> It was only 20 years since the Bakhtiyari had marched on Tehran to depose Muhammad Ali Shah and restore the constitution, and the memory was very much alive among the khans and the subject of constant reference.

The Bakhtiyari were, however, not in open revolt as a confederation. The rebels were composed almost entirely of the Zarrasvand tribe of the Haft Lang, the tribe from which the great khans were drawn, and the Chahar Lang under Ali Mardan Khan, and it seems that the overall leader of the revolt was Ali Mardan Khan Chahar Lang.<sup>33</sup> They allied themselves with Sardar Fatih's brother-in-law, Sartip Khan of the Buyir Ahmadi, and were joined by numerous bands of brigands, particularly that led by the outlaw Khaybar.

Immediately upon the outbreak among the Bakhtiyari, the shah again resorted to the use of the confederation's senior figures to reassert Tehran's control. He sent Sardar Asad, the minister of war, to Isfahan, to use his influence to calm the tribes. However, Sardar Asad's own brother, the *ilkhani*, had just been driven out of the regional capital, Dih Kurd, by rebel Bakhtiyari, and Sardar Asad himself was, by now, too detached from tribal affairs to be able to play a moderating role. On the contrary, Sardar Asad only added to the shah's alarm by his constant telegraphic reports of the gravity of the situation. He favoured a strong response to the rebellion and

advised the shah that the only thing to be done was to send troops and teach the recalcitrant khans and the tribesmen a lesson.<sup>34</sup>

Fighting between the Bakhtiyari and the army had begun in early July when the rebels drove the military governor of Chahar Mahal and the *ilkhani* from the town of Dih Kurd. The only military forces in Isfahan at that point were weak and scattered and they collected in the fort at Safid Dasht, where they were soon besieged by the Bakhtiyari.<sup>35</sup> Although reinforcements soon arrived in Isfahan, a series of military engagements left the tribesmen with the upper hand. The army had been forced to fall back to a defensive position outside Isfahan itself when Riza Shah, in a state of intense anxiety and aware of his military weakness and the dangerous situation still prevailing in Fars, decided it was necessary to have recourse to conciliatory methods. He summoned several meetings of the senior khans in Tehran and finally sent two of the most venerable, Samsam al-Saltanah and Amir Mufakham, to the south to use their influence to restrain the tribes.<sup>36</sup> Samsam succeeded where the army had failed, arranged for the peaceful relief of the fort of Safid Dasht, and persuaded the tribesmen to disperse. Most of the insurgent Bakhtiyari offered their submission to the government, although they at first requested that any agreement be guaranteed either by the APOC or by the British legation. This request, however, was not pressed. In return, the unpopular *ilkhani*, the brother of Sardar Asad, and the *ilbaygi* were removed and the tribes allowed to choose their successors, the hated military governor of Chahar Mahal was removed, and the leaders of the revolt were given pardons by the shah, who also promised that conscription would not be applied to the Bakhtiyari for five years. Ali Mardan Khan, the overall leader of the revolt, did not formally surrender until the autumn, when he was captured and sent to Tehran, where he was received and pardoned by the shah in person. Having arrived in the capital in the old-style Bakhtiyari dress, he wore a modern suit of clothes, complete with Pahlavi hat, for his audience with the shah.<sup>37</sup>

### The Khamsah

As part of its general drive to tighten its control throughout the south, the Tehran government, in the midst of the turmoil of the spring of 1929, had taken the rash step of removing Qavam al-Mulk from his titular leadership of the Khamsah confederation and his governorship of eastern Fars, appointing a military governor, General Abul Hasan Purzand, to replace him.<sup>38</sup> With this step, the whole delicate pyramid of authority in eastern Fars collapsed, with little prepared to replace it. The Khamsah tribes immediately refused to accept General Purzand. His manifest weakness and his inability to impose his authority brought the prestige of the army in eastern Fars to near zero and unleashed a rebellion among sections of the Khamsah, especially the Baharlu. The Baharlu possessed a reputation for turbulence and a

dislike of authority, including that of the Qavamis,<sup>39</sup> and it had only been by the use of an iron fist that Qavan had kept them in order.<sup>40</sup> As soon as this was removed, they quickly broke out into rebellion and overran the south-eastern part of the province and then even the western confines of the neighbouring province of Kirman. Their objectives were, broadly, the same as those of the Qashqai and the Bakhtiyari: no conscription, no disarmament and, especially important in their case, no opium monopoly.

The widespread hatred of the opium monopoly was a factor of paramount importance in the overthrow of the government's authority in eastern Fars and succeeded in uniting the heterogeneous populations of the region against the Tehran regime. Although the bulk of the fighting was carried out by nomadic elements among the Baharlu, they had the active and passive support of both non-Khamsah nomadic groups and of the settled peasantry. When the Baharlu rose against the government, it was in alliance with the non-Khamsah tribes of Lar and Sarkuh, and with the approbation of the settled population in the districts of Darab and Fasa.<sup>41</sup> Many of the settled cultivators of eastern Fars were, themselves, of Khamsah origin, their districts were the biggest opium producers in Fars, and they lent their full support to the Baharlu insurgency which clearly articulated their grievances.<sup>42</sup>

By the end of April 1929 the Baharlu had occupied the town and district of Darab, driven out the government officials, and taken possession of the government stores of grain and opium. The opium they returned to the cultivators, less ten per cent, the equivalent of the government tax, which they kept for themselves.<sup>43</sup> On 9 May they took Fasa, on the road from Darab towards Shiraz. By the end of June they were in possession of the Niriz area, and were administering this district and collecting revenue. Further to the east they also held Saidabad. By the end of July, the Khamsah had scarcely engaged the army and they had refrained from interfering with the main roads or attacking Shiraz itself. But they held all the territory east and south-east of Shiraz, up to the western part of Kirman, where not one civil or military representative of the Tehran government had been allowed to remain. In addition to their own territories, they also held the towns and districts of Darab, Fasa, Sarvistan, Niriz and Istahbanat.<sup>44</sup> Everywhere, the Baharlu appropriated the role of the former officials, collecting government taxes and even the rents of Qavam al-Mulk's properties.<sup>45</sup> In an interesting reversal and mirror-image of government policy, in towns such as Darab and Niriz the Baharlu instituted a policy of imposing fines on all those wearing the new European clothing or the Pahlavi hat, just as the police had formerly fined those wearing traditional clothing after the introduction of the Uniform Dress Law. Even the amount, 52 *qirans*, was the same.<sup>46</sup>

Meanwhile, Qavam al-Mulk, having predicted the consequences of his removal and fearing the shah's wrath, had left for Europe, so could not be returned to eastern Fars to try to restore order.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the government appointed Major Muhammad Taqi Khan Arab, a senior cavalry officer in

the Southern Division and himself an influential Khamsah tribesman, as governor of Fasa and Lar, in place of General Purzand. He left Shiraz on 30 July with a column of 1,000 men and advanced eastwards, sometimes fighting, sometimes negotiating. Major Muhammad Taqi Khan Arab's force was insufficient to impose a military solution in eastern Fars, but he had a high reputation and considerable personal influence with the Baharlu, and the government clearly hoped that he would be able to establish himself by peaceful means and save the army's face by bringing about the nominal submission of the tribes. By the apparent employment of considerable tact and discretion, coupled with an occasional resort to military action, Major Arab gradually reoccupied the towns of eastern Fars. In early September his troops fought a successful action near Darab, after which the Baharlu nominally surrendered. Spasmodic raids continued for some time, but security was gradually restored, and by the end of the year the roads in eastern Fars and western Kirman were again in use.<sup>48</sup>

### **Peasant rebellion and banditry**

The tribal uprisings in Fars and Isfahan were largely predicated on the involvement of the armed and mobile nomadic populations who were resisting what they perceived to be a fundamental assault on their way of life. The uprisings also, however, provided the context for the emergence of two related but quite distinct phenomena, peasant rebellion and banditry.<sup>49</sup> In their armed risings, the nomads were able to rely on a groundswell of peasant resentment while the social, political and economic chaos produced by the regime's authoritarian version of modernity in the rural areas, among pastoralists and cultivators alike, led to a retreat by fringes of these societies into permanent brigandry.

As well as conscription and Pahlavi hats, the nomads feared the forced settlement that the regime had begun to advocate openly. In fact, however, a process of sedentarization was already in train among the nomadic populations. Many former nomads in southern Iran had already voluntarily adopted a semi-settled or settled life, engaging in agriculture. But these sedentarized cultivators, too, were hard-hit by Tehran's reforms, and were drawn into the opposition to the new order in the south. The overthrow of Tehran's authority in eastern Fars was clearly accomplished with the active support of the peasantry, albeit in alliance with their nomadic kin. In southern Fars, too, the imposition of the new order had produced unrest among the settled tribal populations. One example is provided by Mahdi Surkhi, who headed what became a substantial group of bandits. Mahdi Surkhi was a small landowner and khan of the Surkhi, a small tribe, allied but not actually belonging to the Qashqai, semi-sedentarized and heavily engaged in opium cultivation. With the generalized reappearance of banditry in the mid-1920s as a strategy of rural resistance, Mahdi was driven into becoming

an outlaw by the oppression of the local authorities, and from 1926 onwards, collected around him numbers of the disaffected, both Surkhis and members of many of the smaller Qashqai clans.<sup>50</sup> The imposition of the opium monopoly in 1928 turned Mahdi from an outlaw into the leader of a peasant movement, as widespread resistance to the monopoly broke out among the settled cultivators across Fars, and he and his tribe actively involved themselves in the Qashqai rebellion.<sup>51</sup> Again, the Bakhtiyari rebellion clearly shows a community of interest between the peasant cultivators and the nomadic tribes with their fringe of bandits. For example, in July 1929 the leader, named Khaybar, of one of the largest brigand bands, together with 200 Bakhtiyari, captured the village of Taghun, 11 miles west of Qumishah on the Isfahan–Shiraz road. He then, like the Baharlu in Darab, broke open the government opium store, took out the government percentage of ten per cent, and returned the remainder to the peasants, taking receipts.<sup>52</sup> Although the tribal insurgencies of the summer of 1929 were to fade quickly, a generalized phenomenon of small-scale banditry was to persist across southern Iran throughout the next decade.

### **The defeat of the rural resistance**

Perhaps the most important reason for the ultimate political failure of the rural resistance was its inability to connect with disaffected elements in the provincial cities who shared many of its grievances. A tribal capture of a major provincial city would have had the capacity to transform the national political balance of forces. Yet there was no significant community of action between the uprisings in the countryside and broader urban forces, even those, the lower-ranking clerical and bazar elements, who had recently been most active in resisting Tehran's agenda. The Baharlu had proved themselves able to take control of the small towns of south-eastern Fars for a period of time and many provincial towns elsewhere saw sporadic outbreaks of violence against the physical and human representations of the new order, for example, the recruiting commissions and the local civil authorities, with rioting and attacks on the police and the *amniyyah*. But in general, the people of cities such as Shiraz, Isfahan and Tabriz experienced only fear at the prospect of tribal descents on their cities, and panic was the usual reaction to the approach of tribal forces. Nonetheless, although there was fear at the prospect of the actual arrival of armed tribal fighters in the cities, there was, at the same time, considerable sympathy for their plight and their suffering at the hands of the army and the finance department. The urban populations, especially the poorer classes, were also happy to take advantage of the authorities' manifest weakness in the summer of 1929 to make bonfires of the hated Pahlavi hat, which they discarded with impunity and en masse.

Certainly, the provincial cities shared in full measure the grievances animating rural discontent, especially conscription, the Pahlavi hat and, in the south, the opium monopoly. In 1929, as the army's power in the rural areas began to disintegrate, several major cities located within areas of intense tribal disaffection, especially Tabriz, Isfahan and Shiraz, remained tinderboxes of discontent. In Tabriz, the control of the military authorities was, since the violent clashes of the previous August, still tenuous, and it was reported that the people were ready to 'welcome a blow to the Government from whatever direction it might come',<sup>53</sup> while the populations of the southern cities, although not actively defiant, were sullen and resentful. Although provincial urban hostility to the regime remained latent during 1929, and no open or organized dissent materialized in the cities, nonetheless the authorities remained extremely conscious of the precariousness of their position and were obliged to take a variety of palliative measures that they found extremely distasteful, such as allowing low-ranking clergy to resume wearing the turbans banned under the clothing reforms, and permitting the *Ashura* processions commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husayn.

The successive tribal uprisings of 1929 had a serious impact on Riza Shah and his regime. Although the shah was able to respond pragmatically on a practical level, yet throughout the summer he remained in a highly nervous state. The example of Afghanistan was not encouraging. There, King Amanullah, whose radical modernizing reforms mirrored those of Riza Shah, had alienated both the ulama and conservative tribal groups, and he had been overthrown earlier in the year by a tribal rebellion. In Iran the shah now believed himself to be facing the gravest crisis since he had come to the throne, and the very survival of his dynasty to be threatened.<sup>54</sup> He not only feared that southern Iran would slip out of government control altogether, but he was also convinced that the uprisings were the work of the British, who wished to reassert their power in Iran.

The British had certainly, in the past, had close links with both Qavam al-Mulk and the Bakhtiyari khans, although never with Sawlat and the Qashqai, but these relationships had, by mutual consent, evaporated in the early 1920s. Nonetheless, the shah held firmly to the belief that the British had instigated the tribal unrest, and official circles and especially the army shared this view.<sup>55</sup> The shah's belief in British malevolence was aggravated by the outbreak of a strike by labourers in the southern oilfields in May 1929. Although the minister of court, Abdulhusayn Taymurtash, dismissed the alleged communist threat, of which the APOC made much, the shah was outraged by the arrival of British naval vessels just outside Iranian territorial waters in the aftermath of the strike.

As well as reawakening Riza Shah's old fears about British imperial ambitions, the upheavals of 1929 also aggravated his fears for the security of his dynasty and caused him to begin to doubt those who had been his

most ardent supporters. His perennial fear of assassination was also much in evidence. In June Prince Firuz Mirza, the minister of finance and, with Taymurtash and Davar, one of the triumvirate who had controlled the whole machinery of government for the shah since his accession to the throne, was arrested and imprisoned. On the same day the former governor-general of Fars, the Qajar prince, Akbar Mirza Sarim al-Dawlah, and General Fazlullah Zahidi, the commander of the *amniyyah*, who had been in Shiraz during the tribal disturbances, were arrested and jailed in Tehran. A little later General Mahmud Ayrum, the former commander of the southern army, was arrested and imprisoned and the former divisional chief of staff in the south, General Prince Muhammad Husayn Farmanfarma, a brother of Firuz, also fell under suspicion and was arrested. No reasons were given for the arrests, but hints were dropped in the newspapers *Ittila'at* and *Shafagh-i Surkh* that they were in connection with a plot to support the Qashqai revolt.<sup>56</sup> In fact, Firuz, Sarim al-Dawlah and General Muhammad Husayn Farmanfarma were all Qajar princes, and the shah appeared to suspect that the tribal rebellions were a precursor of an attempt to overthrow his dynasty and restore the Qajars, perhaps with British help.<sup>57</sup>

Prince Firuz was the first of Riza Shah's high officials to suffer the fate of disgrace, arrest and imprisonment. With his fall began a process that was to end in the death, imprisonment or exile of most of the shah's loyal officials, including Taymurtash, the minister of court, and Sardar Asad, the minister of war. As well as casting a shadow over his loyal officials, the tribal rebellions of 1929 also sealed the fate of the tribal leaderships themselves. In 1930 Sardar Asad and Sawlat al-Dawlah did their best to demonstrate to Riza Shah their own loyalty and the continued reliability and usefulness of their tribal followers, furnishing substantial irregular contingents for the army's operations against the Buyir Ahmadi. But in the same year Tehran renewed its efforts at tribal disarmament and pacification, and in 1932 began to make serious efforts to implement the policy of sedentarization. At the same time, Riza Shah aggressively pursued his objective of severing the southern tribes from their hereditary leaders and matters quickly came to a head. In August 1932 Sawlat al-Dawlah and his eldest son, Nasir Khan, were imprisoned, and in August 1933 Sawlat was murdered in prison. In November Sardar Asad, still minister of war, a large number of Bakhtiyari khans, and Qavam al-Mulk were arrested and accused of plotting against the shah's life.<sup>58</sup> In April 1934 Sardar Asad was murdered in prison and, in November, eight people implicated in the so-called Bakhtiyari plot were executed.<sup>59</sup> Among those executed were Ali Mardan Khan Chahar Lang, the Haft Lang Bakhtiyari khans Sardar Iqbal and Sardar Fatih, and Sardar Fatih's brother-in-law, Sartip Khan Buyir Ahmadi, all leaders of the 1929 revolt who had all previously been pardoned by the shah. Twenty other Bakhtiyaris were sentenced to long prison terms,

including life imprisonment for four khans.<sup>60</sup> With this, the southern tribal leaderships were permanently removed as a factor in national political life.

For the tribal populations in general, 1929 was also a turning point. The summer of that year saw the last significant collective rural opposition of the Riza Shah period, its failure to delay, divert or moderate the regime's determination to impose its agenda ushering in a decade of extreme hardship throughout the countryside. Disarmed, heavily taxed, the pressure to settle ameliorated only by the corruption of the local authorities, with their khans executed or imprisoned, the tribal populations were profoundly demoralized. With the regime's assault on the nomadic way of life, and its attempted destruction of the pastoral economy, and with military control of their pastures and migration routes ever-tighter, the tribes were no longer capable of asserting the political and military autonomy of the past. The peasantry, too, experienced worsening conditions during these years. Harshly taxed in order to provide revenue for the regime's prestige projects, the Trans-Iranian Railway and the army, undermined by the spread of the cash economy, and largely unable, through lack of money or education, to make use of the new institutions such as the law courts or the department of land registration, the peasants' main point of contact with the modern state was through the conscription commissions. Nonetheless, throughout the 1930s, rural resistance continued to manifest itself, but now only through the widespread persistence of banditry, whereby pauperized rural, especially nomadic, elements, sometimes allied to other marginal figures such as army deserters, continued to evade and defy the new state. Such banditry was neither a survival from the pre-modern era nor an anachronism, but was, rather, created by, and constituted a response to, conditions of rapid and authoritarian modernization and rural social disintegration.

The rural resistance to the new order that erupted across southern Iran during the spring and summer of 1929 ultimately failed to defend the nomadic and peasant populations from the modernist vision of the urban nationalist elite. At no stage did the various manifestations of rural discontent of those months coalesce into a unified or sustained movement. The confederations were, themselves, internally divided, in no case did a tribal confederation as a whole rise against the government, and there was intense hatred between the confederations, particularly between the Qashqai and the Khamsah. Furthermore, the demands of the rebels were invariably defensive, calling for the removal or rescinding of new laws and institutions, and developed no wider political perspective or coherent strategy through which a challenge to the central government might be mounted. The tribal risings also petered out for more mundane, although compelling, reasons, including a severe shortage of ammunition and the needs of the pastoral economy, particularly migration, although not before they had starkly revealed the limits of the regime's coercive power.



The tribal uprisings did not persuade the senior khans to abandon their alliance with the new state. On the contrary, Sardar Asad Bakhtiyari threw his full weight behind a military response and other senior khans were instrumental in re-establishing Tehran's authority. Even Sawlat al-Dawlah's ambivalence ended once he was restored to his former position in Shiraz, whereupon he was happy to act once more as a conduit for the transmission of Tehran's will to his resentful tribesmen. The consequent rise of the *kalantars* as more authentic spokesmen for the nomadic populations led to increased fragmentation and further reduced the tribes' capacity for unified action.

Only 20 years previously the Bakhtiyari khans had ensured for themselves a place in nationalist iconography by their role in deposing the shah and restoring the constitution. Although the myth of 1909 was still vividly alive among the khans, yet a comparison of the situation in 1929 with the earlier rising reveals a very different context. In 1929 the junior Bakhtiyari khans could furnish no figure of the stature of Ali Quli Khan Sardar Asad, the father of the present Sardar Asad, capable of providing intellectual leadership and of uniting the confederation for the march on Tehran. Not only did the tribal risings lack leaders of sufficient calibre and vision, but they lacked urban and intellectual allies in general. In 1909 the Bakhtiyari had acted in concert with the radicals and constitutionalists in Isfahan, Tehran and elsewhere. By 1929 Riza Shah, having begun to implement many of the demands of the nationalist intelligentsia, still largely retained the support of this group which was, in any case, temperamentally disinclined to ally itself with tribal elements, unless in the most exceptional circumstances. By this time, too, there was little or no chance of the tribal rebels mounting a successful assault on the capital. In Tehran, again in contrast to the earlier period, the control of the new state, embodied in the army and police, was complete.

Neither the tribal uprisings of 1929 nor the ulama-led urban opposition that had preceded it proved able to arrest or divert Tehran's centralizing drive. Resistance to the new order, whether urban or rural, was episodic and serial rather than sustained, expressing sectional, regional and local interests as and when these were challenged, and neither possessing nor generating any leadership capable of transcending these interests. It had, furthermore, largely exhausted itself by 1930. Yet, although this resistance had been overcome, it nonetheless had a serious impact on the regime. The traumatic events of 1929 aggravated Riza Shah's perennial inclination towards paranoia. Profoundly shaken by apparent assaults on his rule from many directions, he began to lose confidence in his supporters. The arrest of Firuz Mirza in mid-1929 began the inauguration of what was to become a reign of terror, decimating the Iranian elite and leaving the shah isolated and his regime directionless and demoralized.

## THE POLITICS OF DEBT

### The Anglo-Persian Oil Company and the Bakhtiyari khans

The loss of political independence through increasing indebtedness is a familiar phenomenon in modern Middle Eastern history. Although well known as an affliction of states and governments, indebtedness has also often wrought its debilitating effects on wider layers of society, in the case of the Bakhtiyari khans contributing substantially to their collapse as a cohesive body and their disappearance as a factor of national significance. The succumbing to indebtedness, whether by states, governments, social groups or individuals, is usually reckoned to be a consequence of mismanagement, various kinds of weakness, distorted priorities, even corruption, while those on the lending side of the equation are perceived as playing an essentially passive role, merely responding to ever-more importunate overtures from potential debtors. On the contrary, however, the case of the Bakhtiyari khans and the Anglo-Persian Oil Company reveals the extent to which a would-be lender, the company, pursued an active and deliberate policy aimed at securing the khans' financial dependence, devising and employing aggressive tactics, ethically and even legally doubtful, to this end. Company officials, in persuading the khans to take successive loans which, as they were well aware, could never be repaid, inveigled the khans into a set of incredibly complicated financial arrangements, the implications of which were frequently lost on many of the khans themselves. The latter, for their part, often engaged in behaviour that was foolish, profligate, greedy and crooked; behaviour that suited the company very well and which they encouraged and at which they connived. In the game of blackmail and threat in which both company officials and khans engaged throughout the 1920s, the company was stronger and more skilled, and finally emerged victorious.

Efforts to chart the course of relations between the APOC, its local clients in the south and the new regime in Tehran, reveal how extraordinarily little is known about the actual workings of the company within its Iranian context. By far the largest industrial enterprise in Iran, then or since, exploiting a major national resource, an employer on a massive scale, yet the day-to-day functioning of the company in the 1920s and 1930s is shrouded in secrecy.<sup>1</sup> Very little information or discussion about the company's dealings

with its local clients found its way into diplomatic correspondence, either between the consuls in the south and Tehran, or between Tehran and London, despite the deep involvement of local British officials in company activities. Unsurprisingly, therefore, myths abound regarding the character of the company's relationship with the Bakhtiari khans. For nationalist opinion, at the time and subsequently, the relationship was simply that of foreign patronage of corrupt and self-serving petty local reactionaries. The British, for their part, stuck to a sanitized version of company-Bakhtiari dealings, presenting the relationship, publicly at least, as a generous one in which the company offered the khans financial rewards which they did little to deserve, and in return for which the khans ruthlessly exploited the goodwill of a straightforward commercial operation.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, the narrative that may be reconstructed from the archives of the APOC and the Imperial Bank of Persia clearly shows that the company's relationship with the Bakhtiari khans was subject to considerable flux and far from harmonious and can only be accurately charted if placed within the specific but rapidly changing context of Iran in the early twentieth century. A study of this relationship also reveals the complexities of the interactions both between the khans and the new regime established in Tehran in 1921 and among the khans themselves. It was far from the case that the Bakhtiari confederation, or even the khans as a body, had one common set of interests and the regime another. On the contrary, the tribal pyramid was fractured by acute conflicts, of class, generation, and personal ambition, which permeated the tribal pyramid and which crucially affected the contours of the tribe-state dynamic.

Relations between the new regime established in Tehran in 1921 and the Bakhtiari khans evolved entirely against the backdrop of the khans' deep involvement with the APOC in the south. Perhaps no factor was more responsible for poisoning relations among the khans themselves, especially between the senior and junior khans, and for encouraging the hostile attentions of Riza Shah, than the close and opaque connection between the khans and the company. Although this connection had initially held out the promise to the khans of great wealth and powerful patronage, it in fact led them into chronic indebtedness and turned them into a symbol of foreign meddling and a popular target of nationalist opinion. The Iranian government had always, even in the days of its almost complete powerlessness, rejected and refused to recognize the legitimacy of the agreement between the khans and the company. In the new circumstances of the 1920s, this agreement was clearly anachronistic and offended against wide layers of nationalist opinion. By the end of the decade the khans' position had become intolerable to the new shah and their lands and oil shares an irresistible attraction. For the company itself, meanwhile, the khans had become inconvenient and irrelevant. Although the connection between the company

and the khans was so early established and so intimate, originally so necessary to the company and so lucrative for the khans, it had never been harmonious. The company found the khans to be fractious, irresponsible and unreliable, the money they demanded little more than blackmail, while the khans formed the view early on, and held to it, that the company was determined to swindle them. When the government finally acted against the khans, the company readily withdrew its protection, only too glad to be rid of its awkward local clients.

After their role in the restoration of constitutional rule in 1909 propelled the khans to national prominence, and after their agreement with the oil company, the incomes available to the Bakhtiyari elite increased dramatically. Yet although the sums of money that the khans received from the company, from guarding subsidies, land purchases and oil royalties, as well as their income from non-oil sources, as landlords and as holders of high government offices, were very considerable, nonetheless the khans found themselves in deepening financial difficulties. Their sudden wealth encouraged them to adopt unsustainably lavish ways of life, while their numbers, and thus the divisions of available resources, continued to grow. The early 1920s, however, brought an equally sudden reversal of fortune. As the decade progressed and the new state established itself, old sources of income for the khans, such as tax-farming, road-tolls and provincial governorships, dwindled and finally dried up completely. The khans were, furthermore, obliged to pay out very large amounts indeed, as interest on the loans they had been enthusiastically given by the company and the bank, to the finance ministry in settlement of tax arrears, in compensation for the Bakhtiyari attack on the army at Shalil in 1922, and as presents to the shah to secure their retention of office as *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi* and on completion of land sales to the APOC. Their income from the company, therefore, became increasingly important to them; indeed, for the junior khans this income was absolutely vital. Although royalties increased substantially, if erratically, during the 1920s, reflecting the huge profits being made by the company, the khans found themselves perpetually short of cash.<sup>3</sup> Attempting to manage their financial difficulties by taking out the larger and larger loans eagerly offered by the company and the bank, mortgaging their shares as security, the khans found themselves ever less able to meet their interest payments, and became hopelessly indebted. The scale of the khans' indebtedness, and especially the personal indebtedness of the most eminent among them, Sardar Asad, was such that although the dividends they received from their oil shares grew exponentially they remained insufficient to meet their ever-more burdensome commitments. As the 1920s turned into the 1930s the fiction that these 'loans' could ever be repaid or had ever been meant to be repaid, a fiction held to by both the company and the khans, became increasingly threadbare.

### **The company and the khans: agreements and disagreements**

A connection had grown up between the great khans of the Bakhtiyari and the APOC in the very first days of oil exploration in southern Iran. Drilling for oil had begun in 1902 near the Iraq–Iran border west of Kirmanshah, but in 1905, after this area had failed to produce oil in commercial quantities, the search moved south to the Bakhtiyari winter pastures. Since the khans were the pre-eminent and actual power in this region, so far had the authority of the central government dwindled, their agreement was necessary before drilling could take place. The khans presented themselves as legitimate political authorities and owners of the land, and the D’Arcy Concession Syndicate readily accepted them as such. British officials on the spot did nothing to contradict these assumptions, not hesitating to involve themselves on the Concession Syndicate’s behalf, and Preece, the British consul in Isfahan, undertook negotiations with the khans.<sup>4</sup> On 15 November 1905 an agreement was duly signed between the D’Arcy Syndicate and the Ilkhani-Haji Ilkhani khans. D’Arcy was given drilling rights and, in return, the agreement provided for a three per cent share interest by the khans in any company formed in Bakhtiyari territory; for the guarding of the company’s property and personnel; for the acquisition of land by the company from the Bakhtiyari; and for the reversion to the khans of all land, buildings, etc., on the expiry of the D’Arcy concession.<sup>5</sup> The khans nominated four of the most senior among themselves, two from each major branch of the family, known as the ‘signatory’ khans, to act as their official representatives in all dealings with the company, and to hold on behalf of all the khans all shares allotted to them. The Ilkhani signatories were Samsam al-Saltanah and Sardar Asad, and the Haji Ilkhani signatories, Sardar Muhtasham and Sardar Jang.

On 26 May 1908 D’Arcy discovered oil in Bakhtiyari territory. When it became clear that there were sufficient quantities to make exploitation profitable, complex financial and commercial arrangements were put in place to fulfil the terms of the company’s agreement with the khans. The APOC was formed on 14 April 1909. The previous day, the Bakhtiyari Oil Company (BOC) had been incorporated and a further company was also set up, known as the First Exploitation company (FEC), to facilitate the APOC’s dealings with the khans. These companies were established apparently with the specific and purely technical object of providing the khans with their revenues.<sup>6</sup> The FEC sold its oil below cost price to the BOC, whose sole function was to resell it to the APOC at the normal price.<sup>7</sup> In accordance with the 1905 agreement, the Ilkhani-Haji Ilkhani families were given three per cent of the shares in the BOC. The APOC received the remaining 97 per cent of the BOC shares and all of the FEC shares. In subsequent years, further share issues brought the khans’ total holding in the FEC and BOC to 37,320 shares.<sup>8</sup>

From the very beginning the Iranian government had refused to recognize in any way the company's commitments to the khans. It had, of course, its own agreement in the form of the D'Arcy Concession, signed in 1901, giving rights to oil exploration and exploitation in southern Iran to William Knox D'Arcy, in return for certain stipulated compensation, most importantly 16 per cent of the net profits from any D'Arcy company. However, the British consul had conducted negotiations with the khans, and the Syndicate signed an agreement with them, apparently without any reference whatsoever to the Iranian government, or to any rights it might have possessed under the terms of the D'Arcy Concession. The British legation made strenuous efforts to have the agreement with the khans recognized but the Iranian government remained consistent in its attitude, insisting that the khans had no right to make any agreement and that they, the government, were bound only by the terms of the D'Arcy Concession.<sup>9</sup> However, apart from formal protests, the government took, indeed were able to take, no other action.

Nonetheless, in addition to objecting in principle, the Iranian government repeatedly returned to certain practical issues raised by the terms of the company's agreement with the khans. As well as objecting to the infringements of its sovereignty implied in the agreement, it also specifically objected to certain of its clauses which undermined its own rights under the D'Arcy Concession. The government was already convinced that the company was crookedly reducing the royalties due to it under the D'Arcy Concession. They insisted that the khans did not own the oil and had no right to royalty in any form, and that the company's agreement to pay the khans three per cent was illegal, would not be recognized by the government and should not be deductible from its own 16 per cent.<sup>10</sup> The fact that the three per cent of the profits of the FEC that were being paid to the Bakhtiari khans was, until 1920, deducted from the government's own royalties was a continuing cause of great resentment. The government also refused to accept that the khans were entitled to sell land to the company, rejecting the khans' claims of ownership of the land in question. In particular, it took great exception to one of the conditions of the agreement which granted to the khans a reversionary interest in all land, and buildings erected on land, acquired from them for the period of the D'Arcy Concession, pointing out that, under Article 15 of that Concession, this right already belonged to itself.<sup>11</sup> Although lacking the power to challenge the company outright, the Iranian government attempted, with some success, to whittle away at the agreement with the khans. In 1920 it achieved its first success when the company, as part of the renegotiation of the concession undertaken by Sydney Armitage-Smith, ended the practice of deducting Bakhtiari dividends from the government's royalties.<sup>12</sup>

After the arrival of a new regime in Tehran in 1921, the Iranian government began to repudiate the company's agreement with the khans more

energetically.<sup>13</sup> Gradually, as the decade progressed and the balance between the central government and local elements, including the Bakhtiyari khans, altered to the latter's detriment, the company shifted the focus of its attentions. In tandem with the legation in Tehran, the company increasingly accepted the new regime as the real power in southern as well as national affairs. Neither the company nor the government as yet wished to confront the khans directly but the company began to make efforts to redress some of the government's outstanding grievances, in mid-decade, for example, revoking the land reversionary clause in their agreement with the khans.

### **Subsidies and land sales**

Under the terms of their agreement with the company, the khans' financial interests fell into three categories: the guarding subsidy; sales of land; and royalties on their shares. The guarding subsidy was a straightforward annual payment, ostensibly in return for specified duties. The land sales, however, were to prove a source of grave difficulty in the context of the regime's land legislation of the late 1920s, while the khans' possession of oil shares was to lead them all, but especially Sardar Asad, into ruinous debt and fatal family conflict.

According to the original agreement, the khans were to receive an annual payment of £2,000 in return for guarding the employees, plant and operations of the company, this payment being increased to £3,000 per year after oil had been found and was passing through the pipeline. These payments were, by arrangement among the khans themselves, to be made to the governors of the day, the *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi*, who were to appoint a resident Head Guard to be responsible, under them, for security arrangements in the oilfields area.<sup>14</sup> The British in the south considered these sums of money to be very large indeed for the responsibilities incurred, i.e. the cost of maintaining about 80 tribal guards, and Arnold Wilson's view, that it constituted a sort of blackmail, was typical, company officials readily able to cite plenty of evidence that the khans' followers could as easily cause disturbances as prevent them.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the khans' role as providers not just of guards but also of labour for the oilfields was a factor the company could not ignore. At this time, out of about 5,000 labourers employed by the company, about 4,500 were Bakhtiyaris. Company officials were very conscious that 'without the active goodwill' of the khans, it would not be possible for the company to obtain local labour.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, by the early 1920s it was already becoming clear that the new state intended to establish its own exclusive military control throughout the south and down to the Gulf and to take over direct responsibility for protecting the oilfields. In this context, after the suppression of the Shaykh of Muhammarah, the company's other major local client, the future of the Bakhtiyari guards began to be called into question. In any case, much of the guarding subsidy, although it was

intended as wages for the guards, had, in fact, always been retained by the khans. In 1926, in an acknowledgement of the new realities of power in southern Iran, the guarding subsidy took on even more openly the character of a bribe when the company, as a *quid pro quo* for the revocation of the reversionary clause, agreed to continue paying the khans the annual subsidy of £3,000 even in the event of the central government assuming direct responsibility for the security of the company's operations.<sup>17</sup>

If the guarding subsidy was little more than a bribe to the khans, the land sales were even more lucrative. The company purchased land from the khans in a series of major transactions. The company had first acquired land from the khans under the 1905 agreement, although the haggling that took place between Dr Morris Young, the company doctor who was mainly responsible for dealing with the Bakhtiyari, and the khans over the price of the land lasted till 1911 and further reduced goodwill on both sides. After the First World War the company decided to extend its areas of operations at Masjid-i Sulayman and therefore needed to acquire more land in the area of the Bakhtiyari pastures. In April 1919 Dr Young, ostensibly on behalf of the BOC, made an agreement with the *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi* for the acquisition of 1,180 acres of land between Masjid-i Sulayman and Tambih. With the continuing expansion of operations, further purchases followed. In 1921 the BOC and the FEC made another purchase of 1,571 acres mainly in Kalgah and Naftak. Subsequently, land purchases became almost annual. By 1928 the aggregate land purchased by the company from the khans amounted to 6,750 acres.

