

Anglo-Iranian Relations since 1800



Edited by
Vanessa Martin



ANGLO-IRANIAN RELATIONS SINCE 1800

This book provides an excellent background to the history of Anglo-Iranian relations. Focusing not only on the political and economic relationship with Britain and on issues of strategic sensitivity, it also illuminates British relations with society and state, and describes the interaction between various representatives and agents of both countries. Anglo-Iranian relations have had a long and complex history, characterized on the one hand by mistrust and intrusion, and on the other hand by mutual exchange and understanding. This book explores the intriguing history of this interactive relationship since 1800, looking at it from a variety of perspectives. Experts in the field make original contributions to our understanding of Iranian history by drawing on many previously unavailable documents in English and Persian. In contrast to earlier works, this book brings a new perspective to Anglo-Iranian relations by looking at the subject over a comparatively long period, and by considering new areas of contact such as social and cultural exchange, and the role of the provincial governor, as well as the continually controversial topic of the Persian Gulf Islands.

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 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2005
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge

270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

Transferred to Digital Printing 2006

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individual contributions the contributors

Typeset in Times by
Keystroke, Jacaranda Lodge, Wolverhampton

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Anglo-Iranian relations since 1800 / edited by Vanessa Martin. – 1st ed.
p. cm.

Includes index.

1. Iran–Foreign relations–Great Britain. 2. Great Britain–Foreign relations–Iran.
3. Iran–Politics and government–19th century. 4. Iran–Politics and government–20th
century. I. Martin, Vanessa.

DS274.2.G7A58 2005

327.41055'09–dc22

2005001708

ISBN10: 0–415–37295–X

ISBN13: 9–78–0–415–37295–4

CONTENTS

<i>Contributors</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Transliteration</i>	xi
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xiii
Introduction	1
1 ‘Persia’ in the Western imagination	8
ALI M. ANSARI	
2 Major-General Sir Robert Murdoch Smith KCMG and Anglo-Iranian relations in art and culture	21
JENNIFER M. SCARCE	
3 The clergy and the British: perceptions of religion and the <i>ulama</i> in early Qajar Iran	36
ROBERT GLEAVE	
4 The British in Bushehr: the impact of the First Herat War (1838–41) on relations with state and society	55
VANESSA MARTIN	
5 Ordinary people and the reception of British culture in Iran, 1906–41	67
MORTEZA NOURAEI	
6 The relationship between the British and Abd al-Husain Mirza Farman-Farma during his governorship of Fars, 1916–20	80
MANSOUREH ETTEHADIEH NEZAM MAFI	

CONTENTS

7 Britain, the Iranian military and the rise of Reza Khan	99
STEPHANIE CRONIN	
8 Oil in Iran between the two world wars	128
MOHAMMAD MALEK	
9 An assessment of the withdrawal of British forces from the Persian Gulf (1971) within the framework of disputed islands	137
REZA NAZARAHARI	
10 Anglo-Iranian relations over the disputed islands in the Persian Gulf: constraints on rapprochement	148
HOSSEIN H. MOGHADDAM	
11 The restoration of diplomatic relations with Iran, December 1953	161
DENIS WRIGHT	
<i>Index</i>	167

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This volume arises from two conferences on Anglo-Iranian relations held in the summers of 2001 and 2002. They were jointly sponsored by the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, London, the Centre for Documents and Diplomatic History, Tehran and the British Institute of Persian Studies, to all of whom I would like to express my gratitude for their financial support and assistance in making possible two occasions that much enriched the exchange of knowledge and ideas by the scholars from the two countries. I would in particular wish to thank the Royal Asiatic Society for their assistance and encouragement in the preparation of the following collection of papers.

TRANSLITERATION

The transliteration system is that of the *Cambridge History of Islam* with its Persian additional and variant forms and without diacritics. Where proper names of authors or institutions have an established spelling in English language texts, that has been preferred to the transliterated version.

ABBREVIATIONS

AIOC	Anglo-Iranian Oil Company
APOC	Anglo-Persian Oil Company
BP	British Petroleum
CMS	Church Missionary Society
EIC	East India Company
FO	Foreign Office, National Archives, London, Britain
FRUS	Foreign Relations of the United States
IO	India Office, British Library
LNOJ	League of Nations Official Journal
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive, Tehran, Iran
PRO	Public Record Office (now National Archives), London, Britain
SAM	Sazman-e Asnad-e Melli-e Iran (Iranian National Archives), Tehran, Iran
SPR	South Persia Rifles
UAE	United Arab Emirates

INTRODUCTION

The relations between Iran and Britain have a long and complex history, covering economic and cultural affairs as well as political exchange. The abiding legacy of the imperial past has been one both of mistrust and of familiarity and understanding. To the Iranians of the Qajar period, the British presence in the south was not entirely undesirable given the Russian threat in the north. Whilst British policy towards Iran was often characterized by hectoring and unwarranted interference, it was also recognized at that time that British institutions, law and constitutional government, as well as Britain's industrial strength, offered a model to be emulated. The British navy in the Persian Gulf threatened Iran's sovereignty over her islands, but it also served the useful purpose of advancing technology and protecting and developing trade. Relations in the Qajar period were not as difficult as is sometimes supposed, especially as the British became adept at setting aside their European perspective and advancing their interests through language and arguments developed within the religion and culture of the country. Change came with the initiation by the British of a more assertive policy of economic penetration at the end of the nineteenth century, exemplified by the Tobacco Concession of 1890–1 and the pressure to introduce British financial services, which was to mark the age of high imperialism. Above all, the discovery of oil in 1908 raised the stakes in the Persian Gulf region, making it commercially and strategically infinitely more significant to the British and therefore more liable to bitter dispute, as became evident in 1953.

This book brings a new perspective to the study of Anglo-Iranian relations, which normally engages either with oil, especially the oil crisis of 1953 (see for example H. Katouzian, *Mosaddeq and the Struggle for Power in Iran*, London 1999; M. Elm, *Oil, Power and Politics*, Syracuse, NY 1992), or with Anglo-Iranian relations as part of a broader study of Iranian foreign policy in general (e.g. R. K. Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran*, Charlottesville, Va. 1966 and *Revolutionary Iran* Baltimore, Md. 1988). Of course, specific works on a briefer period than the one researched here also exist (for example W. Olson's *Anglo-Iranian Relations during the First World War*, London 1984, M. E. Yapp *Strategies of British India*, Clarendon 1980, J. B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*, Oxford 1968 and above all F. Kazemzadeh's *Russia and Britain in Persia*

INTRODUCTION

1864–1914, New Haven, Conn. 1968), but their focus is political and economic. Diplomatic memoirs and histories (D. Wright, *The English amongst the Persians*, London 1977 and *The Persians amongst the English*, London 1985 and R. W. Bullard, *Letters from Tehran*, London 1991) necessarily look at the subject from a similar perspective, although they reveal much about society. This work studies the topic over a comparatively long period, thereby providing new understanding, but, above all, it does not focus solely on diplomatic and economic relations between Governments, but on social and cultural interchange as well.

Iran or ‘Persia’ has had a part to play in the British imagination, in literature and myth, for many centuries and in particular has had a notable influence on British art and crafts bringing, on the one hand, new philosophies and images and, on the other, new designs. British travellers of various kinds have taken and promoted Iranian arts, most particularly at the establishment of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. From another perspective there has been interaction at the more ordinary levels of society. After Nasir al-Din Shah (1848–96) visited London towards the end of his reign, the Shah of Persia became a character in popular music-hall productions. In the twentieth century, ordinary Iranians absorbed the significance of the British democratic system and began to seek better representation and more rational administration in their own country. The adoption of British pastimes, such as football, was part of a wider process whereby modern living brought about greater interchange and understanding, at least at the popular level.

The political struggles of Iran and Britain could provide opportunities for the ordinary people in Iran in the nineteenth century, both in bargaining with the state and in removing local powers and vested interests who represented a gradually redundant level of local control and financial extraction. Whilst war could represent losses for the Iranian Government, it could also allow opportunities for gains. The First World War, however, created an extremely taxing predicament for the governor in a province such as Fars struggling to hold the area together and to control the tribes in the face of Percy Sykes’s ruthless pursuit of British wartime objectives. By the end of the First World War, though, Britain’s interests and those of Iran ran in tandem in the desire for a strong state to maintain order, the British military presence did much to secure the kind of rule that would be most helpful to Britain.

British diplomats of the nineteenth century took much trouble to be fully informed on most aspects of Iranian life and politics, as part of the need to understand the country in terms of dealing with the Russians. In the twentieth century, however, the move from broad imperial defence to the protection of particular interests meant that later diplomats had more focused and precise goals in their relations with Iran. As a result they were overall less involved in the country. In particular they were concerned with oil and with placating their Arab allies with regard to disputed Persian Gulf islands. By contrast, the Iranian Government was occasionally caught between grand popular expectations of what it might achieve, and the implications for its prestige of those expectations, and the reality that the best means of persuading the British to yield was by patient, step-by-step

diplomacy. The use by Britain of its great-power status in the earlier part of the twentieth century to enforce its wishes, has remained to haunt it to the present time in negotiations with the Iranian Government, and has placed constraints on the establishment of harmonious relations. Iran, on the other hand, is burdened with the endless struggle to compensate for the past weakness, which still makes it difficult for it to assert its views and secure its interests. Experience would seem to indicate that military strength of one kind or another is the best means of protection in the Western-dominated world. Finally, as the personal experience of British diplomats demonstrates, the Iranian internal political struggle between constitutional and arbitrary government, between consultation and absolutism, has had relentless implications for her foreign relations.

These forgoing observations arise from the collection of articles in this volume. The nature of the evolution of perceptions of the other over time and the question of the development of historical narratives, which necessarily influence to a greater or lesser degree the study of the history of another culture, is investigated in Ali M. Ansari's article "'Persia' in the Western Imagination". Taking up the British, or Western, perspective of Persia from ancient times, he argues that the idea of 'Persia' is a quintessential rather than external other, having a largely antagonistic role in the overall Western view. It is part of the totality of the Western historical narrative and therefore an aspect of the self. Ansari proceeds to demonstrate the myriad and complex ways in which 'Persia' has influenced Western thought, each writer having their own 'Persia' to enrich their vision. The culmination in many ways of this narrative was the fusion of Western scholarship and Iranian perceived national needs to justify the Pahlavi model state (1926–79). He concludes that modern Iranians have sought to synthesize the two traditions into a powerful combination of 'scientific' history and 'mytho-history' to produce a narrative that can claim to be both 'real' and socially relevant.

In 'Major-General Sir Robert Murdoch Smith KCMG and Anglo-Iranian Relations in Art and Culture', Jennifer M. Scarce explores the Scottish contribution to the British role in Iran, which included the endeavours of diplomats, soldiers, artists and explorers. In the best tradition of the Scots who travelled abroad, Murdoch Smith was a pioneer scholar in the study of Iranian art, combining his interest with considerable technological expertise deployed in the service of the telegraph, itself seminal in changing the course of Iranian history. He immersed himself in Iranian culture, holding it in the highest affection and respect, combined with an understanding of the problems facing a country caught between its traditional customs and the impact of modernity. His achievement was to capitalize on the establishment of the Victorian and Albert Museum to build up an Iranian collection that in its artistry, design and skill was to influence British artists and craftsmen. Above all he provided a scholarly documentation of the production of tilework, which he personally encouraged in his support of the tilemaker, Ali Muhammad Isfahani.

The role of the *ulama* in Anglo-Iranian relations is assessed by Robert Gleave in 'The Clergy and the British: Perceptions of Religion and the *Ulama* in Early

Qajar Iran', where he points out the British initially underestimated their political role but in the course of the nineteenth century they came to realize the extent of clerical authority. They developed the objective, though not explicitly and consistently, of attempting to harness clerical influence to the promotion of their own interests. Gleave discusses the subject, first, under the heading of religious rhetoric. He demonstrates that religious references were an essential element in the courtesy of the language of diplomatic communication, but not in its substance. Britain, he argues, managed to prolong Irano-Russian hostilities in the years between 1809 and 1813 in part through use of religious rhetoric, whilst missing an opportunity to advance their cause by closer alliance with the *ulama*. By the mid-century a growing respect for the *ulama* persuaded the British to address them directly in their own terms. This policy came to fruition in the tactic employed by the British Representative, Justin Sheil, of using *fatvas* in his dispute with the Shah over the slave trade. Overall, the British also came to understand that influence could be wielded in Iran through Shi'ism, if they could but find the appropriate means.

Two articles are concerned with the role of the ordinary people in Anglo-Iranian relations. My own article, 'The British in Bushehr: The Impact of the First Herat War (1838–41) on the Relations with State and Society', focuses on the interaction of Anglo-Iranian relations with those between Iranian state and society. It discusses the subject in the context of long-term trends in both British and Iranian policy, the first with regard to strategic interest and prestige, the second in relation to the growth of centralization. It shows how the First Herat War permitted the state to extend its influence in Bushehr and on the Persian Gulf coast at the expense of local powers, particularly the Mazkur family. Central Government policy depended to some extent on an alliance with popular forces, which engaged both in organization and consultation in seeking to advance their own interests to the detriment of the Mazkur. At the same time popular resistance brought pressure on the Iranian Government to keep the British out and created a disincentive, particularly in financial terms, for Britain to extend its influence further in the early part of the nineteenth century, despite the strategic advantages of a foothold on an island.

The impact of British culture in Iran is explored by Morteza Nouraei in the context of the unequal relationship between an imperial power and a country threatened with colonization. In 'Ordinary People and the Reception of British Culture in Iran, 1906–41', he argues that, although Britain's presence as an imperial power brought many disadvantages, it also had beneficial consequences, particularly in the model of its civil institutions. Britain, it is emphasized, did not have any philanthropic intent with regard to introducing its institutions into Iran; nevertheless, interest in and understanding of these institutions developed as a consequence of the contact. The notion that a properly constituted law, in particular, offered a better life, led many Iranians to seek refuge under British protection, but it also led to demands for improvements in the legal system by ordinary people, influenced, amongst other ways, by Persian-language newspapers imported from British India. Nouraei concludes by pointing out that this significant

interaction between the British, British institutional culture and ordinary Iranians took place outside the circles of government and the elite and through mundane conduits, such as parks, cinemas, sewing machines and football, all in the face of Iranian Government nationalist rhetoric.

The relationship between Iran and Britain at provincial level in the south in the complicated and grievous years of the First World War is encapsulated in the career of Abd al-Husain Mirza Farman-Farma. His predicament is scrutinized by Mansoureh Ettehadieh Nezam Mafi in 'The Relationship between the British and Abd al-Husain Mirza Farman-Farma during His Governorship of Fars'. She bases her research on Persian as well as British sources and seeks thereby to challenge the existing negative perceptions of his role. Farman-Farma was caught between his obligations to the central Government as the senior official in Fars and the demands of Percy Sykes, the British commander of the South Persian Rifles (SPR, a force not recognized by the Iranian Government), whose policies favoured British interests above those of Iran. The pre-war system of controlling the British through manoeuvring and bargaining no longer worked because of the weakness of the central Government. In addition, Farman-Farma had to mediate between the powerful Qashqa'i tribe and the British, against a background of famine and unrest, and personal differences with the *il Khan*, the tribal chief, Saulat al-Daula, a situation to which he brought his great experience of local politics. In conclusion, Ettehadieh argues that Farman-Farma should be judged in the context of the very complex political situation in which he had to operate, instead of being interpreted as solely seeking his own advantage at the expense of national interest, as has been the case in the past.

British connections with the military in Iran are followed by Stephanie Cronin in 'Britain, the Iranian Military and the Rise of Reza Khan'. She explores the paradox that, having been party to the development of one military force, the Gendarmerie, Britain turned against it when it evinced nationalistic sympathies, in favour of another force, the Cossack Division, of which Britain had always been suspicious. Cronin shows how British support was crucial to the introduction of the modern Gendarmerie against tribal resistance in the south. However, the British became antagonized by its alliance with Germany, which was in turn rooted in its nationalistic sentiments. The Russian Revolution in 1917 provided the British with an opportunity to gain control of the Cossack Division, which they promptly reformed, with the provisions of the Anglo-Persian agreement of 1919 in mind. Appointed in command of the Division in 1920, Reza Khan immediately showed his political skills, particularly in covert manoeuvres. From a climate of intrigue, the coup of 1921 was executed by Iranians with the crucial support of the British on the spot. Cronin argues that the position of the nationalistic and better-trained Gendarmerie was thus usurped by the reactionary and anti-constitutional Cossack Division. However, the British reward was to be the loss of its ability to intervene directly in Iranian politics for the next twenty years.