The income from the land sales was very important to the senior khans. In fact, by the mid- to late 1920s, these sales were the only revenue-generating activity still left to the tribal governors, for all other perquisites in the shape of revenue collection, bridge tolls, etc., had either been entirely taken out of their hands or now had to be strictly accounted for to the finance ministry.<sup>18</sup> The *ilkhani* and the *ilbaygi*, however, retained complete responsibility and control over the land sales and the very large amounts of money produced by them appear to have been retained entirely by the senior khans, with the junior khans and the tribespeople excluded completely from any benefit. This was so despite the fact that, according to the company, their agreement with the khans definitely contained provision for compensation to be given to the tribespeople, whether settled or nomadic, through the *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi*.<sup>19</sup> According to the company, the BOC and the FEC paid the khans for the land but it was then up to the khans to hand over the money to the dispossessed tribespeople or to provide them with equivalent holdings elsewhere. The senior khans' treatment of tribal pastures as if they were their own personal private property caused outrage within the confederation and contributed materially to the outbreak of a tribal rebellion in 1929. Control over the land sales and the money generated by them also led to vicious competition between the khans for appointments as tribal



governors and large 'presents' were given to the shah in order to secure and retain such appointments, and also whenever a land sale was made.<sup>20</sup> In order to try to contain dissensions among themselves, the senior khans negotiated a succession of agreements regarding the divisions of incomes deriving from the tribal governorships and the land sales, but none seem to have endured.<sup>21</sup>

### Oil shares and royalties

From its very earliest days, the relationship between the khans and the company had been bedevilled by rancorous disputes over money, rights and responsibilities. Both the guarding subsidies and the land sales had entailed wrangling and accusations of bad faith on both sides. However, by far the most serious cause of the souring of relations between the khans and the company, which was to lead to a fatal bitterness towards the khans on the part of senior company management, arose over the issue of the khans' shares in the BOC and the FEC.

Resentment had very rapidly developed among company officials over the necessity of placating the khans with a share in the actual profits of the company. By June 1921 they were complaining that the three per cent royalties to which they had agreed in 1905 had been forced on them *vi et armis*.<sup>22</sup> While the company was dissatisfied with the khans over the guarding arrangements, and irritated by their importunate demands for money, the khans, for their part, had become extremely suspicious of the company and its ally, the Imperial Bank of Persia, and were convinced that both were out to cheat them.

In keeping with the 1905 agreement, the khans' shares were registered in the names of four senior khans, half jointly in the names of two from the Ilkhani family, Samsam al-Saltanah and Sardar Asad, and half jointly in the names of two from the Haji Ilkhani family, Sardar Muhtasham and Sardar Jang. Almost as soon as the shares had been issued, the khans had begun to borrow money against them, from both British and non-British lenders. The khans' borrowing of money from non-British sources against the security of their shares, the repayment of which immediately and obviously began to cause them difficulty, was a source of enormous anxiety to the company, whose officials feared for the fate of these shares. By 1920 a large proportion of the khans' shares were already mortgaged. Of the 21,000 shares held by the khans in the BOC, 9,330 were in their possession and 11,670 were pledged to the Imperial Bank of Persia as security for loans. Of their FEC shares, the khans still possessed 780, but 15,540 shares were pledged as security for loans.<sup>23</sup>

The company and the bank were tormented by the insecurity arising from the khans' oil shares. The company's fears that the khans' shares might, as a consequence of the khans' apparently insatiable need for money,

ultimately end up in outside and possibly hostile hands, dominated its dealings with the khans. Accordingly, British officials, at the legation and in both the company and the bank appear to have decided to use the khans' financial difficulties and their constant need for cash loans as a means of exercising control over them and thereby keeping the shares under British control.

In the midst of the political uncertainties of post-Great War Iran, the endemic tussle between the company, the bank and the khans was in full swing, with negotiations continuing between the khans and various British officials including Norman, the British minister in Tehran; Captain Peel, the acting vice-consul at Ahvaz; Major Noel, special adviser on the Bakhtiari and Armitage-Smith, the financial adviser appointed under the terms of the still unratified Anglo-Persian Agreement, and the relationship between company and bank officials and the khans, never good, was deteriorating steadily. In a typical observation McMurray, Chief Manager of the Imperial Bank of Persia, noted that the khans were convinced that the company and the bank were out 'to do them down'.<sup>24</sup> They could not understand, he continued, how the bank had come to be in possession of so many of their shares, were worried about what the bank might do with these shares, and continually asked for their share certificates to be returned to them. However, what they really wanted, wrote an anxious McMurray, was 'to get the scrip into their own hands in order to be able to raise money when and where they think fit. This of course means from the Americans with whom they have been flirting for some time back'.<sup>25</sup> The possibility that an interest in the APOC might pass into American hands terrified the British, especially in the light of Riza Khan's own flirtations with US oil companies.<sup>26</sup> McMurray concluded starkly regarding the khans that, in this new and unpredictable post-war world, it was 'very important for all concerned that we should retain our hold over these people' and that the company should 'humour' the khans as far as possible.<sup>27</sup>

McMurray was quick to see an opportunity for the bank and the company to cement their control over the khans. In August 1921 he wrote that, while negotiations between the khans and British officials were dragging on, 'it would be a good thing to get the gentlemen into our hands' and he made a concerted effort to use the bank to that end.<sup>28</sup> McMurray intervened directly among the fissiparous khans in an effort to tie one faction more firmly to the British and thereby drag the vacillating remainder along behind. After discussions with Peel and Noel, and after having obtained an official sanction in writing from the British minister in Tehran, McMurray arranged to lend Sardar Asad and his brother, Sardar Zafar, 70,000 *tumans* (approximately £13,725), with oil shares as security.<sup>29</sup> McMurray was well aware that these two khans constituted one faction in the perennial Bakhtiari family quarrels, and that Samsam al-Saltanah led the other. The British officials were anxious about Samsam, who opposed the British loan and was

believed to be too close to the Americans but McMurray thought, correctly, that he would be obliged to abandon his opposition when he realized that money had been raised on a part of the shares in spite of him. By lending to one faction of the khans, against the wishes of other signatories, and without the knowledge or consent of the beneficiary khans, British officials of the bank and the company, together with consular and legation staff, violated both the letter and the spirit of the 1905 agreement, according to which the oil shares were held in trust by the four signatories on behalf of all the beneficiary khans of the Ilkhani and Haji Ilkhani families. The bank was also ready to waive conventional terms for the money, making it more of a gift than a genuine loan. According to McMurray, the bank initially made out the loan document for a period of one year but Sardar Asad and Sardar Zafar refused to sign it unless the bank was prepared to extend the term to five years. McMurray, without further ado, had another document drawn up and this was duly signed. McMurray was extremely pleased with the completion of this deal. He anticipated that in due course the company would take over the loan and themselves take possession of the share certificates held by the bank. In any case, McMurray commented, 'we are sufficiently secured and . . . we shall have had the satisfaction of knowing that we made certain of at least one fifth of the shares being secured from the danger of passing into other hands'.<sup>30</sup>

The anxieties of the bank and the company, however, were not allayed and the next year, 1922, the British made a major effort to wrest the khans away from other lenders and to increase their dependence and their indebtedness by making the company the sole source of loans. Relations between the khans and the company were still at a very low pitch with many issues remaining unresolved. The matter of the share certificates still loomed large. The bank and the company, fearing their falling into outside hands, apparently retained in their possession all the khans' share certificates, both mortgaged and unmortgaged. The khans were as deeply concerned about their share certificates as the company and had for several years been asking for them to be handed over but this request had been consistently refused, the British insisting that the khans must wait upon the outcome of apparently endless negotiations in Tehran and London. Another of the khans' major grievances was that British income tax was being deducted from their dividends. They considered this a violation of their right to a full three per cent, and they considered themselves entitled to exemption. With typical bombast and lack of subtlety, the exasperated khans engineered a crisis. They declared that they considered the benefit they derived from the agreement with the company inadequate as compared with the responsibility entailed. They maintained that the income they received from the company was not sufficient to meet their increasing needs, and announced that they thought it better to sever their connection with the company rather than to continue to incur the odium of the government and of the junior khans who were

constantly pressing them for more money. At a meeting at Malamir with Dr Young towards the end of March 1922, the khans declared that they had decided to withdraw protection and labour from the oilfields and to sever their connection with the company altogether. Nonetheless, they put forward, as a bargaining position, the following demands: relief from income tax in future, a grant of £40,000 to include the income-tax deducted in previous years, and a loan of £2 per share, in return for which they promised to agree to the company retaining custody of all their share certificates.<sup>31</sup>

The adoption of this stance was clearly recognized by all concerned as a rather clumsy tactic by the khans to improve their negotiating position and Loraine, the new British minister, admitted that their attitude was not hostile. Yet the British response, peremptory and implacable, revealed the sensitivity of the matter. Loraine, in Tehran, intervened energetically and forcefully on behalf of the company. He decided to 'speak very plainly' to the signatory khans resident in the capital, Samsam al-Saltanah and Sardar Jang. He told them that he had learnt 'with the utmost surprise' of the 'threat' made to sever their connection with the company; that he 'had no fear of such threats' and that if the course indicated at Malamir were pursued 'it would mean the end of the old friendship and connection' between the legation and themselves. Loraine 'spoke to them with absolute frankness, and without any kind of diplomatic circumlocution'. He demanded to know immediately whether the Tehran khans were themselves prepared to repudiate the 'threat' that had been made to Dr Young, and to telegraph their repudiation to the *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi*. If not, he would refuse any further discussion with them. He simultaneously fobbed them off regarding their specific fears over their oil shares, telling them the matter was being thoroughly and competently examined in London and that they must be patient in this matter.<sup>32</sup>

The khans were 'visibly startled' by Loraine's onslaught and protested loudly that no threat had been implied at Malamir. Samsam al-Saltanah instantly agreed to send a telegram to the *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi* in the sense demanded by Loraine, and this was backed up by another telegram from Loraine himself. Loraine having successfully browbeaten the khans, negotiations continued with Dr Young in the south and by May an agreement was reached.<sup>33</sup> This agreement appeared to give the khans everything for which they had asked, but it actually embodied all the company's major objectives. The agreement had three elements. First, the company granted the khans a loan of £84,000 on the security of all shares, present and future, these shares to remain in the custody of the company. This loan was given specifically to enable them to liquidate all their other debts. The agreement, further, gave the company the option of purchasing the shares in the event of the khans wishing to dispose of them to persons other than members of their own families. Second, the company agreed to meet a long-standing complaint of the khans, and arrange that they be relieved of paying, or be compensated for,

British income tax. Third, the company agreed to make a grant of £30,000 to the khans, ostensibly to make up for past income tax paid and also to meet their present needs. This grant was to be kept strictly secret.

The company duly paid off all the khans' existing debts out of this loan, including those to the bank, and the total of 27,000 or so shares that the khans had, at various times in the past, transferred to the bank's nominees as security for loans, was transferred to the company's nominees as security for the £84,000 loan. The grant of £30,000, made to the four senior signatory khans in secret, remained in the possession of these four khans, and was not distributed among the members of the Ilkhani and Haji Ilkhani families entitled to benefit from the oil incomes. By this method, a barely-disguised bribe, the British not only ensured the acquiescence of the senior khans, but also entrapped the signatories in what became a systematic deception of their kin, at which the oil company first connived and then exploited as a means of blackmail. Although the loan of £84,000 was made public and distributed among the senior and junior khans, even this was more in the way of a bribe than a real loan as, on the instructions of company headquarters in London, no definite period had been fixed for the loan, nor were any arrangements made for its redemption.<sup>34</sup>

Dr Young, the chief negotiator with the khans, shed some light on the company's readiness to offer such financial inducements. Well aware that the khans actually had no wish to terminate their connection with the company but were merely bargaining, Young revealed the real cause of British anxiety. If the present negotiations had failed, and the khans had withdrawn their shares, he wrote, 'there were at least two other parties in Tehran ready to advance them loans on favourable terms . . . the result would have been chaos as far as the shares were concerned . . . it might have reacted very unfavourably on our work'.<sup>35</sup> The signatory khans themselves were, for the time being, extremely happy with the deal they had been offered, and engaged in mutual congratulations with Loraine. When Samsam and Sardar Jang called on Loraine, the latter took the opportunity 'to point out what a substantial proof of the company's sincere friendship and goodwill was afforded by the happy issue' of the negotiations. Samsam and Sardar Jang, not surprisingly, 'expressed their utmost satisfaction'. Meanwhile, the southern khans sent Loraine a message assuring him of their loyalty towards their connection with Britain and stating that 'their attitude towards politics in general and towards the Persian Government will be regulated to suit the policy and views of this Legation'.<sup>36</sup>

### **The company, the khans and the new shah: shifting alignments**

In fact, however, the company had not succeeded in removing the spectre of outside influence over the khans' shares. Its dispute with the khans

continued, the khans procrastinating over the company's repeated requests that they comply with the terms of the 1922 deal and transfer to itself their remaining shares, and making further loans with the object of encouraging them to comply. In addition to its formal loans, the company also made very substantial payments, apparently as gifts, to the khans to enable them to survive the successive crises to which they were subjected by the increasingly confident regime in Tehran. On 23 May 1923, £30,000, provided by the company in secret, was paid on behalf of the khans directly from the Imperial Bank to the ministry of war as compensation for the Bakhtiyari attack on the army, known as the Shalil incident. In August the same year the khans again looked to the company for a loan to help them meet Dr Millspaugh's demands for arrears of taxes.<sup>37</sup>

By mid-decade, their commitments under the 1922 deal notwithstanding, the khans were still avoiding the transfer to the company of their remaining shares. Indeed, the British received an unpleasant reminder of the dangers of the situation when the khans apparently made an unsuccessful attempt to sell their shares on the London stock market. The company became increasingly desperate for the khans to transfer the 10,000-odd shares remaining in their possession to company nominees, and company officials tried two tactics. One tactic was to use the argument that their insistence on transfer was 'solely to avoid the inevitable complications of English probate and death duties' were the shares to remain in the khans' possession.<sup>38</sup> Second, the company made further loans, on rather murky conditions, to the khans, with a view to increasing pressure on them.

In 1926, when the senior khans were in London, a major financial deal was negotiated. In return for another loan of £30,000 secured on the shares, again to be kept secret, the khans again promised to effect the transfer of the remaining shares to company nominees. This money, like the £30,000 gift of 1922, was to be retained solely by the signatory khans, and not distributed, as their obligations required, among the eligible members of their families. The company was, of course, well aware of the deception contained within this agreement and colluded in it. However, this time the company had set a trap for the khans. Company officials pressed on the khans that they should try to liquidate the loans raised by them on the security of the shares, and that for this purpose all future dividends should go towards paying back the loans. Having returned to Iran, the khans continued to avoid transferring their shares and, the following year, 1 January 1928, the company diverted their dividends to loan repayment and the signatory khans found themselves without dividends with which to fulfil their obligations to their relatives. The company was clearly ready for a showdown.<sup>39</sup>

By 1928 pressure was building on the senior khans from all sides. The government's dislike of their connection to the company was obvious while the resentment of the junior khans was becoming more and more openly expressed. The mountain of debt built up by the signatory khans was

becoming impossible to service, a difficulty exaggerated and made more dangerous by the fact that the interest on the secret 1926 loan, all of which had been retained by the signatories, and its redemption, had to be paid out of the collective royalties, making this a secret impossible to keep. In any case, the signatory khans' acquiescence to the company's condition for the 1926 loan, that all future dividends should go towards general loan redemption, meant that a confrontation with the junior khans, never consulted about these decisions but badly affected by them, was inevitable.

At first the signatory khans continued to try to conceal their 1926 loan, none of which they had distributed to their families in accordance with their obligations. They stated only that the company was withholding the dividends for the current year in order to force them (the signatories) to make over the remaining 10,110 shares to company nominees.<sup>40</sup> Although the khans' explanation was less than the whole truth, it did, nonetheless, capture the essence of the matter, as company officials had repeatedly hinted that they would forgo the loan redemption aspect of the 1926 agreement if the signatories would be 'reasonable' about the share transfer.<sup>41</sup>

The junior khans, already on bad terms with their seniors over a number of issues, were becoming increasingly concerned about the four signatories' financial transactions with the company, of which they knew little definite but which they suspected were to their own detriment.<sup>42</sup> They did know that the four signatory khans had, during their visit to London in 1926, borrowed a substantial amount without consulting or even informing them.<sup>43</sup> They were, indeed, full of anxiety regarding their individual positions and were bringing as much pressure to bear on the four signatories as they were able, even threatening that if they did not receive satisfaction they would either sue them in the courts or take the matter to the shah direct.<sup>44</sup>

On 27 February 1928 a group of khans, mostly juniors such as Sardar Zafar, Amir Mujahid, Sardar Iqbal and Sardar Fatih, but including the senior Shihab al-Saltanah, addressed a letter to the company.<sup>45</sup> In this letter they observed that two months had passed since royalties were due, but they had received nothing, the senior khans attributing the delay to the company. They were, therefore, enquiring directly from the company the cause of the delay and were also expressing to the company their dissatisfaction with their four representatives. The junior khans then took the opportunity of reiterating clearly that according to the agreement with the company and the terms of the previous (1922) loan, all the shares, those already standing in the names of company nominees, numbering 27,000 or so, and those still belonging to the khans, numbering 10,000 or so, should be held in trust by the company, and any transaction made or loan contracted by the four representatives in regard to these shares or dividends thereon should be with their (the junior khans) knowledge. Otherwise they declared that any transaction effected would be invalid.<sup>46</sup>

Company officials had now reached a turning point in their attitude towards the khans. They were thoroughly exasperated with the signatories, and especially with Sardar Asad, over their recalcitrance regarding the transfer of the shares, and were increasingly inclined to see them as troublesome and useless in themselves, and as an unnecessary complication in their relationship with the Iranian government. Dr Morris Young, the company's Bakhtiyari expert, typically expressed this evolving attitude among company officials when he commented, on hearing that the row between the senior and junior khans might be brought to the notice of the shah, that 'I have been wondering whether it would not be wise, at least once in a way, to let these four signatories get it in the neck from the Persian Government'.<sup>47</sup> Company officials were now sure that the government intended definite action against the khans and the shift that had taken place in company orientation was clear. On 17 March Jacks, the APOC's Resident Director in Tehran, wrote to Young that such action

will not long be delayed. In my opinion, we have little or nothing to gain in bolstering up the Khans either in the matter of their shares or their land, in fact we should only be risking the goodwill of the Persian Government by doing so. In a country like Persia we can only move with the times and what was force majeure with the Khans yesterday is equally so with the central government today.<sup>48</sup>

The four signatories, under intense pressure from the junior khans, began to fight back. Largely prompted by Sardar Asad, they denied that the pledged 27,210 shares had ever been transferred with their knowledge and approval to the nominees of the company and they further emphatically refused to consider transferring the remaining 10,110 shares to the company's nominees.<sup>49</sup> A personal meeting then took place between Sardar Asad and Jacks at which first recriminations and then threats were exchanged and at which Jacks effectively issued an ultimatum to the khans.

The meeting began with Sardar Asad describing 'the extremely awkward position' in which the four signatory khans found themselves vis-à-vis other members of their families and asked for his help, invoking the past relationship between the company and the khans.<sup>50</sup> Jacks, however, bluntly repeated the company's position, that the 27,210 shares had originally been transferred to the bank's nominees as security for loans incurred and that the shares had passed to the company's nominees as security for the £84,000 loan granted in 1922. Jacks again insisted that the company did not seek a similar transfer in respect of the remaining 10,110 shares as an additional security for existing loans, but solely in order to protect the khans from the necessity of paying British probate and death duties following the demise of any one of the signatories. Jacks also reminded Sardar Asad of the promise made by the khans when in London that they would carry out the



transfer. Jacks then made the offer that, subject to the khans' agreement to transfer the shares as suggested, the company might be willing to pay this year's dividends in full. Sardar Asad rejected this proposal out of hand and simply reiterated his demand that the company pay the dividends in full, leaving the matter of the transfer pending further consideration. Jacks replied that he was unable to treat this suggestion 'other than as a joke' and, in a veiled threat, reminded Sardar Asad that although the company acknowledged responsibility in connection with Bakhtiyari affairs only to the four signatories, it nevertheless regarded these four signatories as trustees of the Ilkhani and Haji Ilkhani families. Jacks, again with breath-taking disingenuousness, informed Sardar Asad that it must be definitely understood that the company 'would not be a party to the deceit which the four signatories were obviously practising on their families'.<sup>51</sup>

This encounter ended without result but the wrangling continued at a further bad-tempered meeting between the signatories and company officials. This time Jacks produced a copy of the original agreement transferring the shares to the bank's nominees, signed by the four signatories, but Sardar Jang responded that this transfer had not been intended to be permanent, himself producing a letter from the bank promising to transfer the shares back to the khans when their debts were liquidated. This was, in fact, an argument that the khans had used repeatedly and Jacks, in a cynical expression of his understanding as to the true nature of the khans' ensnarement and their inability ever to succeed in freeing themselves, expressed the company's willingness to give another letter containing the same promise. Jacks then openly let slip the real reason for the company's obsession with share transfer. When Sardar Asad said that the khans had repeatedly asked for the return of their shares, Jacks replied that the company had acted in the khans' own best interests, saying that had the shares been handed over to them, the khans would have traded them to some third party. Sardar Asad continued with futile suggestions for circumventing the problem, allowing him to deny the 1926 loan to the beneficiaries without capitulating to the company's demands, all of which Jacks rejected out of hand.<sup>52</sup>

At this point, Sardar Asad and the other signatories tried another tack and attempted to argue that in fact the shares were their own private property. As a result of the rapid changes of these years, the senior khans' own attitudes had been undergoing a transformation. Like other members of the elite, they found the new concepts of absolute private property very appealing and, by the late 1920s, the senior khans were increasingly attempting to assert their personal ownership over resources hitherto held collectively, especially land and oil shares. The senior khans had disposed of land to the company as if it had been incontrovertibly their private property. Their oil shares, however, were, according to their original agreement with the company, held in trust on behalf of all the members of the Ilkhani and Haji Ilkhani families, and the junior khans had documents in their

possession as clear proof. Although this arrangement, of course, excluded most of the confederation from any share in the revenues derived from oil, there could be no doubt that it definitely guaranteed benefit to the junior khans. However, in 1928 the signatories attempted to assert individual and private ownership over these shares as well. In the midst of an argument with Jacks over dividends and loans, Sardar Asad asserted that the shares were, in fact, the property of the four signatory khans and that whatever sums had previously been paid to other members of the families were purely favours directed to retain their interests in the company. When Jacks confronted him with evidence that the shares were, indeed, held in trust, Sardar Asad retreated from his assertion, and admitted that he and the other Ilkhani signatory, Samsam al-Saltanah, were the representatives of their relatives, but he insisted that the Haji Ilkhani signatories, Sardar Jang and Sardar Muhtasham, held the view that their 50 per cent of the total shares were their own private property and that their brothers and nephews had no right to them.<sup>53</sup> The company, however, steadfastly rejected this novel interpretation of the status of the shares.

Jacks had come to the conclusion that the company should force the issue of the share transfer by threatening the signatories that it would abandon the elaborate deception in which it had been colluding. He wrote to Dr Young that the present state of affairs was

doing us no good in the eyes of the Khans as a whole and in my view by allowing ourselves to be a party to their deceit, on the ground that we are only able to recognize the Signatories, is to say the least of it to be moving on very thin ice. Sooner or later the position will become known to all, and if the Shah is brought into it . . . then we shall at least be criticized for what can only be regarded as support to the four signatories in the dirty game they are playing on their brothers.<sup>54</sup>

Jacks outlined to Young his scheme which, in fact, amounted to little more than blackmail. He wrote that he intended to tell Sardar Zafar and the other junior khans that the dividends had been paid strictly in accordance with the signatories' wishes, that company requests for the transfer of the 10,000 or so shares was merely to safeguard the interests of the khans against British death duties, and that the transfer meant nothing to the company as they already had sufficient security. In his concluding comment to Young, however, he declared he 'would wish to postpone the disclosure of the signatories' actions if they evinced the slightest desire to be reasonable'.<sup>55</sup>

As 1928 progressed, the beneficiary khans remained without their dividends. Eventually one of the junior khans carried out the threat made earlier and took the desperate and dangerous step of inviting the shah to take an interest in this matter. Sardar Zafar approached the shah with a complaint

that dividends accruing to the khans had been withheld by the company and the shah instructed Taymurtash, his minister of court, to look into the situation.<sup>56</sup> This development exactly coincided with the opening of general negotiations between the Iranian government and company headquarters in London about new concessionary terms and Taymurtash took the opportunity to ask officials in Abadan for exact information about the khans' relationship with the company, their assets, debts and entitlements.<sup>57</sup>

Although Jacks, in a letter to headquarters in London, admitted that company transactions with the four signatory khans should 'normally' be kept strictly confidential, he nonetheless 'felt that circumstances necessitated' his replying to Taymurtash's questions.<sup>58</sup> In his determination to force his will on the signatories, he did not hesitate to present them in as bad a light as possible. Jacks told Taymurtash that the signatories had received the 1926 loan without making any payment to their families, whose security they had pledged, and they had also agreed, in order to obtain the money, to devote their families' dividends towards its amortization. Taymurtash, on being thus informed, replied that it was his opinion that the khans had no right to these shares and that it was obvious that they should not remain in their hands. Notwithstanding his close political and personal association with Sardar Asad, he went on to say that in two or three years' time they would not have them. He also commented that it seemed impossible to settle the khans' differences by friendly mediation and that either they would have to be taken to court or the shah would have to order that those who had received the money must pay the rest their shares.<sup>59</sup>

The position of Sardar Asad and the other signatories had become hopeless. By mid-August 1928 they found themselves without any option but to agree to the transfer of the shares to the company's nominees. Having achieved its long-desired objective, the company instantly abandoned the policy of loan redemption it had formerly insisted upon, paid out all the royalties due and reverted to its former policy of sheltering the signatories from, and stonewalling, their families. This apparent return to the *status quo ante*, however, was both illusory and short-lived.

Company officials had been encouraged in their determination to face down the khans by their increasing awareness that the central government was itself closing in on the Bakhtiyari. Following the stabilization of the new dynasty in 1926-7, the regime entered on a radical phase, introducing a raft of legal, economic and social reforms. The Bakhtiyari found themselves under attack from three directions. First, both the khans and the nomads were profoundly affected by the regime's determination to suppress any potential political threat from the tribal leaderships and to disarm and settle the nomads. Second, although the 1928 legislation for the registration of title deeds to landed property and real estate was initially welcomed by the senior khans as an opportunity, it turned out, rather, to be a danger, launching an upheaval in patterns of land ownership, involving especially the contesting

of customary rights in favour of outright legal ownership, and inaugurating a massive land-grab led by the shah himself. Finally, in the same year Taymurtash, the minister of court, opened negotiations with the APOC regarding terms for a new concession that would represent Iranian interests more fairly, but within which it was clear there would be no special place for the Bakhtiyari khans.

Just as the Bakhtiyari oil shares had attracted the notice of the government in the context of the opening of negotiations for new concessionary terms, so the khans' land sales to the company could not fail to claim the attention of the new shah. The Iranian government had always disputed the khans' rights of ownership over the lands which they had sold, almost annually, to the company. In 1926 the company bowed to pressure from the Iranian government and revoked the clause in its agreement with the Bakhtiyari according to which all land acquired from the khans would eventually, after the expiry of the Concession, revert to the khans. The government, under Article 15 of the D'Arcy Concession, claimed this right as already pertaining to itself, and resented the implication that the khans owned the land in question outright.

The reversionary clause could be considered as a largely theoretical matter, or at least one relevant only to the far distant future. The sales of land themselves, however, were a more serious and immediate matter. Although the khans sold the land and the company purchased it, the exact ownership of the land in question was by no means clear and the government had consistently objected to the implication that the khans actually owned the land, in the Bakhtiyari winter pastures, which they were in the process of selling to the company. These disputes came to a head as a consequence of the government's efforts to clarify property rights through legislation, especially the law for the registration of property and title deeds of 1928. The khans' assertion of their proprietary rights over lands where actual ownership was vague or contested particularly provoked the shah, whose own mania for land acquisition, sparked off by the 1928 legislation, was just beginning to get into its stride.<sup>60</sup> In March 1928 Taymurtash, at the shah's request, initiated a discussion with company officials on this issue. He informed Jacks bluntly that the Bakhtiyari Land Agreement had to be scrapped because the land was the property of the Iranian government, to whom, in fact, all pasture land belonged. He informed Jacks that company requirements of land in Bakhtiyari must henceforward be negotiated only with the government.<sup>61</sup> The company raised no objection, indeed was quite happy to unburden itself of the necessity of haggling with the khans over at least this matter. On 14 June 1930, the governor-general of Khuzistan (Arabistan) wrote to the company stating that in accordance with the government's decision, all the company's negotiations for the acquisition of land were in the future to be conducted direct with the Iranian government and not with the *ilkhani* or *ilbaygi* or other tribal chiefs. From then on, the company conducted all its land purchases only through the government.

In the context of its general redefinition and reassertion of its rights and authority, and especially after Sardar Zafar's request to the shah to intervene in the Bakhtiyari family quarrels over their oil dividends, the government's interest in the precise nature of the Bakhtiyari connection with the company continued to grow. At the beginning of 1929 Issa Khan, on behalf of Firuz Mirza, the minister of finance, asked directly how many shares the khans held in the company, what dividends they had been paid annually, for what amount the shares were mortgaged and from what date, what interest they paid the company, and when it was likely that the shares could be released. Issa Khan also asked what other monies the khans were paid for guarding, etc. The company replied in full, although this information should have been confidential, listing the number of shares, annual dividends since 1913, guarding subsidies and debts.<sup>62</sup>

Although the company was once again backing the senior khans, Sardar Asad's position and that of the other signatories now began to disintegrate. It had been agreed that interest on the 1926 loan was to be deducted from their individual shares of the dividends; however, Sardar Asad's financial difficulties were only just beginning. By now, his accumulated debts, especially gambling debts, were immense. Although the company paid over the royalties for 1928, after all the necessary deductions for interest on loans and amortization had been made, Sardar Asad found himself with insufficient funds to meet his obligations to the members of his family. The next year the situation was even worse. Receiving on time at the beginning of January 1929 his very substantial dividends, over £30,000 were due in total as Bakhtiyari royalties, Sardar Asad again, after deductions for interest on his massive debts, found himself with very little money and nowhere near enough to pay his relatives. After a panicky interview with Jacks in Tehran, a further small loan from the Imperial Bank of Persia of 5,000 *tumans* (about £862) was arranged for him.<sup>63</sup> In June 1930 Sardar Asad charged his dividends for 1931 and 1932 to the bank and in October the signatory khans applied for another loan, of £24,000, from the company, Sardar Asad indicating that the loan should be regarded as strictly confidential between the company and the signatory khans.<sup>64</sup>

Taymurtash, the minister of court and the most powerful individual in the country after the shah himself, was instrumental in securing this new loan. The company enquired of Taymurtash whether the loan had the full approval of the government. Taymurtash indicated that he was anxious that the loan should go through and stated that he concurred with Sardar Asad that the other beneficiaries should not be informed.<sup>65</sup> The company, now once more keen to prop up the signatories and help them keep their affairs out of the courts, felt that its position appeared to be safeguarded from the possibility of criticism from other beneficiaries by a personal request from the minister of court. The loan was agreed, redemption by the signatories

was to be from their individual share of the annual dividends, and the loan's existence was firmly denied to his relatives by Sardar Asad.<sup>66</sup>

In 1931 Sardar Asad's financial difficulties suddenly became acute. In that year there was a significant fall in royalties owed the khans due to the fall in company profits resulting from the world depression and declining world oil prices and sales. At the beginning of 1932, after deductions, a little over £1,000 was all that was left to Sardar Asad as his share of dividends and his own personal financial position was desperate. The junior khans were also again making trouble. Although dividends for 1931 had been large, over £36,000, the junior khans had been bitterly disappointed at the amounts they had actually received as their share and now, once more, as they had many times in the past, they demanded a statement of account from the company showing the amounts actually paid to the signatory khans. The company, however, still trying to sustain the signatories, again refused to provide such a statement and merely referred the junior khans to their elders.<sup>67</sup>

Sardar Asad again resorted to approaching Jacks for a company loan of 50,000 *riyals* (about £555), and it was agreed that, subject to the Imperial Bank being prepared to make the advance, the company would guarantee the bank to the extent of 50,000 *riyals*. Subsequently, however, Sardar Asad found that this sum was less than half the amount he required to keep his affairs out of the courts, whereupon he again approached Jacks to guarantee the bank to the extent of 120,000 *riyals* (about £1,333). This time the company refused, viewing Sardar Asad's financial position as hopeless and believing that it would never get its money back.<sup>68</sup>

The beneficiary khans renewed their threats to take their case to the courts and Sardar Asad, in mortal fear that they would carry out their threat, again turned to Taymurtash for help.<sup>69</sup> Taymurtash then went personally to company officials to press on them an ingenious scheme.<sup>70</sup> Employing arguments likely to sway company officials, he first raised the general question of the position of the signatory khans and Sardar Asad in particular. He said that their trouble arose out of their endeavour to submit to their respective families accounts that would not disclose either the 1926 loan of £30,000, which they had been struggling for years to conceal, or the 1932 loan of £24,000. Taymurtash stressed that the beneficiary khans were, again, becoming extremely suspicious and pointed out that it would be in the best interests both of the signatory khans and of the company to prevent the beneficiaries from having recourse to the courts. Taymurtash then expressed the opinion that the only solution was for the signatory khans to raise a fresh loan of £60,000, repay the £10,000 outstanding on the 1926 loan, and the £19,200 outstanding on the 1932 loan and pay to the beneficiary khans the balance. The new loan would be subject to interest of 5 per cent and amortization at the rate of £5,000 per annum. The signatory khans would

be required to produce a document signed by the beneficiaries that the £30,800 now to be paid to them would be in full and final settlement of their share in the original loans now to be redeemed. Jacks in Tehran strongly recommended to London the acceptance of Taymurtash's scheme, fearing both the revelations in a court of their dealings and the potential loss of control of the shares by the collapse of the position of the now docile and supplicant signatories. He pointed out that while the company might be able to justify its attitude in making the loans in an Iranian court, in doing so it would not avoid considerable criticism in that it had made no attempt to ensure that the interests of the known individual beneficiaries were duly protected. In any case, the company would certainly no longer be able to restrict beneficiary interests to the four signatory khans and the courts might even decree that the shares should be divided among the actual beneficiaries. Jacks, pointing out that the company now hoped at some point in the future to buy the khans' shares, stressed 'it would seem in the company's interests that nothing should occur to upset the existing control as vested' in the four signatory khans and hoped that London would welcome the opportunity 'to adjust the existing position which has long been most distasteful alike to you and ourselves'.<sup>71</sup> Neither Taymurtash nor the company expressed any view as to how the signatories, and Sardar Asad in particular, were to find the money to repay this new loan, or even manage the interest, and the company had already refused Sardar Asad's earlier request for a loan on the grounds that his financial position was 'hopeless', nonetheless the scheme was duly put into effect. In 1933 a new loan of £60,000 was raised, consolidating the two older and secret loans and the royalties due to the beneficiaries were distributed.

### **The company abandons the khans**

By 1933, the skies were darkening over the khans. As Taymurtash had predicted, it was now doubtful that they would continue to possess their oil shares at all. Negotiations over a new oil concession, going on since 1928, had culminated in a serious international crisis when the Iranian government cancelled the D'Arcy Concession in late 1932. When a new concession was successfully negotiated and signed in April 1933, there was no place for the Bakhtiari khans. The new concession made no mention at all of the BOC or the FEC. Edward Wilkinson, Chief Manager of the Imperial Bank, pointed this out to Hasan Taqizadah, the new minister of finance, rather limply commenting 'that it might have been mentioned as a matter of form'.<sup>72</sup>

Meanwhile, Taymurtash had himself fallen from power and, in another ominous development, Sardar Asad had been implicated, albeit innocently, in the financial malpractices that had formed the bases for the charges on which Taymurtash had been arrested, tried and convicted.<sup>73</sup> Taymurtash was

arrested in January 1933. He was then brought to court to face two charges, one in connection with the £24,000 loaned to the Bakhtiyari khans by the company, from which he was accused of having benefited at the expense of the National Bank, and the other in connection with a separate case of bribery.<sup>74</sup>

The first charge provided an explanation for Taymurtash's assiduousness in seeking a loan for Sardar Asad as it appeared that Taymurtash himself benefited financially by manipulating the exchange rate governing the loan.<sup>75</sup> When the loan was obtained by the khans, as a result of Taymurtash's direct and personal intervention and under his auspices, the official rate stood at 60 *qirans* to the pound sterling, but Sardar Asad, *in extremis*, apparently begged Taymurtash to allow him to make the conversion in the bazaar where he could obtain anything between 90 and 100 *qirans*. Taymurtash declared himself unwilling to sanction this illegal action, but said that he would talk the matter over with Lindenblatt, the German Director of the National Bank.<sup>76</sup> Taymurtash's conversation with Lindenblatt resulted in an arrangement being made by which the National Bank advanced the equivalent of the £24,000 at 60 *qirans* per pound but continued to hold the pounds as security against the overdraft. Four months later, when the official rate rose to 90 *qirans*, the sale of the £24,000 was effected and the difference of 30 *qirans* per pound, a total of 72,000 *tumans* (720,000 *qirans*, £8,000 at existing official exchange rates), was credited to Taymurtash's account with the National Bank. While under investigation Taymurtash's account was examined and it showed that, among the withdrawals, only one cheque for 18,000 *tumans* (£2,000) had been drawn in favour of Sardar Asad, 54,000 *tumans* (£6,000) remaining in Taymurtash's possession. When questioned, he stated that he had outstanding accounts with some of the Bakhtiyari khans, who had borrowed money from him or had lost to him while gambling. The court rejected this explanation and found him guilty of benefiting at the expense of the National Bank, and on this charge he was sentenced to a fine of 600,000 *riyals* (about £5,825)<sup>77</sup> and three years' solitary confinement. On the second and unrelated charge, of accepting a bribe, he was sentenced to two years' simple imprisonment, both sentences to be served concurrently.<sup>78</sup>

The evidence produced during Taymurtash's trial shed a harsh light on the relations existing between key figures of the shah's coterie. Nonetheless, the personal connection between Sardar Asad and Taymurtash had been close and of some duration and Sardar Asad took the risk of attempting to intervene with the shah on his colleague's behalf. This was, of course, to no avail and Sardar Asad himself seems to have had some inkling that the minister of court's downfall had sealed his own fate. At the end of 1933 Sardar Asad himself, war minister since 1927, suddenly fell from power and, together with a number of other Bakhtiyari khans, was arrested and



imprisoned. In March 1934 Sardar Asad died in prison, rumours of his murder being confirmed after the shah's abdication in 1941.<sup>79</sup> The majority of those arrested were junior khans, involved in the 1929 uprising, and their imprisonment dealt a devastating blow to the younger generation of the Bakhtiyari elite. The APOC was far from shedding any tears at the news of Sardar Asad's arrest. On the contrary, in a sign of the depth of the company's hostility to its former protégés, Sir John Cadman, the APOC's chairman, employed 'much personal persuasion' to have a *Times* leader appear on the subject of the Bakhtiyari arrests. The leader faithfully repeated the official version of the reason for the arrests, that they marked an important stage in 'what may best be described as the struggle between . . . [the shah] and Persian feudalism'. The leader went on to say that the methods of the shah, although severe, were justified by results, called attention to the reforms he had introduced to the benefit of his country, and declared that a strong and independent Persia (*sic*) was in the British interest.<sup>80</sup>

Sardar Asad was the only one of the signatory khans to be arrested, Sardar Jang, Sardar Muhtasham, and Murtaza Quli Khan, a junior khan who had succeeded his father, Samsam al-Saltanah, as signatory on the latter's death in 1930, remaining free. In fact, Murtaza Quli Khan had been widely suspected of being implicated in intriguing to bring about Sardar Asad's downfall. Suspicion of his involvement increased when, in early 1934, the posts of *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi* were abolished and in their place Murtaza Quli Khan was officially appointed as governor of Bakhtiyari. The Bakhtiyari Head Guard and his men were withdrawn from the oilfields area of Masjid-i Sulayman during the summer of 1934 and after their withdrawal Murtaza Quli Khan's son, Jahanshah Khan, was made responsible for the protection of the oilfields area and a detachment of the *amniyyah* under an officer was supplied to him for that purpose. The guarding subsidy was continued under the terms of the original agreement with the khans but a dispute promptly arose as to which of the khans was entitled to share in it: in the past it had always been paid to the *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi* but the remaining khans were unwilling to accept that it should now go exclusively to Murtaza Quli Khan.<sup>81</sup> The problem continued to fester until it disappeared when the government took over the guarding subsidy as part of their arrangements for the acquisition of all Bakhtiyari rights in the company's areas. From then on guarding arrangements were the sole responsibility of the *amniyyah* and the police.

Although they were completely destroyed as a political factor, the Iranian government was not yet finished with the Bakhtiyari khans who, whether junior or senior, in prison or at liberty, continued to represent an irresistible material target and opportunity. In February 1936 the ministry of finance again turned its attention to them, and began to bring pressure to bear regarding the payment of income tax for the past five years on their FEC interests, and tried to induce the company to deduct the sums owing to the

government from payments due to the khans. Eventually, a writ of attachment was served on the company and in June 1936 the signatory khans were duly notified by the company of this writ and requested to arrange matters with the authorities direct. In July 1936 an official notice was served on the company directing that the distribution of FEC payments and the guarding subsidy should be held up, as the government was engaged in negotiations with the khans. In fact, it subsequently transpired that these negotiations concerned the acquisition of all Bakhtiyari rights.<sup>82</sup>

The company itself had been hoping to purchase all of the khans' shares and rights and had so informed the Iranian government, but before these proposals could materialize the government proceeded to acquire these rights for itself. Representatives of the ministry of finance carried out negotiations regarding the shares piecemeal with the individual Bakhtiyari beneficiaries and completed individual transactions with each.<sup>83</sup> Thereupon the government extracted from the remaining signatory khans a formal declaration that they had transferred to the government their 37,320 shares in the FEC, together with all dividends due on them as from 1 January 1936; their rights to the annual payment of £3,000 in lieu of the guarding subsidy; all other rights derived from the company under the 1905 and subsequent agreements; and a statement that the khans had no further claim or right whatsoever against the company. In addition, the khans renounced any rights of ownership that they had claimed over land ceded to the company by them or their predecessors. The declaration also mentioned that

as all others benefiting from the dividends of the aforementioned shares and from the annual payment of £3,000 have transferred their right to the Imperial Government in accordance with separate official title deeds no person remains having any right to the share dividends, or to the payments in lieu of Guarding Subsidy.

Furthermore, the separate agreements concluded between the government and the individual Bakhtiyari beneficiaries in respect of the shares had clauses stipulating that 'all possible options, even though founded on one of the parties having been cheated, are hereby waived by both parties, and the legal formalities have been duly observed' or similar passages to that effect.<sup>84</sup>

The company, for its part, raised no objection on behalf of the khans, but waived its option on the shares in favour of the government, receiving from the government an option to purchase the shares should the government wish to dispose of them. The outstanding loans due for repayment to the company by the khans were repaid to the company by the government. The government formally notified the company that all Bakhtiyari rights had been transferred to itself and that the khans had, therefore, no further rights or privileges whatsoever in respect to the company's operations.

## Conclusion

After the abdication of Riza Shah in 1941 and their release from prison, the Bakhtiyari khans began efforts to obtain compensation and restoration of their property through the courts. They had received nothing in return for the confiscation of their oil shares or the land to which they had claimed title. The shah's treatment of them had, in fact, amounted to expropriation with a legal veneer, a strategy that the shah had frequently adapted in the 1930s to acquire land. The khan's efforts were part of a much wider determination on the part of victims of the former shah and their relatives to seek legal redress and restoration of their property. Nonetheless, although the veneer of legality had been very thin indeed, and was being comprehensively questioned, many of the khans being actually in prison at the time pressure had been brought to bear on them, nevertheless the company, in the period after 1941, stood by its decisions and steadfastly refused to countenance any claims from the khans.

In late 1941 to early 1942 the khans began action through the Iranian courts against the company. Their claims were on account of dividends on 37,320 shares, with interest; the guarding subsidy (£3,000 per annum); and damages for non-payment of these monies since 1 January 1936.<sup>85</sup> The company insisted that the declaration signed by the khans made their legal action against the company impossible to win, and that even if they could demonstrate that the statements were obtained under duress, their case was only against the government and not the company. In the spring of 1942, the khans submitted five identical statements, signed by a total of 25 khans, to the company, asserting that the transfer to the finance ministry of their shares and guarding subsidies had been 'effected by way of duress' and had no legal effect, and that the shares and subsidies continued to belong to them and should be paid to them by the company. The company's response was made in four words: 'Your statements are denied'.<sup>86</sup> Confidentially, the company 'hoped the subject matter [had] been definitely relegated to the limbo of the past, and [that it would] continue to remain there'.<sup>87</sup>

The APOC's abandonment and betrayal of the Bakhtiyari khans highlights the profound transformation that took place in British attitudes towards Iran during the 1920s. Within this transformation, the company proved itself to be monumentally pragmatic, and even less sentimental than the legation, members of the legation staff expressing qualms at the arrests of 1933 which were quite alien to Sir John Cadman, who not only welcomed the downfall of the khans privately, but provided public cover for the regime's actions in the British press.

The company was able first to tame and finally to rid itself altogether of the khans because, in this, it was working with the grain of Iran's historical development. A determination to destroy any vestiges of tribal power was central to Riza Shah's state-building effort. The reality of the decline

of the Bakhtiyari khans, however, was to some extent obscured, especially to the khans themselves, by the prominence of Sardar Asad as minister of war, his connection to the apparently invincible Taymurtash, and his position at court as a favourite of the shah. Their increasing vulnerability was also complicated by changes taking place among the khans themselves. Their absorption into the class of absentee landowners, accompanied as it inevitably was by the steady erosion of their links to their tribespeople, encouraged the khans to see themselves as an integral part of the urban elite on which the new state based itself. Far from considering themselves eternal enemies of the new order or of modernization, many of the khans opted for a strategy of accommodation, or even support. Their general willingness to place their confidence in the regime is clearly shown by the readiness of the junior khans to invoke the authority of the shah in their struggle with their seniors. In any case, never a coherent body, the Bakhtiyari khans found the rapid changes of the 1920s magnified and accelerated their internal divisions. In particular, the senior khans' growing attachment to the concept of private property, especially in land and subsequently in oil shares as well, caused havoc within the confederation and contributed further to the alienation and bitterness of the junior khans and the tribespeople.

After 1941, although Riza Shah himself had gone, the state that he had created remained fundamentally intact. Although there was an appearance of a reversion to the former era, with the return of tribal khans to their regions and an attempt by them to reassert their power on the old bases of kin loyalty and political autonomy, this was to prove superficial and short-lived. In the new circumstances of the 1940s, the southern tribal aristocracies were, with only brief exceptions, to pursue their interests through the mechanisms and institutions of the modern state, and the tribespeople, as industrial workers in the oilfields, through new class-based organizations such as the Union of Iranian Workers and the Central Council of Federated Trade Unions.<sup>88</sup>

## THE POLITICS OF TERROR

### The fall of Jafar Quli Khan Sardar Asad Bakhtiyari and the 'Bakhtiyari plot'

Jafar Quli Khan Sardar Asad Bakhtiyari was a key supporter of Riza Khan/Shah and a loyal official in the new post-1921 regime for more than a decade, his occupation of a succession of high government appointments culminating in the post of minister of war between 1927 and 1933. Having attached himself decisively to Riza Khan in the early 1920s, thereby ensuring his own personal ascendancy over the other great khans of the Bakhtiyari, Sardar Asad became a staunch defender of the new order and was instrumental in ensuring the political quiescence of the Bakhtiyari and in extending state power throughout south-central Iran. Yet at the end of 1933, he was arrested, along with a large number of other Bakhtiyari khans, and implicated in a plot against the shah. He was secretly murdered in prison the following March. In the circumstances of Sardar Asad's disgrace and murder may be discerned certain of the preoccupations, even obsessions, gripping the shah as his new regime entered its second decade: his determination to destroy the remaining tribal leaderships and enforce nomadic settlement; his anxiety for his own safety and the security of the new dynasty; his growing suspicions of his own key supporters and his increasing resort to the methods of political terror with the resulting general demoralization of the wider nationalist elite; his burgeoning mania for land acquisition, sparked off by the land legislation of 1928; his frustration at his failure to establish fuller control over Iran's oil resources; and his succumbing to a pervasive fear of foreign, especially British, interference coupled with a morbid anxiety about the image Iran presented to the West.

#### **Sardar Asad Bakhtiyari**

Jafar Quli Khan Bakhtiyari was born in 1879. He was the grandson of Husayn Quli Khan Ilkhani, who had first unified the Bakhtiyari confederation in the mid-nineteenth century, and the eldest son of the renowned Ali Quli Khan Sardar Asad, who had led the Bakhtiyari in their participation in the restoration of the constitution in 1909. Jafar Quli Khan had accompanied his father to Tehran in 1909 and had subsequently acquired a

distinguished military reputation in the constitutional wars, fighting against the forces of the ex-shah Muhammad Ali when the latter attempted to regain his throne.<sup>1</sup> It was apparently around this time that he began the relationship that was to be of such future significance, forming a military comradeship with Riza Khan who served under his command in operations against the tribal forces of Rahim Khan Chalabianlu, a partisan of the ex-shah, in the Ardabil region.<sup>2</sup> On his father's death Jafar Quli Khan assumed the title of Sardar Asad and his place as one of the senior great khans of the Bakhtiari.

Although by birth guaranteed a prominent position within the confederation, Sardar Asad nonetheless found himself, in the years immediately after the 1921 coup, only one among equals within the large and fractious collective Bakhtiari leadership that had emerged since the late nineteenth century. The great khans (*khavanin-i buzurg*) of the Bakhtiari, drawn from both the major families of the Ilkhani and the Haji Ilkhani, were riven by rivalries and tensions and by increasingly desperate and bitter struggles for power and for control of resources. These struggles, waged by individuals and by factions, sometimes still reflected, but also increasingly cut across, immediate blood ties. In these circumstances it was inevitable that those engaged in such struggles should seek to achieve and exploit good relations with external sources of power.

Links with powerful non-Bakhtiari political forces, local and national, had always been vital to the success of both the confederation, as a unified entity, and to the ambitions of individual candidates for tribal leadership. Individuals and factions aiming at increasing their power within the confederation naturally attempted to foster and secure such links and those most adept at forging these links were likely to achieve the greatest success as tribal leaders. In the mid-nineteenth century Husayn Quli Khan had benefited, in his bid for leadership of the Bakhtiari, from assistance from the governor of Isfahan and from the sanction of the Tehran government.<sup>3</sup> During the early years of the twentieth century a close relationship with the British had ensured the political and financial ascendancy and security of the great khans. However, in the immediate post-coup period, the great khans were uncertain regarding the stability of the new situation inaugurated by Riza Khan's seizure of power, and as to the nature of the new regime and the attitude towards it of their patron, Britain. At this very early moment, 1921–2, the majority of the khans still hesitated over the options of accommodating themselves to, or opposing, the new regime.

Although the khans, like other members of the traditional elite, were initially in a state of confusion as to how to manage their political relations with the new regime, and as to their place in the new order, the regime itself had a clearer vision of the future. The destruction of the autonomy of the southern tribal aristocracies: the great khans of the Bakhtiari, the families of Sawlat al-Dawlah Qashqai, Qavam al-Mulk of the Khamsah, and Shaykh

Khazal of Muhammarah, and the severing of their independent connection with Britain and their concomitant ability to invoke foreign support, was at the core of the nationalist agenda.

Riza Khan's first priority in bringing southern Iran under central control was the suppression of the Shaykh of Muhammarah. Lacking the political and military resources to confront Shaykh Khazal and the Bakhtiari khans simultaneously, Riza Khan, in 1922–3, opted for a pragmatic and machiavellian approach towards the Bakhtiari. Well aware of the intensity of their internal quarrels, he adopted a tactic of manipulation and divisiveness, using a faction of khans led by his old comrade, Sardar Asad. By coopting this faction to the side of the regime, Riza Khan fatally undermined the cohesion of the Bakhtiari leadership, weakening it by exacerbating its feuds and intensifying their bitterness and paralysing the ability of the great khans to function as a political unit.<sup>4</sup>

In 1921 Sardar Asad had been governor of Kirman, but he had lost this post in the political upheavals of that year. Despite his illustrious parentage, he had then suffered personally from the shrinkage of opportunity being experienced by all the great khans, and spent a period in Tehran without any official position. In the midst of the crisis over the Shalil incident in August 1922, when the Bakhtiari khans had organized an attack on an Iranian army detachment heading south, Sardar Asad apparently grasped the opportunity to secure his personal position at the expense of the majority of the great khans by accepting the pro-regime role offered to him by Riza Khan. Sardar Asad, together with his younger brothers Amir Jang and Sardar Bahadur, and their uncle, Sardar Muhtasham, eagerly embraced the War Minister's offer of patronage and definitively and actively sided with Riza Khan against the majority of the senior khans who were implicated in the attack. So far had kin solidarity disintegrated that Sardar Muhtasham, of the Haji Ilkhani, had no hesitation in adhering to Sardar Asad, of the Ilkhani, to the detriment of his own brothers and close family.

Sardar Asad's faction was well rewarded for its defection to the regime and its ascendancy within the confederation was assured. All four khans were absolved from paying any share of the huge fine imposed on the Bakhtiari for the Shalil attack, Sardar Muhtasham and Amir Jang were appointed *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi* respectively, and thus assumed control over all the Bakhtiari tribes, and Sardar Bahadur began a brilliant career as a senior cavalry officer in the new army. Sardar Asad, however, benefited the most, beginning a career in national politics that was unique in the period among the Bakhtiari khans and the tribal aristocracies in general. Immediately after siding with the government over Shalil, Sardar Asad was made governor-general of Khurasan. In 1924 he was taken into the cabinet, as minister of posts and telegraphs, becoming minister of war in 1927, the first civilian to hold that post for any length of time since the coup of 1921 and the only tribal khan to occupy a cabinet post under Riza Shah.

Sardar Asad, having thrown in his lot with the new order, became unswervingly loyal to the shah and a key functionary of the regime. He did not waver even during the southern tribal crisis of 1929 but violently denounced those junior khans who were leading sections of the Bakhtiyari in revolt, a revolt that was, in fact, at least partly directed against himself and his brother, the *ilkhani*. He even did his utmost to persuade the shah to embark on a military response to the uprising.<sup>5</sup>

Although the southern rebellions of 1929 faded, principally as a result of a government policy of compromise and concession and the inherent weaknesses of tribal politics, nonetheless the episode was a key turning point in the morale and direction of the regime. The full consequences of the tribal insurgencies of 1929, however, and their impact on the shah, were not immediately apparent. In 1930 Sardar Asad, who had held on to his post as minister of war, grasped the opportunity offered by an uprising among the Buyir Ahmadi in Fars to launch an effort to emphasize his personal political reliability and to erase the bad impression caused by the 1929 rebellion, and to demonstrate to the shah his own and the Bakhtiyari's continuing military usefulness. The Buyir Ahmadi, unlike the Bakhtiyari and the Qashqai, had not ended their rebellion during the autumn migrations of 1929 but had remained in defiance of the military authorities. In this defiance they were led by Sartip Khan Buyir Ahmadi, who had at one time been in alliance with the dissident junior khans of the Bakhtiyari. Sardar Asad himself went to Bakhtiyari and raised a large contingent of tribal levies to assist the army in its operations against the Buyir Ahmadi, personally accompanying this force into the field under the nominal leadership of the *ilkhani*.<sup>6</sup> His brother, the cavalry officer Sardar Bahadur, also made a significant contribution to the campaign, commanding a cavalry detachment. At the same time Sawlat al-Dawlah Qashqai made a similar demonstration of his political and military loyalty and usefulness, raising 1,500 levies led by his sons, Nasir Khan and Malik Mansur Khan. After the army's success in these operations, largely resulting from the presence of the Bakhtiyari and the Qashqai, Sardar Asad played a pivotal role in the peace negotiations, conducting a long personal correspondence with the still actively hostile Sartip Khan. On a previous occasion, terms of surrender obtained by Sartip Khan had been violated by the army and he was now particularly concerned to be given satisfactory assurances of a pardon and his freedom. Sartip Khan offered his complete submission to Sardar Asad on the sole condition that Sardar Asad gave him a personal safe-conduct and guarantee that his life would be spared.<sup>7</sup> Sardar Asad was finally successful in persuading him to come to Tehran where he duly received a pardon from the shah.

This campaign certainly provided ample evidence both of Sardar Asad's personal commitment to the regime and of the absence of any permanent hostility on the part of much of the Bakhtiyari confederation towards



the army or the central government. The campaign also demonstrated the continuing military utility of the tribes. Despite a decade of military reorganization and several years of conscription, the Bakhtiyari and Qashqai tribal levies were vital to the army's success in the 1931 campaign against the Buyir Ahmadi.<sup>8</sup> These operations clearly illustrated the regular troops' perpetual vulnerability when faced with tribal guerrilla warfare and their helplessness unless cocooned in tribal cooperation and assistance. There was little reluctance on the part of the Bakhtiyari, who had suffered substantially from Buyir Ahmadi's raiding and looting, to cooperate with the army in these operations and the khans and their followers responded eagerly to the army's call for irregulars. The khans offered their followers further encouragement by giving them formal permission to loot anything they could find of the enemy's goods and cattle as well as pay of four *qirans* daily for infantry and six for cavalry. The readiness of the Bakhtiyari to cooperate was fully reciprocated by the army. Although the Bakhtiyari had been disarmed, the military did not hesitate now to rearm them, distributing 1,000 rifles for the campaign.<sup>9</sup>

### **Tribal policy after 1929**

Nonetheless, despite Sardar Asad's and Sawlat's efforts at propitiation, the danger represented by the events of 1929 had made an indelible impression on Riza Shah. In 1931, after the re-establishment and stabilization of central authority throughout southern Iran, the shah, at the beginning of his second decade in power, opened a new phase in his political offensive towards the southern tribes and their leaderships. His resolve to act against the hereditary southern tribal leaders, all of whom were now either politically subservient or, as in the case of Sardar Asad, enthusiastically loyal, was driven by several different preoccupations, some of them long-standing and some of more recent vintage.

Although Riza Shah's tribal policies had suffered a severe setback in 1929, he remained determined on his long-term objective of crushing what remained of the political power of the southern tribal leaderships, and suppressing the military capacity of the rank and file. To this objective was added a fierce determination to remove once and for all any possibility of a repetition of the challenge presented by the southern tribal groups in 1929. The traumatic collapse of government authority throughout southern Iran in 1929 had a profound and lasting effect on Riza Shah. The uprisings, seeming to coalesce threats from a number of different directions, had far wider consequences than simply renewing the shah's determination to eradicate any potential threat from tribal groups. He feared the resurgence of tribal power, but was especially apprehensive at the possibility of an alliance between the tribes and other political forces such as the ulama, or even the British. As well as reawakening Riza Shah's old fears about British

imperial ambitions, the depth of the crisis of 1929 also acutely aggravated the shah's fears for the security of his dynasty and caused him to begin to doubt even his most loyal supporters within the regime and at court.

Although 1929 had imparted a new sense of urgency, the liquidation of the 'tribal problem' by the transformation of the armed and mobile nomads into peaceful settled agriculturalists had been a long-cherished objective of modernizing reformers. Again, the goal of suppressing the autonomy of the tribal leaders and severing their connections with foreign powers, in practice the British, had been central since Riza Khan had first come to power in 1921. As far as the Bakhtiyari khans were concerned, nationalist circles wished not only to remove any remaining vestiges of imperial patronage, but also specifically to deprive the khans of the privileged position they occupied in relation to the APOC.

By the turn of the decade, however, the character of the regime was itself changing, the shah becoming increasingly arbitrary in his exercise of power and politically isolated as his former support evaporated.<sup>10</sup> The shah had been shocked by the events of 1929, his confidence in his supporters shaken and his perennial paranoia aggravated, and he responded by preparing to unleash a real reign of terror that would eventually cut down enemies and friends alike. The inner core of the regime began to experience a rapid demoralization and an increasing fear while its close-knit structure, largely based on personal connections and patronage, inevitably meant that royal suspicions, once aroused, were likely to range wide in the search for disloyalty. Furthermore, as the shah's rule became increasingly personal, his campaign to destroy the symbolic relics of foreign influence and feudal power in Iran intensified and began to degenerate into xenophobia and morbid suspicion. The court increasingly functioned in an atmosphere conditioned by the growing power of the police and the political police who were assuming an ever-greater role in the maintenance of the regime. The deterioration in the shah's personality, furthermore, went in tandem with his growing obsession for acquiring property, the political destruction of the tribal leaderships becoming entangled with the shah's land mania.

The landed wealth of the southern tribal magnates, including the Bakhtiyari khans, Sawlat al-Dawlah, the Shaykh of Muhammarah and Qavam al-Mulk, was one of the principal sources of their regional power and position. In depriving them of this base, Riza Shah perceived a means to weaken them, politically and economically, but also to make available for his own acquisition vast tracts of rich agricultural property. By the early 1930s the shah had developed what the British minister described as an 'insatiable land hunger'.<sup>11</sup> Although he had always displayed an acquisitive and corrupt inclination, the shah's mania for accumulating landed property appears to have been galvanized by the possibilities opened up by the introduction of new legislation for the registration of title deeds in 1928. The novelty and extent of these opportunities led to a very rapid deterioration

in the morale of the shah and his regime and to its employment of rapidly increasing levels of arbitrary power and violence.<sup>12</sup> Although carried out under a cloak of legality, using formal methods of exchange and purchase, the activities of the officials of the Office of Royal Estates, and their methods of false imprisonment and even murder, became so notorious that in 1932 the British minister was moved to wonder why the shah 'does not, without more ado, register the whole of Persia in his own name, imprisoning all landowners until the period prescribed for objections has passed'.<sup>13</sup> The shah's obsession, and his ruthlessness in pursuing it, caused havoc among large and small landowners alike. As well as altering the composition and personnel of the land-owning classes, the shah's land acquisitions contributed materially to the weakening and sometimes the destruction of local elites in the provinces.<sup>14</sup>

It seems that the specific idea of extirpating the influence of the major tribal landowners in the south by means of an alteration in the pattern of land ownership was suggested to the shah by the settlement which was then being negotiated with the Shaykh of Muhammarah, whereby the whole of the Shaykh's lands in the south were to be valued and exchanged for government property in the neighbourhoods of Tehran and Qazvin. Such an arrangement for the other southern khans would then have the additional advantage of making the lands formerly possessed by them available for 'purchase' by the shah himself. Between 1932 and 1934 a series of laws were enacted, permitting the transfer of *khalisah* (government-owned) land to persons who were exiled from their homes in exchange for their original estates. Qavam al-Mulk and Sawlat al-Dawlah each owned huge estates in Fars and at a *salam* in the spring of 1932 the shah informed both that they would have to make an exchange similar to that being made by Shaykh Khazal, and valuations to that end began immediately.<sup>15</sup> Qavam submitted without demur. The Majlis duly passed a law on 7 June 1932 transferring the whole of the properties belonging to Qavam in Fars to the state, Qavam receiving other land in compensation in the northern provinces where he possessed no political influence. Sawlat, however, proved less amenable, and began a series of prevarications that were ultimately to prove fatal.

As well as undermining the khans' local landed power-base, the government was meanwhile aggressively taking other steps to dissolve any connection between the southern tribes and their hereditary leaders. In Fars, for example, an important step towards severing the connection between the Khamsah and the Qashqai confederations and their ruling families had been taken in early November 1931 when army officers were appointed *ilkhani* of the Khamsah and of the Qashqai in place of Qavam al-Mulk and Sawlat's son, Malik Mansur Khan, respectively. Such a move had been attempted before but had collapsed under the pressure of the 1929 rebellions. This time it was to be permanent. Both Qavam and Sawlat and his sons had already been obliged to go to Tehran and remain there. Other

southern tribal leaders, including the majority of the Bakhtiyari khans and Shaykh Khazal, were also confined to Tehran, practically as prisoners, under police surveillance.

For the time being, Riza Shah refrained from acting against the Bakhtiyari khans, their lands remained untouched and they themselves were not superseded by army officers but continued to occupy the posts of *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi*. The great khans were, however, attracting the hostile attentions of the shah for another reason. The late 1920s and early 1930s saw a concerted bid by the shah to challenge the APOC's concession in Iran. The 1901 D'Arcy Concession, under which the APOC exploited the oil reserves in the south, had, since the moment of its inception, been resented by Iranian nationalists and in July 1928 Abdulhusayn Taymurtash, the minister of court, opened negotiations with the APOC regarding terms for a new concession that would represent Iranian interests more fairly. Since 1905 the Bakhtiyari khans had profited immensely from an agreement they had negotiated directly with the company, without reference to Tehran. Under this agreement they had obtained dividend-generating shares, drawn guarding subsidies, and made profitable land leases and sales, but the government had always steadfastly refused to recognize its validity. Now it was becoming clear that the shah, in the context of a general reassertion of Iran's rights, was determined to break the connection between the khans and the company and to wrest away from them their profitable oil interests, and that there would be no special place for them in any new concession. When, in April 1933, a new concession was finally agreed between the Iranian government and the APOC, it made no mention either of any role for the khans, or of the devices, the BOC and the FEC, through which their royalties had been channelled.

Simultaneously with undermining, to varying degrees, the southern tribal leaderships, the shah launched a fundamental assault on the pastoral nomadic way of life when he began to implement his long-cherished policy of compulsory sedentarization. Nomadic settlement had first emerged as a concrete government policy in the mid-1920s. Its implementation was mooted initially in the energetic and radical programme launched in 1927 and its first targets were the tribes of Luristan, who had proved among the least tractable of the tribal groupings, although the government made it clear that all nomadic populations, including the Bakhtiyari, would eventually be required to settle and become agriculturalists. Despite the strong ideological commitment to this policy on the part of the shah and his nationalist supporters, little or no practical preparations, or even inquiries into its feasibility, had been made by the late 1920s. The army had attempted some ad hoc sedentarization, mainly in Luristan, but it was only in 1932 that general responsibility for the policy was assumed by the government and a new department was created in the interior ministry to devise and oversee a comprehensive plan for nomadic sedentarization.<sup>16</sup> The government had

already, in 1931, begun to impose some limitations on the migration of the southern tribes. Part of the Qashqai, for example, remained the whole year in their winter quarters. In the case of the Bakhtiyari, the government acted, as it had in regard to disarmament and conscription, through the khans, who were still in place as the Bakhtiyari tribal governors. At the beginning of 1932 the government took a guarantee in writing from the *ilkhani* and the *ilbaygi* that after that winter the Bakhtiyari would give up their nomadic existence and settle permanently either in their summer quarters in the hills or in the low country. The representatives of the *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi* then extracted a similar undertaking from the nomads. By the beginning of 1933, therefore, clear orders were in force restricting the Bakhtiyari seasonal migrations.

The settlement policy immediately ran into serious difficulties. Its disastrous consequences, both for the nomadic and semi-nomadic populations and for the rural economy in general, became immediately apparent and tribal leaders and government officials were acutely conscious of the unworkability of the rapid and comprehensive settlement of large numbers of nomads. The Bakhtiyari *ilbaygi*, Murtaza Quli Khan, took the unusual and courageous step of voicing his concerns directly to the shah. At an audience in July 1933, the shah raised with the *ilbaygi* questions about conditions in Bakhtiyari and especially about the movement of the tribes from summer to winter quarters. Murtaza Quli Khan took the opportunity to offer the opinion, which he had in fact consistently expressed on previous occasions, that the nomads should be allowed to continue their seasonal migrations for the time being and should not be settled in permanent quarters until proper villages had been prepared for them, which might take up to ten years.<sup>17</sup> He also pointed out to the shah that the tribespeople were so poor that they could not be expected to build for themselves. The shah was apparently persuaded by these arguments about practicability, but his essential commitment to the policy was, nonetheless, profound and his aversion to pastoral nomadism, with its political risks and its connotations of disorder and backwardness, intense. Despite his own and his advisers' ignorance about, and general indifference to, the conditions of the rural populations, and despite the fact that the advocates of forced settlement had drawn up their plans taking little cognisance of the realities of the pastoral economy, nonetheless he remained undeterred. He agreed that the Bakhtiyari *ilbaygi*'s practical objections were real and that poor people should not be made to suffer unnecessarily, and said that he would give orders that movements up and down should not be stopped at the moment and that the nomads should be allowed to continue to migrate until further notice. The shah, however, also warned Murtaza Quli Khan that he had only postponed the policy of sedentarization and also informed him that, in the meantime, he would send building commission experts to examine suitable building sites and to report.<sup>18</sup>

The building commission officials, however, were also to conclude that the settlement of the Bakhtiyari under existing conditions was impossible. Building commissions were already active in other tribal areas, especially Luristan, and a commission was sent to the Bakhtiyari country, consisting of two engineers from the ministry of communications. The commissioners came to stay with the *ilkhani* and visited various parts of the Bakhtiyari summer quarters. On their return to the *ilkhani* they reported their view that it was not possible for the tribes to construct permanent quarters or to build villages in the mountains owing to climatic conditions and to a lack of suitable large spaces. They thought that it might be possible for a few permanent buildings to be erected in certain places for those who always remained behind when the autumn migration began, but not enough to house the whole of each tribe. In any case, it was generally recognized that cattle and flocks would have to be moved elsewhere in the winter. They were also of the opinion that nothing could be done unless the government provided sufficient funds. After examining other mountain districts the commission went to Malamir, Garmsir and other lowland areas to observe conditions there. The conclusions of the commission were careful and realistic. Its impact in Tehran, however, was limited as its members were reluctant to send their report to their superiors, fearing its reception by the shah and the consequences for themselves.<sup>19</sup>

Not only was the settlement policy incurring scepticism from government officials and tribal khans, but its economic consequences were already becoming starkly visible. Although the orders restricting Bakhtiyari migration had been temporarily eased in the summer of 1933, as a result of Murtaza Quli Khan's intercession with the shah, the nomads, taking no chances, were avoiding altogether the towns in the region of their summer quarters.<sup>20</sup> The normally plentiful dairy products usually provided by the nomads had rocketed in price, even reaching famine levels in the towns, or could not be found at all. Other factors were simultaneously contributing to this crisis. Prices of foodstuffs generally were spiralling because, as a result of conscription, many Chahar Mahal villages had lost their young labourers, and there had been, as a direct consequence, a real decrease in agricultural production.<sup>21</sup> Speculation by urban merchants was also driving up prices. Taking advantage of the crisis, town grain brokers, realizing the desperate need of the rural population, settled as well as nomadic, for money, had bought up and were hoarding wheat, barley and other crops.<sup>22</sup>

For the Bakhtiyari themselves, economic conditions, very bad for some time, were worsening steadily. Their flocks and crops were dwindling and they had very little money owing to their taxes which were both heavy and collected with unfailing regularity no longer by the khans, who might be responsive to individual difficulties, but by government officials headed by the *ra is-i maliyyah* for Bakhtiyari. The khans were themselves in desperate financial straits and were unable to extend help to their followers

and to minor khans in need, as they might have done in difficult times in the past. Indeed, the khans were unable to meet their own obligations to the *maliyyah*. During the summer several finance officials had been staying in the khans' homes, living well at the khans' expense, waiting for their taxes to be paid.<sup>23</sup> The *ra is-i maliyyah* of Bakhtiyari had billeted himself in the house of the *ilbaygi*, Murtaza Quli Khan, indefinitely. In fact, during 1933 a general feeling was developing throughout the area of profound apprehension and fear regarding the future.