The latter part of the volume is composed of four articles that focus on the legacy of Anglo-Iranian relations in the Qajar period, particularly with regard to oil and

to Persian Gulf islands. The initial oil concession of 1901 granting Iran a royalty of only 16 per cent of net profits was subsequently perceived by Iranians as inequitable, and attempts were made to renegotiate it, starting in 1920. Mohammad Malek examines in detail the negotiations between 1928 and 1938 to obtain more advantageous conditions from Britain for Iran in 'Oil in Iran between the Two World Wars'. Vigorous remonstrance by Reza Shah and Taimurtash in 1928 produced an offer of 20 per cent of the shares of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company for Iran, as opposed to the 25 per cent that the Iranians had sought. Subsequent negotiations won for Iran a 4 per cent tax on the profits levied on Iran and a reduction of the area of the concessions, providing the possibility of oil exploitation in the south-west by non-British companies. In 1938 a further dispute over oil revenues led to an agreement on revenues subsequently cancelled because of a drop in oil exports. Contrary to the prevailing view that the Iranians were unable to move the British, Malek demonstrates that through ceaseless pressure they won some concessions over the period in question.

The islands of the Persian Gulf are the subject of enduring disputes between British, Iranians and the rulers of the Arab states. Two articles look at this issue, fraught with problems of both evidence and perception. In 'An Assessment of the Withdrawal of British Forces from the Persian Gulf (1971) within the Framework of Disputed Islands', Reza Nazarahari studies the long history of the disagreement over the sovereignty of the Big Tonb, the Small Tonb, Abu Musa and Sirri from the legal and political dimensions, but also with regard to its implications for the present. He points to the origins of the dispute in the British use of the Ghasemi claim to Lengeh and to the islands as instruments of their own domination. Subsequent claims by Iran in 1928 were thwarted by Britain everywhere, including at the League of Nations. Between 1968 and 1971, by making some concessions over recognition of certain Arab states, Iran was able to settle the dispute over the islands as part of an overall agreement that also covered the British departure from the Persian Gulf. The matter did not settle there, however, due to the legacy of suspicion from the long period of disagreement, particularly as the tactic of adopting a legal perspective based mainly on British archival documentary evidence means that Britain's imperial past is constantly brought up.

Hossein H. Moghaddam also addresses this recurring cause of conflict between Iran and Britain in 'Anglo-Iranian Relations over the Disputed Islands in the Persian Gulf: Constraints on Rapprochement', where he concentrates on the problems of attempting to find a final resolution to the issue. This task was made particularly difficult given the role of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in asserting its perceived rights. The constraints on rapprochement are divided into two categories, those involving Iran and those involving Britain. On the Iranian side naval weakness meant that under the Qajars the Iranians were to some extent dependent on Britain to enforce their claims, whilst under the Pahlavis army needs again took precedence over naval ones, despite a trend towards military self-reliance. A further problem was Iran's failure to devise a consistent national policy. On the British side, the piecemeal policy by local British Residents of fortifying

INTRODUCTION

British interests through agreements with minor powers at Iran's expense and, latterly, reference to a Russian threat, led to an accumulation of Iranian resentment. Negotiations between 1928 and 1934, moreover, foundered on British rigidity. Moghaddam concludes that the issue of diplomatic and military strength is integral to Iran's resolution of the problem, still a subject of difference with the UAE.

The book ends on a note of personal experience of Anglo-Iranian relations at a senior level. Denis Wright gives an account of how, when Head of the Foreign Office Economic Relations Department, he was asked in August 1953 to re-establish diplomatic relations in Tehran as chargé d'affaires. However, first the Iranian Government had to be persuaded that the re-establishment of diplomatic relations should precede a new oil agreement. After Wright's arrival, a major problem presented itself in the Shah's determination to use two personal associates, Ernst Perron and Bahram Shahrokh, as intermediaries between himself and Wright on the subject of the oil agreement. He hoped thereby to circumvent the Iranian Foreign Ministry, arguing that all matters of high policy should be presented directly to him. Wright, accordingly instructed by the Foreign Office, refused to deal with the Shah on these terms and drew the latter's wrath, but full diplomatic relations were restored as a result of his visit, and oil negotiations followed soon afterwards. In this case, the Shah's attempt to assert himself proved brief.

‘PERSIA’ IN THE WESTERN IMAGINATION

Ali M. Ansari

‘[H]e entered into a long explanation [. . .] about an ancient infidel who seemed to know a great deal more about our country than any of our own historians; and who, in spite of all we could say to the contrary, had made him and all England believe that we worshipped fire; and, moreover, that we cut our horses’ throats in honour of the sun’.¹

This essay is an investigation into the nature of historical narratives, their relationship, development and proximity to the concept of ‘myth’. As a consequence, the emphasis here will be on the social construction of ‘histories’ rather than ‘History’ in terms of an *objective* understanding of the past. However, an attempt will be made to show how one of many competing narratives can be rationalized into the dominant ‘grand narrative’, resulting in the marginalization and relegation of other traditions to the realm of myth and fiction. The focus for this paper will be the idea of ‘Persia’ within Western discourse, principally within the English language during the modern period, more specifically (though not exclusively) from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries; the period when the industrial might of the imperial West was beginning to impact upon the old empires of the East. It should be stressed that this paper represents work in progress and is intended as a preliminary case study in the mechanics of narrative construction and appropriation, with a view to outlining some initial arguments on the idea of Persia within Western discourse. These arguments have been prompted by three significant, though quite distinct works: the theoretical critique of ‘Orientalism’ as presented by Edward Said and two papers discussing the often intimate relationship between Persia and the West, both included in *The Legacy of Persia*, first published in 1953.²

This paper argues that ‘Persia’ is part of the Western imagination. In arguing this position it is important to distinguish between ‘Persia’ as a Western narrative construct emanating from classical perceptions and the indigenous historical traditions of Iran. Although ‘Persia’ is seen as part of the Western ‘grand’ narrative, the historical and archaeological discovery of Iran that took place in the modern

period should not simply be interpreted as an act driven by the needs of imperial domination or subjugation, (even though ultimately a process of intellectual colonization accompanied the political and economic aspects of European expansion). It should also be seen as a consequence of the need to discover an aspect of one’s own historical inheritance. No attempt is made here to judge the ‘authenticity’ of each tradition, the emphasis being on the way in which these narratives are related, especially in light of the growth of ‘scientific’ methods of historical inquiry. Attention will be drawn to the manner in which particular myths informed the Western tradition and were paradoxically reinforced by the process of *rationalization*. It remains a supreme irony that the development of the tools of scientific history in the nineteenth century, through which European scholars sought to identify and legitimize their understanding of biblical and classical historiography, should culminate in the ultimately destructive ideological doctrine of the ‘Aryan myth’.

Analytical framework

This paper defines ‘history’ as a social construction that is both fluid and contested. As a product of the human imagination and analysis, it must be distinguished from the concept of ‘History’, which will be retained for that which may be understood as the *objective* and *real* past. History is therefore the *objective reality*, while histories that are narrated represent man’s incomplete interpretation of the whole. This is not to argue for either the inherent falsity of narratives, or indeed their *relative* worth, but simply to state and recognize the limitations of narrative constructions as a product of experiences, ideological convictions and prejudices, as well as the changing nature of method. Narratives may be classified as competing interpretations of a single event and may in time become socialized so that one is recognized as the dominant ‘grand narrative’ describing the origins and development of a single people. Grand narratives are normally (though by no means exclusively) associated with the rise of nationalist narratives in nineteenth-century Europe. Of more interest perhaps, is the category defined as the *meta-narrative*, which here will be understood as the underlying determinants and themes of social and historical development. Thus the grand narrative may be understood as the superstructure to the meta-narrative’s substructure.

The meta-narrative may also be understood as the historical myths that define, shape and motivate a given society. It is argued here that the relationship between ‘histories’ and ‘myths’ is an intimate one that cannot easily be demarcated and is on the contrary both fluid and reciprocal.³ Indeed, it may be argued that ‘myth’ as a means of conveying a historical tale of moral value and purpose to a given society,⁴ is not only a more apt term to describe pre-modern historical writing but, if the distinction is to be made, is more of social value than the dry retelling of ‘facts’.⁵ Few histories, of course, rely solely on the recapitulation of a series of ‘facts’, and the personal interpretation involved in their collection and dissemination reminds us that myth is an integral part of narrative construction.⁶ Nor

should it be assumed that the rise of professional ‘empirical’ history in the nineteenth century resulted in the marginalization of myth.⁷ As the growth of nationalist histories has shown, changes in methodology and the paradoxical *rationalization* of myth in the service of industrial society simply provided the moral tales of the past with an unprecedented scientific potency.⁸

Just as history enjoys an intimate relationship with myth that may be characterized as different aspects or perspectives of a particular discursive field, so too, it is argued, the dichotomous and distinctive relationship between ‘East’ and ‘West’, suggested by Edward Said in ‘Orientalism’, is unsustainable. The apparent duality of an active West and passive East presented by Said has been extensively critiqued elsewhere.⁹ While the basic premise of the ‘imagining’ of the East which Said articulates is central to the argument of this paper, both the implicit duality and antagonistic relationship outlined in ‘Orientalism’ need qualification. Although duality may serve a mythic function, it should not be interpreted as an epistemological distinction. In other words the ‘other’ is part of the totality of the narrative and an essential – indeed defining – aspect of the ‘self’; in the same way it may be conjectured that the English are defined against the French, though clearly not in a mutually exclusive manner. Not only is there an intimate dialogue between the two, but also ultimately they are defined under a grand narrative of Christian and latterly European identity. In this way, it may be said they share the same origins and, as any student of Anglo-Norman history will tell us, the historian is faced with a distinct blurring of boundaries. A similar relationship may be discerned within American historiography and the centrality of the English (and their history) to the US historical imagination.¹⁰ It follows therefore that, in our case, the ‘Persians’ should not be exclusively considered in terms of the ‘other’ awaiting discovery, investigation, invention and control, but should instead be regarded as part of the totality of the Western narrative, a people familiar to the Western imagination long before the imperatives of empire and, through a curious transformation of the narrative, moved from being an essential ‘other’, to an integral part of the self.

‘Persia’ and the ‘West’

For all the problems in defining the specific influence of the ancient Persians on the cultural and historical development of the classical and Judaic worlds, modern scholarship is increasingly aware and more ready to acknowledge the reality of Persian influence.¹¹ Far from the Hellenic monologue some writers would have us believe, there is now greater acceptance of the dialogic nature of the relationship.¹² That, nevertheless, this is a privilege accorded to pre-Islamic Persia as opposed to post-Islamic Iran, is itself a reflection and product of developments in Western historiography which will be detailed below.

Classical and Judaic authors left a narrative legacy that would permeate the medieval mind and be reinforced by the advent of the Renaissance, which, along with the growth in travel, literacy and publishing, ensured an increasing and fertile

audience.¹³ In this age of discovery, dominated by a singular idea of Persia, the Euro-centric superiority of later ages had yet to emerge, and when travellers made their re-acquaintance with the East and, in particular, Persia, they came with both considerable cultural baggage and a healthy sense of admiration. Much has been made of the Sherley brothers’ contribution to the development of Shah Abbas’s artillery and his apparent reliance on the two English adventurers. Considerably less attention is given to Sir Anthony Sherley’s fawning admiration for the King, ‘whom we call barbarous, though from his example we may learn many great and good things’.¹⁴ According to Sherley, Shah Abbas:

is both one of the mightiest Princes that are, and one of the excellentest [*sic*], for the true virtues of a Prince, that is, or hath been; and having come to this greatness, though by right; yet through the circumstances of the time, and the occasions, which then were, solely his own worthiness, and virtue, made way to his right: besides, the fashion of his Government differing so much from that which we call barbarousness, that it may justly serve for as great an Idea for a Principality, as Plato’s Commonwealth did for a Government, of that sort.¹⁵

Such praise is echoed in the comments of James Fraser more than a century later, who wrote of Nadir Shah that, ‘I could relate many other remarkable Things that I have seen and heard of this great Hero, whose actions already are sufficient to convince the World, that few Ages have produced his Equal’.¹⁶

For all this fascination, these observations were not without criticism, and even Sherley noted that *his* Persians were not entirely as he had imagined:

yet the nature of those is so vile in themselves, that they are no more, nor longer good, then they are by a strong and wisely tempered hand made so: The Country not being inhabited by those nobly disposed Persians, of which there are but a few, and those few as they ever were.¹⁷

Such sentiments were also reflected in the musings of the Huguenot merchant Sir John Chardin about Persians on whom he lavished praise and condemnation in almost equal measure.¹⁸ Nevertheless, perhaps as a reflection of his mercantile background, as well as his prolonged stay in Isfahan, Chardin is one of the first commentators to try and reconcile the historical tradition of Persia with which he is familiar with that which he had found. He notes for instance that the Persians themselves call their country ‘Iran’, that there is a clear relationship between the ‘modern Persians’ and the Tartars from whom they ‘proceed’, and that they do possess histories of which he appears to have some understanding. While noting that the Persians call their language ‘Saboun Fars’ and that there is a distinction between the Persians, Turks and Arabs, Chardin clearly remains more at ease with his classical inheritance, resorting to Xenophon to remind his readers that Persians

are excellent horsemen and that ‘the children in Persia are taught three things, to tell the truth, draw a bow, and mount a horse’. Although he adds, the practice of the third aspect, that of riding, was all that he could vouch for in his day.¹⁹ Chardin enjoyed the advantage of having lived among the Persians yet, despite his many acute observations and his brief foray into comparative historiography, he remained too wedded to the familiar, which would have undoubtedly assisted in the sale of his book. Like *The Travels of Marco Polo*, Chardin’s book is essentially a biographical travelogue intended to satiate the curiosity of a growing reading public, increasingly interested in the world beyond Europe, for which Persia remained both familiar and exotic.

For those with little or no access to the Persians, the imagined community continued to be fed by classical authors. However, by the turn of the eighteenth century, with the development of the scientific revolution and at the dawn of the ‘enlightenment’, there appears to have been a tendency towards a more comprehensive, rigorous history, albeit at the service of God and Christian morality.²⁰ Nonetheless, as a historian has noted, continuity does not preclude change, and it is quite apparent that, as with many other aspects of European life, the eighteenth century heralded significant changes in historiography. As one historian has argued,

European elites had lived since the Renaissance with a culture borrowed from antiquity, a period whose artists and authors represented unsurpassable models and whose literary genres constituted the authoritative canons of beauty and truth. Now Europe was raising the question of its cultural autonomy.²¹

This change in attitudes and approach was crucial in initiating the transformation of the relationship between Persia and the West. Just as the world of antiquity was no longer to be viewed with uncritical awe and admiration, so too that particular aspect of antiquity – the Persians – were to come under increasing scrutiny. While James Fraser may heap praise upon Nader Shah, as mentioned, Gibbon, in his *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, was casting a more scholarly eye on the Persians. His sources remained largely classical and he was to repeat the erroneous observations of his sources with respect to Persian education, the apparent ubiquitous utility of horses to Persian society, and Xerxes’ two-million-man army, while adding for good measure the well-worn mantra that it was the very civilization of the Persians that had corrupted them. At the same time, Gibbon was prepared to go beyond the standard sources and, in a clear reflection of the extensive progress made in oriental studies by the end of the eighteenth century, alluded to the *Zendavesta* in his discussion of Zoroastrianism.²² As with Rollin before him, the Persians were an integral part of the narrative constructed by Gibbon, although less centre-stage since the focus was Rome, rather than an attempt to provide context for the Bible. Nevertheless, the ‘Persian wars’ are a recurring event throughout the narrative and, where relevant, Gibbon provides

interesting insights into his main protagonists. He too acknowledged the difference in nomenclature between 'Persia' and 'Iran', as well as 'Touran' but, most intriguingly, tucked away in a footnote, Gibbon makes reference to the *Shahnameh*: 'The *Shah Nameh*, or *Book of Kings*, is perhaps the original record of history which was translated into Greek by the interpreter Sergius, preserved after the Mahometan conquest, and versified in the year 994, by the national poet Ferdoussi'.²³

Gibbon's awareness of the *Shahnameh* was nonetheless limited and, like Chardin before him, he was more comfortable with his traditional classical sources. It was left to a subsequent writer, Sir John Malcolm, to attempt reconciliation between the two traditions. Malcolm's two-volume *The History of Persia from the Most Early Period to the Present Time*, first published in 1815, and subsequently in 1829, is a much-undervalued work that certainly deserves reprinting. As an officer sent to the court of Fath Ali Shah Qajar, Malcolm was charged with ensuring the Qajar state did not succumb to the temptations of an alliance with Napoleonic France. As such, his presence confirmed the changing political realities that Gibbon had hinted at in his reference to the *Zendavesta*: namely, the growing importance of British India. However, Malcolm's political duties were fortunately matched by a voracious appetite for information, a thirst for detail and an acute intelligence that had sufficiently absorbed many of the advances in oriental studies, especially the development of philology.²⁴ Malcolm was, by his own admission, the first British writer to attempt a comprehensive history of Persia from earliest times to the present and to rely as far as possible on indigenous historians.²⁵ In seeking to reconcile the traditions he had discovered with those that he had inherited, Malcolm proved remarkably open-minded, noting that:

The account of the ancient Persians, in the early chapter of this history, is taken almost exclusively from their national documents and traditions: that which has generally been current in Europe has been drawn from the incidental notices found in the writers of Greece and Rome. So greatly do they differ, at first sight one is almost disposed to agree that [. . .] one or the other must be wholly fabulous or fictitious: but such conclusions should not be too hastily adopted. Even in our own times, notwithstanding the multiplied facilities of intercourse, and the numerous channels through which information passes from land to land, still, if one compares the history of a country written by a native, with the occasional notices of foreigners, many discrepancies will be found, and not a few apparent inconsistencies. For, while that which is most interesting at home will often be unheard of abroad, except so far as it appears to speculative men to be possessed of scientific importance, a foreigner seldom looks among the other nations for anything beyond what in some way concerns his own [. . .] But if such is more or less the case among all men, it was eminently so among the Greeks. Much as they had to be proud of, their self-conceit was at least fully equal to their deserts.²⁶

Hitherto the two narrative traditions had enjoyed a parallel existence and when Western observers encountered what may be termed the autonomous indigenous historical tradition, they viewed it at best with sympathetic curiosity, and at worst with incomprehension and barely disguised disdain. Not that they sought to overturn those traditions, in so far as they were familiar with them, they simply had no urge to understand. Malcolm, on the other hand, represented the new scientific curiosity which demanded understanding, and in approaching his sources with an open mind and recognizing their general concurrence and validity on Islamic Persian history, as well as parts of the classical record, he saw no reason to dismiss the ‘myths’ of the *Shahnameh* out of hand. For Malcolm, ‘cultural autonomy’ required a certain equanimity of critical judgement; after all, were not the Greeks capable of embellishment as much or, indeed as Malcolm noted, more than others? Malcolm therefore recognizes the mythic qualities of traditional historiography before attempting a rationalization and reconciliation of the two traditions. Thus Malcolm argued, ‘This is the period of his history [the period of Kay Kâoos] in which Firdousee [*sic*] indulges most in fable; but we nevertheless discover facts in his page in complete accord of the general tenor of what Herodotus has recorded’.²⁷ Among the conclusions he drew from a detailed comparison of the traditions were that Zohak was the equivalent of ‘the Assyrian monarch who conquered Persia’,²⁸ and that ‘Kay Khosroo is Cyrus [. . .] that Herodotus transmitted the same tradition, which has since been recorded by Firdousee [*sic*]’.²⁹

Malcolm was a transitional figure. He was an amateur historian driven by a scientific curiosity and access to new reservoirs of knowledge that the ‘discovery’ of India had facilitated. He was aware of the developments in the understanding of Sanskrit, which Sir William Jones had pioneered,³⁰ but, for all his erudition, Major-General Malcolm reminds us that ‘history’ had yet to become a discipline or indeed a profession. Indeed, as one historian has commented, during this period,

excessive display of learning could only impair, not enhance, the moral and pragmatic impact of a history. Gentlemen must write as they rode – with great skill but no apparent effort. In the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Republic of Letters, Bayle’s and Gibbon’s footnotes could win them a reputation for both impudence and erudition.³¹

It was Malcolm’s misfortune that he wrote just at the dawn of the professionalization of history, a development that dismissed the need for either gentlemen or myths.

The Aryan myth

The professionalization of history is regularly associated with the contributions of the German historian Leopold von Ranke, who established many of the

characteristics of 'modern' university history teaching that we are familiar with today. Yet Ranke's reputation as a radical empiricist has undoubtedly been exaggerated, given his own disdain for the 'necessary evil' of referencing. Indeed, 'For all his modern erudition, Ranke evidently retained to the classical notion of what a history should look like [. . .] Ranke shied away from disfiguring his powerful narrative and set piece battle scenes with the ugly contrivances of scholarly mechanics'.³² Ranke's ambivalence towards the utility of rigorous referencing should not detract from his significant contribution to method; in particular his use of 'primary sources in archives with a zest and thoroughness quite new to historical scholarship'.³³ In other words the new historical scholarship was a consequence of changes in method rather than narrative construction, and while the building blocks of historical writing may have changed,³⁴ the consequences were not necessarily the production of 'objective' history, but a *rationalization* of mythic history into a more perfect ideological tool, which in the nineteenth century went to serve the interests of the modern European nation.

This process of rationalization gradually resulted in the displacement of one tradition by another, until the Western (secularized) tradition moved from being one of many histories, to becoming the History, a process which is all the more remarkable as it was seemingly total, given the richness of Islamic/Persian historiography.³⁵ Malcolm's immediate successors were less ready to accept the Persian sources they encountered, which were not recognized as 'archival' and, as a result, tended to dismiss as at best literature (or alternatively a collection of somewhat suspicious 'pre-modern facts'), that which did not support their own familiar tradition.³⁶ Given that this tradition was essentially an 'ancient' history, it was on this period that Western scholars, aided by the new discipline of archaeology, focused their attention. The precise mechanics by which this gradual displacement took place would require further detailed investigation. Suffice it to say that it was probably not simply a consequence of the change in method, but crucially of the changing relationship between Persia and the West, reflected in the growing political and economic domination of the country, and the imposition of new 'Western' education, which effectively resulted in what may be characterized as the *intellectual colonization* of the local elites.³⁷ A similar (synthetic) process arguably occurred during the Parthian era when Eastern historical traditions grew to dominate those specifically Western Iranian traditions, and the consequent loss to the national memory of the Achaemenids.³⁸

In order to better show how the return of the Achaemenids to the Iranian historical consciousness was less a process of 'objective' historical enlightenment, and more one of ideological displacement, it is important to appreciate the function of this new history, which was as much, if not more, part of the Western imagination than before. If the Persians were familiar for the moral purpose they served in the biblical epic, they were now to serve the purposes of European nationalisms. The tentative admiration for the Persians, qualified through increasing experience of 'modern' Persians (seen for instance in Chardin's comments noted above), was now fully developed into a distinction between the noble Persians of old and

their ‘diluted’ progeny. This process was reinforced and made necessary by the arguments emphatically initiated by Sir William Jones that, ‘all of humanity was descended from an original couple and [Jones] was “absolutely certain” that Iran was the post-Deluvian centre from where the “whole race of man proceeded”’.³⁹ Jones’s investigations into linguistic relationships was then transformed by successive scholars into a theory of race, empowered by the empirical certainty of the modern fact into a scientific reality which would brook no compromise.⁴⁰ As absurd as many of these observations seem in retrospect, the search for Aryan origins was extensive and serious.⁴¹ In 1827 a certain L. C. Beaufort presented a paper at the Royal Irish Academy that argued that there were Zoroastrian roots to Irish spirituality and that Celtic culture had clearly revealed an Eastern and, specifically, ‘Persian origin’.⁴² In 1862, Samuel Laing, a former member of the Viceroy’s Council gave a paper in which he argued that Zoroastrianism was ‘the most pure and rational of all religions’, adding for good measure that there, ‘was no such thing as a stupid Arian [*sic*] nation’.⁴³ As Ballantyne has argued ‘Aryanism’ was not simply an intellectual excursion, it was to have practical consequences for British Indian policy, especially with respect to military recruitment after the Indian Mutiny, when the natives were divided into good northern (Aryan) Indians, and bad southern (non-Aryan) Indians. It seems logical that this racial classification would have applied to the Persians themselves, especially since the apparent centrality of ‘Iran’ to the grand narrative of European (Aryan) descent made it imperative that the ineffectual Qajar state be distinguished from their illustrious predecessors.⁴⁴ Henceforth there would be ‘noble Persians’, (a rare breed), and the rest.

Yet as with the political domination of Iran, this process of intellectual colonization remained incomplete. There was undoubted collaboration in so far as few of those affected could resist the characterization of the ancient Persians promoted by the West, or indeed their centrality to the European narrative. Indeed, for many Iranian intellectuals, this narrative was a means by which Iran could reintegrate itself into the narrative of the great (European) nations and they could extricate themselves from the decay and decline that was palpable around them. Furthermore, pride in ‘Iranian-ness’ and an antipathy to non-Iranians was something to which Iranians raised on the *Shahnameh* had, in principle, little difficulty in adapting, and the appropriation of Western elements into the traditional narrative had, of course, been achieved before with the romance of Alexander. However, the new narrative being imposed could not tolerate the inconsistencies integral to the traditional historical narrative that, through time, had sought to weave an inclusive myth of Iranian identity. Instead, as well as dispensing with the irrational fables, it sought to deconstruct the ‘Islamization’ of the traditional narrative and counterpose Aryanism against the Semitic Arabs. The exclusivity of the new narrative was reflected not only in its construction but also in its adoption, which was limited essentially to the elites who espoused an Iranian nationalism modelled on European norms and in which ‘race’ became a central feature. The comments of Mirza Agha Khan Kermani were indicative of this trend:

The root of each of the branches of the tree of ugly character of Persia that we touch was planted by the Arabs and its fruit [sprang from] the seed sown from the Arabs. All the despicable habits and customs of the Persians are either the legacy and testament of the Arab nation or the fruit and influence of the invasions that have occurred in Persia.⁴⁵

As the official ideology of the state, this emasculated narrative, devoid of much of the social relevance of the original myth, came of age during the Pahlavi dynasty. Under Mohammad Reza Shah the dependence on Western narratives for the justification of the state (and curiously the monarchy) appeared complete. The cult of Cyrus was supported by Western scholarship and there was a curious absence of Persian sources to justify the 2500-year *Persian* monarchy.⁴⁶ Yet just as the Pahlavi state promoted an elite ideology with an accompanying historical narrative that bore little relation to the aspirations of ordinary Iranians, so too did traditional narratives die hard. The tales of the *Shahnameh* may no longer be viewed as real, but they enjoyed a relevance that ensured their durability, especially for a society undergoing dramatic change.⁴⁷ As Sir Percy Sykes noted in 1921, ‘the heroic age of Persia [. . .] as given by Firdausi in his great epic the *Shahnameh* or “History of Kings”, is practically the only early history ever read or believed by Persians’.⁴⁸ This was because the *Shahnameh* did not simply represent the grand narrative of Persian history but the *meta-narrative* of Iranian identity.

Mythology describes the spirit of various nations. And there is no nation or people whose history is free from myth. Of course, in conformity with the weight of civilization and the history of a nation, the myth of the nation is deeper and more complicated. And civilized nations usually have myths. The ethical myth and the myth epic indicate the spirit of Iranians [. . .] the Book of Kings [is] the symbol of Iran.⁴⁹

Herein lies the significance of the transformation of contemporary Iranian nationalism. Hitherto denied the social and political utility of their indigenous narratives, modern Iranians have sought to synthesize the two traditions into a powerful combination of ‘scientific’ history and ‘mytho-history’ to produce a narrative that can claim to be both ‘real’ and socially relevant. It is the construction of this new nationalist grand narrative, incorporating rather than dismissing the crucial *meta-narrative* that will determine Iranian politics for decades to come.

Notes

1. J. Morier, *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan in England* (London 1835), p. 131.
2. The two papers are; L. Lockhart ‘Persia as Seen by the West’, and J. E. Heseltine, ‘The Royame of Perse’, both in A. J. Arberry *The Legacy of Persia* (Oxford 1953), pp. 318–58, 359–87.
3. The etymology of the word ‘history’, and the ambiguity of its meaning in, for

example, French, as opposed to English, as well as the use of the comparable term (*ustura*) in Arabic and Persian, also offer an interesting indication of the proximity of history and myth. See B. Lewis 'Reflections on Islamic Historiography', in *Middle Eastern Lectures*, Vol. II, 1997, p. 69.

4. The definition here is largely derived from R. Barthes's *Mythologies* (London 1973).
5. This was certainly a view held by Aristotle in *Poetics* (London 1996), p. 16. Significantly, for our purposes, Aristotle is discussing the merits of epic poetry.
6. On the historian and his facts, see E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (London 1981), pp. 7–30. There are of course many texts on the nature of historical writing including Hayden White 'The Historical Text as Literary Artefact', in *History and Narrative* (London 1998), pp. 34–56; and P. Munz 'History and Myth' *Philosophical Quarterly*, 6, 22, 1956, pp. 1–16.
7. For a fascinating investigation into the relationship and influence of literature and historical writing, see R. Irwin, 'Saladin and the Third Crusade: A Case Study in Historiography and the Historical Novel', in M. Bentley, ed., *Companion to Historiography* (London 1997), pp. 139–52.
8. For the paradoxical circularity of myth and reason, see Adorno and Horkheimer *The Dialectics of the Enlightenment* (London 1999), trans. J. Cumming.
9. See R. Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London 1990), especially pp. 141–56.
10. See for instance J. Higham, 'The Construction of American History' in J. Higham (ed.) *The Reconstruction of American History* (London 1962), pp. 9–24. Also F. FitzGerald, *America Revised* (New York 1980), pp. 59–69. For a brief survey on differing interpretations of the American Revolution, see W. Cartwright and R. Watson, eds, *Interpreting and Teaching American History*, National Council for the Social Studies (Washington, DC 1961), pp. 38–55.
11. See for example, A. Momigliano, *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography* (London 1990), p. 5.
12. For a self-proclaimed 'revisionist' interpretation see P. Springborg, *Western Republicanism and the Oriental Prince* (Cambridge 1992), in particular pp. 23–180.
13. There was, by all accounts, a literary explosion during the seventeenth century: 'Where 200,000 individual volumes were produced each year in the first decade, two million items were on sale annually by the end of the century, so that, despite their fragility, books are now the single commonest class of object to survive from past times', N. Wheale, *Writing and Society: Literacy, Print and Politics in Britain 1590–1660* (London 1999), p. 6.
14. Sir Anthony Sherley, *His Relation of His Travels into Persia* (London 1613), p. 70. Sherley's use of the term 'barbarous' may be indicative of his classical education, as is his use of the term 'Babylon' to describe Ottoman Mesopotamia, see pp. 20–1.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
16. J. Fraser, *History of Nader Shah* (London 1742), p. 234.
17. Sir Anthony Sherley *Persia*, p. 41 (note that the facsimile text has two p. 41s). The notion that the Persians needed a firm hand to make them good has of course been repeated many times since, though it should be noted that Sherley would have probably justified strong government in his own country for similar reasons.
18. Sir John Chardin, *Travels in Persia*, ed. P. Sykes (London 1927), pp. 183–97. Chardin's travels were originally published in 1686.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 126–7.
20. See for example, M. Rollin, *The Ancient History of the Egyptians, Carthaginians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes and Persians, Grecians and Macedonians* (Edinburgh 1832). First published in French in 1729.
21. François Furet quoted in M. Bentley, 'Introduction: Approaches to Modernity:

- Western Historiography since the Enlightenment', in M. Bentley, ed., *Companion to Historiography* (London 1997), p. 400.
22. E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. I (London 1983), pp. 187–200. The first volume was published in 1776 and the final in 1788. Interestingly, Gibbon also defines the Sasanian monarchy as an 'Oriental despotism': Vol. V, p. 182–5. For a discussion of Gibbon's sources, see D. O. Morgan, 'Edward Gibbon and the East', *Iran*, 33, 1995, pp. 85–92.
23. Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, Vol. V, p. 185.
24. J. Malcolm, *The History of Persia from the Most Early Period to the Present Time* (London, 2nd edn, Vol. 1, 1829), pp. 476–90. For a useful contextualization of Malcolm, see A. K. S. Lambton, 'Major General Sir John Malcolm (1769–1833) and the "History of Persia"', *Iran*, 33, 1995, pp. 97–109.
25. Malcolm, *Persia*, pp. v–vii.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 475.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 515.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 509.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 523. A similar conclusion is drawn by E. Yarshater 'Iranian Historical Tradition: b) Iranian National History', in E. Yarshater, ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 3 (1) (Cambridge 1983), p. 389.
30. Malcolm, *Persia*, p. 483.
31. A. Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, Mass. 1997), pp. 225–6.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
33. M. Bentley, 'Approaches', p. 422.
34. For a discussion on the development of the 'modern fact' see M. Poovey, *The History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (London 1998).
35. See for example Lewis, 'Reflections', p. 70.
36. For a discussion of the value of Persian sources and historiography, see J. S. Meisami, *Persian Historiography to the End of the 12th Century* (Edinburgh 1999), pp. 1–14. For detail on the Safavid period see, S. A. Quinn *Historical Writing during the Reign of Shah Abba* (Salt Lake City, Utah 2000). The Il-Khanid period is also, of course, now generally recognized as a particularly rich historiographical period.
37. Sartre sums this process up neatly in his Preface to F. Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* (London 1967).
38. See E. Yarshater, *History*, pp. 388–91.
39. T. Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism and the British Empire* (New York 2002), p. 28.
40. Probably the most explicit exposition of this racial theory was that of Count de Gobineau, *The Inequality of the Human Races*, trans. A. Collin (New York 1967).
41. For background details see H. Tudor, *Political Myth* (London 1972), pp. 103–10.
42. Ballantyne, *Orientalism*, p. 38.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
44. One of the more absurd extensions of this trend was the view of some of Europeans which assumed that any successful Iranian was in fact a European adventurer. See the reference to Nadir Shah as the Irish adventurer, Thomas O'Kelly, referred to in Morier *Adventures*, p. 193.
45. Quoted in S. Bakhsh, *Iran: Monarchy, Bureaucracy and Reform under the Qajars: 1858–1896* (London 1978), p. 345.
46. See, for example, the very curious M. Honarmand, *Pahlavism – maktab-i nau* (Tehran 1345), which refers to Herodotus, St Augustine and Will Durant! Interestingly, as the Shah became more confident, his use of the *Shahnameh* for political purposes increased: see M. Karanjia's *Mind of a Monarch* (London 1977).

47. P. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. J. B. Thompson (Cambridge 1981), p. 227. See also P. Ricoeur, 'Myth as the Bearer of Possible Worlds' in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, ed. M. J. Valdes (Toronto 1991), p. 484, 'For it is only when it is threatened with destruction from without or from within that a society is compelled to return to the very roots of its identity; to that mythical nucleus which ultimately grounds and determines it'.
48. Sir Percy Sykes, *A History of Persia*, Vol. I (London 1921), p. 133. See also Vita Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran* (London 1926), pp. 105, 121.
49. 'President Khatami Addresses Iranian Expatriates in USA', BBC SWB ME/3339 MED/1, dated 23 September 1998, New York 20 September 1998.

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR ROBERT MURDOCH SMITH KCMG AND ANGLO-IRANIAN RELATIONS IN ART AND CULTURE

Jennifer M. Scarce

There is a long and distinguished tradition of Scottish involvement in the history and commerce of Europe and the Middle East where steadily increasing contact offered opportunities for careers as diplomats, soldiers, merchants, scientists, archaeologists, artists and explorers. Economic hardship, political uncertainty and limited opportunities for employment encouraged both permanent and temporary migration. As might be expected, there is plenty of evidence that the Scots extended their activities to Iran in varied roles. In the early seventeenth century the East India Company's bases in Bandar Abbas and Isfahan recruited Scots. One of the best qualified employees was George Strachan of the Mearns (in Aberdeenshire) who had an excellent knowledge of Persian, Arabic and Turkish, collected books and manuscripts in those languages and was a close friend of the Italian traveller Pietro della Valle.¹ When Iran opened up again to contacts with Europe in the early nineteenth century, Scots soon became involved, including, for example, James Baillie Fraser who travelled around north Iran between 1810 and 1815 recording both contemporary affairs and his own experiences in detail.² Sir John McNeill enjoyed a successful career in official and diplomatic circles. After service as a medical officer in the East India Company, he was attached to the British Mission in Tehran in 1820. He spent many years in Iran becoming, in 1831, British Resident at Bushehr then Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary in 1836, finally retiring in 1841.³

Sir Robert Murdoch Smith (1835–1900) continued in this tradition with a long career in Iran from 1864 to 1888. The entry for him in *The Dictionary of National Biography* tersely summarizes his fields of interest as 'Military, politics, government and political movements'⁴ and his occupations as 'Major-General, archaeologist and diplomat'.⁵ These important and official activities are then expanded in a short clearly written biographical article. It does not, however, do sufficient justice to his contribution as a pioneer scholar in the study of Iranian art,

which had received little attention apart from references to architecture by travellers and artists who described, drew, painted and sometimes recorded the plans of the buildings that they saw during their journeys.

While concentrating on his achievements in the field of Iranian art, it is essential also to review his career in the context of relations between Britain and Iran in the nineteenth century. His life reflected not only the continuous need of the Scots to emigrate for economic reasons and their value to British Government service, but also showed the professionalism required in the nineteenth century to meet the needs of rapid technological change. He was recruited for the technical and organization skills that he could bring to develop an efficient infrastructure in communications. The reasons for the growing interest in technology lay in Britain's overseas role and are clear, particularly in relation to India, where news of the Mutiny of 1857–8 only reached London after months of delay. The need for efficient and fast communication between London and India, which had long been discussed, now became urgent. Here the construction of a land telegraph line through Turkey and Iran linking the systems of Britain and India seemed the obvious choice. Consequently, after protracted negotiations, the first of several Telegraph Conventions was signed in Tehran in February 1863 stipulating that British experts should supervise the construction of the line.

Murdoch Smith, then a lieutenant in the Royal Engineers, answered an advertisement in *The Times* for engineers to supervise construction work. His application was successful and he was duly appointed as superintendent of the Tehran–Kohrud section of the line, taking up his post in 1864. The engineering work was completed by October 1864 finally linking London and India by telegraph. Murdoch Smith's progress was rapid as he was made Director of the Persian Telegraph Department in 1865 with the local rank of major. His work was varied, demanding and adventurous. In addition to supervision of the administration and accounts of the department, he had constantly to survey and monitor the work of the regional offices and the construction and maintenance of telegraph lines throughout Iran. These activities involved him in many journeys and tours of inspection around Iran and, as a result, he came to know the country very well. He also took the time and trouble to learn Persian and was able to speak it fluently, which gained him the respect of the Iranians he encountered. The letters, memoranda and reports of his surviving correspondence written between 1867 and 1886, give a detailed picture of both the telegraph business and his understanding of contemporary Iranian affairs.⁶

He obviously had a successful career as an administrator and technical expert to fully occupy him, but he made the time and effort to become a pioneer scholar of Iranian art. While this may seem a curious choice, there are sound reasons that qualified him to undertake this study, namely his social background, education and undeniable intellectual ability, and his career before he came to Iran, which all came together in the right place at the right time.⁷

Murdoch Smith was born on 18 August in 1835 at Bank Street, Kilmarnock, the second son of Hugh Smith, a doctor, and his wife Jean Murdoch, a farmer's

daughter, who gave him a secure but modest family environment, but one without the wealth and means to guarantee him high office. His background did, however, afford him a sound education, and a survey of the range of subjects that he studied gives some insight into the shaping of his personality and his future achievements. At school in Kilmarnock Academy he had thorough instruction in the traditional Greek and Latin classics. Glasgow University offered him the advantages of the stimulating combination of subjects characteristic of the Scottish curriculum in higher education. He continued his classical studies and took courses in chemistry, and in moral and natural philosophy. He also took an active interest in the study of modern languages, acquiring fluent French and German, a working knowledge of Italian and some acquaintance with Arabic, showing an aptitude which later enabled him to become an excellent Persian linguist.

Armed with an education well balanced between the arts and sciences he had to find a career suitable for his talents that would offer a reasonable income, as he could not rely on family resources. He was interested in the army but, again, his opportunities were limited as he could not afford to purchase a commission in a fashionable London regiment. His choices were between the Indian Army or the Royal Engineers, which both valued professional and technical qualifications and took officers without private means. Murdoch Smith chose the Royal Engineers, a decision that was to determine the course of the rest of his life. On 1 August 1855 he entered the first open competition for commissions in the Ordinance Corps held by the Royal Engineers. He came first out of 380 candidates in the qualifying examination and was awarded a lieutenant's commission on 24 September, which he took up at the Royal Engineers Establishment at Chatham on 15 October 1855 (Figure 2.1). He was in a position to embark on a probably distinguished but conventional officer's career when an unexpected opportunity intervened that brought him temporarily into the field of classical archaeology and opened up new worlds of exploration and adventure.

During the nineteenth century, interest in the civilizations of Greece and Rome, which had flourished as an antiquarian enthusiasm in the eighteenth century, gradually evolved into a scientific discipline involving both fieldwork and the systematic documentation of sites and their associated objects. Charles Newton, later to become Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities in the British Museum, found the ideal opportunity to put these methods into practice when he launched an expedition in 1856 to investigate the remains of one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, the site of the spectacular tomb of Mausolos, ruler of Caria from 377 to 353 BC, located north-west of the coastal resort of Bodrum in western Turkey. Such an ambitious project required technical personnel, whom Newton requested from the Royal Engineers, as their skills in the construction and repair of roads, bridges and houses could easily be adapted to the needs of archaeology. Murdoch Smith was seconded to supervise a team of Royal Engineers and Turkish workmen, and remained at Halicarnassus from November 1856 to 1859, where he identified the site of the Mausoleum, pieced together various fragments of classical sculpture and excavated



Figure 2.1 Lieutenant R. Murdoch Smith RE in 1856 (from a coloured photograph by Alexander Stanesby).

a spectacular stone lion at neighbouring Cnidus, which were all published in his technical report.⁸ Murdoch Smith found that garrison life in Malta, to which he returned after the Halicarnassus excavations were completed, did not make the best use of his talents and looked for more archaeological opportunities. He found them in Libya at Cyrene, capital of a Greek colony and later of the Roman province of Cyrenaica, which had never been adequately surveyed and excavated. He obtained leave of absence and worked with Lieutenant E. A. Porcher RN in 1860 and 1861, excavating the site at his own expense. Their report was prepared during Murdoch Smith's employment at the War Office from 1861 to 1863 and published in 1864,⁹ when he was beginning his career in Iran, where, apart from two years of home leave from 1871 to 1873, he was to remain until his formal retirement from the Telegraph Department in 1888.

His experiences of classical Graeco-Roman archaeology were to influence his life in Iran, as they had given him a permanent enthusiasm for antiquarian and historical research. Through his classical education he was also aware of the complex and intimate relationships between the Greeks of both the mainland and Asia Minor and the Achaemenids, who ruled Iran from the sixth to the fourth centuries BC. Beyond the requirements of his work he therefore found time to immerse himself in Iranian culture, visiting both ancient and Islamic monuments, and was perceptive and sympathetic to a country caught between a traditional way of life and the impact of Western technology. His own words express this well:

The country is not as badly governed as people suppose. Life and property are wonderfully safe and the remarkable freedom of speech and behaviour which prevails does not indicate that the people are cowed by oppression.

The people are one of the finest in the world physically and intellectually. They are imbued with a strong sense of nationality and through their art, literature and general culture exert an influence in the East out of all proportion to their military power.¹⁰

Iran's dilemma is dramatically illustrated by the contrast in style and presentation of the two main Qajar rulers of the nineteenth century Fath Ali Shah (1797–1834) and his great grandson Nasir al-Din Shah (1848–96). Fath Ali Shah projected a strikingly glamorous image of authority, through a series of portraits painted in oils, carved on rock faces, and meticulously crafted on lacquer boxes, mirror cases, pen cases, book covers and enamelled cups, dishes and mirrors, which presented an ageless figure immaculately dressed in richly brocaded robes and the regalia of the crown jewels.¹¹ Nasir al-Din Shah's image, equally widely disseminated through paintings, drawings, photographs and newspaper illustrations, became increasingly subdued throughout his reign as he favoured sober dark clothes based on the cut of European military uniforms and discreet use of jewellery for cap badges and coat buttons. His reign also saw an ambitious programme of planning and rebuilding the capital Tehran between 1867 and 1892, which involved enclosing an area four times the size of the city of his predecessors

within an impressive set of new walls, demolition of old congested areas and the construction of large squares and avenues and a much enlarged Gulistan palace.¹²

Murdoch Smith was to encounter Nasir al-Din Shah frequently during his career, both in connection with telegraph work and through his interest in Iranian art. The Shah's own cultural horizons were broadened by his three visits to Europe of 1873, 1878 and 1889, which he carefully recorded in travel diaries.¹³ His journey of 1873, which exposed him for the first time directly to European art and culture, brought him into direct contact with Murdoch Smith, then on home leave in London.

The Shah noted in his diary that an audience at Buckingham Palace on Tuesday 24 June was attended by 'Gold-Ismit [Colonel F. J. Goldsmid KSCI] who had gone to the frontiers of Seistan and Baluchistan, Ismit [Major Smith] the telegraph-man of Tehran, and others'.¹⁴ He met Murdoch Smith again in a more active role on Thursday 3 July when he visited an international exhibition at the Albert Hall and recorded that 'We selected about ten or fifteen fine paintings. Ismit Sahib [Maj. R. M. Smith, Acting Director of the Persian Telegraph] interpreted for me'.¹⁵ Appropriately enough the Shah came into direct contact with Scottish popular culture during a tea party on 4 July at the residence of the Duke of Argyll, then Secretary of State for India, who had arranged a special entertainment for him. After tea,

We then went down into the garden, where a tent was pitched, in which we took a seat. A Scotch individual in Scotch garb, came and for a while played the pipe and drone [bagpipes]. Another individual in the Scotch garb, danced a Scottish dance. He arranged four swords on a round board, and for a time danced about the swords.¹⁶

Nasir al-Din Shah's regard for Murdoch Smith was to continue throughout his years in Iran. He presented him with a Sword of Honour in recognition of his work in 1885 at the time of his retirement from active telegraph service. In Murdoch Smith's own words:

On Nowrooz day the Shah sent me my sword. It was evidently sent with the idea that I should wear it at the salaam [. . .] It is very handsome, far more so than I expected. The blade is a curved Khorasan one of fine water. The hilt and scabbard which is covered with dark blue velvet are mounted with massive repoussé gold.¹⁷

Murdoch Smith's last visit to Iran was for a few months in 1887 to negotiate some telegraph business and to present to Nasir al-Din Shah and his court gifts from Queen Victoria in recognition of their support of the Telegraph Department. This was accomplished with much ceremony on 2 July at the summer palace of Sahib Qiraniyya where Murdoch Smith presented 'a set of instruments for a military band of sixty men, especially made by Boosey and Co of London and finished in the highest style of their art'.¹⁸ The Shah was delighted, as he loved

military music and, accordingly, 'presented the gallant officer with a gold snuff-box encrusted with diamonds'.¹⁹

Murdoch Smith retired from the Persian Telegraph Department on 31 December 1887 with the honorary rank of Major-General and received a knighthood (KCMG) in the New Year Honours for 1888. He then concentrated on his last career as Director of the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art,²⁰ a post that he held until his death in 1900. There he was able to continue the project that he had begun many years before, of collecting and studying Iranian art.

Murdoch Smith's serious commitment to Iranian art may be traced back to his period of home leave from 1871 to 1873. He had by then been in Iran for seven years, but he had necessarily to concentrate on establishing and consolidating the Telegraph Department and had therefore had little time to pursue his personal interests. He had also arrived in Tehran in 1864 fresh from completing the publication of his archaeological work in Cyrene, so it is arguable that he would naturally be receptive to the standing monuments of Iran's impressive history and culture. As he travelled on his journeys of inspection, he would have seen the remains of Persepolis, admired the still graceful tiled and painted mosques and palaces of Isfahan's Maidan-i Shah and witnessed the continuity and modification of Iran's architectural forms and techniques during the early stages of Nasir al-Din Shah's development programme for Tehran. He would have seen the decorative crafts, such as ceramics and tile-making, metalworking, textile-printing, carpet-weaving, that supplied the furnishings of domestic life. Seven years' residence would also have given him time to master the Persian language, which, apart from its practical application in his work, was put to good use in London where he interpreted for the Shah. With his excellent knowledge of Iran and the Persian language, his respect for its art and culture and his wide network of personal contacts with Iranians and the support of the European administrative and technical staff of the various telegraph offices, he was ready to plan his ambitious project. It had three aims: acquisition of a representative and balanced collection, presentation and scholarship, and the documentation of contemporary crafts. Here he was fortunate in finding an institution to support him because one of the results of the Great Exhibition held in the Crystal Palace in 1851, which introduced the products of the Middle and Far East to the general British public, was the creation of new museums under government patronage, such as the South Kensington Museum²¹ and the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art. Their role was to capitalize on the interest generated through a programme of acquisition and educational display and to provide reference material to stimulate the work of contemporary artists and craftsmen.