The regime's tribal policies appeared to be running into the sand and the government was obliged temporarily to retreat. Owing to the immense practical and political difficulties, the restrictions on migration had been eased in the summer of 1933, and the nomads migrated fully that autumn. But the political restrictions on the khans grew ever tighter. The xenophobic atmosphere pervading the court was increasing markedly and the Bakhtiyari khans' old connections with the British made them more than ever an object of suspicion for the shah. This, coupled with the shah's extreme sensitivity to the image presented by Iran to the outside world, especially any intimations of 'backwardness', meant that the government had been making, for some time, strenuous efforts to control and inhibit any contact between the khans and foreigners. For several years, any foreigners who wished to visit Bakhtiyari had been obliged to obtain letters of introduction from Sardar Asad. This served the twofold purpose of enabling the Bakhtiyari khans to extend hospitality to visitors with less fear of any adverse consequences and of allowing the authorities to send an *amniyyah* officer to accompany and watch the foreigners, ostensibly as a guard.<sup>24</sup>

Nonetheless, despite these manifold precautions, in the summer of 1933 a visit by an Italian scientific expedition to the Bakhtiyari mountains had disastrous repercussions, causing a significant worsening in the regime's attitude towards the khans. The Italian party had visited Bakhtiyari in August with official permission, specifically with letters of introduction from Sardar Asad. While the Italians were in Bakhtiyari some disturbance was caused by a band of robbers on the Bakhtiyari road. Members of the party subsequently published rather colourful articles in the European press stating, among other things, that great numbers of rebel tribesmen had been encountered. These articles created outrage in official circles in Tehran and the press began a campaign of vilification of the Italian expedition.<sup>25</sup>

This episode, trivial in itself, gave rise to some apprehensions among the Bakhtiyari khans and real fear on the part of Sardar Asad who was well aware of the shah's morbid suspicion of the foreign press and his sensitivity about the representation of Iran abroad. When, in September, the British consul at Ahvaz made an application to Sardar Asad for introductions, he met with a blank refusal, Sardar Asad telling him that he must make an official request through the ministry for foreign affairs. Although Sardar Asad stated that his attitude was due to the irritation of himself and other

Bakhtiyaris at the articles in the European press, it seems that he already had some inkling that he and other Bakhtiyari khans had fallen under the direct suspicion of the shah, especially as a result of the articles' references to rebel tribesmen.<sup>26</sup>

Sardar Asad's fears were also linked specifically to the fate that had recently overtaken his close personal and political ally, the minister of court, Abdulhusayn Taymurtash. Sardar Asad's rise had taken place in the context of Taymurtash's ascendancy and he was intimately connected to Taymurtash's network of patronage. His own tenure at the ministry of war had exactly coincided with the zenith of Taymurtash's power as court minister. Taymurtash's fall inevitably threatened to bring down all his associates, including Sardar Asad, who was particularly vulnerable as he was directly implicated in one of the shady financial transactions of which Taymurtash stood accused, and he had attracted attention by several futile attempts to intervene with the shah on Taymurtash's behalf.<sup>27</sup>

### **The fall of Taymurtash**

Since Riza Khan had become shah in 1925, Taymurtash had acted as his principal lieutenant and had rapidly made himself the most powerful man in the country, after the shah. Making up a triumvirate with Ali Akbar Davar, the minister of justice, and Firuz Mirza, the minister of finance, Taymurtash assumed charge of the whole machinery of government and was one of the architects of the radical reform programme launched in 1927, for which he provided much of the intellectual and ideological inspiration.<sup>28</sup> By the latter part of the 1920s Taymurtash had taken command of all matters of civil administration, leaving the shah content to control the army. It was Taymurtash who possessed and exercised real power, while the cabinet merely carried out his dictates, the prime minister was a figurehead and the cabinet purely decorative.<sup>29</sup> However, in 1929, as a result of the tribal rebellions, first Firuz, and then Taymurtash himself, began to arouse the suspicions of the shah.

Both before and since 1921 personal insecurity and the risk of violence had been present as penalties for failure in political and official life. However, in the early years of the new regime, the use of illegal, arbitrary and violent methods was limited. Riza Khan allowed important figures posing serious opposition such as Sayyid Ziya, and even suspected of conspiring against his own life, Mushar al-Mulk in 1921, and Qavam al-Saltanah in 1923, to flee into exile.<sup>30</sup> In 1926 the new shah resisted General Yazdanpanah's exhortations to have his rival, the commander of the Eastern Division, General Davallu, executed for treason following a mutiny in the army.<sup>31</sup> Not only were execution and secret murder not employed routinely, but efforts were made to preserve legal forms. Although the shah was determined on a capital penalty in the case of Colonel Puladin, an army officer



accused of plotting against his life, the prime minister successfully persuaded him of the necessity of the preservation of judicial formalities. Although the army eventually yielded to the shah's demand for vengeance, three courts martial were necessary to produce the required verdict.<sup>32</sup> Puladin's civilian co-accused, Samuil Hayyim, was, as the law required, handed over to the civil courts for trial.<sup>33</sup> The regime did resort to the assassination of critics in times of crisis, in the case of the murder of the poet Ishqi, for example, and tribal rebels such as the Sardar of Bujnurd or the Luristan chiefs were also occasionally the victims of summary execution, but, in general, high officials were spared the sort of treatment habitually meted out in the past to disgraced Qajar favourites.<sup>34</sup>

After 1929 this dispensation was at an end. From that time on, the shah embarked on a generalized terror that ultimately engulfed most of the regime's core supporters. This terror both provoked and was provoked by a constant stream of accusations of disloyalty, treason and conspiracy, by and against officials and army officers, high and low, producing a climate of fear and suspicion that profoundly affected the political landscape. Such accusations, usually lacking any connection to actual political disaffection, were frequently made purely in order to exploit the shah's suspicions and to advance the careers of those who made them. Many army and police officers and civilian officials, aware of the power the shah's fears had over him, occasionally sought to foster those very fears in order to damage or destroy their rivals and increase the trust in which they themselves were held. The proliferation of such tendencies and the atmosphere thus created finally led to the decimation of the political elite, the regime's abandonment of legality and its increasingly frequent resort to murder.

The readiness to make these accusations, and the equal readiness with which they were believed, flourished within a climate fashioned by the power of the police and the political police. By the early 1930s the police had become one of the major instruments of the shah's internal policy, the other being the army. In fact, the police, whose activities were described as 'ubiquitous and disquieting' even by the British, were far more important to the maintenance of the safety of the regime and the shah than even the pampered and privileged military.<sup>35</sup> Although the army had been, and still was, useful in the rural areas for tribal management, and might still be used in cities, especially provincial cities, as an instrument of coercion in times of crisis, it was less useful as a guarantor of political security. Indeed, it was not itself trusted by the shah, who used the civil police to keep watch on army officers.<sup>36</sup>

The police and the secret police had been vital to Riza Shah's acquisition and consolidation of power. The role of the police as an instrument of political repression and control, which figured so centrally in the 1930s, had been exactly prefigured in the first half of the 1920s when the army officer Colonel Muhammad Dargahi, the first Iranian chief of police after the

dismissal of the Swede, General Westdahl, had built up an extensive intelligence service upon which the shah had come to rely completely. In 1931 the shah appointed another army officer, General Muhammad Husayn Ayrum, chief of police.<sup>37</sup> During his occupation of this post, which lasted until 1935, Ayrum was immensely powerful and implicitly trusted by the shah. He, in turn, placed Captain Abdullah Miqdadi at the head of the political police and had as his own deputy General (the police rank of *sarpas*) Rukn al-Din Mukhtar.<sup>38</sup> After Ayrum himself fled the country in 1935, he was succeeded as chief of police by his erstwhile deputy, General Mukhtar. As Dargahi had been crucial to Riza Khan's rise in the 1920s, so these police officers were key figures in the maintenance of the shah's apparatus of political repression in the 1930s.

The police were particularly adept at feeding the shah's growing paranoia and, throughout the two decades of his rule, proved fond of concocting and organizing the revelation of conspiracies, especially assassination attempts. These theatrical productions were carefully stage-managed by senior police officers who played a crucial role at every stage, in arresting and interrogating suspects, in formulating charges and in producing, often fabricating, evidence, and in reporting to and shaping the shah's perceptions of the episodes.<sup>39</sup> The shah was, for his own part, highly receptive to the police's suggestions regarding the existence of plots as, indeed, they very well knew he would be.

The shah's fears of assassination had become very visible from at least the mid-1920s and these fears only heightened with time. By the early 1930s he had become dominated by a sense that his own life and the future of his dynasty were in danger. Although he had little concern about any rival to himself, he was extremely conscious of the vulnerability of the succession, owing to the Crown Prince's youth and weakness. His own health was suffering, his use of opium taking its toll, his morale further damaged by the attitudes and behaviour of those surrounding him, and he became morbidly preoccupied with the real or imagined ambitions of those closest to the court. It was in this context that the trauma of 1929 marked a turning point in the shah's attitude towards his high officials. With the disgrace, arrest and imprisonment of Firuz Mirza in that year, the shah inaugurated a purge that was to end in the death, imprisonment or exile of most of his loyal officials.

Firuz, the minister of finance, was arrested in June 1929, having fallen under suspicion of being somehow involved in fomenting the Qashqai rebellion and of being involved, together with other Qajar remnants, in a plot to overthrow the new dynasty. As was usual, however, he was eventually tried on charges of bribery and corruption which were much easier to sustain in court. Firuz's trial was conducted according to due process. He was granted access to legal counsel and his trial was open to the public. Indeed, it attracted great attention. He was convicted in May 1930 and

sentenced to four months' imprisonment, a fine of between five and six thousand *tumans*, and the forfeiture of all civil and political rights.

By the late 1920s, and even earlier, embezzlement and corruption of every kind were rampant. Indeed, they were encouraged by the shah as a means of buying support and creating dependence, but they were also most useful as weapons with which to destroy any officer or official who had become too powerful or otherwise inconvenient. Although both Firuz and Taymurtash were, in reality, brought down by the shah's suspicions of their treachery, both were tried and convicted of financial crimes. Certainly, the financial malpractices of which Firuz and Taymurtash were convicted would have been tolerated had they not fallen under suspicion for other, more directly political reasons, but the charges themselves were not trumped-up.

In 1931 the shah's purges reached the army with the arrest and court martial of General Habibullah Shaybani, one of the best and most well-known of the senior commanders, this episode causing particular disquiet among the officer corps. Senior generals had fallen from favour and been disgraced before, but none had faced court martial and lengthy imprisonment. Although in 1926 General Davallu had been blamed by the shah for a serious mutiny and the organizational collapse of the Eastern Division, his only punishment was to be dismissed from the army. Other disgraced senior officers, Generals Ansari and Tahmasbi in 1925, for example, had escaped lightly and had been reinstated within a short time. However, the essential trust and toleration that Riza Shah had extended to his senior officers, who had all risen with him since his coup, evaporated in the deteriorating conditions of the early 1930s. In the autumn of 1931 General Shaybani was tried by a court martial on a charge of military inefficiency in his 1930 operations against the Mamassani and the Buyir Ahmadi tribes and disobedience of orders, and was sentenced to two years' imprisonment and deprivation of all his ranks and dignities. Both the charge and the punishment were framed personally by the shah whose resentment dated back to 1928 when Shaybani had defied his wishes by refusing to sign Colonel Puladin's death-warrant. It appears that, in the changed atmosphere of the early 1930s, the shah's memory of this episode had resurfaced and his resentment rekindled, burning ever brighter until he was compelled to destroy a general officer of great professional competence, nationalist integrity and undoubted loyalty.<sup>40</sup>

By 1931–2 the regime's reform drive was faltering and an atmosphere of fear and apprehension, 'a general feeling of malaise', had come to permeate society.<sup>41</sup> Among the general population, the government's development policies and the international depression were leading to general economic difficulties, the cost of living rose ever higher and there was widespread impoverishment, reaching catastrophic levels especially among the rural poor. Merchants suffered from the government restrictions on trade, land-

owners and even some peasants resented the shah's expropriation of estates with scarcely a pretext of legality; and army officers were frustrated by the suspicions that drove the shah to supersede anyone of ability with 'inexperienced nonentities'.<sup>42</sup> Although the most senior ulama were attempting to accommodate themselves to the new order, discontent among the lower ranks of religious personnel continued to simmer.

Political repression was also tightening across society. State censorship and control of the press inevitably made rumour flourish, leading to further uncertainty and fear. It was not only high officials who began to fear disgrace and arrest. In the spring of 1932, for example, reports of plots again began to circulate with the arrest of a number of minor government employees. Those arrested were eventually convicted for aiding a foreign power but the convictions, far from restoring calm, were instead followed by further arrests and further rumours.<sup>43</sup> There were also signs of an increasing mistrust of minorities, to whom the regime had hitherto been well-disposed. Some Assyrians, for example, were arrested after having engaged in conversation with a British officer of the Iraq Assyrian Levies who had visited the Rizaiyyah (Urumiyyah) district.<sup>44</sup> During 1933 there were constant arrests of people accused of espionage and a number of alleged Soviet agents were executed in Mashhad in the summer. Although in 1932 dissatisfaction had still been visible, by the following year it had largely disappeared, 'the reign of terror having silenced even the elements among the upper classes' who had formerly been prepared to air their criticisms.<sup>45</sup>

Firuz had been tried and imprisoned in 1930 and Shaybani in 1931, but both, once sentenced, were treated with relative leniency. Firuz was released from prison after a month and allowed to serve the remainder of his sentence under house arrest while Shaybani was also released after a few months and allowed to go into retirement and, finally, to move abroad. In August 1932, however, a much more severe blow was struck at Sawlat al-Dawlah. As a harbinger of what was to come for the Bakhtiari khans, Sawlat and his son, Nasir Khan, deputies to the Majlis with parliamentary immunity, were accused of having incited their Qashqai followers to revolt, were arrested and imprisoned, their immunity lifted by special Majlis legislation. In fact, Sawlat's half-brother, Ali Khan, who had led the 1929 rebellion, had again for some months been actively engaged in confronting the army in the Qashqai region of Firuzabad. By June this insurgency had reached dangerous dimensions, with Ali Khan's followers estimated at 15,000 men, but Sawlat's responsibility for instigating the rising is unclear. In any case, it was generally believed that the shah's real motive was his desire for Sawlat's lands.<sup>46</sup> In August the following year Sawlat died in Qasr-i Qajar prison. His death was reported to have been from some form of heat stroke, although it was universally assumed that he had been murdered.<sup>47</sup> As well as the political obstacle that he was still capable of

representing, Sawlat's reluctance to agree to the exchange of his southern estates was clearly a factor in the shah's decision to move against him so decisively. After his death his lands in Fars were immediately confiscated.

Sawlat's murder while in official custody in prison, under the supervision of the prison doctor, Dr Ahmadi, an appointee of the chief of police, and by the direct order of the shah, was a new departure in the regime's treatment of its supposed enemies.<sup>48</sup> Provincial army commanders had certainly in the past disregarded safe-conducts and meted out summary execution to tribal rebels but usually in the thick of campaigning and far from the reach of civilian authority.<sup>49</sup> Not only was Sawlat an eminent personality and a Majlis deputy, but his murder took place in prison in the capital, where he was under the direct responsibility of the government. Sawlat had not been given even the pretence of a trial, Riza Shah's resort to Dr Ahmadi in this case signalling his growing indifference to the preservation of legal formalities, however manipulated.

At the end of 1932, the shah's purges reached the very highest level of the state and the court with the arrest of Abdulhusayn Taymurtash, the minister of court. When, in 1929, his close associate Firuz had been arrested, Taymurtash too had fallen under a cloud but his eclipse had been only temporary and he seemed to recover the shah's full favour. But the shah again gradually became nervous of Taymurtash's power. By early 1932 the shah's displeasure, especially at Taymurtash's extravagance while in Europe, which appeared to have been at the illegitimate expense of the National Bank, was clear.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, for a second time, Taymurtash regained the shah's confidence. His difficulties resumed, however, this time in earnest, with the announcement of the APOC royalties in June 1932, the sums being much diminished due to the international recession then in full swing. This announcement complicated Taymurtash's efforts, which he had begun in 1928, to negotiate a new concession with the oil company, and led to the government rejecting the tentative agreement he had put together. Responsibility for the oil negotiations was then taken from him and given to his rival, Hasan Taqizadah, who replaced Firuz as minister of finance.<sup>51</sup>

Speculation about the reasons for Taymurtash's decline then shifted away from the oil negotiations and began to crystallize around his role in the catastrophe that had overtaken the affairs of the National Bank. Bank Melli had opened in 1928 as a keystone of the shah's drive against foreign concessions and a symbol of national independence, Iran's modern banking functions having hitherto been the preserve of the British Imperial Bank of Persia.<sup>52</sup> Bank Melli, however, under its first manager, the German, Dr Kurt Lindenblatt, had quickly run into difficulties, corruption and incompetence leading to large losses and the collapse of public confidence. In 1932 the shah established a commission of enquiry into the bank's affairs and in September Lindenblatt's German deputy committed suicide.

Towards the end of the year the crisis surrounding the bank began to envelop Taymurtash. His own fall was immediately preceded by the arrest of his intimate associate Abdulhusayn Diba, whom he had appointed as the treasurer of the court, and who was charged with bribery in relation to the Majlis elections. On 24 December, it became definitely known that Taymurtash had been dismissed. On 17 January 1933 he was placed under house arrest and on 16 February transferred to the prison at Qasr-i Qajar, where he was immediately admitted to the prison hospital owing to the state of his health. The official charges against him were then published and were almost entirely concerned with his dealings with the National Bank.

At first, immediately after Taymurtash's arrest, it had seemed that the shah might once again relent and pardon, or only punish lightly, his minister. This possibility was ended by the appearance of an article entitled 'Dropping the Pilot' in *The Times* of London on 9 January. This article stated baldly that the shah was growing old and was in poor health, that the question of a regency must in the circumstances have often occupied his thoughts, and that he must have concluded that his young son would stand little chance with a man like Taymurtash, ambitious and unscrupulous, in charge. Sardar Asad, who interceded with the shah on Taymurtash's behalf several times, certainly believed that this article had sealed Taymurtash's fate.<sup>53</sup>

The shah was now showing a 'relentless animosity' towards his former favourite.<sup>54</sup> Although it had at first been thought that Taymurtash was being punished for his failure to settle the dispute with the APOC, and the financial charges generated by the Bank Melli scandals were certainly serious, it seems that the shah's attitude was, in reality, due to his suspicion that there had been some sort of plot between Taymurtash and the Soviet government, perhaps with the object of setting up a republic with Taymurtash at its head when the shah died.<sup>55</sup> The mere inkling of a suspicion that Taymurtash harboured ambitions to be more than the most powerful of ministers, coupled with the shah's deepening fears that he might die before his son was old enough to succeed him without an upheaval, was, in the climate then enveloping the Court, enough to destroy the minister of court.

Although Firuz had been tried in open court, with due process more or less observed, Taymurtash was tried *in camera*. His trial was, however, conducted according to civil law and he was given full access to defence counsel. The charges were of bribery and embezzlement from the National Bank and in March he was found guilty and sentenced to three years' imprisonment and to a fine of 600,000 *riyals*.<sup>56</sup> But this verdict did nothing to assuage the shah's animosity towards Taymurtash. Although he was extremely dissatisfied at the sentence handed down by the court, for the time being the shah seemed to wish to remain within the constraints of the law. He looked around for further legal means to use against him and in June Taymurtash was tried and again convicted on further charges of bribery and

again sentenced, this time to five years' solitary confinement. But the shah was still unable to rest. At the beginning of September, Taymurtash's situation deteriorated further. No one, including his lawyer, was now allowed access to him and reports circulated that a political charge was to be brought against him and he would be court-martialled. Significantly, the shah gave orders that Taymurtash, although ill, was not to be allowed access to his own doctor but was only to be treated by the prison doctor, Dr Ahmadi.<sup>57</sup> It was, in any case, taken for granted by public opinion that he would never leave prison alive. Rumours of his death were constant and on 3 October he actually died. The cause of death, according to the official communiqué, was angina. Although his health had been precarious for some time, he was universally and immediately believed to have been poisoned, a belief finally confirmed after the shah's abdication. It seems that Riza Shah, still seemingly tormented by fear or vengefulness and having exhausted the legal repertoire at his disposal, had once again resorted to the prison doctor for a permanent remedy.

### The Bakhtiyari plot

Sardar Asad seems to have realized that the minister of court's downfall had sealed his own fate. The personal and political connection between Sardar Asad and Taymurtash had been close and of some duration. He had, in particular, been implicated, albeit innocently, in the defrauding of the National Bank for which Taymurtash had been convicted. The blow duly fell towards the end of the year, comments in the British press once again precipitating events. The shah took the foreign, especially the British, press extremely seriously, apparently believing that British journalists knew more about the reality of Iranian politics than he or his officials knew, and that the stories that appeared there somehow reflected deeper British machinations.<sup>58</sup> On 28 November an article appeared in *The Times* that criticized the shah and his regime and included exaggerated reports of unrest among the tribes.<sup>59</sup> The next day, Sardar Asad, still minister of war, was arrested at the Turkman horse races in Mazandaran, having gone there to accompany the shah and where he had distributed the prizes in the shah's name. He was sent back to Tehran under escort and imprisoned in the Qasr-i Qajar prison. Immediately afterwards, on or about 30 November, most of the leading Bakhtiyari khans in the capital were also arrested and imprisoned. A few remained at liberty, including the aged *ilkhani*, Amir Mufakham. One or two minor khans were also spared, and, for the time being, the two Bakhtiyari Majlis deputies, Amir Husayn Khan Ilkhan and Amir Jang, a younger brother of Sardar Asad.<sup>60</sup> The *ilbaygi*, Murtaza Quli Khan, who was in the Bakhtiyari country at the time, was also left untouched. Other than these, all the Bakhtiyari khans who were then in Tehran were seized. These included two brothers of Sardar Asad, Sardar Bahadur, commandant

of the *Fatih* cavalry regiment, and Manuchihr Khan Asad; Amir Mujahid and his son; Sardar Iqbal and his son; Sardar Fatih; Salar Arfa; Shihab al-Saltanah, and a number of others to a total of about 16, and 12 of their retainers.<sup>61</sup> At some point, although it is not clear when, certain other tribal leaders were also arrested as part of the sweep of Bakhtiyari, including Ali Mardan Khan Chahar Lang, Sartip Khan Buyir Ahmadi, Shukrullah Khan Buyir Ahmadi, Imam Quli Khan Mamassani, and Husayn Khan Darrahsuri of the Qashqai. As these arrests were taking place the shah's state of mind was further aggravated, to a furious pitch, by a highly critical article that appeared in another British newspaper, *The Evening Standard*.

The constitutional immunity from arrest of the Bakhtiyari Majlis deputies did not last long. Early in the morning of 10 December the two deputies, Amir Husayn Khan Ilkhan and Amir Jang, along with another deputy, the former *ilkhani* of the Khamsah, Ibrahim Qavam al-Mulk, were arrested and also imprisoned in Qasr-i Qajar. Later in the day the Majlis unanimously approved a motion removing their immunity and calling for their criminal prosecution. The reason for all these arrests was shrouded in secrecy. The only official indication of any explanation was given when the minister of the interior, Mudir al-Mulk, Mirza Mahmud Khan Jam, informed the Majlis, prior to the lifting of immunity, that certain persons had 'considered the security and development of the Pahlavi regime to be contrary to their personal interests, and have been guilty of conduct detrimental to the State', and that this had necessitated strong government action. Three deputies were accused and named as the two Bakhtiyaris and Qavam.<sup>62</sup> Meanwhile, the wave of arrests had extended from Tehran to some of the Bakhtiyari khans resident in Isfahan and in the Bakhtiyari country itself, notably Khan Baba Khan, another brother of Sardar Asad.<sup>63</sup> Various servants and employees of the khans in the tribal areas were also arrested.

British officials in Tehran, despite their former close relationship with the khans, were completely in the dark regarding these arrests and, though they tried to find out what was going on, it appeared no one could tell them. They approached both the minister for foreign affairs and the chief of police, but neither had any idea what the charges against any of the detainees were and professed complete ignorance of the reasons for their arrest. It seems that the general sense of bafflement extended to those directly involved in the arrests.<sup>64</sup> One of those imprisoned under suspicion of complicity in the alleged Bakhtiyari plot had been a guide for the now infamous Italian expedition. He was released after ten months and later described how he had formed the impression that his interrogators were themselves puzzled as to what they were trying to find out. They asked him the same questions time and time again. He knew that some had resigned, or had at least tried to, but their resignations had not been accepted. They had asked him a great number of questions, trying to discover something. He was questioned as to his relations with various British officials, with the



Italian mountaineering expedition and with Sardar Asad. He was also questioned as to what he knew about relations between the APOC and the Bakhtiari khans.<sup>65</sup>

As the weeks passed, and the government was questioned further by members of the foreign legations, an official version of the episode emerged in which the arrests were presented as part of the struggle against feudalism.<sup>66</sup>

There were, however, various indications that in reality the arrests resulted, as usual, from the fact that the shah had once again come to believe in the existence of a plot against his life involving many persons, some of whom were not yet identified. Qavam al-Mulk, for example, had apparently been arrested solely because the shah thought he might know something. Qavam had been on friendly terms with Sardar Asad to the extent that they saw each other frequently, albeit now on the direct instructions of the shah, and two days after Qavam's arrest, his wife was summoned to the palace and told that the shah ordered her to visit her husband in prison and say that, unless he revealed full details of the Bakhtiari plot, torture and death awaited him.<sup>67</sup>

Eventually, a version of an alleged plot emerged that appeared to have some official backing. According to this version, Sardar Asad had been the prime mover in a conspiracy to murder the shah. Sardar Asad and his accomplices had hired two assassins to shoot the shah while he was in Mazandaran at the Turkman races but details had leaked out, the shah had been warned, and the conspirators had then sent a telegram from Tehran to the two assassins calling off the bid. This telegram had supposedly been intercepted and given to the shah, who showed it to Sardar Asad, the latter immediately admitting everything. The police were, as usual, deeply involved in the revelation of the details of this conspiracy. Some care seems to have been taken to provide fragments of tangible corroboration for the story, the police having a lengthening record for the production of doubtful evidence. The British minister, for example, reported that, at about the time of the shah's departure for the races, he had received through the post an anonymous letter saying that the shah would be killed in a day or two. He immediately sent the letter to the chief of the police, General Ayrum, who told the oriental secretary that he knew all about the writer, who was under arrest.<sup>68</sup>

Public opinion considered it quite incredible that Sardar Asad, who had nothing to gain personally by a change of regime, would have lent himself to any such plot. Indeed, it was obvious to everyone that, if the shah fell, Sardar Asad would fall too. Furthermore, although the khans disliked conscription and compulsory settlement, it was generally thought highly improbable that any of them were contemplating active resistance or that the disarmed tribesmen could have effectively supported them if they had done so.<sup>69</sup> Nonetheless, the khans had been virtual prisoners in Tehran for a long

time, and had become deeply indebted in the expensive life of the capital. The British minister speculated that it might therefore have been possible that they had given vent to their grievances in talk that third parties might have been able to represent as sedition.<sup>70</sup> Such a possibility crystallized around the supposed existence of a letter written by Sardar Asad to a relation in the Bakhtiyari country and intercepted by the governor of Isfahan, containing some phrase capable of a dangerous interpretation. The existence of such a letter, with varying versions as to its content, was attested to by a number of sources. One specific version stated that the governor of Isfahan had intercepted a letter from Sardar Asad to the *ilbaygi*, Murtaza Quli Khan, in which Asad had allegedly stated that Anglo-Iranian relations were strained, and the Bakhtiyaris should be ready to take advantage of any difficulties into which the central government might fall as a result.<sup>71</sup>

Yet another explanation for the arrests circulating in Tehran centred on the allegation that the khans had secretly imported arms into the Bakhtiyari area. This allegation came with considerable detail, according to which a quantity of military stores, including specifically 80 bombs, 400 rifles and 300,000 cartridges, all new stocks and the property of the war department, had been found near the houses of Sardar Asad and his brother, Khan Baba Khan, in Chahar Mahal.<sup>72</sup> Yet it was by no means clear whether these weapons actually existed or not. As Watkinson, the British consul at Ahvaz, commented, it would be an easy matter for the military authorities to 'discover' these stores, while a further possible explanation was that no discovery was made at all, but that the story was being circulated deliberately on instructions from Tehran or by the *ilbaygi*, Murtaza Quli Khan.<sup>73</sup>

It was, indeed, widely suspected that Sardar Asad's downfall was in some way connected to intrigue by Murtaza Quli Khan, who was believed to have made certain accusations against him to the shah and whose enmity for Asad was notorious.<sup>74</sup> In any case, the *ilbaygi* certainly made the most of the opportunities offered by Asad's arrest. He was instrumental in the government's efforts, in the immediate aftermath of the arrests, to calm the nomads then congregated in their winter quarters. Both the *ilbaygi* and the *ilkhani*, the old and ineffectual Amir Mufakham, sent telegrams to Hurmuz Khan, the Bakhtiyari head guard at the oilfields, who was himself a close relative of Sardar Asad, requesting him to make it known that they had both been confirmed in their posts and that tribal affairs should be continued as normal. This information was duly conveyed to *kalantars* and *kadkhudas* throughout the Bakhtiyari country.<sup>75</sup> However, in early January Hormuz Khan, who was also the local land agent of Sardar Asad, was himself arrested following a visit by the *ilbaygi*, who was then able to appoint a nominee of his own, in fact his own son, Jahanshah Khan.<sup>76</sup> This development contributed further to the growing suspicion that the intrigues of Murtaza Quli Khan had been responsible for the whole trouble, a belief that was again strengthened by the dismissal in early 1934 of Amir

Mufakham from the post of *ilkhani*, with the consequence that Murtaza Quli Khan was now able to combine both posts of *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi*, and was thus able to retain, for the time being at any rate, the whole of the APOC allowance for the protection of the oilfields.<sup>77</sup>

Other strands of public opinion understood the arrests in their wider context, as a continuation of the policy of suppressing all tribal influence bit by bit. According to this view, Qavam had been removed and the Qashqais suppressed; the Lurs transplanted and turned into railway labourers; and now it was the turn of the Bakhtiari to be brought to heel. This seems to have been the authentic assessment of many of the shah's supporters, and chimed broadly with the version that had been allowed to appear in the foreign press. The army Chief of Staff, General Muhammad Nakhchavan, for example, suggested to the British military attaché that the imprisonment of the khans, whom the shah regarded as opposed to all progress, was designed to test the strength of tribal feeling. The military attaché inferred from Nakhchavan's attitude that it was intended that the removal of the khans be followed by the abolition of the posts of *ilkhani* and *ilbaygi*, by the imposition of conscription and a complete absorption of the confederation into the normal administration of the country.<sup>78</sup>

A variation of this interpretation saw the action taken against the khans as the making of an example. Certainly, the shah's tribal policies had not been proceeding either smoothly or rapidly. Progress with applying conscription to the Bakhtiari, as with other nomadic groups, had been slow. Although the preliminary administrative operation of the issue of civil registration papers had been completed for about half of the Bakhtiari, compulsory enlistment had still not yet even begun. The settlement policy was also faltering, encountering opposition from many officials charged with its implementation as well as from the khans and the nomads themselves. It seemed that the shah's dramatic action might have been designed to show these recalcitrant elements that the government would brook no opposition to its policies.<sup>79</sup>

A more cynical explanation for the episode also gained currency, according to which it was in reality a scheme to confiscate all the khans' property. Certainly, the arrests took place at the height of the shah's campaign of intimidation and pressure against landowners and, according to the testimony of one of those arrested with the khans, a continuous stream of landowners, large and small, were coming into the jail throughout his ten months' imprisonment.<sup>80</sup> All were there under one pretext or another, but actually because the shah wished to force them to forgo their rights under the land registration laws or to sell their lands at greatly reduced prices.

Suddenly, on 31 March 1934, after months of official silence, the newspaper *Ittila'at* announced that Sardar Asad had died from apoplexy in the prison infirmary two days earlier. The notice was placed half-way down the third page and after a number of unimportant items. Although it was

the case that Asad, who was only about 52 years of age, had already had an apoplectic stroke of a mild nature about a year before, which had incapacitated him from work for a few days, there was no doubt that he had been murdered in prison, again under the supervision of Dr Ahmadi.<sup>81</sup> A little before Asad's death, on 10 March 1934, Qavam al-Mulk, who had been arrested without explanation, was quietly released from prison, again without explanation. He himself could shed no light on the reasons for his detention.