Murdoch Smith embarked on the first stage of his project by approaching the South Kensington Museum in 1873. He offered his services as a roving agent to report on Iranian objects suitable for acquisition, which the Museum would then purchase through a system of official imprests. The Museum accepted his offer and he began collecting soon after his return to Iran. He reported his first acquisitions in a letter of 3 November 1873, 'I have the honour to report that I have

already purchased a considerable collection of old Persian fayence, a suit of damascened steel consisting of helmet armpiece and shield, a number of carved metal vessels of different kinds and a few other articles of artistic interest'.²²

His transactions on behalf of the Museum are documented in sixty-eight reports submitted between 1873 and 1885, which are a fascinating record of collecting policy. They show his systematic approach and his ability to solve transport problems by shipping objects through Bushehr, Iran's main seaport, rather than by the long overland route to the north. Murdoch Smith was especially concerned to search for collections that would give a balanced survey of Iranian art. Here one of his most successful negotiations resulted in the acquisition of the collection of Jules Richard who had arrived in Iran about 1844–6 and had taught French at the Dar al-Fanun, Tehran's Technical College. He wrote to the Museum in January 1875:

I have recently examined in a cursory manner a very valuable collection of Persian artistic articles belonging to M. Richard a French Mussulman who has long been resident in Teheran. The Collection comprises articles of almost every class and has been formed gradually in the course of nearly thirty years. Most of the objects are packed away in boxes but I am now getting them unpacked and a catalogue made. I have induced M. Richard to agree to my proposal to fix a price for each article at such prices as to give the Museum the refusal of the whole or any portion of the collection.²³

The Museum naturally enough authorized him to purchase the collection for intended exhibition, which encouraged him to more effort:

Being informed of your intention of holding a special exhibition of Persian art on the arrival of the collection now being packed, I have taken the responsibility of adding still further to M. Richard's final list. He lately received several boxes of earthenware which his agents had gradually collected for him at Ispahan, Kashan etc. most of which I have purchased for the Museum. He has also procured for me some very good ancient wall tiles, one of which contains the date A.H. 716. There are also some specimens of the best work in steel, some ornamental saddlery, Turcoman carpets, and a large number of illuminated books and manuscripts. He was also good enough to get for me, with some trouble, a collection of upwards of 100 modern tiles of different patterns, such as are used for decorating walls and floors at the present day.²⁴

Once the practical negotiations were completed, Murdoch Smith employed all his organizational skills and contacts to ensure the collection's safe arrival in London. The objects were packed in sixty-two boxes, which were then transported by mules overland to Bushehr for shipment to London accompanied by a warrant

from a high-ranking Iranian official giving exemption from all customs duties. News of the consignment's safe arrival in London was telegraphed to Murdoch Smith in December 1875.

The acquisition and subsequent display of the collection continued to encourage further acquisition involving in 1883 both Richard and staff in the Telegraph Department, in particular his colleague Sydney Churchill.

I had [. . .] been in communication with M. Richard again with a view to the purchase of a collection belonging to that gentleman and afterwards went carefully over it article by article and selected about 100 pieces of old Persian earthenware and 20 pieces of Persian glass costing altogether about £145.²⁵

Since the date of my last report I have bought a large number of objects of different kinds chiefly through the agency of M. Richard and Mr. Churchill who have rendered me great assistance in searching for the class of articles I wanted and in obtaining them from the owners at reasonable prices.²⁶

Murdoch Smith's appointment to the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art released him from the demands of telegraph work and enabled him to continue his collecting of Iranian art. Here he was still able to use his connections with telegraph staff stationed in Iran to acquire a representative collection for the Museum. Sydney Churchill again, J. B. Preece, Ernst Hoeltzer and John Fahie, superintendents based in the Isfahan and Tehran offices, all helped him. The Museum's records give evidence of gifts and purchases, including fine metalwork, through Sydney Churchill in 1886, a large collection of textiles from Ernst Hoeltzer in 1888, and a large panel of Isfahan's polychrome tilework of the seventeenth century from J. B. Preece, which is on display today on one of the walls of the Museum's Great Hall. Murdoch Smith's last significant contribution to collections of Iranian art benefited both the London and Edinburgh museums. Jules Richard appeared again to display and sell the last part of his collection at the Universal Exhibition held in Paris in 1889. Murdoch Smith negotiated the purchase of objects, which were shared between the two museums. Armour, weapons, ceramics, glass, lacquer and textiles of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries greatly enriched Edinburgh's holdings of Safavid and Qajar art.

It is clear that Murdoch Smith had worked hard to achieve the first goal of his project: a permanent collection of objects documented to the best information available at the time. Museum collections, however, need to be studied, classified and exhibited, preferably with a published catalogue, if they are to illustrate a culture and encourage ongoing research. Murdoch Smith, through his own record of archaeological publication, understood this well, while both museums were committed to an educational policy of presenting their collections to a wide public. The South Kensington Museum had already decided that its investment of

resources in the acquisition of the Richard collection should result in a major exhibition, and it duly opened in April 1876. The scope was ambitious aiming to present the full range of Iranian art from the twelfth to nineteenth centuries through 3,517 objects divided between the categories of ceramics, tiles, glass, metal including the work of gold- and silversmiths, arms and armour, enamels, manuscripts, paintings, lacquered papier mâché, carvings in wood and stone, textiles decorated in many techniques and musical instruments. The exhibition was a spectacular success introducing Iranian art to the British public, who responded with amazement to the concentrated impact of colour and design and to the critics who wrote favourable reviews in such papers as *The Times*, *Athenaeum*, *Daily News* and *Morning Post*. A full catalogue, which is an indispensable record of the objects displayed, and a handbook of Iranian art, which the Museum sensibly commissioned from Murdoch Smith, accompanied the exhibition.²⁷ This publication is a clearly written account of the facts and theories of Iranian art available to Murdoch Smith at the time, qualified by his field observations on technique, design, function and provenance. It is still an essential source for the artefacts of the late eighteenth to nineteenth centuries. The exhibition and publications ensured maximum circulation of information on Iranian art and established Murdoch Smith's reputation as a pioneer scholar in the subject. He developed this role further in Edinburgh, where he organized an exhibition of the Iranian collection he had acquired, and wrote a short guidebook in 1896 to provide supplementary information.²⁸

The acquisition, exhibition and publications accomplished the first and second aims of Murdoch Smith's project. He was, however, working simultaneously on the third aim, the collection and documentation of contemporary arts and crafts. Here he had a systematic interest in tracing the evolution of a craft through all its stages and the foresight to realize that today's fully documented object is tomorrow's historical evidence. His approach encompassed several levels of patronage. He began with Nasir al-Din Shah in 1875 and negotiated a fine gift of contemporary carpets and embroideries, which was sent to the South Kensington Museum in 1877. He reported:

that H. E. the Emin el-Mulk has sent me an assortment of 14 carpets and 24 pieces of Resht embroidery, and that he is now in search of specimens of other fabrics so as to make H.M.'s present a collection of all the principal textiles of Persia. In choosing one class of objects, and that textiles, for presentation H.M. is following the suggestion I made last year to the Emin el Mulk as reported in my letters No 28 of May 22nd and No 29 of June 1876. My reasons for making the suggestion were 1st the idea of a present of modern textiles would probably commend itself to H.M.'s mind as an indirect means of increasing the trade of his own country; and 2ndly that whatever sum H.M. might devote to the purpose would be better expended on one class of objects than if it were frittered away on many.²⁹

His unique contribution, however, to the study of contemporary Iranian crafts was his documentation of tilework production, which was experiencing a flourishing revival during Nasir al-Din Shah's reign. The reconstruction of Tehran involving the enlargement of the city area, the construction of mosques, public buildings and mansions and the extension of the Gulistan Palace all decorated with panels, friezes and borders of brilliant polychrome tilework, gave plenty of work to tilemakers.³⁰

Murdoch Smith witnessed all of this building activity and realized that he had an exceptional opportunity. He had already, during his collecting activities for the South Kensington Museum, included some contemporary examples of tilework and had established contact with a known tilemaker, Ali Muhammad Isfahani, whose work he praised in his report of 1884:

I have ordered some wall tiles to be made at Isfahan by a clever young potter there, who for the last few years has been making experiments in imitation of the tiles of the old Safavean buildings of that city. Some specimens of his last productions which I saw recently struck me as highly artistic, the designs are original, only the paste, the glaze and the general style of the old examples being imitated.³¹

Ali Muhammad's career may be traced through signed and dated tiles and Murdoch Smith's continued patronage. Tiles signed and dated to 1884 giving Tehran as the place of manufacture indicate that by then Ali Muhammad had migrated to Tehran in search of work and that he had settled in the potters' quarter near the old Shah Abdul Azim gate in the south of the city. It seems that his move was successful and included commissions for European customers apart from Murdoch Smith, such as Monsieur Le Maire, who taught military music at the Dar al-Fanun.

Surviving pieces show that Ali Muhammad worked on a grand scale making tabletops, wall panels and mantelpieces of intersecting tiles all decorated with narrative scenes featuring the legendary heroes of Achaemenid and Sasanian Iran, using as sources the popular lithographed copies of historical chronicles printed in the late nineteenth century. He experimented with a revived version of the technique of painting in clear translucent colours – blue, turquoise, green, yellow, rose pink – on a white ceramic paste ground, which was then sealed with a colourless lustrous glaze. Liberal use of black to outline and shade motifs, a technique influenced by contemporary photographs and lithographs, enabled him to create fluent pictorial designs additional to the traditional decorative repertoire of spiralling foliage and palmettes. Murdoch Smith commissioned tiles from him both for the London and Edinburgh museums and, most significantly, persuaded him to write an account of his materials and craft techniques, *On the Manufacture of Modern Kashi Earthenware Tiles and Vases*, which was translated from Persian into English by Mr Fargues of the telegraph office in Tehran, and published in Edinburgh in 1888.³² This technical manual is all the more precious as it is, as yet,

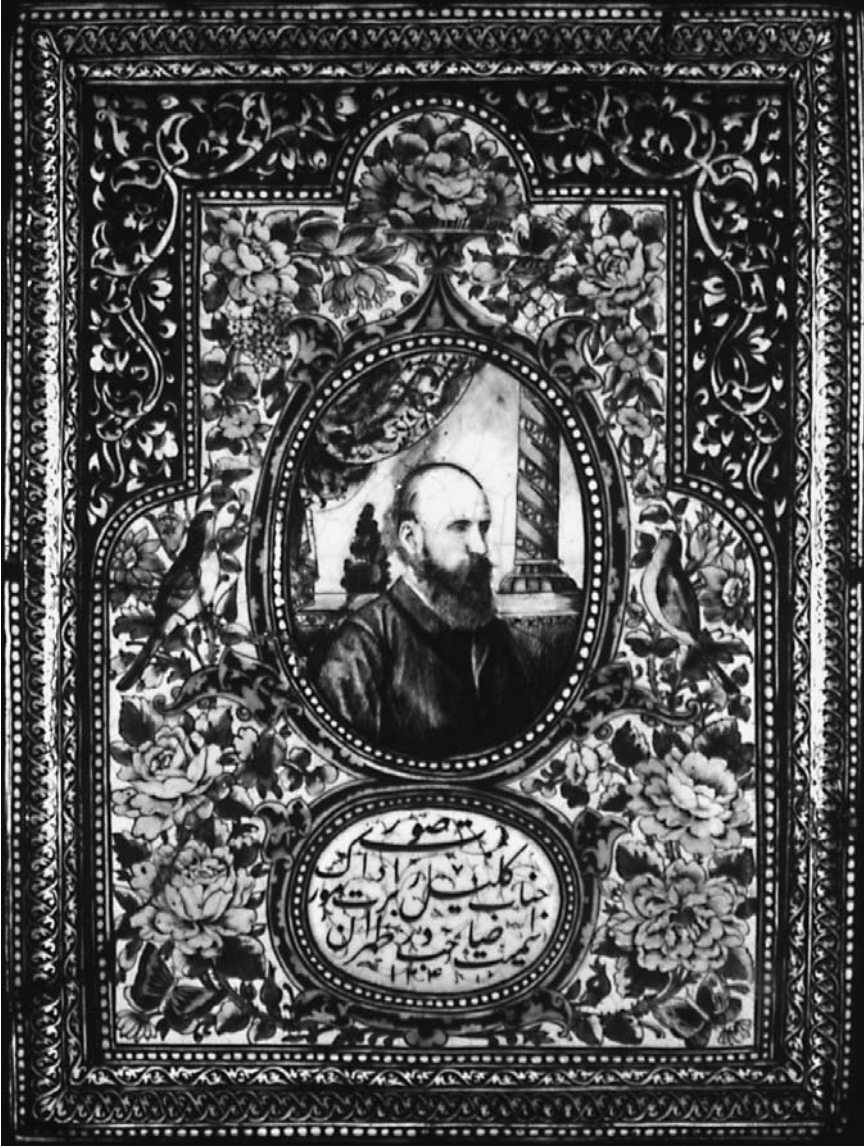


Figure 2.2 Portrait of Sir Robert Murdoch Smith. A polychrome underglaze tile made by Ali Muhammad Isfahani dated 1304 (1887 AD).

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR ROBERT MURDOCH SMITH

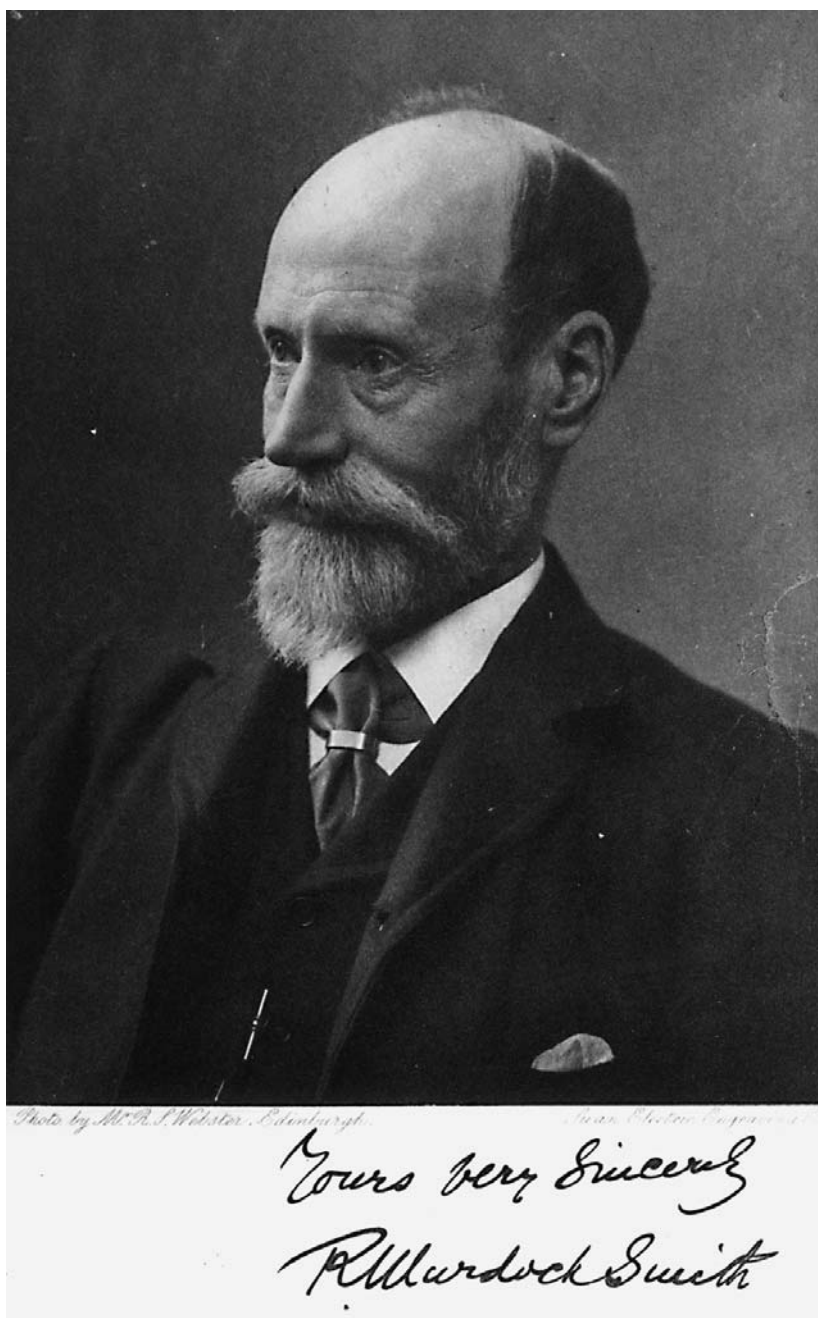


Figure 2.3 Photograph of Sir Robert Murdoch Smith c.1885, the source of the portrait on the tile.

the only account of the production of Iranian ceramics and tiles written since Abu'l-Qasim Kashani's treatise dated to 1301.³³

A comparison of the two texts indicates a remarkable and reassuring continuity. One of the main factors in Ali Muhammad's success was his ability to accommodate the tastes of his customer. Among the most intriguing and popular tile products of the late nineteenth century are the portraits based on photographs supplied by Europeans who wanted a permanent souvenir of their service in Iran. Ali Muhammad's relationship with Murdoch Smith is charmingly illustrated by a set of portrait tiles inscribed in Persian 'Portrait of Colonel Robert Murdoch Esmit honoured gentleman 1304 (1887 AD)' copied in fine black detail from a contemporary portrait and framed in foliage and roses (Figures 2.2 and 2.3).

Murdoch Smith was one of the many professionals who found an active and fulfilling career in Iran. He was fortunate in possessing the talent, experience and energy to recognize opportunities and to transform them into permanent achievements, always scrupulously maintaining the balance between his primary and alternative roles as a telegraph engineer and as an expert on Iranian art. In both cases his contributions were significant: an improved communication system, that also benefited Iran as well as Britain, and a lasting respect and admiration through his researches for a great tradition of art and culture. Nasir al-Din Shah acknowledged and honoured the relationship between Murdoch Smith and Iran during his third visit to Europe in 1889 when he travelled to Scotland, where Murdoch Smith entertained him on 23 July to an official reception in the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art.³⁴

Notes

1. George Strachan, *Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. VI: *The Timurid and Safavid Periods*, Peter Jackson and Laurence Lockhart, eds (Cambridge 1986), p. 394; see also his biography, A. Dellavida, *George Strachan: Memorials of a Wandering Scottish Scholar of the Seventeenth Century* (Aberdeen 1956).
2. James Baillie Fraser, *Narrative of a Journey into Khorasan in the Years 1821 and 1822*, 2 vols (London 1825); and *Travels and Adventures in the Persian Provinces on the Southern Banks of the Caspian Sea* (London 1826).
3. *Memoir of the Right Hon. Sir John McNeill G.C.B. and of His Second Wife Elizabeth Wilson, By their grand-daughter* (Florence MacAlister) (London 1910).
4. *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford 1995), entry for Sir Robert Murdoch Smith 1835–1900, p. 1.
5. *Ibid.*
6. A set of copies of this correspondence is held in the Manuscripts Department of the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, Acc 9569. These are accurate and complete copies of originals held in a private collection.
7. W. K. Dickson, *Life of Major-General Sir Robert Murdoch Smith* (London and Edinburgh 1901), p. 19.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 353–67.
9. R. Murdoch Smith and E. A. Porcher, *A History of the Recent Discoveries at Cyrene Made during an Expedition to the Cyrenaica in 1860–61* (London 1864).
10. Murdoch Smith to Sir Owen Burne, 2 March 1887.

11. See Sir Robert Ker Porter, *Travels in Georgia, Persia, Armenia, Ancient Babylonia, etc. During The Years 1817, 1818, 1819 and 1820* (London 1821), Vol. I, p. 335, for a description of Fath Ali Shah's resplendent image.
12. See Jennifer M. Scarce, 'The Role of Architecture in the Creation of Tehran', in Chahryar Adle and Bernard Hourcade, eds, *Teheran: capitale bicentenaire* (Paris 1992), pp. 73–94 and 'The Architecture and Decoration of the Gulistan Palace: The Aims and Achievements of Fath Ali Shah (1797–1834) and Nasir al-Din Shah (1848–1896)' in *Iranian Studies*, 34, 1–4, 2001, pp. 103–16 for details of Nasir al-Din Shah's reconstruction programme.
13. Nasir al-Din Shah wrote a diary of each of his three visits to Europe in 1873, 1879 and 1889. The first two have been translated into English: J. W. Redhouse, *The Diary of H.M. the Shah of Persia* (London 1874) and A. Houtum-Schindler and L. de Norman, *A Diary Kept by his Majesty the Shah of Persia, During His Journey to Europe in 1878* (London 1879).
14. Nasir al-Din Shah, *Diary* (Redhouse), p. 167.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 210.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
17. Murdoch Smith to Bateman Champaign, 30 March 1885 (see note 6).
18. *The Scotsman*, 18 August 1887, Notes from Persia.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Now the Royal Museum of Scotland in the National Museums of Scotland.
21. Now the Victoria and Albert Museum.
22. Report 1, 3 November 1873.
23. Report 9, 20 January 1875.
24. Report 18, 9 July 1875.
25. Report 51, 15 February 1883.
26. Report 53, 26 June 1883.
27. South Kensington Museum Art Handbooks, *Persian Art* by Major R. Murdoch Smith R.E. 1st edition 1875; 2nd edition, revised and enlarged 1876.
28. Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art, *Guide to the Persian Collection in the Museum* by Major-General Sir Robt. Murdoch Smith KCMG (Edinburgh 1896).
29. Report 30, 1877.
30. Jennifer M. Scarce, 'The Tile Decoration of the Gulistan Palace at Tehran: An Introductory Survey', *Akten des VII Internationalen Kongresses für Iranische Kunst und Archaeologie Munchen*, 7–10 September 1976, Berlin 1979, pp. 634–41.
31. Report 60, 1884. See also Jennifer M. Scarce, 'Ali Mohammed Isfahani, Tilemaker of Tehran', *Oriental Art*, New Series, 22, 3, Autumn 1976, pp. 278–88.
32. Ali Mohammad Isfahani, *On the Manufacture of Modern Kashi Earthenware Tiles and Vases, written at the request of Major-General Sir R. Murdoch Smith KCMG* (Edinburgh 1888).
33. James W. Allan, 'Abu'l Qasim's treatise on ceramics', *Iran*, 11, 1973, pp. 111–20.
34. *The Scotsman*, 24 July 1889.

THE CLERGY AND THE BRITISH

Perceptions of religion and the *ulama* in early Qajar Iran

Robert Gleave

Introduction

‘The Persians have much respect for their *moolahs* or priests, but do not permit them to possess, as is the custom with the Turks, any political influence’.¹ John Macdonald Kinneir was to make this judgement in his *A Geographical Memoir of the Persian Empire* published in 1813. The memoir was the result of observations and reports made by the team that had accompanied John Malcolm on his third and final mission to Iran, beginning in 1810. Macdonald Kinneir was no stranger to Iran, having served with Malcolm on his second mission of 1808, so his opinion cannot be regarded as simple naivety. Rather, his judgement on the political importance of the *ulama* reflects a more general British (and, in Macdonald Kinneir’s case, British-Indian) underestimation of the significance of the religious classes in Iranian political life. This underestimation is all the more remarkable since Macdonald Kinneir must have been aware of the role played by members of the religious classes in encouraging the Irano-Russian hostilities that began in 1805 and only ended with the signing of the treaty of Gulistan in September 1813. As we shall see below, Britain was keen to promote the potential religious character of the war between Iran and Russia, though at this point British diplomats did not see the *ulama* as an effective means whereby British interests might be furthered. Macdonald Kinneir, notwithstanding the famous *fatvas* issued by *mujtahids* in favour of a war with Russia, considered the Iranian *ulama* to be of religious and social, but not political, importance.²

British assessments of the political importance of the *ulama* were to undergo significant changes during the nineteenth century. In the records of the official exchanges between Britain, Iran and British India, there are various indications that in British diplomatic circles there was a gradual realization that the position of respect enjoyed by the Iranian *ulama* could be usefully harnessed to serve British interests in the East. There was, however, no clearly defined and consistent policy with respect to the clergy. In contrast to Macdonald Kinneir’s assessment, one finds

Justin Sheil, Minister Plenipotentiary to the Court of Persia between 1844 and 1853, contacting six of the leading Tehran *mujtahids* and obtaining *fatvas* from them to present to Muhammad Shah (1834–48) in 1847. The *fatvas* concerned the legality (in terms of the *shari'a*) of the slave trade, and Sheil succeeded in gaining these *fatvas* to further Britain's campaign against the active and lucrative traffic in slaves operating in the Persian Gulf.³ The '*moolahs*' whom Macdonald had considered politically unimportant were now a central element in British attempts to end the Persian slave trade.⁴ British respect for the *ulama* was deepened further during the latter half of the nineteenth century, as some diplomats attempted to use the Oudh bequest to encourage the *ulama* in the shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala to meddle in internal Iranian politics in a manner beneficial to British interests.⁵ The Oudh bequest was a sum of money granted by the Nawab of Oudh, the post-Mughal Indian successor state in northern India. A large part of it was used for charitable purposes in the shrine cities of southern Iraq, channelled through the British, and administered locally by the leading *mujtahids* of those cities.⁶

This essay traces the development of British diplomatic attitudes towards the Iranian *ulama* and the manner in which these attitudes influenced British policy in Iran between 1797 (the death of Aqa Muhammad Qajar and the accession of Fath Ali Shah) and 1848 (the death of Muhammad Shah and the accession of Nasir al-Din Shah). I intend to describe how the (mistaken) view of supposedly well-informed British functionaries (such as Macdonald) that the *ulama* played no significant political role was modified to a more sophisticated attitude (exemplified by Sheil). It became clear to British agents that the *ulama* could be used to promote British policy in the region. Of course, the position of the *ulama* did not stay static during the reigns of Fath Ali Shah and Muhammad Shah. A number of commentators have argued that the *ulama* developed an effective independence from the Qajar state, indicated most obviously by the more efficient collection of religious taxes from the faithful and the *ulama*'s subsequent lack of financial dependence on court patronage.⁷ Floor has questioned this view, considering it only an accurate description of the very wealthiest *ulama*, and it is clear that within the clerical class there was stratification in terms of both status and wealth.⁸

In the first section of this article, the use of religious rhetoric in diplomatic correspondence of the late Zand and early Qajar periods is examined. Religious language was used in these early diplomatic exchanges to reinforce British policy, but can hardly be considered a primary motivator of that policy.

The second section discusses the British reaction to the involvement of religious scholars in the Second Irano-Russian War (1826–8). Whilst the British were happy to encourage the First Irano-Russian War (1807–13), they were, for reasons outlined below, keen to prevent this second war, and the manner in which they dealt with (or failed to deal with) the influence of religious scholars shows a certain naïveté concerning their role in Iranian society.

In the third section, the change in British attitudes from naïveté to respect and recognition is charted, particularly in the exchange between the British Plenipotentiary Minister, John McNeill, and the highly influential scholar, Muhammad

Baqir Shafti in 1836. In the final section, I argue that any success the British may have had in engendering a relationship with high-ranking members of the *ulama* did not always translate into *bon voisinage* between the British authorities and low-ranking scholars. The British base at Bushehr and the difficulties it faced in the late 1830s and early 1840s demonstrate this point and also reveal the stratification of the scholarly class and the relative independence of its various strata.

Religious rhetoric as a diplomatic tool

References to religious themes in later Anglo-Iranian diplomatic correspondence can most profitably be viewed as rhetorical; that is, 'religious' considerations very rarely drove British or Qajar policy. This did not mean that their discussions were free of religious reference. Before the Qajar period, and particularly in the Grant of Privileges (see below), religion was an important conditioning factor on the nature and scope of British operations in Iran. However, during the early Qajar period, religious references were ornamentations to the discourse, used to persuade the speaker's opposing side to take a particular course of action. That is, religious references in correspondence between the Qajars and the British were an essential element of the mode of diplomatic communication, but religion was rarely an essential component of policy formation. The Grant of Privileges (made in 1793 between the British East India Company and Karim Khan Zand) demonstrates how both parties viewed religious considerations as a natural, unremarkable element of their negotiations. Fifty years later, the British diplomatic efforts outlined below display a greater recognition of the utility of religious themes as a rhetorical tool in accomplishing their political objectives.

The background to the relationship between the Qajar state and the British diplomatic missions of the reigns of Fath Ali Shah and Muhammad Shah is found in the relations between British agents and the Safavids (1501–1722). Of more immediate relevance is the contact between British military agents and the court of Karim Khan Zand (1752–79). The East India Company (EIC) had wished, after abandoning its mission at Bandar Abbas, to establish a base at Bushehr on the Persian Gulf. Negotiations between the British and the representatives of Shaikh Sa'dun, the ruler of Bushehr, were carried out by the EIC's 'provisional agent', Mr William Andrew Price, in April 1763. Having negotiated the conditions on which the British might be allowed to establish themselves in Bushehr, Price appointed a Mr B. Jervis to the post of EIC Resident at Bushehr. Jervis became aware that Shaikh Sa'dun was subject to the authority of the Governor of Shiraz (Sadiq Khan), and that Sadiq Khan was subject to the authority of his brother Karim Khan Zand. Hence, Jervis was aware that the terms that he had negotiated with Shaikh Sa'dun would have to be ratified by an officer acting directly on the authority of Karim Khan Zand. The grant of privileges obtained from Sadiq Khan by Lieutenant Durnford and the former EIC linguist in Bandar Abbas, Mr Stephen Hermit, was 'duly authenticated by Karim Khan's own seal'. The grant included,

most interestingly, two articles relating directly to matters of religion: the British would 'enjoy religious freedom in all parts' of Iran and they would be outside Iranian jurisdiction (and therefore not subject to the *shari'a* courts). For their part, the British would not 'ill-treat Muhammadans', or aid the enemies of Iran. By this agreement, the EIC gained a monopoly (to the exclusion of other nationalities) on the importation of woollen goods into Iran through their residence in Bushehr. The grant was, for sure, a general statement of the conditions on which British merchants could operate in Iran, but the existence of clauses relating specifically to religious practice is significant. The British wished to establish a base in Bushehr and naturally envisaged their contingent of men in that place as being engaged in worship and other religious practices. Recognizing that this might be problematic, they were eager to secure Karim Khan's sanction for such activities. On the other hand, Sadiq Khan (and through him, Karim Khan) wished to ensure that the EIC understood the importance of the religious and national integrity of Iran.⁹ The Iranians may have been (unduly) fearful of 'Christian' (Russo-British) or British–Ottoman cooperation at the expense of Iran, and they may have wished to guard against religious activities being used to extend British political influence in Iran.

However, the pledges from both parties in the grant seem imbalanced. Not only does the grant seem a most advantageous agreement from the perspective of the EIC, but there is also an imbalance in the legal rigour with which articles are worded. The benefits to the EIC are defined in quite specific terms. The British are permitted to build factories at any point on the Persian Gulf coast and 'mount thereon as many guns as they choose, not larger than 6-pounders'. In addition, export goods purchased by Iranians from the British will not attract taxes of more than 3 per cent.¹⁰ The specificity of these conditions was probably the result of the EIC's desire to have a 'legally' defensible agreement if (and when) their interests were to come under threat from the Iranian powers. The benefits to the Iranians, stipulated by Sadiq Khan, were more vaguely worded. The British should not 'ill-treat Muhammadans', though the definition of ill-treatment was not specified, and was probably kept vague for tactical purposes. Rebels against Persian authority should not be harboured by the British, though the parameters of rebellion were not defined. One detects a legal exactness operating in British negotiations regarding benefits and, in contrast, potential ambiguities displayed in the articles stipulated by the Iranians. The dissonance between Iranian and British expectations reflects, no doubt, the differing understandings of the purpose and operation of such treaties (pre-modern/traditional and modern/legal-rational respectively), with contrasting understandings of an independent body or standard by which conflicts over the interpretation of the grant might be resolved. Religion played its role in these discrepant conceptions, central as it was to the social activities of both parties.

References to religious themes in later, Qajar–British diplomatic correspondence can most profitably be viewed, I suggest, as rhetorical; that is, 'religious' considerations very rarely drove British or Qajar policy. This did not mean that their discussions were free of religious reference. Before the Qajar period, and

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In 1802, the death of the Persian envoy Haji Khalil Khan in Bombay threatened to disrupt the friendly relations established through the work of Mahdi Ali Khan (the acting British resident in Bushehr, appointed in 1798). Mahdi Ali Khan had the advantage of being a Persian subject (albeit in the pay of the British), and had discussed with Fath Ali Shah the suppression of French interests in Persia. The important agreement between Britain and Iran on this matter had become necessary due to British fears of a possible French invasion of India. One outcome of Mahdi Ali Khan's negotiations on behalf of the EIC and the British was the appointment of Haji Khalil, an associate of Mahdi Ali, to the post of Persian Ambassador to British India. Having taken up his post, Haji Khalil was unfortunately shot during a fracas at his residence in Bombay in July 1802. The British, perturbed by the potentially disruptive nature of Haji Khalil's death, made efforts to assure the Shah that they hoped this unfortunate incident¹¹ would not damage Anglo-Iranian relations. Amongst the compensatory measures, arranged by Malcolm, were payments to the relatives of Haji Khalil, and a specific payment of 10,000 rupees (around 1,000 pounds) to the *ulama* of Najaf, where the body was to be transferred. Malcolm was, therefore, aware of the need to make substantial compensatory payments to the family of the deceased, but sufficiently savvy to offer a religious gesture also. The British authorities also sent, as a mark of respect, agents to accompany the body (Lieutenant Charles Pasley, Malcolm's nephew, and a Bombay civil servant, 'Mr Day').¹² The (Sunni) Ottoman Governor of Baghdad, Sulaiman Pasha, was keen to point out the inappropriateness of this escort:

Hajee Kheleel lived as an infidel [i.e. as a Shi'i], and with infidels [i.e. the British] and therefore was destined to hell: he was however, murdered by infidels and so became a shahyde [a *shahid*, a martyr who gains immediate entry into paradise]. This gave him a chance of paradise, but his former friends have robbed him of this chance by deputing an infidel [a reference to Mr Day] to attend his corpse to the grave.¹³

The comment demonstrates not only the disdain with which the Pasha held the Iranians and the British, but also that Ottoman foreign policy, like that of the British and Iranians of the period, was coloured by religious rhetoric.