After the announcement of Asad's death, there was no further public indication of the fate of the khans until 27 November, when the press announced the execution of eight persons and gave their names. On the following day a further list appeared of 20 khans sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, and of eight khans exonerated from blame and freed. Thirty-six men were thus accounted for, 8 being shot, 20 imprisoned, and 8 set free; all were Bakhtiyaris except 4 of the executed. Nothing was revealed officially concerning the trial or the accusations, although it was known that the court was a specially convened military tribunal.<sup>82</sup> However, details of the charges against the accused may be found in a confidential report from the ministry of war to the shah.<sup>83</sup> The prosecution made no reference to any plot to kill the shah at the Turkman races, and the allegation about the military stores and rifles was only raised in relation to two of the accused, Khan Baba Khan, a brother of Sardar Asad, and Amir Husayn Khan Ilkhan, the former Bakhtiyari Majlis deputy. Other than this, the charges on which the khans were convicted all related to the 1929 uprising. In the case of Amir Mujahid, his involvement in the Shalil attack of 1922 and his old collaboration with the Shaykh of Muhammarah were also dredged up and used against him. Of the eight who were executed, the four Bakhtiyaris, Sardar Fatih, Sardar Iqbal, Ali Mardan Khan Chahar Lang and Aqa Gurdaz Ahmad Khusravi, had all been among the principal leaders of the 1929 rising; Sartip Khan and Shukrullah Khan Buyir Ahmadi had also led their followers in resistance to the government first in collaboration with the Bakhtiyari in 1929 and then on their own account in 1930–1; *Husayn Khan Darrahshuri* was one of the Qashqai *kalantars* who were the real leadership of the Qashqai revolt, while Imam Quli Khan Mamassani had defied the authority of the government for many years and had led his tribe against the army in 1929. All the khans were collectively accused of treason and armed rebellion and the verdicts were as follows:

Executed:

- 1 Sardar Fatih, Muhammad Riza Khan, found guilty of involvement in the 1929 Bakhtiyari uprising in the Garmsir and of being in the leadership of the rebels;
- 2 Sardar Iqbal, Muhammad Javad Khan, found guilty of leading the rebels in Dih Kurd, together with Amir Jang and Sardar Fatih;

- 3 Ali Mardan Khan Chahar Lang, found guilty of entering into a coalition with the Haft Lang khans, fighting against the army in Safid Dasht, refusing to submit after the surrender of the rebels and continuing his resistance, his activities necessitating a second army operation under Colonel Mahdi Quli Tajbakhsh;
- 4 Aqa Gurdaz Ahmad Khusravi, a retainer of Sardar Fatih, found guilty of instigating the uprising in Chagakhur and fighting against the army, and of distributing ammunition to other minor khans to help them continue the rising in the regions of Kuhgilu and Qashqai after the surrender of the main body of rebels;
- 5 Sartip Khan Buyir Ahmadi, found guilty of desertion from the army camp of General Abul Hasan Purzand at a time of war against the Mamassani, of joining the fighting against the army and of involvement in the battle in Tang-i Tamarudi and of being one of the fighting commanders of the Buyir Ahmadi;
- 6 Shukrullah Khan Buyir Ahmadi, found guilty of being one of the commanders at Tang-i Tamarudi and of fighting against the army;
- 7 Imam Quli Khan Mamassani, found guilty of commanding the fighting against the army in Mamassani, of killing soldiers and inflicting damage on the army;
- 8 Husayn Khan Darrahshuri, found guilty of instigating the Qashqai uprising, his men killing the army officers martyred at Pul-i Khan, of mediating between and later uniting the khans of the Buyir Ahmadi and the Qashqai, and extending the spread of uprisings, found to be one of the leading figures of the southern uprising.

Life imprisonment:

- 1 Amir Jang, Muhammad Taqi Khan Asad, found guilty of instigating the Bakhtiyari uprising;
- 2 Bahadur al-Saltanah, Musa Khan, found guilty of involvement in the Bakhtiyari uprising;
- 3 Ismail Khan Zarrasvand, found guilty of involvement in the battle at Safid Dasht;
- 4 Mulla Khayrullah Janaki, found guilty of disarming soldiers in Janaki and of involvement in the Janaki battles.

Ten years' hard labour:

- 1 Manuchihr Khan Asad, found guilty of instigating the Bakhtiyari uprising and of the disarmament of soldiers in Chagakhur;
- 2 Ali Salih Khan Ilkhan, found guilty of involvement in the Bakhtiyari unrest;
- 3 Ahmad Khan Ilkhan, found guilty of involvement in the Bakhtiyari unrest.

Ten years' solitary confinement:

- 1 Amir Mujahid, Yusuf Khan, found guilty of involvement in the Shalil attack (1922), as well as of collaborating with Shaykh Khazal of Muhammarah, of involvement in the Bakhtiyari uprising and of being fundamentally corrupt.

Eight years' hard labour:

- 1 Nusratullah Khan Ilkhan, found guilty of being one of the Bakhtiyari rebels;
- 2 Aqa Iskandar Baba Ahmadi, found guilty of carrying out the orders of Amir Jang, and of instigating the Bakhtiyari rising.

Seven years' hard labour:

- 1 Mustafa Khan Bihdarvand, found guilty of being head of one of the clans in rebellion.

Six years' hard labour:

- 1 Khan Baba Khan Asad, found guilty of being in secret possession of the weapons and ammunition discovered after the arrests and of being secretly involved in the Bakhtiyari rebellion;
- 2 Ali Muhammad Khan Ilbayg, found guilty of involvement in rebellion.

Five years' hard labour:

- 1 Salar Azam, Muhammad Khan Asad, found guilty of instigating rebellion;
- 2 Abdulkarim Khan Isfandiyari, found guilty of being one of the rebels and of involvement in the Safid Dasht engagement;
- 3 Mirza Aqa Ilbayg, found guilty of involvement in the uprising.

Five years solitary confinement:

- 1 Lutf Ahmad Khusravi, found guilty of being one of the members of the revolutionary society of Bakhtiyari, *hayat-i ijtimai-yi inqilabi-yi Bakhtiyari*, of being financial trustee of the rebels, of trying to bring about a coalition between the Bakhtiyari and the Qashqai.

Three years' hard labour:

- 1 Amir Husayn Khan Ilkhan, found guilty of being the owner of the weapons and ammunition hidden by Khan Baba Khan.

Correctional imprisonment for three years:

- 1 Aqa Nasrullah Mulmuli, found guilty of involvement in rebellion.

Correctional imprisonment for one year:

- 1 Taymur Khan Isfandiyari (son of Sardar Iqbal), found guilty of involvement in rebellion with his father.

## Exonerated:

- 1 Shihab al-Saltanah, Sultan Ali Khan;
- 2 Sardar Bahadur, Muhammad Quli Khan Asad;
- 3 Rahim Khan Amir Bakhtiyar;
- 4 Ismail Khan Isfandiyari;
- 5 Parviz Khan Isfandiyari;
- 6 Habibullah Khan Isfandiyari;
- 7 Ali Muhammad Khan Ilkhan;
- 8 Ilyas Khan Ilkhan.

The nature of the charges against those convicted, and the fact that four of the eight executed were not Bakhtiyaris but had been deeply involved in the 1929 southern risings, suggest that it was the shah's continuing concern at the tribal potential for political and military challenge, and also perhaps his desire for revenge, that lay behind the mass arrests of 1933-4. These motives easily fed into his inclination, encouraged by the police and perhaps by Sardar Asad's enemies, to imagine the more immediate existence of conspiracies and assassination plots, against himself, against his new dynasty, and, possibly, in collaboration with a foreign power. Sardar Asad, who could in no way be implicated in the 1929 events, nonetheless easily attracted suspicion because of his political eminence and because of his close relationship with the disgraced and murdered Taymurtash. His own murder, before the convening of the court martial, perhaps indicated the shah's realization that Asad could never plausibly be presented as an author of the 1929 risings, or perhaps simply represented an intolerable animus against a former comrade suspected of betrayal. Asad's fall followed a pattern that was becoming familiar: long occupancy of a position of power, the arousal of suspicion by various, more or less specious, coincidences, and the *coup de grâce* delivered by unfortunately timed articles appearing in the foreign press and aggravating the shah's fears to unbearable levels.

Sardar Asad was a unique figure in early Pahlavi Iran. A former military commander and comrade of Riza Shah, he was the only tribal khan in this period to negotiate the transition out of tribal politics and into the new government. He alone succeeded in transcending his tribal background and in integrating himself into the inner coterie of the shah's supporters. Indeed, so complete was his journey from his tribal base that, when he suffered the fate of so many of the shah's elite, he was neither able nor inclined to call on any tribal support. Sardar Asad had risen to occupy the post of minister of war for six crucial years in the life of the regime, and had transformed himself from a tribal khan into a pillar of Riza Shah's new order, yet, for nationalist opinion, the Bakhtiyari nomads remained symbolic of Iran's 'backwardness' and the khans in general self-serving petty local reactionaries at the beck and call of a foreign power. When the shah finally struck at Sardar Asad and the Bakhtiyari khans, the official justification, that

the move was part of the regime's struggle against feudalism, was still able to resonate among nationalist opinion.

The murder of Sardar Asad and the execution and imprisonment of most of the great khans of the Bakhtiyari was one of the most savage and dramatic blows suffered by any tribal leadership in these years.<sup>84</sup> Yet, by now, so divorced were the khans from their followers that its impact in the south was minimal, the reaction from the nomads largely one of indifference. In any case, by 1933 no level of the Bakhtiyari tribal pyramid, great khans, junior khans, *kalantars* or nomads, was in a position to offer any meaningful resistance to the regime's agenda. Although banditry was widespread, and sporadic but highly localized opposition continued in Baluchistan and among the Kurds, the rural areas were otherwise largely quiescent, with generalized tribal resistance all but crushed. It is possible, therefore, that the shah finally, by 1933–4, felt strong enough to do what he had not felt strong enough to do in 1929, and dealt a crushing blow to all those involved in the southern tribal uprisings, pardons notwithstanding, thus also removing any conceivable opponents among the khans to his radical proposals for forced sedentarization. It is also possible that, finding himself increasingly tormented by his own fears and suspicions, he was by 1933–4 less able to tolerate the memory of disloyalty and the continued freedom and even the existence of those who had once challenged his power.

The remaining years of Riza Shah's rule were extremely harsh for the Bakhtiyari, as for other nomadic groups. The regime pushed on with the settlement policy and tried to impose conscription while living standards plummeted as a result of these measures and of high general taxation and soaring prices. The Bakhtiyari suffered especially from forced sedentarization. In many tribal areas little real progress was actually made in building settlements, large quantities of money vanishing through corruption, with false reports of non-existent house construction being forwarded to Tehran.<sup>85</sup> In the Bakhtiyari summer pastures, however, by the latter part of the 1930s a number of stone hamlets had appeared, each of two or three houses with a *kadkhuda* over each.<sup>86</sup> The nomads were allowed to send only one man and one woman with each flock from pasture to pasture, the remainder of the family obliged to live permanently in the houses and suffering greatly from disease and the extreme cold of the winter.<sup>87</sup> Although the large-scale rebellions of the past were now no longer possible, yet resistance to the policies of the government continued in a variety of forms. The Bakhtiyari continued to wear their own dress, albeit in a modified form, although all those of any social standing had adopted the Pahlavi hat. Khans and nomads alike bemoaned the fact that they were no longer allowed to carry guns but all said that they had rifles hidden. Even physical attacks were occasionally carried out on unwelcome parties of government officials, the Bakhtiyari using the clubs they had become accustomed to carry since disarmament, and also occasionally their hidden weapons.<sup>88</sup>



The khans, too, despite the calamity that had overtaken them, found that their ordeals were not yet over. The special position they occupied in relation to the APOC had long been anachronistic and Riza Shah was determined to divest them of their oil interests. In 1936 the ministry of finance opened a renewed onslaught against them, both those who were in prison and those who were at liberty, demanding income tax for the previous five years on their oil shares. Finally, the khans were forced to transfer to the government their oil shares and all dividends due on them, their rights to the annual guarding subsidy, any rights of ownership over land leased by them to the APOC, and all other rights derived from their agreement with the company.<sup>89</sup> The khans received nothing by way of compensation for the oil shares or for the land. In 1938 and 1939 the government opened a new front against the khans and, returning to the issue first aired at the time of the mass arrests, succeeded in depriving them of much of their landed property. Those khans who were in prison were pressured to sell their properties in Chahar Mahal and Khuzistan either to the government itself or to private non-Bakhtiyari individuals. Those khans who were not in prison were also pressed to sell their lands but most of them, notably Murtaza Quli Khan, managed to avoid actually doing so.<sup>90</sup> In 1941 Riza Shah again took fright at reported Bakhtiyari intrigues in Isfahan and had a number of khans arrested and imprisoned there. All the khans who had been arrested in 1933 remained in prison till after the abdication of Riza Shah in 1941, even those whose sentences had expired being refused release. By then, not only Sardar Asad, but also Amir Mujahid and Khan Baba Khan had died in prison.

The murder of Sardar Asad, a loyal official, the execution of eight tribal leaders, Bakhtiyaris and non-Bakhtiyaris, all of whom had been pardoned personally by the shah, and the long imprisonment of a further 20 Bakhtiyari khans, constituted an episode that symbolized the wider degeneration of the new regime and the increasing political and personal isolation of the shah. Part of the train of events begun by the tribal rebellions of 1929 and the fall of Firuz Mirza and General Shaybani, and occurring shortly after the murders of Sawlat al-Dawlah and Taymurtash, the 'Bakhtiyari plot' illustrated perfectly the shah's incipient paranoia, its encouragement by the ever-more pervasive role of the police, and his deepening reliance on sinister and even criminal figures such as Police General Mukhtar and prison doctor Ahmadi.<sup>91</sup>

During the 1920s, the preservation, as far as possible, of legal formalities had remained of importance to the shah, for reasons both of domestic and, more especially, international legitimacy. In the context of the abolition of capitulations, it was essential that the new regime demonstrate a serious commitment to its new judicial codes and institutions. In 1926-8, for example, although determined to have Colonel Puladin executed for allegedly plotting against his life, the shah's desire to achieve this objective via properly constituted courts martial is striking. He also made no attempt

to force Puladin's civilian co-accused, Samuil Hayyim, to stand trial before a military court. Again, although the financial crimes of which Firuz and Taymurtash were accused were not the real reasons for the shah's enmity, they were in themselves real enough and the criminal prosecutions conducted according to due process. By late 1931–2, however, the shah was losing patience with these methods and a steady deterioration in the regime's attitude to legality may be discerned.

Firuz had been tried in open court, indeed in the glare of publicity, but Taymurtash's two trials took place in secret. However, although the shah could usually rely on the judicial system for the production of a satisfactory verdict, at least eventually, he considered the sentences the civil courts were empowered to hand down far too lenient and he developed a taste for military courts. The Bakhtiyari khans, one example among many, were finally brought before a military court, sitting in secret, though, as civilians, they were clearly entitled to a trial under the normal criminal code. Nonetheless, even such measures were sometimes insufficient. Thus, in the case of Taymurtash, the shah, after toying with the idea of a court martial, finally opted for the quicker and more reliable method of secret murder. Such a resort was to become a habit. First Sawlat al-Dawlah in 1932, then Taymurtash in 1933 and Sardar Asad in 1934 were murdered in prison, with no judicial ceremonial, and such murders, in prison and outside, by the police and often under the auspices of Dr Ahmadi, were to continue as the decade progressed.

The shah, furthermore, seemed to find the memory of opposition, and the memory of his own former leniency or weakness, harder and harder to bear and began to mete out harsher treatment to those already punished or pardoned years previously. Although Shaybani was tried and convicted in 1931 from charges arising from the previous year's tribal operations, the shah's real resentment arose from his defiance over Puladin in 1928. Samuil Hayyim, Puladin's co-accused, originally spared a capital sentence and held in prison under the jurisdiction of the civil authorities, was, in December 1931, suddenly committed for trial by a military court, sitting in secret, and executed, an event that caused outrage and mass public protests among the Jewish community.<sup>92</sup> Firuz, who had been released from prison early and allowed to serve his sentence under house arrest, was rearrested in late 1936 and strangled a few months later under the supervision of Dr Ahmadi.<sup>92</sup> Sayyid Hasan Mudarris, arrested in 1929 and exiled to Khurasan, was murdered in 1938 by a special police team sent from Tehran.

By the time of their murders, none of these individuals, nor others who shared the same fate, were engaged in political opposition or offered any conceivable danger to the shah, the dynasty or the regime, although all had, on some occasion in the past, fallen under intense, if often baseless, suspicion. Most had been loyal to the shah and in many cases had already been in prison for some time. Often carried out many years after the individuals

concerned had first fallen from favour, such murders may be explained principally by reference not to the actual political context and the strength of any tangible threat, but, rather, by reference to the psychology of the shah and the pathology of the regime he had created and on which he had imprinted his personality.

# CONCLUSION

## The end of tribal politics in Iran

Riza Shah's massive experiment in social engineering – the settlement of the nomads and the complete political, social and cultural integration of the tribal populations into broader Iranian society – was brought to an abrupt end by the Anglo-Soviet invasion of August 1941 and his own enforced abdication the following month.

During the second decade of his reign, the nomadic populations of Iran had experienced great suffering, with immense losses in livestock and even some decline in their own numbers due to greatly increased rates of mortality and sporadic absorption into peasant communities through forced settlement. Although some real sedentarization had occurred, a perhaps somewhat accelerated version of a process endemic to nomadic life, in general the nomads had not been converted into agriculturalists but had endured a squalid and parasitical existence, often actually increasing the hardships of the peasant population which was, itself, suffering a catastrophic deterioration in conditions resulting from the regime's development policies and the commercialization of land.

The tribal leaderships' experience during the 1930s had been more mixed. They had certainly suffered both from the general consequences of the shah's increasingly brutal dictatorship, and from the specific policies designed to destroy their local power bases. Some were executed, more were imprisoned or exiled. Those suspected of posing an actual or future political threat had their lands confiscated or forcibly exchanged. Nonetheless, the regime continued to accept the tribal leaderships as members of the elite. Even where a khan or one or more of his relatives suffered execution, the rest of his family might receive comparatively lenient treatment, the regime allowing them to live in relative comfort in Tehran or to travel conveniently abroad, provided they eschewed opposition and agreed to stay away from their tribal territories. Most importantly, although individual khans occasionally fell foul of the shah, the tribal elites, like the land-owning class in general, benefited significantly from the regime's land policies. They greatly increased their land holdings and continued their assimilation into the absentee landlord class.

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In general, compulsory settlement contributed substantially to further polarizing existing social antagonisms within tribal society.<sup>1</sup> The nomadic rank and file suffered most. Owning only livestock, they were devastated by their losses during the few years of the experiment.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps those who fared best in these years were the middle-ranking *kalantars* and *kadkhudas*. Largely spared the political repression visited on the khans, the *kalantars* and *kadkhudas* adapted to the changed political context, cooperated with the authorities and prospered by concentrating on managing their own, often substantial, properties.<sup>3</sup>

In 1941, the political collapse of the regime signalled by the shah's abdication was accompanied by the actual collapse of its coercive apparatus, particularly in the rural areas. Officials abandoned their posts and the army, followed by the gendarmerie, melted away, the rank and file simply dispersing after their officers had fled.<sup>4</sup> The veneer of government control in the tribal areas vanished, to be replaced by a power vacuum and there was an appearance, and to some extent a reality, of a reversion to the former era. This was, however, to prove temporary.

In the light of the extreme violence that the regime had employed to impose its policies on the tribal populations, it is unsurprising that the collapse of its power heralded a spontaneous return by the former nomads to their old ways of life. They immediately resumed their migrations and abandoned their settlements, the Bakhtiyari, for example, destroying the stone huts they had been forced to build.<sup>5</sup> They also rearmed, often as much to defend themselves from their regional and tribal enemies as from the army. Some of their modern weapons they acquired direct from the army itself. As large numbers of officer-less troops had deserted, they had taken with them their rifles, ammunition and equipment, which they readily sold in order to be able to buy food. Looted weapons from Allied munitions stores also found their way to the tribes, as did rifles smuggled in through the Gulf ports, and the tribesmen also retrieved old rifles that they had buried or hidden. By 1942 the rural populations were fully rearmed with modern weapons.

On the shah's fall, the khans too immediately grasped the opportunity to reassert their regional political power and the old tribal system. Khans and *kalantars* escaped from their imprisonment or exile and returned to their tribal homelands, assuming once again all their former functions, including political leadership, control of the migrations, the right, lost under Riza Shah, to appoint or approve the *kadkhudas* of their tribal sub-sections, and so on. Tribal organization quickly began to resemble that of the pre-Pahlavi period. Nasir Khan Qashqai, the son of the murdered Sawlat al-Dawlah, for example, was one of the first to re-establish his position, leaving Tehran for Firuzabad in September 1941, immediately on the shah's abdication. Others were more cautious but, by the spring of 1942, all traces of government administration had disappeared from the tribal areas and been replaced by

the authority of the old tribal families. The reception given to the returning khans and *kalantars* varied from tribal group to tribal group. Most of the Qashqai tribes, united by a common hatred of the army and the Pahlavi dynasty, were prepared to accept Nasir Khan's leadership. Elsewhere, however, for example among the Bakhtiyari, there was considerable apprehension at the prospect of the return of the khans.

The returning tribal leaderships once again insisted on the autonomy of their areas vis-à-vis the state and resumed the old methods of alternately negotiating with the government in the attempt to reach a *modus vivendi* and resisting its encroachments by force of arms. Those who had lost lands under Riza Shah also launched concerted efforts for their recovery, especially by working through the Tribal Lands Commission, a body established by the Majlis to restore lands confiscated by Riza Shah to their former owners. The Bakhtiyari khans, for example, having successfully resumed the governorship of Bakhtiyari, which Murtaza Quli Khan had finally lost in 1936, fought a prolonged campaign for the return both of their lands and for compensation for the loss of their oil shares. By 1945 they had been successful in the first aim, achieving some restitution of property, and by 1957 in the second, when they were given compensation for their losses as part of the general settlement following oil nationalization.<sup>6</sup>

Gradually, the political and military authorities in Tehran began to recover from the shock of the 1941 collapse, and to rebuild their structures under Allied auspices. The loss of government control across most of rural Iran posed an immediate problem. In the circumstances of the world war then in progress, the willingness of the Qashqai and other tribal groups to offer support to the Germans was an irritant to the Allies and a spur to their insistence on Tehran taking military action.<sup>7</sup> Although the government in Tehran possessed, as a matter of routine, a commitment to re-establishing its presence in the tribal areas, yet pro-German sentiment persisted, particularly in the army, and the political will to move against anti-British khans such as Nasir Khan Qashqai was doubtful. The British considered Fars a particular hotbed of pro-German sympathy and in February 1943 the government, under British pressure, appointed General Muhammad Shahbakhti to command in the province with orders to disarm and subdue the Qashqai and other recalcitrant tribal groups. From the start he was hampered by a lack of support from the Tehran government and the difficulties of tribal pacification by purely military means were as great as ever. An encounter between Shahbakhti's troops and a combined force of Qashqai and Buyir Ahmadi at Simirum turned into a disaster. The tribal force captured over 1,000 rifles and many other weapons and their defeat led to a total demoralization of an already reluctant army.<sup>8</sup>

Simirum was, in fact, Tehran's last attempt at military operations against the tribes in the south for many years. The political context was changing rapidly. By 1943 the threat from pro-German elements in Iran, and from

the Axis Powers internationally, was receding, while the Soviet ally was appearing dangerously strong. The Tehran government could now agree with the British on a pragmatic policy of leaving the old tribal leaderships in place in the south.

After its defeat at Simirum, the government came to a face-saving agreement with the Qashqai which recognized the khans as responsible for the security of their areas. Tehran made a similar acknowledgement of the *de facto* position of most of the tribal groups in the south, either through tacit understandings or more formal arrangements. Thus the government openly relinquished any role either in internal tribal organization or in the broader administration of the tribal areas, abandoning the collection of taxes and having, in fact, almost no physical presence there.<sup>9</sup> Throughout the 1940s the government took little or no action to recover its lost authority in the tribal areas of southern Iran. A few government offices functioned in the major towns where a few gendarmerie posts and some token army garrisons were also stationed. Beyond this, there was no government presence on tribal territory throughout much of southern Iran. In stark contrast to its attitude towards Kurdistan, Tehran appeared content with this arrangement. The southern tribes and their leaders, although refusing to pay taxes, offered no existential challenge to the government, and, indeed, were again being seen increasingly as a valuable political prop, to be placated rather than confronted.

In the 1940s, as in earlier decades, Britain's attitude was, again, a crucial factor in the tribal politics of southern Iran. During the Second World War, as the southern tribal khans had re-emerged as an important factor in regional politics, Britain had adjusted its attitude accordingly. During the 1920s and 1930s Britain had progressively abandoned its tribal clients in favour of uncomplicated relations with Tehran. Now, however, with the central government weakened and vulnerable to external pressures, the British again began to cultivate the southern khans as a potential counterweight to the growing power of the Soviet Union and of the Tudah Party.

At first the British had been lukewarm about the return of the Bakhtiari khans and scathing about the efforts of Ibrahim Qavam (Qavam al-Mulk) to re-establish himself in Fars, as well as fiercely hostile to the renewed local power of Nasir Khan Qashqai. Yet, as the international military and political balance and Iran's internal situation began to alter, so too did the constellations of tribal politics. The British turned first to the Bakhtiari. In 1942 they had been 'very guarded' in their response to the khans' efforts to re-establish themselves, but during 1943 their attitude began to soften.<sup>10</sup> Murtaza Quli Khan Bakhtiari, now once more governor of the entire Bakhtiari area, together with the other khans seemed again to be an element 'worth cultivating'.<sup>11</sup> In an echo of the past, the British held out the promise of political support for the khans' land claims as an inducement to their cooperation.

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After the Soviet Union's decisive victory at the Battle of Stalingrad in early 1943 and its growing international confidence, British efforts to foster a close relationship with the southern khans became more urgent. Britain was concerned about the regional power of the Soviet Union itself, still in occupation of Iran's northern provinces, but it was also fearful of the growing strength of the Soviet-sponsored Tudah Party, Tudah influence in Tehran on the government and in the Majlis and also, and especially, its ability to organize labour in the southern oilfields.

In their efforts to bolster their position in the south, the British reached beyond their traditional allies, the Bakhtiyari khans and Ibrahim Qavam, and extended an offer of friendship even to their old enemy and quondam German sympathizer, Nasir Khan Qashqai. By the spring of 1944, the British and Nasir Khan had begun to come to an accommodation.<sup>12</sup> In August 1944 a meeting took place between Qavam, Murtaza Quli Bakhtiyari and Nasir Qashqai. In an undertaking reminiscent of the Southern League's resistance to the central government in the early 1920s, the three tribal leaders agreed on 'co-operation in the interests of the south, opposition to the Tudah Party and no action against British interests'.<sup>13</sup> To make absolutely sure no misunderstanding remained about the changed British attitude, in July 1945 the British ambassador informed Nasir Khan in person that Britain was prepared 'to let bygones be bygones'.<sup>14</sup>

This resurgence of tribal politics under British auspices reached its high point the following year when the rapprochement among the tribal khans and between them and the British resulted in the formation of the 'Fars National Movement'. The year 1946 saw a protracted political and international crisis arising from the Soviet demand for an oil concession in Iran, their continued occupation of the northern provinces, and their sponsorship of the autonomous republics in Kurdistan and Azarbayjan.<sup>15</sup> In the autumn, as the prime minister, Ahmad Qavam,<sup>16</sup> was still attempting to negotiate a solution to the Azarbayjan problem, the southern tribal khans launched a coordinated tribal rising. In October Nasir Qashqai, supported by the Bakhtiyari khans and a number of minor tribal chiefs, raised tribal forces and captured Bushire and Kazirun, threatening Shiraz. The 'Fars National Movement' demanded an end to any political role for the Tudah, whether in the central government or in the south. Although openly reactionary and covertly pro-British, the khans adopted the language of modern nationalism and demanded for Fars and Isfahan provincial concessions similar to those recently made to the Soviet-sponsored Democrat Party of Azarbayjan. The tribal revolt was able to call on significant support from right-wing and military circles in Tehran and Qavam's government succumbed to the intense pressure and itself lurched rightwards.<sup>17</sup> Although the tribal movement immediately subsided, the southern khans' ability to combine with individuals and groups at the centre and thus exercise a major influence on national politics had again been demonstrated. Once again, the southern khans had



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threatened regional autonomy and secession in a bid to frustrate or intimidate the central government, holding out the possibility of a continued base for British power should Tehran fall under hostile control.

Although the 'Fars National Movement' deployed, to some extent, the terminology of a nationalist movement, in reality it possessed no such character. The khans had neither the desire nor the capacity to act as the carriers of a genuine national consciousness, nor was any incipient national consciousness displayed by those they mobilized. The revolt was, rather, a purely tribal movement, led by khans acting in pursuit of local and national right-wing, pro-British and anti-communist goals.

During the same year the stimulation of tribal politics and the introduction of ethnic politics in defence of British interests were also evident in Khuzistan. Like other former tribal rulers, the family of Shaykh Khazal tried, after 1941, to regain its former position in Khuzistan. Britain, however, although offering its quiet good offices to the family in their efforts to regain their confiscated lands, declined to back their return to local power. Their long absence and general unpopularity had rendered them irrelevant in the rapidly changing context of a province dominated by the oil economy and modern ideological politics and class-based industrial relations. Instead, the British turned to a number of minor shaykhs of the local Arab tribes who had remained in place throughout the Riza Shah period and whose control over their followers had actually been strengthened by their adoption of the role of labour contractor to the oil company. In the face of the developing international crisis over Azarbayjan, and the intensifying industrial conflict in Khuzistan, these Arab shaykhs, with British encouragement, also discovered the language of ethnic identity and began to raise notions of independence for Khuzistan or union with Iraq. Like the Qashqai and Bakhtiyari khans, they too formed a committee which sent delegates to Tehran to demand the same concessions for Khuzistan as were then being negotiated with the Azarbayjani Democrats. Yet this was, again, as in the 'Fars National Movement', essentially a method of opposing the Tudah, especially its immense local influence within Khuzistan and the oil industry. The majority of the new workers in the oil industry had come to the area from other parts of southern Iran and, although rural in origin, coming from both the nomad and peasant populations, they were overwhelmingly non-Arab, and it was they who filled the ranks of the Tudah-dominated Central Council of Federated Trade Unions (CCFTU). The shaykhs now organized their contracted Arab labourers in Abadan into their own trade unions in opposition to the CCFTU. When the CCFTU organized a general strike in Abadan in July 1946, it rapidly degenerated into ethnic conflict between the Arab labourers and the main body of the workforce in the oil industry.<sup>18</sup> As well as their traditional pro-British ties, the shaykhs had powerful reasons of their own for wishing to deal a blow against the Tudah, the latter

having recently issued exhortations to Arab sharecroppers to withhold the landlord's usual share of the agricultural produce.

For the new wage-labourers from the rural hinterland of southern Iran, the experience of migration to the oilfields had been in many respects a liberating one, freeing them from economic dependence on, and social subservience to, their khans, *kalantars* and *kadkhudas*, and opening up new political and ideological possibilities. The Arab workers however, employed not as individual workers by the company but rather as members of construction teams supplied by private contractors, their own shaykhs, had been excluded from the new forms of solidarity provided by union and political affiliation. They found themselves instead only exposed to a 'modernized' industrial exploitation even more ruthless than that of the agricultural past and against which they were completely defenceless.

Having achieved their immediate objectives with the Soviet withdrawal from northern Iran, the British quickly dropped both the shaykhs and notions of Arab nationalism. In the following decades, however, as detribalization accelerated, the region's oil and steel industries developed and the need for labour continued to attract migration, the Arab population of Khuzistan emerged as a national minority. Yet although increasingly the target of nationalist and pan-Arab propaganda from abroad, particularly from Iraq, the Arabs of Khuzistan largely eschewed the option of 'imagining' themselves part of a larger trans-border nationality and remained without an ethnically based political agenda, although a sense of relative regional deprivation remained strong.<sup>19</sup> Their disinclination was reinforced by the sensitivity of the issue for Iranian nationalism, whatever the character of the regime in Tehran, Iranian awareness of the temptation the province presented to outside powers dating from the days of the very earliest British sponsorship of Shaykh Khazal.

Elsewhere in Iran, however, a rapid transition from tribal politics to ethnic nationalism was, indeed, under way. Traces of the rhetoric of Kurdish nationalism have been discerned in the rebellion led by Ismail Agha Simko between 1918 and 1922, but his remained essentially a tribal revolt, based on tribal support and power and limited by tribal aspirations.<sup>20</sup> In the 1930s the Kurdish tribes, whether settled or nomadic, suffered in the same ways as had other rural populations, pauperized, with compulsory settlement and a growing gulf between the land-owning aghas and the ordinary tribespeople. After 1941 there was, in north-western and western Iran as elsewhere, a similar collapse of the state structures with the former Kurdish tribal chiefs and aghas returning to reclaim their old positions.

By the 1940s, however, a national movement had begun to develop in Kurdistan, a movement based not on the tribal aghas but on modern social forces and, in part at least, prompted by the aggressive Persification policies of the Riza Shah period. This movement emerged in Mahabad, the principal town of the region, was urban in its origin and composition and

led by a Kurdish intelligentsia and middle class. It drew inspiration from more advanced Kurdish movements abroad, particularly in Iraq, and received encouragement and support from the Soviet occupying authorities in Azarbayjan. Expressing itself through modern ideological parties, first the Komala JK,<sup>21</sup> and then the Democratic Party of Kurdistan, this national movement in January 1946 declared the autonomous Kurdish Republic of Mahabad.<sup>22</sup>

The protection given by the wartime Soviet authorities was crucial in providing space for the rapid development of Kurdish nationalism in this period.<sup>23</sup> Although, like Britain, these authorities were pursuing their own strategic objectives, their orientation towards the Kurds was the polar opposite of that adopted by the British towards the southern khans. Bypassing the tribal aghas and the urban notables, the Soviet authorities fostered a Kurdish leadership that originated from subaltern social layers and which possessed an ideological predisposition consisting of a left-leaning nationalism. Although the leadership of the Kurdish movement, and later of the Republic itself, was assumed by the notable Qazi Muhammad, this had little effect on its social base and ideological outlook. With Soviet assistance, particularly the gift of a printing press, the Komala embarked on a programme of cultural activity central to its project of disseminating a national consciousness throughout Kurdish society. In addition to formulating and promoting a range of linguistic, cultural and political demands vis-à-vis Tehran, the Komala, in keeping with its leftist inclinations, began to employ in its publications a distinct class and anti-gha rhetoric.<sup>24</sup>

Nonetheless, the Kurdish movement in Mahabad, lacking any armed strength of its own, was militarily dependent on tribal forces. The aghas themselves exhibited the usual tendency of tribal leaderships to gravitate towards the stronger sources of power and therefore vacillated between Mahabad and Tehran, their support for the Kurdish nationalists waxing and waning according to the wider political context. Although an implicit tension persisted between the urban Kurdish leadership and the tribal chiefs, as long as the movement and the Republic seemed strong, the tribes were prepared to offer their support.<sup>25</sup> During 1946, however, as the Republic showed signs of crumbling, the tribal forces, its only military defence, deserted it.

Tehran clearly understood the new social forces at work in Kurdistan and signalled this understanding in its military reoccupation of the area at the end of 1946 and its brutal repression of the Kurdish political leadership. In the south, in 1943, a lack of political support from the government in Tehran had led to the Iranian army suffering a humiliating defeat against a tribal force of Qashqai and Buyir Ahmadi. Subsequently, the British, their new rapprochement with the southern khans in place, argued strongly that the khans should be left unmolested and that the army was incapable of establishing the direct control of the state. Similarly, in 1946, faced with an

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anti-Tudah tribal rebellion, the military commander in Fars played down the army's capabilities and gave an exaggerated picture of tribal strength, implying that the government had no alternative but to accede to the khans' demands. At the end of 1946, however, Iranian military units, possessing the full backing of Britain and the US, the Iranian army high command and the political elite, successfully reoccupied both Azarbayjan and Kurdistan. Not only was the army's operation triumphant but Tehran underlined its comprehension of the difference between the emerging Kurdish movement and traditional tribal defiance by its policy after reoccupation. None of the southern khans who had rebelled against or defied the government since 1941 had been punished, but had rather been entrusted with security in their areas. In Mahabad, however, Qazi Muhammad and a number of other Kurds were publicly hanged by the military authorities and the army immediately closed down the Kurdish printing press and once again banned the teaching of the Kurdish language.