Whilst the Ottomans may not have been impressed with such ceremony accompanying Haji Khalil's death, Malcolm's arrangements seem to have been effective, and the threatened break in Anglo-Iranian relations never materialized.

I have found no further reference to the payment of 10,000 rupees to the *ulama* of Najaf after Haji Khalil's burial, though there is much evidence indicating that large sums of money were transferred from India to the *ulama* of the Atabat (the Shi'i shrine centres in Mesopotamia), sometimes for specific purposes (such as donations to build and maintain the canals crucial to the water supply of the shrine cities, or to provide stipends for religious students) and at other times as gifts to the *mujtahids* without 'ring fencing'. British mechanisms were used in the transfer since they were considered safer than the traditional means of monetary transfer.¹⁴ The payment, presumably, became part of this general cash flow. The use of these mechanisms served British interests in the labyrinthine complexities of the Great Game. The close relationship with the *ulama* engendered by this dependence would, the British hoped, enable them to establish Ottoman territory and Qajar Iran as buffer zones to protect British India.¹⁵ The famous Oudh bequest was supposed to serve a similar purpose later in the nineteenth century.

It is in this context that Harford Jones, later to be the first British envoy to the Iranian Court, had argued for an Ottoman–Iranian alliance against the Wahhabis following their incursions into southern Iraq and the sacking of Kerbala in April 1801. Jones, as Agent of the EIC in Baghdad, was aware both of the importance of the Shi'i network between Ottoman Iraq and Iran, and the threat to Ottoman authority posed by the Wahhabi raids. He judged that the two powers should come together to face a common enemy, thereby cementing relations between the two and strengthening their role as buffer states for British India. Once again, a keen recognition of the potency of religious themes enabled an agent to pursue a policy beneficial to British interests. Despite viewing the Shi'a as infidels, Sulaiman Pasha seems to have been sympathetic to the idea of an alliance.¹⁶ There is little evidence, however, that the Iranians reacted in a positive manner, or were even aware of the possibility. They viewed the Ottomans as culpable for the Wahhabi raids since they had neglected to protect the Shi'i shrine cities.¹⁷

Harford Jones was sent to Tehran as the envoy of the Crown to Iran, arriving in Tehran in 1809. The conflict between Jones and Malcolm and the dispute between the British and Iranians over the French mission of General Gardane are well known.¹⁸ In short, Gardane's mission was attractive to Fath Ali Shah since the French had promised to exercise leverage with the Russians and end the Russian incursions into northern Iran. The Shah hoped that the treaty of Finkelstein (1807) between Iran and France might prove a useful means of ending the Russian advances. Britain was, unsurprisingly, deeply worried by this possible alliance, since it would lead to French troops being posted in Iran and threatening India. Malcolm and, later, Harford Jones exercised their diplomatic skills in an attempt to persuade the Shah to abrogate the treaty, and replace it with an agreement between Iran and Britain. When, in February 1809, there was a series of Russian attacks in Azerbaijan, the Shah was eventually convinced that France was not

going to halt the Russian advances. He therefore turned to Britain for help. Jones was successful in negotiating the preliminary treaty between Britain and Iran, and this was signed on 15 March 1809. Amongst the promises made in the treaty was a military mission to train 16,000 Iranian regulars and a 100,000 pound annual subsidy should Iran be attacked by a European power. British policy was to encourage Iran to engage the Russians. This would, it was thought, prevent Russia (and hence France) from threatening British interests in the Gulf and India. Harford Jones was, therefore, keen to persuade the Shah to continue the war with Russia, despite Iran clearly being no match for the Russian forces. In May 1809 when the Iranians were nervous and looked as if they might sign a peace treaty on terms that the British saw as disagreeable, Harford Jones called Mirza Shafi, the vizier to Fath Ali Shah, to the British Legation to give him advice over the war. Jones reported his meeting to George Canning at the Foreign Office:

Yesterday evening I had a conference with Meerza Sheffee which lasted until 2 this morning at which I pointed out, as well as I could, the immense advantages [. . .] which Persia would obtain from Russia, being employed in Christendom under the present campaign. I stated that if the King was to make one vigorous effort this year, it was extremely possible that he might recover Georgia. It was with great pleasure that I saw this alluring prospect had the desired effect upon the Meerza.¹⁹

The British policy of encouraging the Irano-Russian war had the intention not only of preventing Russian influence in a nation bordering India but also of diverting Russian attention away from the European arena. Austria and Napoleonic France were engaged in Poland and threatened to extend their influence in Europe. In order to prevent Russian involvement on the side of France and Austria, Britain encouraged Iran to maintain the conflict on the Russian border. The British had succeeded in effecting a similar policy with respect to the Ottomans, who adopted an anti-Russian stance, having signed the British–Ottoman treaty of Dardanelles earlier in 1809. The discussion showed some promise and, on 20 May 1809, Jones wrote to Robert Adair, the British Ambassador to Istanbul, saying: ‘I have endeavoured with these people to place the war the [Ottoman] Porte has entered into with Russia in the light of a war of religion and I have succeeded in convincing them if any accident happens to the Ottoman Porte, the downfall of the Mohametan Religion inevitably follows’.²⁰

In a similar manner to his discussions concerning the Wahhabis with Sulaiman Pasha a decade earlier, Harford Jones was here attempting to establish a common religious policy between the Ottomans and the Iranians. He had no intrinsic interest in intra-Muslim unity, it simply furthered the interests of Britain. This led him to adopt the interesting role of being an envoy of a Christian nation, encouraging a Muslim religious war against a second Christian nation.

It is clear that both the French and the British were attempting to bring Tehran and Istanbul closer together. However, the outcomes they hoped for out of such an

accord were quite distinct. The French were hoping for a route through Turkey and Iran to India; the British were hoping to prevent such a route becoming available. Both, however, saw an improvement in Irano-Ottoman relations as central to achieving their objectives. The diplomatic correspondence of the period indicates that the British were attempting to influence the Ottoman and Persian courts whilst looking for every opportunity to portray the French as meddling. As Jones writes to Adair in October 1809:

I am thoroughly convinced such an overture [i.e., a French-inspired attempt to achieve Irano-Ottoman détente] made here [i.e. Tehran] by the Court of Constantinople, when evidently under such influence, would be received by the King [i.e. the Shah] and the Minister with contempt and disgust and the Turks would be in that instance considered by the Persians as betraying the Mohammedan faith.²¹

Whilst Jones presents his opinion as a prediction of the Iranian reaction to French-inspired Irano-Ottoman détente, it is clear that he was also working towards such a 'union'. In the same letter, he writes:

It is notorious that an antipathy originating in speculative points of religion, fomented by the remembrance of past and most destructive and savage wars between the two countries, and strengthened by the total contrariety of customs, manners and habits, exists between the Turks and the Persians, and it has only been by exhibiting in the strongest colours to this court, the danger to which the Mohammedan Religion will be exposed, and the disastrous consequences which must ensue to this country from the conquest of Constantinople by any European power, that I have been able to excite in the King and the Minister any serious wish for an intimate and close alliance with Turkey. Now it appears if both parties could be activated by these principles, nothing dangerous but on the contrary everything useful to us would accrue from the closest possible union between them.²²

In the view of Britain, any agreement between the Ottoman and Persian courts concerning a common policy with respect to their separate conflicts with Russia was to be on British, not French, terms. In order to achieve this aim, Jones and Adair used the threat to Islam by Russia and France and the 'European design' to conquer Constantinople. The British perceived that any armistice between the Muslim empires and Russia would undoubtedly be on terms beneficial to the latter, which in turn would aid the designs of France. When an armistice between Iran and Russia looked likely in early 1810, Jones wrote to Mirza Shafi:

I am satisfied you will easily perceive this question of Armistice or Peace does not solely relate to England and Persia; for you must be aware there

are now only two Mohammedan kingdoms existing in the World and it is most evident whatsoever is injurious to one, must be injurious to the other, and that vice versa what is advantageous to one cannot fail of being advantageous to the other [. . .] But I will even venture to go a step further and say that one of them cannot be destroyed without the other shortly after ceasing to exist. In every transaction which Persia has, at the present moment, with Russia, recommend this as a principle which should neither be lost sight of, nor departed from.²³

Jones strained the diplomatic protocol to express his strong discouragement of an Irano-Russian agreement:

Now permit me to ask you, if Turkey continues the war with Russia, do you design to enter into an Armistice with that Power? If you have such a design I must frankly tell you that is one as injurious to Persia in part of Religion as it will be politically mischievous.²⁴

The desire to prevent an Irano-Russian peace agreement was so great amongst the British that Adair acted as a conduit for news from the Ottoman cabinet concerning their own decisions over the conflict with Russia. The British records preserve an account of a letter written by Abbas Mirza to Adair in February 1810, saying: 'We shall await Your Excellency's answer for 50 days more in order to obtain a precise knowledge of the intent and determination of the Ottoman Cabinet'.²⁵

This period of British diplomatic activity in Tehran and Istanbul aimed, then, to persuade the Ottoman and Iranian Governments to continue the war with Russia. The continuance of this war would achieve a number of British objectives: it would scupper French diplomatic efforts aimed at establishing friendly relations with both Muslim powers; it would prevent the French from establishing a possible land route to India; and it would draw Russian attention away from European conflict, thereby weakening Russo-French relations. The hope was that Turkey and Iran would come to some sort of accord, but on terms that would suppress French and Russian interests in the area. In order to achieve this aim, one of the rhetorical devices employed by both Adair and Jones was the threat to the Muslim people by the Russians. That Jones recognized the difficulty of this tactic is demonstrated by his assessment of the differences of religion between the Sunni Ottomans and the Shi'i Iranians and the disparity of 'manners' between the Persians and Arabs. These factors were a significant hindrance to the British plan, and Jones was involved in intensive lobbying at the Persian court. The use of religion as an emotive device, appealing to some sort of supra-sectarian unity, had already been used by Jones in his attempt to bring the two Muslim empires together against the Wahhabis. Here we see such rhetoric employed again in an attempt to achieve the same geopolitical aim: the maintenance of the Persian and Ottoman Empires in the face of possible Russian and French influence.

Ultimately, British attempts to stall an armistice were to fail. Iran was eventually forced into signing the treaty of Gulistan in 1813, with conditions that were particularly disadvantageous to Iran. However, the British had managed to prolong the war, in part through their use of religious rhetoric. That the Shah was also under pressure from his own religious constituency is clear. The *fatvas* issued by leading *mujtahids*, declaring the war with Russia to be a *jihad* and urging Fath Ali Shah into conflict with the Russians were certainly congruent with British interests of the time. However, to my knowledge, there is no evidence of influence from the British upon the *ulama* (or vice versa) over the issue of war with Russia, though British involvement in the funding of *mujtahids* and seminaries in the Atabat through their Indian connections would have made this possible.

Religious themes in the second Irano-Russian War

The treaty of Gulistan provided for a commission in which the border disputes between Iran and Russia would be settled. By 1825, this work had broken down as the Crown Prince, Abbas Mirza, was refusing to compromise on points of detail regarding the lands ceded to Russia in the treaty. Abbas Mirza is normally portrayed as eager for war. In particular, he wished to avenge the losses inflicted upon Iran by Russian forces in the first war and the humiliation imposed upon Iran by the treaty of Gulistan. There were, of course, divisions within the court, which the British *chargé d'affaires* of the time, Henry Willock, attempted to exploit. Whilst Britain had been involved in encouraging the first Irano-Russian war, they were determined to prevent the second. One reason for British determination on this point was certainly the treaties between Britain and Iran negotiated by Harford Jones in 1809, Jones's successor Sir Gore Ouseley in 1812, and James Morier, Ouseley's successor as Minister Plenipotentiary, in 1814. All these treaties differed slightly in the detail of Britain's offer to Iran of help in the case of an invasion by a European power. The original offer by Jones was that a force or subsidy and military supplies would be given to Iran in the event of an invasion or threatened invasion. Ouseley and Morier managed to restrict the treaty's provisions to an actual invasion and excluded those circumstances in which Iran was the aggressor. Furthermore, the EIC was unwilling to commit itself to providing a military force to protect Iran, and hence this promise had to be reinterpreted as a subsidy to aid Iran in raising a military force. Finally, the subsidy was viewed not as an 'extraordinary payment', but as a regular payment to the Qajar state in an attempt to establish a standing army under the leadership of Abbas Mirza. This arrangement was continued until 1821; Abbas Mirza viewed Iran as having been continuously invaded by a foreign power since the treaty of Gulistan, and hence Iran should be in continuous receipt of the subsidy promised in the treaty. The ending of regular payments in 1821, on the grounds that no part of Iran was occupied or under threat of being so, caused considerable tension between the two countries. Willock, in 1826, wanted to prevent hostilities between Russia and Iran for the simple reason that he wished to avoid this treaty obligation being reactivated. If it were, he would

be forced to negotiate the aid and subsidy Britain would have to provide, and neither London nor the EIC were interested in making such a commitment. This policy also provided Britain with the opportunity of influencing (in a manner beneficial to British interests) the peace between Iran and Russia.²⁶

It was into this politically sensitive situation that the *ulama* stepped with a similar demand to that issued during the first Irano-Russian war, namely that Fath Ali Shah should declare a *jihad* against the Russians. In the first war, Britain had encouraged conflict between Iran and Russia and had utilized the tactic of encouraging the view that it was a religious war between Islam (represented by Iran and the Ottomans) and Christendom (France and Russia). This time, Britain wished to prevent the war, and hence its diplomats adopted the tactic of denouncing the religious rabble-rousers and appealing to the political instincts of the Shah rather than to his religious sentiments. The principal religious figure advocating war with Russia was Aqa Sayyid Muhammad Isfahani. Isfahani was a Kazimain-based cleric, who had heard rumours of Russian attacks on Muslims in Georgia and Karabagh from pilgrims travelling from those areas to Mecca by way of the Iraqi shrines.²⁷ Willock reports that he was having to spend much time and effort countering these reports and portraying the Russians as pursuing a beneficent policy towards its Muslim minorities.²⁸ He was not successful in this endeavour, as most at court believed the Russians to be mistreating their Muslim subjects. Worried by these reports, Isfahani set off for Iran; some sources say he wrote to Fath Ali Shah first and came to encourage the Shah in the path to war with Russia. Isfahani arrived in Tehran on 25 May 1826.

It is not certain whether Isfahani saw the Shah immediately, or whether they had any correspondence after Isfahani's arrival. The Shah decamped at Sultanieh for the summer, arriving on 12 June 1826. Willock urged the Shah to negotiate with the Russian envoy Prince Menchikov and to take measures to prevent Isfahani from coming to Sultanieh. Willock knew that Isfahani would encourage those at court who wanted war and thereby harden the Iranian negotiating position with Menchikov. It appears that the Shah heeded Willock's advice, and a message was sent to halt the cleric at Kazvin. Unfortunately he had already left and arrived at the Shah's camp on 11 July 1826. The diplomatic reports indicate how unhappy Willock was with this state of affairs. Persian sources record a number of *ulama* present at Sultanieh; none, however, were from the highest echelons of the Shi'ite hierarchy.²⁹ Isfahani was certainly the most significant of these, and his arrival was greeted with celebration by the religious party in the camp. Willock had failed to prevent this important purveyor of pro-war propaganda from penetrating the heart of the Shah's court and influencing proceedings decisively for war. Abbas Mirza had already presented Russian aggression in Gokcha, between Erivan and Ganja, as an example of Russia's antipathetic attitude towards Islam, and the significance of controlling the Caucasus as a religious symbol was important, for different reasons, to both Iran and Russia.³⁰ Any war was now to be a *jihad*, sanctioned by members of the *ulama* whom Britain had failed to prevent influencing Abbas Mirza and other members of the Shah's inner circle. As with the first war, the conflict with

Russia was a disaster for Iran, ending with the treaty of Turkmanchai of 21 February 1828, by which Iran ceded to Russia yet more control of areas in the north.