The Republic of Mahabad represented a 'transitional era between tribalism and national consciousness'.<sup>26</sup> Over the following decades in Kurdistan tribalism, as a method of organizing social life, cultural identity and political representation continued to wither, gradually to be replaced by an ethnic nationalist movement embodied in political groupings with a class character that combined national demands with a programme of radical social and economic change. The evolution of Kurdish nationalism in Iran made explicit the embryonic anti-*agha* tendencies exhibited by the *Komala* in the 1940s. Modern nationalism, in general, necessarily shifted the locus of leadership away from the rural areas to the urban, and away from traditional chiefs to modern leaders with different skills, a different understanding of the nature and purpose of politics, a different appeal and different modes and bases of organization. Furthermore, the particular variety of politics that developed in Kurdistan in the late 1970s to early 1980s, as represented by the leftist Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran and even more starkly by the Revolutionary Organization of the Toilers of Kurdistan (*Komala*), made an anti-*agha* position central to its agenda for Kurdistan.

In contrast to the Kurds, tribal groups in the interior of the country, even numerically substantial confederations such as the *Bakhtiyari* and the *Qashqai*, did not undergo the same evolution from tribe to distinct national minority capable of generating political demands.<sup>27</sup> They certainly experienced many of the processes that impelled the Kurds towards a sense of ethnic consciousness. Both the *Bakhtiyari* and the *Qashqai* produced a reforming cadre from the modern-educated children of the tribal elite. In the case of the *Bakhtiyari*, this phenomenon had been evident at a very early stage, in the form of the *Bakhtiyari Star*. The tribespeople of the south were subject to the same broad processes of socio-economic change, including labour migration, the penetration of capitalist relations and the spread of the cash economy, and the arrival of mass literacy, which were transforming

the material bases of tribal life and politics in Kurdistan and producing there an authentic national movement. Yet, although for the Bakhtiyari and the Qashqai, as well as for the myriad smaller groupings, a sense of tribal belonging remained an important element of personal identity, this sense remained focused on membership of a descent group. For these tribal populations, no qualitative transformation took place whereby an essentially genealogically based identity was transformed into an identity based on membership of an ethnic or national group, however 'imagined', and their tribal identity generated no political, or even cultural/linguistic programme.<sup>28</sup> Rather, the second half of the twentieth century saw the process of detribalization, which had been evident among the tribal elites decades earlier, trickle down the social pyramid.<sup>29</sup> The emerging modern middle and professional classes of tribal origin, and the swelling ranks of ex-tribal industrial and urban migrant workers, joined their non-tribal counterparts in constituting social classes and political organizations configured along national lines, consciously or unconsciously transcending regional, tribal or sectarian affiliations.

During the 1940s the 'tribal problem' in Iran had demonstrated the beginning of an historical bifurcation leading, on the one hand, to modern ethnic nationalism, and on the other, to detribalization and absorption into wider class or ideology-based social and political structures. The reasons for these differing trajectories have been the subject of some debate.<sup>30</sup> In the interior of Iran each tribal population was small in itself, at least by comparison to the Kurds, and its sense of difference with its tribal neighbours was much sharper than its discomfort with the larger concept of 'Iranian'. In particular, the urbanized intelligentsia and middle class, the conduit of nationalism to the Kurds, was, for the Bakhtiyari and the Qashqai and others, too small, too weak and too underdeveloped to sustain an exclusive political movement. Perhaps most crucially the Kurds, and the other tribal groups that developed some sense of national consciousness, unlike the Bakhtiyari and the Qashqai, were decisively shaped by the gravitational pull of pan-national movements active immediately across the Iranian frontiers. It was the formation of parallel and simultaneous national movements among the Kurds in Turkey and Iraq that provided the Iranian Kurds with the numerical weight and ideological and cultural reinforcement necessary to constitute themselves as a national minority with a defined political programme.

The 1940s also saw another significant change in the tribal politics of Iran. The episodes in Fars and Khuzistan in 1946 represented the last attempt by Britain, or any other foreign power, to manipulate the tribes in its own interests. Henceforward, the khans themselves willingly abandoned the possession of independent ties to Britain. The overall decline in British importance had, in any case, rendered these ties obsolete, while access to the benefits of US patronage could best be secured through the Pahlavi regime itself. However, the old efforts by outside powers to patronize tribal

groups was, to some extent, transformed into a strategy of sponsoring anti-regime ethnic nationalist movements. The tendency to develop an orientation towards, and even to invent, ethnic nationalist movements among former tribal populations, pioneered by Britain in the 1940s, continued and was perhaps most evident in Iraq's efforts to exploit any sign of an incipient ethnic consciousness among the Arabs of Khuzistan just before the beginning of the Iran–Iraq war in 1980.

From the 1940s onwards the tribal elites systematically positioned themselves within the institutions of the Pahlavi state. The social success of, for example, the Bakhtiari was perhaps best symbolized by the marriage in 1951 of the shah to Surayya Isfandiyari, their political success by the position of Taymur Bakhtiyar as the first head of SAVAK,<sup>31</sup> and their economic success by Agha Khan Bakhtiyar, head of the National Iranian Oil Company. The younger generation, taking advantage of the educational opportunities both in Iran and abroad available to the wealthy, increasingly found places in the independent professions such as law and engineering, and in staffing the upper echelons of the bureaucracy.

From this time on, too, opposition to the shah among the tribal elites was increasingly expressed through modern political organizations and movements. The old Qashqai hostility to the Pahlavis drove Nasir Qashqai and his brothers into support for Muhammad Musaddiq in the early 1950s, leading to their exile in 1954, although the Qashqai *kalantars* successfully adapted to, and profited from, the changing political environment. In general, tribal origin quickly became irrelevant in determining an individual's political attitudes, even in relation to the monarchy itself. Although much of the Bakhtiari elite had opted for the preservation of its privileges, accepting positions of power and influence under Muhammad Riza Shah, dissident individuals found their way into opposition organizations. Shapur Bakhtiar, for example, served in Musaddiq's government and was for decades a leading member of the National Front. His fellow National Front leader, Karim Sanjabi, also originated from a Kurdish tribal family. Both, however, based their political careers not on their tribal positions but on their education, ability and beliefs. Individuals among the younger generation of the tribal elites also began to find their way into leftist organizations.

The process of detribalization, operating at different speeds and in different ways but in evidence among all layers of the tribal pyramids, was massively accelerated by the land reform of the early 1960s. During the previous decade the khans, on condition that they offered no political challenge to the regime, had been allowed to continue to dominate the tribal areas, exercising political power and consolidating their position as landowners, while nomadism, resurgent since 1941, still continued despite sporadic and largely ineffectual attempts at its suppression by the government.

With the land reform of the early 1960s, a massive upheaval occurred throughout the rural areas. The law limiting ownership affected the tribal

leaders as it did the class of large landowners in general and both responded in much the same way, taking full advantage, as they had under Riza Shah, of the opportunities offered by the new legal realities. Some landowners, both tribal and non-tribal, retained their holdings through legal loopholes or subterfuge, and went on to profit from the development of new, post-land reform, agro-capitalism. Others took their compensation and diversified into industry, property, trade, banking and contracting, enhancing their position within the economic elite of late Pahlavi Iran.<sup>32</sup> The lower ranks of the tribal leaderships, the *kalantars* and *kadkhudas*, also prospered in these years, as they had in the harshest times of the 1930s. They found new alternatives to traditional economic activities such as stockbreeding, particularly the profitable business of labour contracting.<sup>33</sup> They often used their prestige and authority to advance their economic interests, many forming close ties with government officials and with SAVAK functionaries. This often caused many ordinary tribespeople, who contrasted their prosperity with their own impoverishment, to view them as collaborators.

While the land reform enabled the tribal khans to adjust the basis of their economic power, the White Revolution ended their political power in the countryside. The role played in the rural areas by both khans and landowners was now superseded by organs of the state itself. The Literacy Corps in particular eroded any residual paternalism and contributed towards crystallizing an anti-khan attitude among the younger generation of tribespeople.<sup>34</sup> However, while further undermining the position of traditional figures of authority, neither the White Revolution in general nor the activities of institutions such as the Literacy Corps were successful in fostering support for the monarchy among the tribal and rural populations.

The majority of the nomads benefited little from land reform and suffered from subsequent economic developments both on their own account and in common with the settled rural poor. Nomadism was hit hard by the law for the nationalization of pasturelands and the subsequent invasion of former tribal pastures by commercial stockbreeders. The transformation of nomads into detribalized migrant workers was speeded up, poor Bakhtiyari, for example, moving in even greater numbers into menial jobs in the petroleum and agro-industrial sectors and the steel industry in Khuzistan.<sup>35</sup> The post-land reform development of agro-industrial schemes in the rural areas led to ever more pauperization and flight from the land among nomads and peasants alike.

By the 1960s both tribal political power and military strength had become historical memories while the socio-economic basis of pastoral nomadism was being eroded daily by the rapid pace of development. Muhammad Riza Shah had no need to resort to the directly political and administrative methods employed by his father to deal with the 'tribal problem', rather, he could rely on the march of the apparently impersonal but inexorable forces of capitalist economic development. So effective were these forces that by

the 1970s the regime felt so confident of its final victory that it was able to present the tribes, in a way that would have been anathema to Riza Shah, as 'colourful, folkloric relics from the past, a tourist attraction'.<sup>36</sup>

The political tensions resulting from the White Revolution had seen a flare-up of residual armed tribal defiance, notably among the Qashqai, the Buyir Ahmadi and other tribal groups in Fars. The regime was quick to attribute this to 'feudal' resistance to land reform but none of the risings were actually led by the khans, the paramount Qashqai khans had in any case been exiled, and the opposition was short-lived and easily suppressed. Now, however, the rural areas were becoming the site of new forms of armed hostility to the state as the attitude of political opponents of the regime towards the rural poor began to change. Reforming and leftist political trends had always espoused a programmatic commitment to land reform and improving the lot of the peasantry. However, the Iranian left tended in practice to share urban nationalism's routine denigration of the rural poor, viewing the nomadic tribes in particular with dislike and contempt.

Indeed, they occasionally adopted an even more exaggerated view, adding class hatred of the khans and ideological anti-imperialism to the elite's nationalist and modernist prejudices. In 1929 the Comintern had chided the Iranian Communist Party for these prejudices during the rural unrest of that year. According to the Comintern, the central committee of the Iranian Communist Party 'inaccurately estimated the peasant movement . . . in regarding it as a rising of a pack of reactionaries who have attracted the ignorant peasant masses and . . . tribes by the slogans of the Afghan reaction'.<sup>37</sup> On the contrary, argued the Comintern: 'This movement is pregnant with the seeds of a powerful peasant nationalist-revolutionary movement which might easily outgrow its present character, abandon the designs of its temporary leaders, and become a truly revolutionary and popular movement'.<sup>38</sup>

By the 1960s, the Comintern's positive view of the revolutionary potential of the rural poor was exercising an increasing attraction for a younger generation of Iranian leftists disillusioned by the Tudah's failures and influenced by the Chinese, Cuban and Vietnamese rural guerrilla wars. The Revolutionary Organization of the Tudah Party of Iran (ROTPI), a Maoist grouping, adopted the Chinese experience as a model, and developed a plan for organizing a revolutionary movement among the peasantry and capturing the cities from rural strongholds.<sup>39</sup> In pursuit of this strategy, the ROTPI encouraged Bahman Qashqai, a nephew of the paramount Qashqai khans, to revive the tribal resistance, but the movement was crushed. Notwithstanding this and other failures to replicate the Chinese and Vietnamese experiences, a substantial section of the Iranian left continued to place their hopes in the peasant masses. The remote rural areas also offered both the possibility of striking at the shah's apparatus of control and the hope of finding shelter from reprisals. When a sustained guerrilla war against the



shah's regime was launched in 1971, it was with an armed attack by the *Fida'in-i Khalq* against the gendarmerie post in Siyahkal, a village in Gilan, by a small band with the evocative name of the Jangal group.<sup>40</sup>

Nonetheless, when the revolution came, in 1979, it was overwhelmingly an urban phenomenon. Yet the rural poor played their part in the revolutionary movement, as migrants to the cities, participating in the mass demonstrations and protests, and as workers, engaging in industrial strikes with both economic and political demands, while villages within commuting distance of urban centres were themselves drawn into the revolutionary ferment.<sup>41</sup> As in 1941, the sudden collapse of the regime led to efforts by a variety of political groups and social forces to assert their claims and agendas in the rural areas. The Kurdish ethnic nationalist organizations grasped the opportunity to put forward political demands for autonomy and to launch a social revolution in the countryside, Komala in particular confronting landlords and encouraging peasant uprisings and land redistribution.<sup>42</sup> Across the country there were waves of land seizures and occupations by tribal and peasant communities.<sup>43</sup> This process went so far in the Turkman Sahra in north-eastern Iran as to lead to the establishment of a network of peasants' councils which, for a period, operated as the real authority in the region.<sup>44</sup> There was a resurgence of nomadism and some former tribal khans and chiefs moved to regain their former positions.

Gradually, the new Islamic Republic authorities reasserted the power of the state. Tehran's fears of secession and disintegration continued, as in earlier periods, to dictate a hard line towards ethnic nationalism and, specifically, towards Kurdish demands for autonomy. In respect of the tribal populations in general, however, and towards nomadism, the attitude of the Islamic Republic was in marked contrast to that of its Pahlavi predecessor. The turmoil in the countryside prompted the new regime to take a number of initiatives of general significance for the rural areas, including a new land reform, albeit partial and conservative, the establishment of a ministry for rural development (*vizarat-i jihad-i sazandigi*), of village councils (*shura*) and of agricultural cooperatives (*mosha'*).<sup>45</sup> Regarding the nomadic tribes specifically, the ideological approach of the regime was in stark contrast to that of the Pahlavis. Ayatullah Khomeini declared them to be 'Treasures of the Revolution' (*zakhayir-i inqilab*), and the fourth Armed Force (after the army, the *pasdaran* and the *basij*), conferring on them official recognition for what was described as their role in protecting Iran's independence. In addition to its ideological favour, the new regime also made certain benevolent adjustments to the economic basis of nomadism, giving the nomads new freedom to cultivate crops and orchards and to build houses on their seasonal pasturelands, and helping them to diversify their economic activities while still remaining nomadic.<sup>46</sup> Different agencies of the state, especially the *jihad-i sazandigi*, often staffed by people of tribal

## CONCLUSION

origin, also brought improvements to the nomads in health, education, access to clean water, roads and veterinary services.

The revolution also confirmed the historical demise of the khans as a political force and the rise of new foci of power within rural populations. Pahlavi modernization and the White Revolution had failed to attract support to the monarchy but had, in tandem with the general growth of dissent and opposition throughout Iranian society, contributed towards a widespread dislike of the old tribal class structure among ordinary tribespeople. After the revolution, some of the khans attempted to reposition themselves as political leaders of tribal populations, but without success. The most serious effort by a former tribal leader to regain his position was that of Nasir Qashqai, an effort that ended with an insurgency in 1982 which signally failed to attract support from the Qashqai rank and file and ended in utter disarray. The khans and their families finally disappeared as a political factor, many left the country, 'a few remaining only as private citizens, with some wealth but little or no influence'.<sup>47</sup> In their place were established elected councils composed of younger tribespeople loyal to, and dependent upon, the regime.

Pahlavi modernity cast the tribes in the role of its own antithesis. The Islamic Republic, on the other hand, broke the link between modernity and detribalization and settlement. It accepted nomadism as a rational ecological option and, in an ideological decision opposite to that of the Pahlavis but equally ahistorical, redefined the tribes as defenders of national independence. Its assertion of its own political supremacy in the tribal areas was, however, absolute. In the twenty-first century, ethnic nationalism is a reality in Kurdistan, tribal origin continues to be an element in personal identity and pastoral nomadism shows a surprising resilience, but tribal politics in Iran is a feature only of historical memory.

# APPENDIX

## Tribal campaigns 1922–41

- 1922      Operations in Azarbayjan against Simitqu  
            Operations against the Shahsavans in the Ardabil area  
            Operations against Sayyid Jalal in Gilan  
            Attack by Kuhgilus on an Iranian detachment marching from  
            Isfahan to Ahvaz
- 1923      Operations in Azarbayjan against the Shahsavans  
            Operations in Luristan
- 1924      Operations in Baluchistan  
            Operations in Luristan  
            Operations against the Shaykh of Muhammarah  
            Operations against the Turkmans
- 1925      Operations in Khuzistan against the Arabs  
            Operations against the Turkmans  
            Operations in the Baluchistan Sarhad  
            Operations in Luristan  
            Operations against the Vali of Pusht-i Kuh  
            Operations in southern Kurdistan
- 1926      Operations in Luristan  
            Operations in Kurdistan  
            Divisions
- 1927      Operations in Kurdistan  
            Operations in Luristan  
            Operations in south-eastern Fars
- 1928      Operations in Kurdistan  
            Operations in Khuzistan  
            Operations in Luristan  
            Operations in north-western Fars  
            Operations in Baluchistan  
            Operations in north-western Khurasan
- 1929      Operations in Azarbayjan against the Kurds  
            Operations in Fars against the Qashqai, the Khamsah, the  
            Mamassani, Kuhgilu, Buyir Ahmadi

## APPENDIX

- Operations in Isfahan against the Bakhtiari
- Operations in Baluchistan
- Operations in north-western Khurasan
- 1930 Operations in Fars against the Buyir Ahmadi, the Mamassani
- Operations in Azarbayjan against the Kurds
- Operations in Baluchistan
- 1931 Operations in Azarbayjan against the Kurds
- Operations in Kurdistan
- Operations in Fars against the Mamassani Division
- 1932 Operations in Azarbayjan and Kurdistan against Kurdish rebels from Turkey
- Operations in Fars against the Qashqai
- Operations in Luristan
- Operations in Baluchistan
- 1933 Minor operations in response to raids and robberies in various provinces
- 1934 Operations in Baluchistan
- 1935 Minor operations in Kurdistan
- Minor operations in Baluchistan
- 1936–41 No operations
- Troops remained under field service conditions in Kurdistan and Baluchistan
- Minor military responses to raids and robberies in various provinces

# NOTES

## INTRODUCTION

- 1 For a discussion of the general character of Riza Shah's rule, see the introduction, Stephanie Cronin (ed.) *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society under Riza Shah, 1921–1941* (London and New York, 2003). For a discussion of the relationship between tribes and state-building in various countries of the Middle East in different periods, see Philip Khoury and Joseph Kostiner (eds) *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (Berkeley, CA, 1990).
- 2 The forced relocation of tribal groups was an even older practice and dated back at least to the Safavid period, but this was a utilization of tribal power by the state, rather than an attempt to suppress it.
- 3 Eric Hooglund has described how the constitutionalist intellectuals formulated land reform as desirable essentially as a means of pursuing their primary political objective, while Parvin Paidar has located early notions of 'women's emancipation' firmly within the context of the perceived need for 'national progress'. Eric Hooglund, *Land and Revolution in Iran, 1960–1989* (Austin, TX, 1982), pp. 36–40. Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-century Iran* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 71.
- 4 For a discussion of the political context and consequences of unveiling, see Stephanie Cronin (ed.) *The Making of Modern Iran*, pp. 8–9; 157–210.
- 5 Riza Khan became shah in December 1925 when a Constituent Assembly voted in favour of a change of dynasty. The designation Riza Khan or Riza Shah has been employed according to the chronological context.
- 6 Ibrahim Khan Qavam al-Mulk himself, like his forebears, was not of tribal origin. The Qavam al-Mulk family, merchants and landowners in Shiraz and Fars, had been given the appointment of *hakim* (administrator) of the newly created Khamsah confederation by Nasir al-Din Shah in 1861–2. Nonetheless, his position of overlordship of the confederation made him a factor in the tribal politics of the region and, as far as the state was concerned, a figure able to marshal tribal political and military strength. See Lois Beck, *The Qashqa'i of Iran* (New Haven, CT and London, 1986).
- 7 Sawlat al-Dawlah (1878–1933) was first appointed *ilkhani* of the Qashqai confederation in 1904 and held the title for most of the period down to 1933. A rival to Qavam in Fars, he was always the object of profound British hostility.

Emphasizing his anti-British past to appeal to Riza Khan and to nationalist opinion in general, he was elected to the Majlis but fell under suspicion and was detained in Tehran. He was arrested in 1932 and murdered in prison the following year. Qavam al-Mulk (1888–c.1972), titular head of the five tribes of the Khamsah confederation, a position he inherited from his father, was one of the largest landowners in Iran and several times elected to the Majlis. One of the major pillars of British influence in southern Iran, he adapted to the rise of Riza Shah and became a loyal courtier. His eldest son, Ali, married Riza Shah's third daughter, Ashraf, in 1937. Shaykh Khazal, Sardar Aqdas (1861–1936) became shaykh of the Muhaysin tribe in 1897 and was appointed governor of Muhammarah the following year. He gradually acquired control over the most important Arab tribes in the region and accumulated great wealth and influence. He was extremely useful to Britain during the First World War, was awarded a knighthood and given various assurances and promises of support. After the army forced his submission to Riza Khan in 1924, he was brought to Tehran where his disputes with the government over his properties continued until his death.

- 8 For a discussion of the debates surrounding the meaning of the term 'tribe', see Richard Tapper, *Frontier Nomads of Iran: A Political and Social History of the Shahsavans* (Cambridge, 1997); Beck, *The Qashqa'i of Iran*.
- 9 For a discussion of some of the resulting difficulties, see Tapper, *Frontier Nomads*, pp. 1–33.
- 10 See, for example, Ja'afar Quli Khan Amir Bahadur and Iraj Afshar (eds) *Khatirat-i Sardar As'ad Bakhtiyari* (Tehran, 1372); Ahmad Amirahmadi, *Khatirat-i Nakhustin Sipahbud-i Iran* (Tehran, 1373); Kavih Bayat (ed.) *'Amaliyyat-i Luristan: Asnad-i Sartip Muhammad Shahbakhti, 1303 va 1306 shamsi* (Tehran, n.d.); Kavih Bayat, *Shurish-i 'Asha'ir-i Fars* (Tehran, 1365). For some contemporary Iranian army views of tribal campaigning see, *inter alia*, Kavih Bayat, "'Asha'ir az Didgah-i Manabi'-yi Nizami-yi Mu'asir 1300–1350,' *Tarikh-i Mu'asir-i Iran*, vol. 1, Winter 1372.
- 11 See, for example, the discussion of the circumstances surrounding Sardar Asad's death in prison in Hamid Riza Dalvand, *Majarayi-yi Qatl-i Sardar As'ad Bakhtiyari* (Tehran, 1379), and the account of the Chahar Mahal peasant movement in Amir Husayn Karim Nikzad, *Shinakht-i Sarzamin-i Chahar Mahal* (Isfahan, 1357). The journal devoted to Bakhtiyari affairs, *Kitab-i Anzan, Vizhah-i Farhang, Hunar, Tarikh va Tamaddun-i Bakhtiyari*, was an interesting experiment but was unfortunately discontinued after two issues.
- 12 See, for example, Gene Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran* (Cambridge, 1983); Lois Beck, *The Qashqa'i of Iran*; Richard Tapper, *Frontier Nomads of Iran*; Farideh Koochi-Kamali, *The Political Development of the Kurds in Iran: Pastoral Nationalism* (Basingstoke, 2003); Pierre Oberling, *The Qashqa'i Nomads of Fars* (The Hague, 1974).
- 13 See, for example, the petition from the Qashqai *kalantars* in FO248/1389/591/22.

## 1 TRIBE AND STATE

- 1 See, for example, the views expressed in the journals *Iranshahr*, *Farangistan* and especially *Ayandih*. See also Ahmad Kasravi, *Tarikh-i Pansad-i Salih-i Khuzistan* (Tehran, 1362).

- 2 For a discussion of Iranian modernism or perhaps 'pseudo-modernism', see Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926–1979* (London, 1981); and *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and The Emergence of the Pahlavis* (London and New York, 2000).
- 3 Kaveh Bayat, 'Riza Shah and the tribes: an overview', in Stephanie Cronin (ed.) *The Making of Modern Iran*, p. 213.
- 4 Ibid. See also Mansurah Nizam Mafi, *Maramnamahha va Nizamnamahha-yi Ahzab-i Siyasi dar Iran* (Tehran, 1361).
- 5 Even the British had their *yaylaq* in their summer residence in the village of Qulhak then to the north of Tehran.
- 6 Stephanie Cronin, *The Army and the Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran, 1910–1926* (London and New York, 1997), pp. 5–6; 121–5.
- 7 For Qajar reform, see, *inter alia*, A. Reza Sheikholeslami, *The Structure of Central Authority in Qajar Iran, 1871–1896* (Atlanta, GA, 1997); Guity Nashat, *The Origins of Modern Reform in Iran, 1870–80* (Urbana, IL, 1982); Shaul Bakhash, *Iran: Monarchy, Bureaucracy and Reform under the Qajars: 1858–1896*, (London, 1978).
- 8 For the role of the Qajar state in confederacy formation in the nineteenth century, see Beck, *The Qashqa'i*. For a similar analysis in a different context, see Malcolm Yapp, 'Tribes and States in the Khyber, 1838–1842', in Richard Tapper (ed.) *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan* (London, 1983).
- 9 See, *inter alia*, Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906–1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy and the Origins of Feminism* (Columbia, NY, 1996); Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (Oxford, 1988); Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran*.
- 10 Tapper, *Frontier Nomads of Iran*, p. 254.
- 11 See Muhammad Taqi Bahar, Malik al-Shu'ara', *Tarikh-i Mukhtasar-i Ahzab-i Siyasi-yi Iran* (Tehran, 1323), vol. 1.
- 12 See Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs*.
- 13 Cronin, *The Army and the Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, p. 60.
- 14 W. J. Olson, *Anglo-Iranian Relations during World War I* (London, 1984); Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs*; Beck, *The Qashqa'i of Iran*.
- 15 The choice of terminology to describe this province raises extremely sensitive political issues. This book has broadly tried to follow official Iranian practice, using 'Arabistan' for the Qajar period, changing to 'Khuzistan' for the period after the province was formally renamed by Riza Shah.
- 16 For an excellent discussion of the methods by which tribal groups established themselves in control of a region, see Tapper, *Frontier Nomads of Iran*, pp. 274–5.
- 17 Approximate estimates suggest that in 1921, of the total population of around 12 million, about 20 per cent were urban, 20 per cent nomadic tribes and 60 per cent settled cultivators. M. E. Yapp, *The Near East Since the First World War* (London, 1991) p. 167. The Bakhtiyari and the Qashqai were the largest groups, one estimate puts the Qashqai in 1918 around 175,000. The Tribes of Fars, Lt. Magee, November 1945, FO371/52737/E1260/633/34, p. 10.
- 18 A. K. S. Lambton, 'Ilat', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 3, p. 1105.
- 19 Kuhgilu is used to denote the tribal group, Kuhgiluyyah the region.

- 20 See Koohi-Kamali, *The Political Development of the Kurds in Iran*.
- 21 Cronin, *The Army and the Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, p. 113.
- 22 A full list of the tribal campaigns undertaken by the army between 1921 and 1941 is given in the Appendix.
- 23 For a discussion of the army's operational difficulties in this period, see Cronin, *The Army and the Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, pp. 108–43.
- 24 Cronin, *The Army and the Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, pp. 131–2.
- 25 In 1920, for example, it was estimated that the Bakhtiari were able to put 30,000 armed men into the field, the Yamut Turkmans 20,000, the Shahsavani between 10,000 and 20,000, while in Fars alone the Qashqai possessed 30,000 fighting men, the Khamsah 14,000, the Kuhgilu 12,000, the Mamassani, Buyir Ahmadi and Dushmanziyari 7,000, and the smaller tribes of the Bushire hinterland around 8,000 more. Report of the Anglo-Persian Military Commission, 1920, FO371/4911/C197/197/34.
- 26 For the defeat of Pasyan by Kurdish forces, see Stephanie Cronin, 'An Experiment in Revolutionary Nationalism: The Rebellion of Colonel Muhammad Taqi Khan Pasyan in Mashhad, April–October 1921', *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 33, no. 4, October 1997. See also Kavih Bayat (ed.) *Inqilab-i Khurasan, Majmu'ah-i Asnad va Madarik 1300 shamsi* (Tehran, 1370). For the continuing utility of tribal levies in the new army, see Cronin, *The Army and the Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*.
- 27 The *ilkhani* was the paramount chief of the Bakhtiari confederation. Before 1923 a consensus among the senior khans would determine who would occupy this post, the consensus being confirmed by Tehran. After 1923 the appointment was made by Riza Khan. The *ilbaygi* was the *ilkhani*'s deputy.
- 28 For the army's Luristan campaigns, see Ahmad Amirahmadi, *Khatirat-i Nakhustin Sipahbud-i Iran* (Tehran, 1373); Kavih Bayat (ed.) *'Amaliyyat-i Luristan: Asnad-i Sartip Muhammad Shahbakhti, 1303 va 1306 shamsi* (Tehran, n.d.). An interesting feature of the Luristan campaigns was the army's extensive deployment of the Armenian squadron. This unit was composed entirely, at all ranks, of Armenians, and constituted one of the most effective fighting units of the new army. It also acquired, among the Lurs and beyond, a particular reputation for brutality. The origins of the Armenian squadron are obscure. It may have been a survival of the force assembled by the constitutionalist Yifrim Khan or it may have been a more recent formation, composed of refugees from the newly sovietized republic of Armenia.
- 29 Although Amirahmadi may be taken as a typical, if rather extreme, example, of the outlook prevailing within the army, an alternative attitude was occasionally to be found among individual commanders. Such an attitude, more subtle and predicated upon a political rather than a military approach, was evinced by, for example, General Abdullah Tahmasbi in Azarbayjan in the early 1920s, and by Brigadier Haydar Quli Khan Pasyan while military governor of Bihbahan and Kuhgiluyyah between 1924 and 1926.
- 30 For the Shalil attack, see Chapter 2.
- 31 The nationalist discourse about the tribal problem was shared by both the political left and the right. Indeed, the left might be even harsher, adding to its dislike of foreign interference a class hatred of the khans. See Conclusion, p. 203.
- 32 For the Jangalis, see Cosroe Chaqueri, *The Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran, 1920–1921: Birth of the Trauma* (Pittsburgh, PA, 1995); for Pasyan, see Cronin,



- 'An Experiment in Revolutionary Nationalism'; for Lahuti, see Stephanie Cronin, 'Iran's Forgotten Revolutionary: Abulqasim Lahuti, and the Tabriz Insurrection', in *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran: New Perspectives on the Iranian Left* (RoutledgeCurzon, 2004); Kavih Bayat, *Kudita-yi Lahuti, Tabriz, Bahman 1300* (Tehran, 1376); for Simko, see Koochi-Kamali, *The Political Development of the Kurds in Iran*; for the Shahsavani, see Tapper, *Frontier Nomads of Iran*.
- 33 On British policy, see Cyrus Ghani, *Iran and the Rise of Reza Shah: From Qajar Collapse to Pahlavi Power* (London and New York, 1998); Houshang Sabahi, *British Policy in Persia 1918–1925* (London, 1990).
  - 34 Sayyid Ziya al-Din Tabatabai (c.1888–1969), having established a close relationship with the British during the First World War, became the civilian leader of the 1921 coup. He was the first prime minister in the post-coup regime but was forced into exile by Riza Khan within a very few months, in May 1921. While in exile in British mandatory Palestine he attended the Jerusalem General Muslim Congress in 1931. He returned to Iran in 1943 and re-entered politics, forming the National Will Party (*hizb-i Iradah-i Milli*).
  - 35 E. G. B. Peel, Note on Bakhtiari Policy, 2 July 1921, Trevor to Government of India, 18 August 1921, FO371/6406/E11188/2/34.
  - 36 Stephanie Cronin, 'Great Britain, v. British Influence during the Reza Shah Period, 1921–1941', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. xi, fascicle 3, 2002.
  - 37 On Shaykh Khazal, see W. T. Strunk, 'The Reign of Shaykh Khaz'al ibn Jabir and the Suppression of the Principality of 'Arabistan: A Study in British Imperialism in South-Western Iran, 1897–1925', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Indiana, 1977.
  - 38 Chick, Shiraz, to Loraine, 31 January 1922, FO371/7805/E4730/6/34.
  - 39 Stephanie Cronin, 'Popular Protest, Disorder and Riot in Iran: The Tehran Crowd and the Rise of Riza Khan, 1921–1925', *International Review of Social History*, vol. 50, part 2, 2005.
  - 40 Cronin, *The Army and the Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*; Kavih Bayat, *Qiyam-i Nafir-i Jam: Shurish-i Lahak Khan Salar-i Jang* (Tehran, 1375); Baqir Aqali, *Riza Shah va Qushun-i Muttahid al-Shakl, 1300–1320* (Tehran, 1377), pp. 234–48.
  - 41 See Stephanie Cronin, 'Conscription and Popular Resistance in Iran (1925–1941),' in Erik Jan Zürcher (ed.) *Arming the State: Military Conscription in the Middle East and Central Asia 1775–1925* (London, 1999).
  - 42 This policy appears to have been first considered concretely in relation to the tribes of Luristan. See Annual Report 1927, Clive to Chamberlain, 21 May 1928, FO371/13069/E2897/2897/34. By 1928 the government was already building walled villages for the settlement of the nomadic Lurs. Annual Report 1928, Clive to Henderson, 14 July 1929, FO371/13799/E3676/3676/34. For the shah's intention, by 1928, to apply this policy to the Bakhtiari, see Report on the Situation in Bakhtiari, 22 September 1928, R. G. Monypenny, Consul, Ahvaz, FO416/83, pp. 141–6.
  - 43 Although their power based on their tribal position was suppressed, many members of the tribal elites made successful transitions to positions of power, influence and wealth by adapting to the modern framework of the new Pahlavi state. See Conclusion.

- 44 The electoral law of 9 September 1906 did not provide for any tribal representation, other than that of the tribe from which the dynasty was drawn, the Qajar. The electoral law of 1 July 1909, however, made provision for the Bakhtiyari, the Shahsavan, the Qashqai, the Khamsah and the Turkman each to send one deputy to the Majlis. Lambton, 'Ilat', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, pp. 1109–10. Nonetheless, by the late 1920s the Bakhtiyari had apparently acquired the right to send two deputies.
- 45 Summary of Events and Conditions in Fars during the year 1934, Knatchbull-Hugessen to Simon, 11 February 1935, FO371/18994/E1482/1482/34.
- 46 The statistical evidence necessary for the precise measuring of the impact of the changes of these years on living standards is extremely scanty. For example, it is likely that amid the general immiseration a minority of better-off peasants were able to prosper, but evidence is lacking. For a discussion, see John Foran, *Fragile Resistance: Social Transformation in Iran from 1500 to the Revolution* (Boulder, CO, 1993), pp. 231–3.
- 47 Knatchbull-Hugessen to FO, 23 August 1935, FO371/18992/E5443/608/34.
- 48 See, for example, Knatchbull-Hugessen to Simon, 21 March 1935, FO371/18992/E2275/608/34.
- 49 V. A. L. Mallet, Notes on a Tour in Khorasan and Gurgan (Astarabad) Province, 18 October 1935, Knatchbull-Hugessen to Hoare, 24 October 1935, FO371/18992/E6776/608/34.
- 50 See, for example, Annual Report 1931, Hoare to Simon, 12 June 1932, FO371/16077/E3354/3354/34.
- 51 For the notion of the spontaneous settlement of nomads, see Fredrik Barth, *Nomads of South Persia: The Basseri Tribe of the Khamseh Confederacy* (London, 1961), Chapters 7, 10; Xavier de Planhol, 'Geography of Settlement', *Cambridge History of Iran*, 7 vols (Cambridge, 1968–91), vol. 1, pp. 416–18.
- 52 Xavier de Planhol, 'Geography of Settlement', p. 417.
- 53 Mohammad Gholi Majid, *Great Britain and Reza Shah: The Plunder of Iran, 1921–1941* (Florida, 2001), p. 281.
- 54 R. F. G. Sarell, acting Vice-Consul, to Watkinson, Consul, Shiraz, 14 July 1937, FO371/20835/E6271/904/34. See also X de Planhol, 'Geography of Settlement', *Cambridge History of Iran*, 7 vols (Cambridge, 1968–91), vol. 1.
- 55 R. F. G. Sarell, acting vice-Consul, to Watkinson, Consul, Shiraz, 14 July 1937, FO371/20835/E6271/904/34.
- 56 Sir Mark Aurel Stein, *Old Routes of Western Iran* (London, 1940), p. 276.
- 57 The Tribes of Fars, Lt. Magee, November 1945, FO371/52737/E1260/633/34.
- 58 Ibid., p. 29.
- 59 Ibid., p. 97.
- 60 Ibid., p. 127.
- 61 Tapper, *Frontier Nomads of Iran*, p. 291.

## 2 THE NEW STATE AND THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TRIBAL LEADERSHIPS

- 1 For the Bakhtiyari prior to the rise of Riza Khan, Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs* is invaluable. Some historical information and attempts at constructing theoretical

- frameworks for the study of the Bakhtiari, although from an anthropological perspective, may be found in David Brooks, 'The Enemy Within: Limitations on Leadership in the Bakhtiari' and Jean-Pierre Digard, 'On the Bakhtiari: Comments on "Tribes, Confederation and the State"', in Richard Tapper (ed.) *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan* (London, 1983). See also further works of Jean-Pierre Digard, 'Histoire et anthropologie des sociétés nomades. Le cas d'une tribu d'Iran', *Annales, Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, xxviii (6), 1973; 'Jeux de Structures: Segmentarité et pouvoir chez les nomades Baxtyâri d'Iran', *L'Homme* 102, April-June 1987, xxvii (2); 'Baktiari Tribe, i. Ethnography', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 3, 1988.
- 2 Arthur C. Millspaugh, an American citizen, was appointed Iranian Administrator-General of Finance in 1922, a post and title first held by Morgan Shuster during the constitutional period. He successfully reorganized Iran's tax system and the ministry of finance but after friction developed between his mission and Riza Shah his contract was not renewed. He left Iran in 1927. He headed a second financial mission to Iran between 1943 and 1945.
  - 3 The memoirs of Jafar Quli Khan Sardar Asad have been edited and published but, although they are mostly concerned with the 1920s and early 1930s when Sardar Asad occupied a succession of high government positions, they provide little insight into the inner workings of the regime. Ja'afar Quli Khan Amir Bahadur and Iraj Afshar (eds) *Khatirat-i Sardar As'ad Bakhtiari* (Tehran, 1372).
  - 4 For the Bakhtiari in the nineteenth century, see Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs*.
  - 5 The confederation consisted of the two major lineages of the Haft Lang and the Chahar Lang.
  - 6 Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs*.
  - 7 Strunk, 'The Reign of Shaykh Khaz'al'.
  - 8 Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs*, p. 113.
  - 9 Ibid.
  - 10 Ibid., pp. 87-8.
  - 11 Ibid., p. 40.
  - 12 Ibid., pp. 104-12.
  - 13 Cyrus Ghani, *Iran and the Rise of Reza Shah*, p. 10.
  - 14 Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs*, pp. 136-8.
  - 15 Ibid., p. 138.
  - 16 For Pasyan, see Cronin, 'An Experiment in Revolutionary Nationalism'. For the Jangalis, see Chaqueri, Cosroe, *The Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran, 1920-1921: Birth of the Trauma* (Pittsburgh, PA, 1995).
  - 17 For the formation of the new divisions, see Cronin, *The Army and the Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, Chapter 4.
  - 18 Memorandum by Oliphant, 2 January 1922, FO371/7802/E102/6/34; Loraine to FO, 4 January 1922, FO371/7802/E192/6/34. For British doubts about Riza Khan's reliability, see Houshang Sabahi, *British Policy in Persia*.
  - 19 Crow, Isfahan, to Minister, Tehran, 22 March 1922, FO371/7806/E5378/6/34.
  - 20 Ibid.
  - 21 Minister, Tehran, to Consul-General, Isfahan, 13 April 1922, FO371/7806/E5378/6/34.
  - 22 Chick, Shiraz, to Minister, Tehran, 11 March 1922, FO371/7806/E5378/6/34.

- 23 M. Y. Young to the General Manager, APOC, 23 March 1923, BP 71724.
- 24 For friction between the military and civil authorities in the provinces in this period, see Cronin, *The Army and the Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, pp. 199–205.
- 25 Intelligence Summary no. 13, 1 April 1922, FO371/7827/E5230/285/34.
- 26 Fitzpatrick, Ahvaz, to Minister, Tehran, 20 July 1922, FO371/7809/E9958/6/34.
- 27 Strunk, 'The Reign of Shaykh Khaz'al', p. 322.
- 28 Ibid., pp. 350–1.
- 29 Loraine to Balfour, 8 July 1922, FO371/7808/E8447/6/34.
- 30 Sabahi, *British Policy in Persia*, p. 179.
- 31 Loraine to FO, 19 July 1922, FO371/7807/E7202/6/34.
- 32 Loraine to FO, 20 July 1922, FO371/7807/E7230/6/34.
- 33 Loraine to FO, 22 July 1922, FO371/7807/E7260/6/34.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Minister, Tehran, to Resident, Bushire, 22 July 1922, FO371/7808/E9336/6/34.
- 36 FO to Loraine, 27 July 1922, FO371/7807/E7505/6/34.
- 37 Viceroy to Secretary of State for India, 28 July 1922, FO371/7807/E7505/6/34.
- 38 Loraine to FO, 13 August 1922, FO371/7807/E8043/6/34.
- 39 Interview with War Minister, Saunders, Military Attaché, 17 August 1922, FO371/7809/E10850/6/34.
- 40 IS no. 33, 19 August 1922, FO371/7828/E10849/285/34.
- 41 Strunk, 'The Reign of Shaykh Kha'al', p. 358.
- 42 Fitzpatrick, Isfahan, to Minister, Tehran, 3 August 1922, FO371/7809/E9337/6/34; Loraine to FO, 13 August 1922, FO371/7807/E8043/6/34.
- 43 Loraine to FO, 22 August 1922, FO371/7808/E8385/6/34.
- 44 IS 33, 19 August 1922, FO371/7828/E10849/285/34.
- 45 Ibid.; Loraine to FO, 22 August 1922, FO371/7808/E8403/6/34; IS no. 35, 2 September 1922, FO371/7828/E10188/285/34.
- 46 Loraine to FO, 9 August 1922, FO371/7807/E7956/6/34.
- 47 Loraine to FO, 13 August 1922, FO371/7807/E8043/6/34.
- 48 Loraine to FO, 22 August 1922, FO371/7808/E8385/6/34.
- 49 Loraine to Curzon, 10 May 1923, FO371/9043/E6343/1416/34.
- 50 Loraine to Curzon, 4 September 1922, FO371/10134/E10179/457/34.
- 51 For the general political background, see Cronin, *The Army and the Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, pp. 184–6; Houshang Sabahi, *British Policy in Persia*.
- 52 See Cronin, *The Army and the Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, pp. 184–6.
- 53 Annual Report 1923, Loraine to MacDonald, 4 March 1924, FO371/10153/E3362/2635/34; Crow, Isfahan, to Minister, Tehran, 19 November 1922, FO371/9043/E6343/1416/34.
- 54 Loraine to Curzon, 10 May 1923, FO371/9043/E6343/1416/34.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Ahmad Shah was the last monarch of the Qajar dynasty. He had acceded to the throne in 1909, while still a minor, on the deposition of his father, Muhammad Ali Shah, and was himself deposed by the Constituent Assembly of 1925.
- 57 Loraine to Curzon, 10 May 1923, FO371/9043/E6343/1416/34.
- 58 Ibid.

## NOTES

- 59 Crow, Isfahan, to Tehran, 19 November 1922, FO371/9043/E6343/1416/34.
- 60 Consul, Ahvaz, to Loraine, 15 July 1923, FO371/9043/E8161/1416/34. It appears that the khans also made an attempt to instigate a local brigand, Haji Husayn Quli, to kill or capture the war minister. Elkington to the General Manager, APOC, 19 May 1923, BP 71724.
- 61 Loraine to Curzon, 10 May 1923, FO371/9043/E6343/1416/34.
- 62 Annual Report 1923; Bahar, *Tarikh-i Mukhtasar*, vol. 1, p. 71.
- 63 Elkington to the General Manager, APOC, 19 May 1923, BP 71724. Chahar Mahal is a rich agricultural plain on the fringes of Bakhtiyari summer pastures where much of the land was owned by the khans and where many had built homes.
- 64 Loraine to Curzon, 10 May 1923, FO371/9043/E6343/1416/34.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Annual Report 1923.
- 68 IS no. 14, 7 April 1923, FO371/9019/E5822/69/34.
- 69 IS no. 13, 31 March 1923, FO371/9019/E4911/69/34.
- 70 IS no. 16, 21 April 1923, FO371/9019/E5824/69/34.
- 71 Loraine to FO, 2 April 1923, FO371/9042/E3431/1416/34.
- 72 Loraine to FO, 10 April 1923, FO371/9042/E3710/1416/34.
- 73 Loraine to FO, 20 April 1923, FO371/9043/E4056/1416/34.
- 74 Loraine to Curzon, 10 May 1923, FO371/9043/E6343/1416/34.
- 75 Ibid.
- 76 FO to Loraine, 7 April 1923, FO371/9042/E3431/1416/34.
- 77 Loraine to FO, 30 April 1923, FO371/9043/E4392/1416/34.
- 78 Ibid.
- 79 IS no. 18, 5 May 1923, FO371/9019/E6618/69/34.
- 80 His Excellency the Minister of War to Sir P. Loraine, 1 May 1923; Serdar Sepah (*sic*) to His Majesty's Minister, 3 May 1923, FO371/9043/E6343/1416/34.
- 81 Loraine to Curzon, 6 September 1923, FO371/9043/E10191/1416/34.
- 82 For an appreciation of the size of this sum, it may be noted, for example, that the budget for the year 1924–5 only provided for revenue of nearly 23 million *tumans*. IS no. 42, 18 October 1924, FO371/10132/E10388/255/34.
- 83 Millspaugh, A. C., *The American Task in Persia* (New York, 1925), pp. 185–8.
- 84 Loraine to Curzon, 6 September 1923, FO371/9043/E10191/1416/34.
- 85 Ibid.
- 86 Annual Report 1923.
- 87 Loraine to Curzon, 6 September 1923, FO371/9043/E10191/1416/34.
- 88 Ibid.
- 89 Major Noel's report, Isfahan, 12 May 1921, FO371/6405/E9256/2/34.

## 3 CHALLENGES FROM WITHIN AND BELOW

- 1 Annual Report 1922, Loraine to Curzon, 16 July 1923, FO371/9051/E8057/8057/34.
- 2 The programme may be found in Bridgeman to Curzon, 5 October 1921, FO371/6407/E13435/2/34. A very slightly amended version of this programme, produced in response to the severe criticism that greeted its first appearance

- may be found in Consul-General, Isfahan, to Loraine, 17 February 1922, FO 371/7805/E4742/6/34. The programme is also reproduced in Rawshanak Bakhtiyar, 'Zindigi va Marg-i Khan Baba Khan As'ad', *Kitab-i Anzan, Vizhah-i Farhang, Hunar, Tarikh va Tamaddun-i Bakhtiyari*, vol. 1.
- 3 Rawshanak Bakhtiyar, 'Zindigi va Marg-i Khan Baba Khan As'ad', p. 86.
  - 4 Bridgeman to Curzon, 5 October 1921, FO371/6407/E13435/2/34; Consul-General, Isfahan, to Loraine, 17 February 1922, FO371/7805/E4742/6/34. The *Kumitah-i Ahan* was an association of moderate reformers once headed by Sayyid Ziya, see Husayn Makki, *Tarikh-i Bist Salah-i Iran*, 8 vols (Tehran, 1323), vol. 1, pp. 188–9.
  - 5 The Soviet consulate in Isfahan opened in June 1922.
  - 6 Consul-General, Isfahan, to Loraine, 17 February 1922, FO371/7805/E4742/6/34; Annual Report 1922, Loraine to Curzon, 16 July 1923, FO371/9051/E8057/8057/34.
  - 7 Fitzpatrick, Consul, Ahvaz, to Minister, Tehran, 20 July 1922, FO371/7809/E9958/6/34.
  - 8 See Chapter 6.
  - 9 See Chapter 5.
  - 10 The Bakhtiari Tribe, C. A. Gault, Consul, Isfahan, 1944, L/P&S/12/3546.
  - 11 Loraine to Curzon, 20 September 1923, FO371/9043/E10202/1416/34. For Bibi Maryam, see Julie Oehler, 'Bibi Maryam: A Bakhtiyari Tribal Woman', in Edmund Burke III (ed.) *Struggle and Survival in the Modern Middle East* (London and New York, 1993).
  - 12 M. Y. Young to the General Manager, APOC, 23 March 1923, BP 71724.
  - 13 Elkington to the General Manager, APOC, 19 May 1923, BP 71724.
  - 14 Elkington to the General Manager, APOC, 17 August 1923, BP 71724.
  - 15 Consul-General, Isfahan, to Consul, Ahvaz, 10 October 1923; Consul-General, Isfahan, to Consul, Ahvaz, 11 October 1923; Peel, Ahvaz, to Tehran, 13 October 1923; Consul-General, Isfahan, to Consul, Ahvaz, 14 October 1923; Consul-General, Isfahan, to Consul, Ahvaz, 15 October 1923; Monson, Tehran, to Peel, Ahvaz, 16 October 1923; Peel, Ahvaz, to Loraine, 21 October 1923, FO371/9043/E11815/1416/34.
  - 16 Major Noel's report, Isfahan, 12 May 1921, FO371/6405/E9256/2/34.
  - 17 Ibid.
  - 18 Ibid.
  - 19 Ibid.
  - 20 For the *bastagan* see Jean-Pierre Digard, 1987, 'Jeux de Structures: Segmentarité et pouvoir chez les nomades Baxtyâri d'Iran', *L'Homme*, vol. xxvii, no. 2.
  - 21 Major Noel's report, Isfahan, 12 May 1921, FO371/6405/E9256/2/34.
  - 22 M. Y. Young to Mr Greenway, Maidan-i Naphtun, 16 July 1915.
  - 23 Major Noel's report, Isfahan, 12 May 1921.
  - 24 Ibid.
  - 25 Loraine to Curzon, 13 November 1923, FO371/9043/E11754/1416/34.
  - 26 For a full discussion of these processes, see Chapter 4.
  - 27 IS no. 21, 8 August 1925, FO371/10842/E5218/82/34.
  - 28 The Bakhtiari Tribe, C. A. Gault, Consul, Isfahan, 1944, L/P&S/12/3546.
  - 29 The Bakhtiyari governor of Chahar Mahal, Sardar Muazzam, was especially instrumental in the implementation of the policy. Bahram Amiri, 'Zindiginamah:

- Hamasah-i Ali Mardan Khan Bakhtiyari', *Kitab-i Anzan, Vizhah-i Farhang, Hunar, Tarikh va Tamaddun-i Bakhtiyari*, vol. 2.
- 30 The Bakhtiyari were not alone in their resentments. For another example of the negative attitudes of tribal populations to the land claims of their chiefs, see Reinhold Loeffler, 'Tribal Order and the State: The Political Organization of Boir Ahmad', *Iranian Studies*, vol. 11, 1978.
  - 31 Jacks to Young, 17 March 1928, BP 71680.
  - 32 For a full discussion of the significance of this episode in its wider context, see Chapter 4.
  - 33 Report on the Situation in Bakhtiari, 22 September 1928, R. G. Monypenny, Consul, Ahvaz, FO416/83/p. 143. See also Amir Husayn Karim Nikzad, *Shinakht-i Sarzamin-i Chahar Mahal* (Isfahan, 1357).
  - 34 Unfortunately, we have no record of the precise provisions of this programme.
  - 35 Report on the Situation in Bakhtiari, 22 September 1928, R. G. Monypenny, Consul, Ahvaz, FO416/83/p. 143.
  - 36 The modern secular courts established through the reorganization of the judicial system by Ali Akbar Davar, minister of justice, in 1927.
  - 37 Their last in the sense of a post as a Bakhtiyari right or possession. Although Sardar Asad remained minister of war this was because of his own personal standing with the shah, not because the Bakhtiyari had any special customary rights in relation to the post.
  - 38 Report on the Situation in Bakhtiari, 22 September 1928, R. G. Monypenny, Consul, Ahvaz, FO416/83/p. 143.

#### 4 THE NEW STATE AND THE RURAL POOR

- 1 See, for example, Afsaneh Najmabadi, *The Story of the Daughters of Quchan: Gender and National Memory in Iranian History* (Syracuse, 1998).
- 2 For a discussion of some of the resulting difficulties, see Richard Tapper, 'Writing tribal history', *Frontier Nomads of Iran*, pp. 1–33.
- 3 A small number of older works paid some attention to the condition of the peasantry, including the major work dealing with land tenure in Iran, Ann K. S. Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia* (London, 1953), and also Nikki Keddie, *Historical Obstacles to Agrarian Change in Iran* (Claremont Asian Studies, no. 8, Claremont, 1960), but these shared the general tendency to define the peasantry as essentially passive. The 1979 revolution, however, produced a shift in perspective, partly as a result of new discourses generated by the revolution itself, and partly due to the maturing of Iranian Studies as an academic discipline and its move away from traditional 'Orientalist' narratives. Efforts to understand the impact of the land reform of the 1960s, although they often remained focused on state policy, were particularly important in redirecting attention towards the countryside. See, *inter alia*, Hooglund, *Land and Revolution*; Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Land Reform and Social Change in Iran* (Salt Lake City, 1987); Fatemeh E. Moghadam, *From Land Reform to Revolution: The Political Economy of Agricultural Development in Iran, 1962–1979* (London, 1996); Mohammad Gholi Majd, *Resistance to the Shah: Landowners and Ulama in Iran* (Florida, 2000). There have also been a small number of studies attempting to

- restore historical agency to the rural poor, see Farhad Kazemi and Ervand Abrahamian, 'The Nonrevolutionary Peasantry of Modern Iran', *Iranian Studies*, vol. xi, 1978; James J. Reid, 'Rebellion and Social Change in Astarabad, 1537–1744', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1981; Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs* (London, 1985), Chapter 4; Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, pp. 145–76; Ahmad Ashraf, 'Dihqanan, Zamin va Inqilab', *Kitab-i Agah*, (special issue), *Masa'il-i Arzi va Dihqani* (Tehran, 1361). For a discussion of the impact on Iranian historiography of the 1979 revolution, see Stephanie Cronin, 'Writing the History of Modern Iran: A Comment on Approaches and Sources', *Iran*, vol. xxxvi, 1998.
- 4 Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', *Surveys from Exile*, edited and introduced by David Fernbach (London, 1973), p. 239. Although Marx recognized the existence of peasant agency per se, he saw it as necessarily limited in its scope and political object, and unable to be anything other than local. Furthermore, since the political objective of many peasant movements was anti-feudal and for the restitution of small property in one form or another, rather than for collective ownership, and since where they were anti-capitalist or opposed to 'modernity', they tended to evince a desire to restore the *status quo ante*, Marx and Marxists have tended to regard them as in the main conservative, seeking neither to overturn existing private property relations nor to transcend them. Nonetheless, conservatism in such cases should not be conflated with passivity.
  - 5 For a discussion of the reasons for this absence, see Farhad Kazemi and Ervand Abrahamian, 'The Nonrevolutionary Peasantry'. Eric Hooglund, in an extremely sophisticated study of the impact of the land reform of the 1960s on the peasantry, has also emphasized the almost total dependence and powerlessness of the Iranian peasant within the prevailing system of land tenure. Hooglund, *Land and Revolution*, pp. 34–5.
  - 6 Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant*, p. 392.
  - 7 See, for example, the descriptions in Biscoe to Parr, Meshed, 23 May 1928, FO371/13064/E3551/1209/34; Hoare to Simon, 3 February 1933, FO371/16953/E1101/1101/34.
  - 8 This shift in perspective owes much to the work of James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (New Haven, CT, 1976); *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT, 1985). For the application of this approach to Iran, see, especially, Fereydown Safizadeh, 'Peasant Protest and Resistance in Rural Iranian Azerbaijan', in Farhad Kazemi and John Waterbury (eds) *Peasants and Politics in the Modern Middle East* (Florida, 1991). The validity of Scott's framework has provoked much debate. Two objections to the procedure of identifying 'everyday forms of resistance' as occurring at every conjuncture in all agrarian contexts may be mentioned. First, Dipankar Gupta has argued that 'from below' resistance does not actually occur but is invoked by wealthier peasants to justify their oppression of their agricultural workers, see Dipankar Gupta, 'Everyday Resistance or Routine Repression? Exaggeration as Strategem in Agrarian Conflict', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2001, and second, that where it does occur, no distinction is made between rich peasants resisting taxation and poor peasants resisting wage cuts, see Tom Brass,



- Peasants, Populism and Postmodernism: The Return of the Agrarian Myth* (London and Portland, OR, 2000). More generally, resistance theory fails to differentiate between rural movements that are backward-looking and sometimes reactionary, such as the Vendée in 1790s France and the Cristeros in 1920s Mexico, and those that are forward-looking and politically progressive.
- 9 Kazemi and Abrahamian, 'The Nonrevolutionary Peasantry'.
  - 10 Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, pp. 145–76.
  - 11 Majd, *Resistance to the Shah*, pp. 186–7; Ahmad Ashraf, 'State and Agrarian Relations Before and After the Iranian Revolution, 1960–1990', in Farhad Kazemi and John Waterbury (eds) *Peasants and Politics in the Modern Middle East*, (Miami, FL, 1991); Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs*, Chapter 4.
  - 12 For some attempt to shift the focus away from the state, see Stephanie Cronin (ed.) *The Making of Modern Iran*.
  - 13 It is possible that a small minority of rich peasants were able to benefit from the land legislation, research on this topic remains to be carried out.
  - 14 The best description of agrarian society in twentieth-century Iran can be found in Hooglund, *Land and Revolution*.
  - 15 Hooglund, *Land and Revolution*, pp. 22–8.
  - 16 For the *bunah*, see Hooglund, *Land and Revolution*, pp. 23–8; Janet Afary has also drawn attention to the strong collective tradition represented by the *bunah*. Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, p. 150. See also Xavier de Planhol, 'Geography of Settlement', pp. 431–2.
  - 17 For the persistence of slave-raiding even in the 1920s, see the depositions of runaway slaves originally captured on Iranian territory and shipped across the Gulf. FO248/1387.
  - 18 For a description of the new burdens placed on the peasants by the arrival of the modern state, see, for example, Biscoe to Parr, Meshed, 23 May 1928, FO371/13064/E3551/1209/34.
  - 19 Fatemeh E Moghadam, *From Land Reform to Revolution*, p. 44.
  - 20 Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant*, p. 184; Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, (Princeton, NJ, 1982), p. 149.
  - 21 For relations between the Ottoman State and the peasantry, see Halil Berktaý and Suraiya Faroqhi (eds) *New Approaches to the State and Peasant in Ottoman History*, a special issue of *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 18, nos 3 and 4, 1991.
  - 22 For a full discussion of the complexities of land tenure in Iran, see Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant*.
  - 23 Majd, *Resistance to the Shah*.
  - 24 See Chapter 6, p. 151.
  - 25 See Hooglund, *Land and Revolution*, pp. 36–41.
  - 26 Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant*, p. 189.
  - 27 Report on the Situation in Bakhtiari, 22 September 1928, R. G. Monypenny, Consul, Ahvaz, FO416/83/pp. 141–6; Nikzad, *Shinakht-i Sarzamin-i Chahar Mahal*. A narrative of the Chahar Mahal movement is given in Chapter 3.
  - 28 Kerman Diary no. 27, 16–30 September 1924, FO371/10156/E10384/6329/34.
  - 29 See below, Chapter 5, pp. 127–8
  - 30 Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant*, p. 306.

- 31 Kerman Diary no. 27, 16–30 September 1924, FO371/10156/E10384/6329/34.
- 32 Kirman appears to have been full of *anjumans* representing every social group and political interest. See, for example, the Kerman Diaries for 1924, FO371/10156.
- 33 Kerman Diary no. 27, 16–30 September 1924, FO371/10156/E10384/6329/34.
- 34 Fatemeh E. Moghadam, *From Land Reform to Revolution*, p. 48.
- 35 For the Bakhtiyari Star, see Chapter 3, pp. 74–6.
- 36 Annual Report, 1922, Loraine to Curzon, 16 July 1923, FO371/9051/E8057/8057/34.
- 37 FO416/74/p. 176.
- 38 IS no. 28, 12 July 1924, FO371/10132/E6706/255/34.
- 39 On the general significance of anonymous threats, and the seriousness with which they were viewed by the authorities, see E. P. Thompson, 'The Crime of Anonymity', in D. Hay, P. Linebaugh, John G. Rule, E. P. Thompson and Cal Winslow (eds) *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth Century England* (London, 1975).
- 40 There is a considerable literature on the role of rumour in popular politics. For some recent discussions, see, for example, Ethan H. Shagan, 'Rumours and Popular Politics in the Reign of Henry VIII', in Tim Harris (ed.) *The Politics of the Excluded, c.1500–1850* (Basingstoke, 2001); A. Fox, 'Rumour, News and Popular Political Opinion in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England,' *Historical Journal*, vol. XL, 1997. For some discussion of the non-European world, see R. Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi, 1982); A. A. Yang, 'A Conversation of Rumours: The Language of Popular Mentalities in Late Nineteenth Century Colonial India', *Journal of Social History*, vol. xx, 1987. See also L. White, 'Between Gluckman and Foucault: Historicizing Rumour and Gossip', *Social Dynamics*, vol. XX, 1994. The impact and significance in the Iranian context of the twin phenomena of the circulation of *shabnamahs* and the persistence and tenacity of rumour still await research.
- 41 The British suspected the Soviet consuls in both Isfahan and Kirman of having played a role in instigating the peasant movements in those places, but this may be discounted as an important factor.
- 42 IS no. 28, 12 November 1921, FO371/7826/E445/285/34.
- 43 Z. Z. Abdullaev quotes several Soviet documents to this effect. Z. Z. Abdullaev, 'Promyshlennost i zarozhdenie rabochego klasse Irana v kontse xix-nachale xx vv', (Baku, 1963), extracts reproduced in Charles Issawi (ed.) *The Economic History of Iran, 1800–1914* (Chicago, IL, 1971), pp. 48–52.
- 44 Ervand Abrahamian, 'The Strengths and Weaknesses of the Labor Movement in Iran', in Michael E. Bonine and Nikki Keddie (eds) *Continuity and Change in Modern Iran* (Albany, NJ, 1981), p. 183.
- 45 R. W. Ferrier, *The History of the British Petroleum Company, vol. 1, The Developing Years* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 401. The accumulation of a working class in the oilfields continued throughout the interwar period. By 1938 the company employed the huge number of 45,978 Iranian workers. J. H. Bamberg, *The History of the British Petroleum Company, vol. 2, The Anglo-Iranian Years, 1928–1954* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 81. For analyses of more recent agriculture/oil linkages in Iran, see Hassan Hakimian, 'The Impact of the 1970s Oil Boom on Iranian Agriculture', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1988; Massoud

- Karshenas, 'Oil Income, Industrialization Bias, and the Agricultural Squeeze Hypothesis: New Evidence on the Experience of Iran', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2, 1990.
- 46 A. T. Wilson, Resident Director, Bushire to Minister, Tehran, 13 May 1923, BP 71724.
- 47 For this migration, see Hassan Hakimian, 'Wage Labour and Migration: Persian Workers in Southern Russia, 1880–1914', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 17, 1985; Touraj Atabaki, 'Disgruntled Guests: Iranian Subaltern on the Margins of the Tsarist Empire', *International Review of Social History*, vol. 48, 2003; Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*.
- 48 Eric Wolf, 'Peasant Rebellion and Revolution', in Jack A. Goldstone (ed.) *Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative and Historical Studies* (San Diego, CA, 1986), p. 175.
- 49 Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, p. 22.
- 50 See Chapter 3, pp. 81–5.
- 51 See Chapter 5, pp. 127–8.
- 52 For Riza Khan's deployment of populist tactics and rhetoric in his rise to power, see Stephanie Cronin, 'Popular Protest, Disorder and Riot in Iran: The Tehran Crowd and the Rise of Riza Khan, 1921–1925', *International Review of Social History*, vol. 50, part 2, 2005.
- 53 For example, in encouraging the secession of the Chahar Lang lineage, see Chapter 3.
- 54 IS no. 13, 18 April 1925, FO371/10842/E2783/82/34.
- 55 IS no. 14, 2 May 1925, FO371/10842/E3056/82/34.
- 56 Annual Report, 1925, Loraine to Chamberlain, 8 April 1926, FO371/11500/E2635/2635/34; Nicolson to Chamberlain, 28 July 1929, FO371/ 11502/E4812/4323/34.
- 57 Clive to Henderson, 27 July 1929, FO371/13782/E3918/95/34.
- 58 Petition from Certain Kashgai (*sic*) Chiefs to His Majesty's Consulate, Shiraz (undated), Davis, Shiraz, to Clive, 10 June 1929, FO371/13781/E3350/95/34, petition in original Persian in FO248/1389/591/22.
- 59 Copy in translation of General Shaybani's Proclamation, Clive to Henderson, 12 July 1929, FO371/13781/E3668/95/34.
- 60 For an account of the course of the uprisings and their suppression, see Chapter 5.
- 61 See Chapter 5, pp. 127–8.
- 62 For Grigur, see Amirahmadi, *Khatirat-i Nakhustin Sipahbud-i Iran*.
- 63 During the summer of 1929, for example, the village of Gayun was the scene of an atrocity when the band led by Sartip Khan, who was cooperating with the Bakhtiari rebellion, massacred between 30 and 40 men, women and children. The villagers, to whom weapons had been distributed by the army, had resisted Sartip Khan's demands for supplies and the massacre was also apparently a reprisal for the arrest in Tehran of Sartip Khan's brother. Acting Consul Davis to Clive, Shiraz, 21 August 1929, FO371/13782/E4424/95/34; Report of Political Happenings, 19–28 August 1929, Shiraz and Fars, BP 59010.
- 64 Notes on a Tour in Khorasan and Gurgan (Astarabad) Province, V. A. L. Mallet, 18 October 1935, Knatchbull-Hugessen to Hoare, 24 October 1935, FO371/18992/E6776/608/34.

- 65 Most famously by Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (London, 1969; 2000). For a different view, see Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: The Ottoman Route to State Centralization* (Ithaca, NY, 1994). For a literary representation of Hobsbawm's view of bandits in the Turkish context, see the novels of Yashar Kemal, especially *Memed, My Hawk*, translated by Edouard Roditi, London, 1990. Hobsbawm's inclination to romanticize banditry has been criticized by Blok and others who have pointed out that bandits have often acted not as challengers to, but as enforcers of, landlord power in the countryside. Bandits might, for example, threaten recalcitrant tenants or labourers on behalf of a landlord who would, in return, ensure that they were able to keep their loot and remain out of reach of the police. Anton Blok, 'The Peasant and the Brigand: Social Banditry Reconsidered', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 14, no. 4, 1972.
- 66 For the concept of 'social banditry', see Hobsbawm, *Bandits*.
- 67 For peasant rebellions in the Caspian provinces, see Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, pp. 145–76; Kazemi and Abrahamian, 'The Nonrevolutionary Peasantry'.
- 68 For the politically and socially radical Jangali movement, which operated in Gilan between the constitutional revolution and the establishment of the new regime in Iran in 1921, see Kazemi and Abrahamian, 'The Nonrevolutionary Peasantry'; Cosroe Chaqueri, *The Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran, 1920–1921*.
- 69 Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant*, p. 189.
- 70 Hoare to Simon, 17 March 1933, FO371/16953/E1869/1101/34.
- 71 IS no. 22, 31 May 1924, FO371/10132/E5858/255/34.
- 72 Consul Hoyland to Dodd, Kermanshah, 30 September 1931, FO371/15341/E5391/146/34.
- 73 For example, as the shah neared the town of Sistan while on a tour in 1930, a man ran forward bearing a small pile of brushwood on his head which he had set alight as the shah's car approached. The shah stopped his car and was told by the man that he was much oppressed by his landlord and that his position and that of his neighbours was one of continual destitution. The shah replied that he would enquire into the state of the peasants. Earlier in the year one body of petitioners had succeeded in stopping the royal car when the shah was on his way to Hamadan. They were peasants who had waited a long way outside the town for a couple of days in their anxiety to complain of the wrongful seizure of their water by villagers higher up above Hamadan. Consul, Sistan and Kain, to Tehran, 8 December 1930, FO371/15341/E606/146/34; Vice-Consul Summerhayes to Dodd, 28 September 1931, FO371/15341/E5391/146/34.
- 74 Sir Mark Aurel Stein, *Old Routes*, p. 303.
- 75 Seymour to Eden, 4 December 1937, FO371/20835/E7454/909/34.
- 76 Mr R. F. G. Sarell, acting vice-Consul, to Watkinson, consul, Shiraz, 26 July 1937, FO371/20835/E6271/904/34.
- 77 Foran, *Fragile Resistance*, p. 229.
- 78 For Muhammad Riza Shah's land reform, see Conclusion.

## 5 RURAL RESISTANCE

- 1 The reform drive may actually be said to have begun in 1925 but was interrupted and delayed by the multiple crises afflicting both the new regime and, especially,

- the army during 1926. See Stephanie Cronin, *The Army and the Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*.
- 2 Ali Akbar Davar (1885–1937) graduated from the *Dar al-Funun* and joined the ministry of justice in 1909 and later studied at the University of Geneva. He played a major role in the Constituent Assembly which approved the change of dynasty in 1925 and in February 1927 he was appointed minister of justice where he was responsible for reorganizing the judicial system and introducing legal codes based on European models. Appointed minister of finance in 1933, he committed suicide in 1937. Firuz Mirza, Nusrat al-Dawlah (1889–1938) was the eldest son of Abdulhusayn Mirza Farmanfarma and a grandson of Muzaffar al-Din Shah. He served in a series of official appointments, including several cabinet posts during and after the First World War, and was elected to the fourth, fifth and sixth Majlis. In 1925 he became minister of justice, then minister of finance in 1927. He was dismissed by Riza Shah in 1929 and tried and convicted on corruption charges in 1930. He was rearrested in 1936 and secretly murdered in January 1938. Abdulhusayn Taymurtash (1879–1933) was educated in Russia and then served in the ministries of foreign affairs, justice and public works and as a provincial governor. He was repeatedly elected to the Majlis and was appointed minister of court by Riza Shah in 1926. He was dismissed in 1932, tried and convicted of bribery and embezzlement, and murdered in prison in 1933. See Chapter 7, pp. 176–8.
  - 3 Cronin, 'Conscription and Popular Resistance in Iran'.
  - 4 Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia*, p. 189.
  - 5 A. C. Millspaugh, *The American Task in Persia*, p. 190.
  - 6 The Uniform Dress Law of 1928 aimed at standardizing and Europeanizing male attire. A central element was the obligatory adoption of the Pahlavi hat, a military-style peaked cap based on the French *képi*.
  - 7 Annual Report, 1929, Clive to Henderson, 30 April 1930, FO371/14545/E2445/522/34; Gilliat-Smith, Tabriz, to Clive, 28 January 1929, FO371/13781/E1658/95/34; Clive to Chamberlain, 12 March 1929, FO371/E1658/95/34.
  - 8 Kavih Bayat, *Shurish-i 'Asha'ir-i Fars*.
  - 9 Cronin, *The Army*, pp. 199–205.
  - 10 Annual Report, 1925, Loraine to Chamberlain, 8 April 1926, FO371/11500/E2635/2635/34; Nicolson to Chamberlain, 28 July 1929, FO371/11502/E4812/4323/34.
  - 11 Chick to Nicolson, 12 July 1926, FO371/11502/E4812/4323/34.
  - 12 Annual Report, 1928, Clive to Henderson, 14 July 1929, FO371/13799/E3676/3676/34.
  - 13 Summary of Events and Conditions in Fars during the year ended March 31, 1929, Chick, Shiraz, to Clive, 25 March 1929, FO 371/13781/E2149/95/34.
  - 14 Ibid.
  - 15 Annual Report, 1929, Clive to Henderson, 30 April 1930, FO371/14545/E2445/522/34.
  - 16 Davis, Shiraz, to Clive, 15 May 1929, FO371/E2814/95/34; Summary of Events and Conditions in Fars during the year ended March 31, 1930, Davis, Shiraz, to Clive, 24 April 1930, FO371/14551/E3025/3025/34.
  - 17 Davis, Shiraz, to Clive, 15 May 1929, FO371/13781/E2814/95/34.

- 18 Petition from Certain Kashgai (*sic*) Chiefs to His Majesty's Consulate, Shiraz (undated), Davis, Shiraz, to Clive, 10 June 1929, FO371/13781/E3350/95/34, petition in original Persian in FO248/1389/591/22.
- 19 Clive to Chamberlain, 1 June 1929, FO371/13781/E3975/95/34.
- 20 Summary of Events and Conditions in Fars during the year ended March 31, 1930, Davis, Shiraz, to Clive, 24 April 1930, FO371/14551/E3025/3025/34.
- 21 Clive to Henderson, 28 June 1929, FO371/13781/E3553/95/34.
- 22 Copy in translation of General Shaibani's proclamation, Clive to Henderson, 12 July 1929, FO371/13781/E3668/95/34.
- 23 Annual Report, 1930, Clive to Henderson, 22 May 1931, FO371/15356/E3067/3067/34.
- 24 Annual Report, 1929, Clive to Henderson, 30 April 1930, FO371/14545/E2445/522/34; Davis, Shiraz, to Clive, 31 July 1929, FO371/13782/E4083/95/34.
- 25 Clive to Henderson, 10 August 1929, FO371/13782/E4084/95/34.
- 26 Davis, Shiraz, to Clive, 3 August 1929, FO371/13782/E4083/95/34.
- 27 Summary of Events and Conditions in Fars during the year ended March 31, 1930, Davis, Shiraz, to Clive, 24 April 1930, FO371/14551/E3025/3025/34.
- 28 Annual Report, 1929, Clive to Henderson, 30 April 1930, FO371/14545/E2445/522/34.
- 29 Summary of Events and Conditions in Fars during the year ended March 31, 1930, Davis, Shiraz, to Clive, 24 April 1930, FO371/14551/E3025/3025/34.
- 30 Clive to Henderson, 27 July 1929, FO371/13782/E3918/95/34.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Knatchbull-Hugessen to Simon, 1 December 1934, FO371/17889/E7530/40/34.
- 33 Intelligence Summary no. 15, 27 July 1929, FO371/13785/E3919/104/34; Amir Bahadur and Afshar (eds) *Khatirat-i Sardar As'ad Bakhtiyari*, pp. 232–3; Bahram Amiri, 'Zindiginamah: Hamasah-i Ali Mardan Khan Bakhtiyari', in *Kitab-i Anzan, Vizhah-i Farhang, Hunar, Tarikh va Tamaddun-i Bakhtiyari*, vol. 2, pp. 78–9.
- 34 Bristow, Isfahan, to Clive, 11 July 1929, FO371/13781/E3668/95/34.
- 35 Clive to Henderson, 10 August 1929, FO371/E4084/95/34.
- 36 Clive to Henderson, 27 July 1929, FO371/E3918/95/34.
- 37 Clive to Henderson, 13 November 1929, FO371/13782/E6242/95/34.
- 38 Chick, Shiraz, to Clive, 15 March 1929, FO371/13781/E1872/95/34.
- 39 Lois Beck, *The Qashqa'i of Iran*, p. 81.
- 40 Annual Report, 1929, Clive to Henderson, 30 April 1930, FO371/14545/E2445/522/34.
- 41 Summary of Events and Conditions in Fars during the year ended March 31, 1930, Davis, Shiraz, to Clive, 24 April 1930, FO371/14551/E3025/3025/34.
- 42 Davis, Shiraz, to Clive, 31 July 1929, FO371/13782/E4083/95/34.
- 43 Davis, Shiraz, to Clive, 15 May 1929, FO371/E2814/95/34.
- 44 Davis, Shiraz, to Clive, 31 July 1929, FO371/13782/E4083/95/34.
- 45 Clive to FO, 12 July 1929, FO371/13781/E3315/95/34.
- 46 Weekly Diary of Happenings in Shiraz and Fars, Thursday 27 June 1929, BP 59010.
- 47 Summary of Events and Conditions in Fars during the year ended March 31, 1930, Davis, Shiraz, to Clive, 24 April 1930, FO371/14551/E3025/3025/34.

- 48 This was by no means the end of the Baharlu insurgency which resumed the following year, and during which Major Arab was killed.
- 49 See Chapter 4, pp. 106–9 for a discussion of peasant rebellion and banditry in Iran.
- 50 Chick to Nicolson, 12 July 1926, FO371/11502/E4812/4323/34.
- 51 Bayat, *Shurish-i 'Asha'ir-i Fars*, pp. 125–6. Mahdi Surkhi was finally hanged in Shiraz in 1931 but his brother, Muhammad Jan Surkhi, took over leadership of the band which continued its activities in the region of Firuzabad in Fars.
- 52 Clive to Henderson, 27 July 1929, FO371/13782/E3918/95/34.
- 53 Gilliat-Smith, Tabriz, to Clive, 28 January 1929, FO371/13781/E1658/95/34.
- 54 Clive to Henderson, 10 August 1929, FO371/13782/E4086/95/34.
- 55 See, for example, Clive to Henderson, 12 July 1929, FO371/13781/E3668/95/34; extract from the Tehran newspaper *Iran* of July 5, 1929, FO371/13781/E3668/95/34; Taimourtache to Clive, 13 Juillet 1929, FO371/13781/E3659/95/34; Clive to Henderson, 29 June 1929, FO371/13781/E3557/95/34.
- 56 Clive to Henderson, 29 June 1929, FO371/13782/E3554/96/34.
- 57 Summary of Events and Conditions in Fars during the year ended March 31, 1930, Davis, Shiraz, to Clive, 24 April 1930, FO371/14551/E3025/3025/34; Annual Report, 1929, Clive to Henderson, 30 April 1930, FO371/14545/E2445/522/34.
- 58 Hoare to Simon, 16 December 1933, FO371/17889/E41/40/34.
- 59 See Hamid Riza Dalvand, *Majarayi-yi Qatl-i Sardar As'ad Bakhtiari*.
- 60 Knatchbull-Hugessen to Simon, 1 December 1934, FO371/17889/E7530/40/34. See also Rawshanak Bakhtiari, 'Zindigi va Marg-i Khan Baba Khan As'ad', in *Kitab-i Anzan, Vizhah-i Farhang, Hunar, Tarikh va Tamaddun-i Bakhtiari*, vol. 1.

## 6 THE POLITICS OF DEBT

- 1 The first two volumes of the official history of BP, dealing with the Anglo-Persian (Iranian) Oil Company, contain a wealth of information on the company as an international commercial operation, but are less informative regarding its political dealings with its Iranian clients, and are actually silent on this matter for the period after 1921. See R. W. Ferrier, *The History of the British Petroleum Company, vol. 1, The Developing Years, 1901–1932* (Cambridge, 1982); J. H. Bamberg, *The History of the British Petroleum Company, vol. 2, The Anglo-Iranian years, 1928–1954* (Cambridge, 1994).
- 2 For a typical example of this approach, see Loraine to Curzon, 10 May 1922, FO371/7823/E6587/123/34. Loraine seems to have been especially concerned to ensure that the FO also accepted this fictional view of company–khan relations.
- 3 The net sums (pounds sterling) paid to the Bakhtiari khans as dividends were as follows:

1913–14	1,376
1914–15	3,453
1915–16	4,126
1916–17	5,720
1917–18	6,864
1918–19	8,580
1919–20	13,329

## NOTES

1920–1	17,160
1921–2	15,314
1922–3	10,517
1923–4	10,856
1924–5	12,310
1925–6	14,215
1926–7	6,966
1927–8	14,547
1928–9	30,322
31 December 1930	36,116
31 December 1931	31,100
1932	not available
31 December 1933	30,096

Until 1928 the financial year ended on 31 March. In 1928 the financial year changed to end on 31 December. 10 January 1929, BP 71680; First Exploitation Company statement of account, Young, 19 March 1928, BP 71680; see also file BP 71680.

- 4 For an account of these negotiations, see Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs*, pp. 108–9.
- 5 Memorandum regarding the rights and interests of the Bakhtiari khans in the First Exploitation Company, Ltd. 22 April 1942, BP 71722.
- 6 L. P. Elwell-Sutton, *Persian Oil: A Study in Power Politics*, London, 1955, p. 19.
- 7 Ibid., p. 29.
- 8 In 1925 the FEC and BOC were merged although the position of the khans was not thereby altered, except that the whole of their holding now became FEC shares. Memorandum regarding the rights and interests of the Bakhtiari khans in the First Exploitation Company, Ltd. 22 April 1942, BP 71722.
- 9 See, for example, the remarks of Mushir al-Dawlah on behalf of the Iranian government as quoted in Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs*, pp. 108–9.
- 10 Sir Charles Greenway to Armitage-Smith, 28 June 1921, Letters file, 1920 Mar–1927 Mar, British Bank of the Middle East, 615-2.
- 11 Memorandum regarding the rights and interests of the Bakhtiari khans in the First Exploitation Company, Ltd. 22 April 1942, BP 71722.
- 12 Armitage-Smith was appointed the British financial adviser to the Iranian government under the terms of the never-ratified Anglo-Iranian Agreement of 1919.
- 13 See, for example, the letter from the governor-general of Shushtar, Moayyed al-Dowleh (*sic*) to Peel, the British consul at Ahvaz, officially repudiating any agreement between the company and the khans. Young to Jacks, 8 April 1922, BP 71724.
- 14 Memorandum regarding the rights and interests of the Bakhtiari khans in the First Exploitation Company, Ltd. 22 April 1942, BP 71722.
- 15 A. T. Wilson, later Sir Arnold, had been acting consul in Muhammarah and vice-consul in Ahvaz before the Great War. During the war he was promoted to lieutenant-colonel and served for a time as civil commissioner in Baghdad in the post-war administration. He returned to Iran as a senior member of the APOC management, and was resident director in the first half of the 1920s.



- 16 A. T. Wilson, Resident Director, in Resident, Bushire to Minister, Tehran, 13 May 1923, BP 71724.
- 17 Memorandum regarding the rights and interests of the Bakhtiari khans in the First Exploitation Company, Ltd. 22 April 1942, BP 71722.
- 18 Young, 19 March 1928, BP 71680.
- 19 Jacks to Young, 17 March 1928, BP 71680.
- 20 Young, 19 March 1928, BP 71680. These 'presents' could be very substantial indeed. In March 1927, for example, Amir Jang, the *ilbaygi*, told the company that he and the *ilkhani* were confronted with the necessity of 'making a present' to the shah in order to retain office, and that they considered that 200,000 *qirans* (over £4,000) was the minimum amount which would be expected from them. Elkington to London, 25 March 1927, BP 71725.
- 21 See, for example, F. S. Greenhouse to the Resident Director, Tehran, 15 February 1928, BP 71680.
- 22 Sir Charles Greenway to Armitage-Smith, 28 June 1921, Letters file, 1920 Mar–1927 Mar, British Bank of the Middle East, 615-2.
- 23 23 September 1920, British Bank of the Middle East, 119.
- 24 McMurray to Rogers, 4 August 1921, British Bank of the Middle East, 119.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 At the end of the Great War, US oil companies, especially Standard Oil of New Jersey and the Sinclair Consolidated Oil Company had begun to show a much more active interest in Iran. In November 1921 Standard Oil obtained a 50-year concession covering the five northern Iranian provinces, although after this became a joint venture between Standard Oil and the APOC, the Majlis consistently refused to recognize its legitimacy. Following Standard Oil's exit, the Majlis, in 1922, approved negotiations with Sinclair for a northern concession but this effort collapsed after the murder of the American vice-consul in Tehran, Major Robert Imbrie.
- 27 McMurray to Rogers, 4 August 1921, British Bank of the Middle East, 119.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Loraine to Curzon, 10 May 1922, FO371/7823/E6587/123/34.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Young to APOC, 6 May 1922, BP 71724.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Loraine to Curzon, 10 May 1922, FO371/7823/E6587/123/34.
- 37 APOC to London, 10 August 1923, BP 71724.
- 38 M. Y. Young, 8 February 1928, BP 71680.
- 39 Resident Director, Tehran, to Director, APOC, London, 28 May 1928.
- 40 Jacks to Young, 17 March 1928, BP 71680.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Greenhouse to the Director, London, 27 January 1928, BP 71680.
- 43 Resident Director, Tehran, to Director, APOC, London, 6 March 1928, BP 71680.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Letter dated 7 Isfand 1306 (27 February 1928) in BP 71680.
- 46 Ibid.

- 47 M. V. Young to Elkington, 27 January 1928, BP 71680.
- 48 Jacks to Young, 17 March 1928, BP 71680.
- 49 Resident Director, Tehran, to Director, APOC, London, 6 March 1928, BP 71680.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Jacks to Young, 17 March 1928, BP 71680.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Resident Director, Tehran, to Director, APOC, London, 28 May 1928, BP 71680.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 For Riza Shah's land acquisitions, see Mohammad Gholi Majd, *Resistance to the Shah*, pp. 33–71.
- 61 Jacks to Young, 17 March 1928, BP 71680.
- 62 10 January 1929, BP71680.
- 63 Resident Director, Tehran, to London, 24 January 1929, BP 71680.
- 64 Resident Director, APOC to Imperial Bank of Persia, 22 June 1930; APOC Tehran Weekly Letter no. 17, 21 October 1930, BP 71680.
- 65 APOC Tehran Weekly Letter no. 17, 21 October 1930, BP 71680.
- 66 Ibid.; London to Tehran, 22 January 1931, BP 71680.
- 67 R. D. [Resident Director], Tehran to Director, London, 26 June 1932, BP 71680.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 Letter from E. W. to Eldrid, Tehran, 2 December 1933, British Bank of the Middle East 666.
- 73 Financial malpractice often formed the basis for charges against those of the shah's officials who had fallen from favour for other reasons. For the political context of Taymurtash's arrest and trial see Miron Rezun, 'Reza Shah's Court Minister: Teimourtash', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 12, 1980.
- 74 Letter to Eldrid, 21 March 1933, British Bank of the Middle East 666.
- 75 A table showing the annual exchange rate between 1890 and 1952 can be found in Geoffrey Jones, *Banking and Empire in Iran: The History of the British Bank of the Middle East* (Cambridge, 1986), vol. 1, pp. 359–60.
- 76 Letter to Eldrid, 21 March 1933, British Bank of the Middle East 666. Lindenblatt himself fell under suspicion of involvement in corrupt and speculative malpractice.
- 77 The riyal replaced the *qiran* in March 1932, with one *riyal* equivalent to one *qiran*. Jones, *Banking and Empire in Iran*, vol. 1, p. 224.
- 78 Letter to Eldrid, 21 March 1933, British Bank of the Middle East 666.
- 79 For Sardar Asad's arrest and murder see Dalvand, *Majarayi-yi Qatl-i Sardar As'ad Bakhtiyari*.
- 80 13 December 1933, FO371/16942/E7695/47/34.
- 81 Draft letter to Jackson, 31 January 1946, BP 71722.

- 82 Memorandum regarding the rights and interests of the Bakhtiari khans in the First Exploitation Company, Ltd. 22 April 1942, BP 71722.
- 83 Draft letter to Jackson, 31 January 1946, BP 71722.
- 84 Memorandum regarding the rights and interests of the Bakhtiari khans in the First Exploitation Company, Ltd. 22 April 1942, BP 71722.
- 85 Ibid.
- 86 Five Separate Statements Having Exactly the Same Wording, 20 April 1942, BP 71722.
- 87 31 January 1946, BP 71722.
- 88 Ervand Abrahamian, 'The Strengths and Weaknesses of the Labor Movement in Iran', Michael E. Bonine and Nikki Keddie (eds) *Continuity and Change in Modern Iran*, Albany, NJ, 1981. There were signs of renewed efforts by tribal elements, including the Bakhtiyari, the Qashqai and the family of the Shaykh of Muhammara, to reassert themselves in southern Iran during the 1946 crisis but these efforts were brief and without long-term consequences. See Conclusion, pp. 195–7.

## 7 THE POLITICS OF TERROR

- 1 Amir Bahadur and Afshar (eds) *Khatirat-i Sardar As'ad Bakhtiyari*, pp. 6–7.
- 2 Annual Report, 1923, Loraine to MacDonald, 4 March 1924, FO371/10153/E3362/2635/34; Bahar, *Tarikh-i Mukhtasar*, vol. 1, p. 71.
- 3 See Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs*.
- 4 See Chapter 2.
- 5 See Chapter 5.
- 6 Trott, acting Consul-General, Isfahan, to Minister, Tehran, 5 September 1930, FO371/14551/E5310/3025/34.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Annual Report, 1930, Clive to Henderson, 22 May 1931, FO371/15356/E3067/3067/34.
- 9 Trott, acting Consul-General, Isfahan, to Minister, Tehran, 5 September 1930, FO371/14551/E5310/3025/34.
- 10 For an analysis of the changing character of the shah's rule, see Homa Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran*, Chapter 11.
- 11 Hoare to Simon, 24 May 1932, FO371/16077/E2780/2780/34.
- 12 For a discussion of the methods employed by the shah and his officials see Mohammad Gholi Majd, *Resistance to the Shah*, Chapter 3; 'Ali Akbar Darakhshani, *Khatirat-i Sartip-i 'Ali Akbar Darakhshani* (Bethesda, 1994).
- 13 Hoare to Simon, 24 May 1932, FO371/16077/E2780/2780/34.
- 14 Majd, *Resistance to the Shah*.
- 15 Acting Consul, Shiraz, Summary of Events and Conditions in Fars in 1932, Hoare to Simon, 3 February 1933, FO371/16953/E1101/1101/34.
- 16 Bayat, 'Riza Shah and the tribes', p. 217.
- 17 Memorandum respecting the Bakhtiari Tribes, A. E. Watkinson, Consul, Ahvaz, October 1933, Mallet to Simon, 20 October 1933, FO371/16970/E6755/5362/34.
- 18 Memorandum respecting the Bakhtiari Tribes, A. E. Watkinson, Consul, Ahvaz, October 1933, Mallet to Simon, 20 October 1933, FO371/16970/E6755/5362/34.
- 19 Ibid.

- 20 Letter to Trott from a Persian friend in Isfahan, Isfahan, 14 August 1933, FO371/16970/E5362/5362/34.
- 21 In its early years, conscription was imposed most energetically on those least able to offer resistance, rural rather than urban populations, the settled rather than the nomadic, and the poorest rather than the better-off. Stephanie Cronin, 'Conscription and Popular Resistance in Iran', Zurcher (ed.) *Arming the State*.
- 22 Letter to Trott from a Persian friend in Isfahan, Isfahan, 14 August 1933, FO371/16970/E5362/5362/34.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Memorandum respecting the Bakhtiari Tribes, A. E. Watkinson, Consul, Ahvaz, October 1933, Mallet to Simon, 20 October 1933, FO371/16970/E6755/5362/34.
- 25 Annual Report, 1933, Hoare to Simon, 24 February 1934, FO371/17909/E1620/1620/34.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 For details of Sardar Asad's unwitting role in Taymurtash's attempts to make money at the expense of the National Bank, see Chapter 6, pp. 153–5.
- 28 Miron Rezun, 'Reza Shah's Court Minister: Teimourdash'.
- 29 Annual Report, 1928, Clive to Henderson, 14 July 1929, FO371/13799/E3676/3676/34.
- 30 Stephanie Cronin, *The Army and the Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, pp. 184; 154.
- 31 Ibid., p 170.
- 32 Ibid., p. 157.
- 33 Clive to Chamberlain, 23 February 1928, FO371/13064/E1295/688/34.
- 34 For the assassination of Ishqi see Stephanie Cronin, 'Popular Protest, Disorder and Riot in Iran: The Tehran Crowd and the Rise of Riza Khan, 1921–1925'; M. Qa'id, *Ishqi* (Tehran, 1998).
- 35 Mallet to Simon, 14 July 1933, FO371/16941/E4225/47/34; Kh. Mu'tazid, *Pulis-i Siyasi* (Tehran, 1366).
- 36 Stephanie Cronin, 'The Politics of Radicalism within the Iranian Army: The Jahansuz Group of 1939', *Iranian Studies*, vol. 32, no. 1, Winter 1999.
- 37 General Muhammad Husayn Ayrum should not be confused with General Mahmud Ayrum, commander of the southern division 1922–8. For bibliographical details of these and other senior officers in Riza Shah's army see Cronin, *The Army and the Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, appendix A.
- 38 Mukhtar was the first police officer actually to head the police and his appointment was, perhaps, a sign of the shah's increasing distrust of the army.
- 39 See, most notably, the police role in the episodes involving Qavam al-Saltanah in 1923, Puladin in 1926, and Jahansuz in 1939. Cronin, *The Army*, pp. 153–7; Cronin, 'The Politics of Radicalism'.
- 40 Annual Report, 1931, Hoare to Simon, 12 June 1921, FO371/16077/E3354/3354/34.
- 41 Annual Report 1932, Hoare to Simon, 22 April 1933, FO371/16967/E2439/2439/34.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Annual Report, 1933, Hoare to Simon, 24 February 1934, FO371/17909/E1620/1620/34.

- 46 This was certainly the view of, for example, the US Minister in Tehran. Majd, *Great Britain and Reza Shah*, p. 185.
- 47 See, for example, Lois Beck, *The Qashqa'i of Iran*, p. 137.
- 48 The prison doctor, the notorious Dr Ahmadi, had no training in modern medicine but was a *pizishk-i mujaz*, a traditional physician with a licence to practice.
- 49 See, for example, the case of General Amirahmadi's execution of the Lur chiefs to whom he had offered a pardon, Cronin, *The Army and the Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, pp. 210–11.
- 50 Annual Report 1932, Hoare to Simon, 22 April 1933, FO371/16967/E2439/2439/34.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 For the Imperial Bank of Persia see Geoffrey Jones, *Banking and Empire*.
- 53 Annual Report, 1932, Hoare to Simon, 22 April 1933, FO371/16967/E2439/2439/34.
- 54 Annual Report, 1933, Hoare to Simon, 24 February 1934, FO371/17909/E1620/1620/34.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 See Chapter 6.
- 57 US Minister, Hart, quoted by Majd, *Great Britain and Reza Shah*, p. 183.
- 58 The Iranian elite was well aware of the power of this belief. Qavam al-Mulk, for example, soon after his arrest, sent a desperate plea to the British legation that no mention of his predicament and certainly nothing complimentary about himself should appear in the British press. Hoare to FO, 11 December 1933, FO371/16942/E7666/47/34.
- 59 Majd, *Great Britain and Reza Shah*, p. 190.
- 60 Until 1934, the tribes were allowed specific representation in the Majlis. In that year Riza Shah abolished the allocation of seats to tribal deputies.
- 61 Hoare to Simon, 16 December 1933, FO371/17889/E41/40/34.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 For Khan Baba Khan, see Rawshanak Bakhtiyar, 'Zindigi va Marg-i Khan Baba Khan As'ad', *Kitab-i Anzan*, vol. 1.
- 64 Hoare to Simon, 16 December 1933, FO371/17889/E41/40/34.
- 65 Hoare to Simon, 3 November 1934, FO371/17889/E6966/40/34.
- 66 See, for example, the remarks of the foreign minister to the German ambassador, Hoare to Simon, 10 February 1934, FO371/17889/E1297/40/34.
- 67 Hoare to FO, 15 December 1933, FO371/16942/E7813/47/34.
- 68 Hoare to Simon, 16 December 1933, FO371/17889/E41/40/34.
- 69 Annual Report 1933, Hoare to Simon, 24 February 1934, FO371/17909/E1620/1620/34.
- 70 Hoare to Simon, 16 December 1933, FO371/17889/E41/40/34.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 Watkinson, Ahvaz, to Hoare, 5 March 1934, FO371/17889/E2249/40/34.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 The British certainly held such suspicions. See, for example, Hoare to Simon, 16 December 1933, FO371/17889/E41/40/34.
- 75 Watkinson, Ahvaz, to Hoare, 8 December 1933, FO371/17889/E41/40/34.
- 76 Hoare to Simon, 10 February 1934, FO371/17889/E1297/40/34.
- 77 Ibid.
- 78 Ibid.

- 79 Hoare to Simon, 16 December 1933, FO371/17889/E41/40/34.
- 80 Hoare to Simon, 3 November 1934, FO371/17889/E6966/40/34.
- 81 Hoare to Simon, 7 April 1934, FO371/17889/E2581/40/34. See also Dalvand, *Majarayi-yi Qatl-i Sardar As'ad Bakhtiari*.
- 82 Knatchbull-Hugessen to Simon, 1 December 1934, FO371/17889/E7530/40/34.
- 83 Rapurt, Vizarat-Jang, I Azar, 1313 (22 November 1934), M111, 300/863, Markaz-i Asnad-i Inqilab-i Islami.
- 84 While in prison, the activities of Dr Ahmadi apart, the khans were not in general ill-treated. The interrogations were not accompanied by any physical maltreatment, and one informant even paid tribute to the personal kindness shown to him by General Ayrum, the chief of police. Conditions, however, were primitive, the cells were dark and damp and swarming with vermin and there were no bathing facilities, but food was regular and they had cigarettes, and they were allowed both food and clean clothing brought from outside. Hoare to Simon, 3 November 1934, FO371/17889/E6966/40/34. This absence of torture or any physical coercion is in marked contrast to the experiences of political prisoners in later periods. See Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (California, 1999).
- 85 See, for example, Seymour to Eden, 4 December 1937, FO371/20835/E7454/904/34.
- 86 R. F. G. Sarell, acting vice-Consul, to Watkinson, Consul, Shiraz, 14 July 1937, FO371/20835/E6271/904/34. See also X. de Planhol, 'Geography of Settlement', *Cambridge History of Iran*, 7 vols, (Cambridge, 1968–91), vol. 1.
- 87 R. F. G. Sarell, acting vice-Consul, to Watkinson, Consul, Shiraz, 14 July 1937, FO371/20835/E6271/904/34.
- 88 Ibid.
- 89 See Chapter 6, pp. 156–7.
- 90 The Bakhtiari Tribe, C. A. Gault, Consul, Isfahan, 1944, L/P&S/12/3546.
- 91 After Riza Shah's abdication, relatives of victims of the secret police initiated legal proceedings and trials took place of police officers and other government officials. General Mukhtar was arrested, and after mounting a defence based largely on the culpability of the ex-shah, was sentenced to six years in prison. Dr Ahmadi, however, held responsible by the court for the murders of dozens of prisoners, was hanged. For the trials see the account by Jalal 'Abduh, the public prosecutor. Jalal 'Abduh, *Chihil Sal dar Sahnah-i Qaza'i, Siyasi, Diplumasi-yi Iran va Jahan*, 2 vols (Tehran, 1368).
- 92 Annual Report, 1931, Hoare to Simon, 12 June 1932, FO371/16077/E3354/3354/34.
- 93 Sattareh Farman Farmaian with Dona Munker, *Daughter of Persia: A Woman's Journey from her Father's Harem through the Islamic Revolution* (London, 1992), p. 96.

## CONCLUSION

- 1 Jean-Pierre Digard, 'Baktiari Tribe, i. Ethnography', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 3, 1988, p. 557.
- 2 Their losses in livestock in these years have been estimated at 60 per cent. Digard, 'Baktiari Tribe, i. Ethnography', p. 558.
- 3 Ibid., p. 557.

- 4 Stephanie Cronin, 'Riza Shah and the Paradoxes of Military Modernization in Iran, 1921–1941', in Cronin (ed.) *The Making of Modern Iran*.
- 5 The Bakhtiari Tribe, C. A. Gault, Consul, Isfahan, 1944, IOL/L/P&S/12/3546.
- 6 Jean-Pierre Digard, 'Baktiari Tribe, i. Ethnography', p. 558.
- 7 Beck, *The Qashqa'i of Iran*, pp. 145–7. For an account by the German agent responsible for liaising with Nasir Khan Qashqai, see Berthold Schulze-Holthus, *Daybreak in Iran: A Story of the German Intelligence Service* (London, 1954).
- 8 G. F. Magee, Tribes of Fars, Shiraz, November 1945, FO371/FO371/52737/E1260/633/34, p. 11.
- 9 Ibid., pp. 20–1.
- 10 Gault, Isfahan, to Bullard, 7 August 1943, FO248/1424.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 G. F. Magee, Tribes of Fars, Shiraz, November 1945, FO371/52737/E1260/633/34, p. 11.
- 13 Ibid., pp. 11–12. For the Southern League, see Chapter 1, p. 29; Chapter 2, p. 52.
- 14 G. F. Magee, Tribes of Fars, Shiraz, November 1945, FO371/52737/E1260/633/34, p. 12.
- 15 See Louise L'Estrange Fawcett, *Iran and the Cold War: the Azerbaijan Crisis of 1946* (Cambridge, 1992).
- 16 Ahmad Qavam (Qavam al-Saltanah), (c.1875–1955), the owner of large estates in northern Iran, held a series of government appointments, the first as minister of the interior in 1911, and he became prime minister twice for short periods in 1921 and 1922–3. He was exiled in 1923 after being accused of plotting against the life of Riza Khan. He returned in 1930 and became prime minister again in 1942, 1946, and briefly in 1952.
- 17 Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, NJ, 1982), p. 236.
- 18 For an account of this episode, see Abrahamian, 'The Strengths and Weaknesses of the Labor Movement in Iran'.
- 19 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983).
- 20 Koohi-Kamali, *The Political Development of the Kurds in Iran*, p. 88. For the development of Kurdish nationalism in general see also David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London, 1997); C. J. Edmonds, 'Kurdish Nationalism', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1971.
- 21 *Komala-yi Jiyanawi Kurdistan* (the Committee for the Revival of Kurdistan).
- 22 For the Mahabad Republic see Archie Roosevelt, Jr, 'The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad', *Middle East Journal*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1947; W. Eagleton, *The Kurdish Republic of 1946* (London, 1963); 'The Republic of Kurdistan: Fifty Years Later', (Special Issue), *International Journal of Kurdish Studies*, vol. 11, nos 1 and 2, 1997.
- 23 Edmonds, 'Kurdish Nationalism', p. 97.
- 24 McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p. 238.
- 25 Koohi-Kamali, *The Political Development of the Kurds in Iran*, p. 110.
- 26 Ibid., p. 123.
- 27 For the view that the Qashqai do constitute a national minority, see Beck, *The Qashqa'i of Iran*, pp. 285–90.
- 28 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

- 29 In this analysis detribalization is posited as a process that may take place at different speeds in different contexts but which, although it may accelerate or decelerate, cannot be reversed. Tribal identities and networks may be reproduced in the new urban and industrial environments, but their significance is fundamentally changed. They no longer arise from nor are reinforced by socio-economic realities but take on an essentially voluntary character.
- 30 See, for example, Gene R. Garthwaite, 'Reimagined Internal Frontiers: Tribes and Nationalism – Bakhtiyari and Kurds', in Dale F. Eickelman, *Russia's Muslim Frontiers: New Directions in Cross-Cultural Analysis* (Bloomington, IN, 1993).
- 31 *Sazman-i Ittila'at va Amniyyat-i Kishvar* (SAVAK) was the shah's domestic intelligence and security service.
- 32 John Foran, *Fragile Resistance: Social Transformation in Iran from 1500 to the Revolution* (Boulder, CO, 1993), p. 320. Regarding the post land-reform Shahsavan, for example, Tapper describes how, in the mid-1960s, several Shahsavan chiefs were running business empires based on ownership of farmland, pastures and flocks, and were among the wealthiest men in the region. Tapper, *Frontier Nomads of Iran*, p. 306.
- 33 Digard, 'Baktiari Tribe, i. Ethnography', p. 558.
- 34 See Beck for the impact on the Qashqai of the tribal education programme. See also Paul Barker, 'Tent Schools of the Qashqai: A Paradox of Local Initiative and State Control', in Bonine and Keddie, *Continuity and Change in Modern Iran*.
- 35 Digard, 'Baktiari Tribe, i. Ethnography', p. 558.
- 36 Richard Tapper, 'Introduction: The Nomads of Iran', in Richard Tapper and Jon Thompson (eds) *The Nomadic Peoples of Iran* (London, 2002), p. 15.
- 37 A reference to the overthrow in 1929 by a tribal rebellion of King Amanullah of Afghanistan whose reforms had alienated both the ulama and the tribal leaderships.
- 38 Eastern Department of the Comintern to Central Committee, Persian Communist Party, FO371/13784/E3200/99/34.
- 39 Maziar Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause: the Failure of the Left in Iran* (London and New York, 1999), p. 40.
- 40 For the guerrilla organizations of the 1970s, see Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, pp. 480–95; Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, pp. 48–94.
- 41 Hooglund, *Land and Revolution in Iran*, pp. 138–52.
- 42 Koohi-Kamali, *The Political Development of the Kurds in Iran*, p. 182.
- 43 Ahmad Ashraf, 'Dihqanan, Zamin va Inqilab'.
- 44 Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, p. 108.
- 45 These initiatives are assessed in Ali Shakoory, *The State and Rural Development in Post-Revolutionary Iran* (Basingstoke, 2001).
- 46 Lois Beck, 'Qashqa'i Nomads and the Islamic Republic', *Middle East Report*, vol. 22, no. 4, 1992, p. 38.
- 47 Tapper, 'Introduction: The Nomads of Iran', p. 38.



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- , *Kudita-yi Lahuti, Tabriz, Bahman 1300*, Tehran, 1376.
- , *Qiyam-i Nafir-i Jam: Shurish-i Lahak Khan Salar-i Jang*, Tehran, 1375.
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