A comparison of the British attempts to control the manner in which the two wars were presented to the Shah and his entourage reveals a failure to recognize the importance of the *ulama* in Iranian domestic and foreign affairs. In the first war, great advantage could have been gained by coordinating British pressure on the Shah with the *ulama* of both Iran and Iraq who were, generally speaking, eager for Iran to embark on a war and had issued *fatvas* to this effect. Jones and his successors, however, missed this trick, and whilst it would not have influenced the timing of the start of the war, the British may have been able to control the outcome to greater effect if they had forged an alliance with this important element of the Iranian domestic scene. Such an alliance may also have prevented the development of religious rhetoric propagated by members of the *ulama* regarding the Second Irano-Russian War. Whilst, as Avery argues, the religious aspects of the case for war were not necessarily decisive in the minds of Abbas Mirza and the Shah, they certainly added to the pressure upon them to embark on military operations against the Russians.³¹ Institutionally, the British diplomatic establishment (in India, Iran and Britain) had not realized the potential of the clerical class. This was to change in the years following the treaty of Turkmanchai.

Respecting the role of the *ulama*

The gradual realization by the British of the importance of the *ulama* ran parallel with an increase in the *ulama*'s own political involvement. It is not simply the case that British agents failed to recognize a constant and abiding *ulama* influence in Iranian society. The British, in their early diplomatic contacts with Qajar Iran, did not take sufficient account of the opinions and influence of the *ulama*. They were forced into a change of policy by the events of the Second Irano-Russian War, during which they became aware that the scholarly elite could frustrate British plans for the region. In short, the *ulama* had not been wooed.

This change in the institutional knowledge of British diplomacy is well demonstrated by the exchange between John McNeill, the British Minister Plenipotentiary to the Persian Court, appointed in 1836 and Muhammad Baqir Shafti. The Iranians wished to retake Herat, considering it a historic city of Iran and part of the Persian Empire. Britain wished to prevent this from coming about. British fears were based around the increased Russian influence in Iran following the treaty of Turkmanchai. If Iran was under the sway of Russia, and if Herat was to fall into Iranian hands, then the potential for an attack on India by Russia was greatly enhanced. McNeill was charged with persuading the Shah to abandon his designs in Afghanistan. Muhammad Shah, who had acceded to the throne in 1834, had moved his forces into Khorasan in 1837 and later set up camp outside Herat, clearly preparing himself for a siege. McNeill set off for the Shah's camp in March 1838. During negotiations, the Shah argued that the 1814 treaty, finalized by Morier, allowed Iran to intervene in Afghanistan without British hindrance;

McNeill, on the other hand, argued that the treaty was designed, amongst other things, to protect India, and an Iranian occupation of Herat would endanger India's defence. McNeill failed to dissuade the Shah, and in June 1838 McNeill severed relations between Iran and Britain. He retreated slowly across the country towards Turkey, hoping along the way that the Shah might change his mind and relations could be restored. When he reached Erzurum McNeill wrote a letter, in Persian, to the famous *mujtahid* Muhammad Baqir Shafi, the leading religious scholar of his day, in which he outlined the reasons for the rupture in relations, and expressed a hope that this would not harm the long-standing and friendly relationship between the peoples of Iran and Britain. Shafi wrote a long reply in which he generally supported the Shah's actions. However, he also assured McNeill that the rupture in diplomatic relations would not affect the friendly relations between the Iranian and British peoples.³²

The exchange is interesting in itself, but in the developing attitudes of the British towards the scholarly class, it signifies a change. First, McNeill, a medical doctor by training, had taken much time to learn the niceties of Persian prose, and, whilst he probably had help writing the letter itself, his respect for the *mujtahid's* religious authority is obvious from the text of the letter:

At this time, your devoted friend [i.e. McNeill] must leave this land by an honest route and with a good opinion; it is necessary, nay, it is essential that he bring to the reverent and perspicuous attention of the 'Support of the Nation' [i.e. Shafi], the best of men – upon him and his family be salutations and peace – the nature of some of the circumstances, and the manner of some of the affairs which have occurred between these two honoured nations, Iran and Britain.³³

The use of 'your devoted friend' (*mukhlās*) is not, of course, an indication of any intimate friendship between McNeill and Shafi. It is a purely polite device of formality. Similarly, the *mujtahid's* description of McNeill as scrupulous (*bi tadlis*) is a form of politeness that is interesting to note, but does not signify anything other than rigorous adherence to etiquette on the part of both parties.³⁴ What is more significant is that the generic regulations of letter-writing pertain to an exchange between an English diplomat and a Persian *mujtahid*; that is, McNeill, in order to communicate with the scholar, has taken the trouble to learn and acquire the appropriate skills, thereby forcing Shafi to reply in kind. The appointment of McNeill, with his skills in etiquette but relative inexperience in diplomacy, perhaps marks an acceptance in London that Persian diplomacy required specific Persian skills.

Second, McNeill's motives for writing to Shafi are clearly linked with a wish to avoid friction between the British and the *ulama*; that is, a British agent has eventually recognized the utility of the *ulama* in the fulfilment of British foreign-policy objectives. Fearful that a religious war (similar to that declared against Russia a decade before) might be pursued against Britain, McNeill sought to

engender support for, or at least an understanding of, the British position amongst the *ulama*. The letter represents a recognition that poor relations with the *ulama* might harm British interests.

Finally, the manner of McNeill's appeal indicates a more sophisticated understanding of the nature of Iranian society than that displayed in previous diplomatic correspondence. For example, McNeill uses Shafti as a conduit for an appeal to the people of Iran, and not to the Shah himself:

In no way is [British policy] aimed at harming or opposing the people of the nation of Iran, and does not include any enmity or hostility towards all the people of Iran [. . .] On every occasion, the agents of this nation have experienced the perfectly hospitable and kind behaviour of the people of this country.³⁵

By doing so, he demonstrates that he has recognized the close relationship between the *ulama* and the lower strata of Iranian society. McNeill, and possibly the British diplomatic establishment more generally, were beginning to understand that the political elite of Iran was subject to popular pressure, and that this popular pressure was most often channelled through the natural spokesmen of non-elite groups – that is, the *ulama*.³⁶

The importance of the *ulama* as potential allies³⁷ in the execution of British policy is further confirmed a decade later by the use of *fatvas* from the leading Tehran *mujtahids* by McNeill's successor, Lieutenant-Colonel Justin Sheil. As mentioned earlier, the British hoped to stamp out the trade of slaves in the Gulf region, and this required a *farman* from Muhammad Shah. The Shah was proving resistant to Sheil's efforts, despite the fact that the Shah's vizier, Haji Mirza Aqasi, was broadly in favour of the British desire to end the slave trade. As part of his bid to persuade the Shah of the religious imperative to suppress the slave trade, Sheil procured the *fatvas*, through the mediation of 'Meerza Agha, the First Persian Secretary of the Mission'. On 27 April 1847 Sheil had an audience with the Shah in which a proposed *farman* banning slavery was discussed. The Shah maintained that 'religious motives were the only obstacle to his compliance with the wishes of the British Government'. The fact that a recent Ottoman decree had prohibited trading in slaves in Ottoman Gulf ports made no impact on the Shah. The Shah argued that 'many practices contrary to divine law' were practised by the Ottomans and that this was merely yet a further example of Turkish deviance. Sheil then presented the *fatvas* to the Shah, which did not declare slavery illegal according to the *shari'a*, but did describe the trade in people as an 'abomination'. The Shah 'could not contain his astonishment, and would not at first credit their authenticity'. Even when their authenticity had been demonstrated to the Shah, he maintained his position saying that he 'could not face the wrath of God by impeding the conversion of Pagans'.³⁸ Sheil's tactic did not, then, have an immediate effect on the Shah, though the weakening of any religious objection, through the *fatvas*, probably contributed to the eventual decree prohibiting the slave trade.

Local difficulties

The relationship between the British and local Iranian communities inevitably involved religion, and British awareness of the religious sensibilities of the local population were evident as early as the grant of privileges in 1763. In 1814, when an Englishman, Mr George William Browne, passed through Tehran and insisted on wearing Turkish dress, Ouseley attempted to dissuade him: 'I was equally unsuccessful in trying to persuade him to quit his Turkish dress and travel as an Englishman whilst in Persia, as the difference of religion and other prejudices render it almost impossible for a Turk to travel in Persia with safety'.³⁹

Ouseley's failure to do so had fatal results. Browne was killed after leaving Tehran, in circumstances that, though obscure, undoubtedly involved his eccentric attire. Ouseley's awareness of local religious prejudices indicates that it was safer to be English than Turkish in Iran; that is, it was better to be a Western Christian than an Ottoman Sunni.

The growing awareness of the importance of the *ulama* indicated above did not, however, translate into improved local relationships between the British and low-ranking clerics. Instances of clerical-British conflict on a local level are regularly found, for example, in the dealings of the Bushehr Residency. When the French spy, Robbio, was captured in 1809 and held in detention in Bushehr by agents of the Residency, the local authorities, including the local religious judge (*qazi*) began to agitate against this violation of Iranian jurisdiction. The grant of privileges did not permit British personnel to apprehend nationals of other countries on Iranian soil. Jones, aware of this breach, was clearly worried about the religious delicacy of the situation. He chastised the staff involved for failing to act properly, writing: 'I cannot conclude without desiring you hereafter to bear in mind that Rights of Asylum and Hospitality are amongst all Mohammedan Nations not only a moral, but a religious duty'.⁴⁰

In November 1838, the Jewish quarter of Bushehr was raided on the orders of the *qazi* of Bushehr, Shaikh Hasan, on the pretext of suppressing the sale of liquor. The money-changer of the Residency was beaten and liquor for export was destroyed. The action was clearly an attack on the Residency's activities and a protest against the British occupation of Kharg earlier that year.⁴¹ Unhappiness with the British presence continued and on 26 June 1842, a number of buggalabs (small vessels) flying the British flag were set alight on the orders of *qazi* Shaikh Hasan. Robertson, the Assistant Resident in Bushehr, wrote to Sheil saying that the complaint consisted of an objection to Muslim vessels flying the British flag: 'The Cazi of Bushehr had assailed the Governor of Bushehr respecting the impropriety of Muhammadan buggalows being allowed to fly the English flag in their boats on Fridays'.⁴²

Edwards, one of the Residency staff, wrote a note to Robertson, included in the letter to Sheil:

A suspect was arrested and Shaikh Nasser [the Governor of Bushehr] gave him a good bastinado. The suspect confessed but claimed Ismail Beg

[the head of the Customs House] had ordered him to do it. Ismail Beg fled for asylum to the house of Shaikh Hasan, the head Caze of this place, before he could be seized by the people sent by the governor for that person. Shaikh Hasan will not deliver over the supplicant who has sought his protection from punishment and Shaikh Nasser will not violate the sanctuary of the Caze's house.⁴³

The Treasurer of the Residency, a Mr Johannes, also wrote a report in rather imperfect English:

Also I hear some days ago Sheik Salman old Cazy's nephew told the people that why does Musulman's buggalows open on Friday English flag [. . .] I think that it is Cazy's doing of telling Ismail Beg to do such a thing, by my idea of teaching the people not to open English flag and protecting Ismail Beg in house.⁴⁴

Sheil was unsurprisingly concerned by this turn of events and feared danger for the Bushehr residency, but Robertson wrote again on 1 September 1842: 'The matter has now been settled and my sole object in mentioning the circumstance to you was as a piece of intelligence, throwing light on peculiar prejudices'.⁴⁵

Whilst the matter was eventually settled (presumably by a payment of compensation and the prosecution of the offender), the conflict between the British in Bushehr and the local *qazi* demonstrates that, whilst diplomats in Tehran were increasingly sensitive to religious issues and the need to placate the high-ranking *ulama*, locally, the British faced serious resistance and, in this case, had clearly failed to establish good working relationships with local clergy. The 'peculiar prejudices' mentioned by Robertson refer to the religious objections to British operations, which were to re-emerge later in 1857 when British troops occupied Bushehr and the Iranian *ulama* declared a *jihad* to expel them.⁴⁶

Concluding remarks

The episodes of contact between the British and the *ulama* described above are evidence of a growing awareness amongst British diplomats and agents of the utility of religious rhetoric in their dealings with Iranian officials. Religion and, later, the religious scholarly class could be used as a means whereby British policy objectives might be more effectively implemented in Iran during the reigns of Fath Ali Shah and Muhammad Shah. Correspondence between British and Iranian officials was not devoid of religious content in the early period. However, this was rarely accompanied by any recognition that this appeal would be most effective when channelled through the *ulama*. Furthermore, British diplomats do not appear to have recognized that an appeal to pan-Muslim sensibilities through reference to Ottoman policies might not carry weight in Shi'ite Iran. The hope that Iran

might be forced into action through reference to analogous Ottoman actions or coordinated action with the Porte is evident in the exchanges between Sheil and Muhammad Shah over slavery. The fact that the Shah was unimpressed by Sheil's claim that the Ottomans had agreed to restrict the slave trade indicates that the British had yet to fully recognize that Iran was unlikely to be embarrassed into action by Sunni Ottoman policies. If Sheil were to persuade Iranians that the abolition of slavery was in conformity with the religious law, he would need support from the religious scholars of Shi'ism. It is likely that Sheil's procurement of *fatvas* from leading *mujtahids* was motivated by such a realization. It appears that whilst the *ulama* developed their role in Iranian society in the early nineteenth century, British diplomats were slow to recognize that this class of society could be productively employed in the furtherance of British interests. As a consequence of this tardy response, they occasionally missed opportunities to exert a greater influence over developments both in Iran and between Iran and her neighbours.

Notes

1. John Macdonald Kinneir, *A Geographical Memoir of the Persian Empire* (London 1813), p. 28.
2. On the attitudes towards the war with Russia and how they were linked to developments within Shi'i legal conceptions of *jihad*, see R. Gleave, 'State Legitimacy and the Theory of *Jihad* in Early Qajar Iran' in R. Gleave, ed., *Religion and Society in Qajar Iran* (London 2004).
3. FO 84/647, Sheil to Palmerston, 31 December 1846, where it is reported that Muhammad Shah, before seeing these *fatvas* felt '[even] if according to their religion the traffic [in slaves] is condemned as an abominable practice, in our religion it is lawful'.
4. Fraser, based on his travels in Iran in 1821 and 1822 writes: 'The ecclesiastical body, which includes the expounders of the religious law, is numerous, wealthy and powerful'. James B. Fraser, *Narrative of a Journey into Khorasan, in the Years 1821 and 1822* (London 1825), p. 60.
5. On which see M. Litvak, 'A Failed Manipulation: The British, the Oudh Bequest and the Shii Ulama of Najaf and Karbala', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 27, 1 (2000), pp. 69–89.
6. The money was interest on a loan made to the British in 1852 by the Nawab Ghazi al-Din Haydar, and became active in 1849.
7. See, for example, H. Algar, *Religion and State in Iran (1785–1906)* (Berkeley, Calif. 1969), pp. 5–18; S. A. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam* (Chicago, Ill. 1982), pp. 185–207.
8. W. Floor, 'The Economic Status of the Ulama during the Qajar Period' in L. Walbridge, *The Most Learned of the Shi'a* (Oxford 2000), pp. 76–93.
9. The terms of the grant are laid out in J. G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia* (Calcutta 1908, reprinted 1986), Vol. IV, pp. 1780–1.
10. Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, Vol. IV, p. 1780.
11. Wellesley described it, in a letter to the Shah, as a 'dreadful, unforeseen and uncontrollable calamity'. Marquess Wellesley, *Dispatches Minutes and Correspondence of the Marquess Wellesley during his Administration in India* (London, 1836), Vol. V, Supplement, p. 92, cited in D. Wright, *The Persians amongst the English: Episodes in Anglo-Persian History* (London 1985), p. 32.

12. Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, p. 1891 mentions Mr Day. Wright, *Persians*, p. 33, mentions Pasley accompanying the body as far as Basra.
13. Harford Jones Brydges, *An Account of the Transaction of His Majesty's Mission to the Court of Persia in the years 1807–11* (London 1834), Vol. VII, pp. ix–x.
14. See J. R. I. Cole, 'Indian Money and Shrine Cities' in J. R. I. Cole, *Sacred Space and Holy War: The Politics, Culture and History of Shi'ite Islam* (London 2002), p. 82.
15. M. Litvak, *Shi'i Scholars of Nineteenth-Century Iraq* (Cambridge 1998), p. 119 and p. 121.
16. IO, LPS 9, Vol. VI, Jones to Scot (Baghdad, 12 August 1801).
17. Muhammad Taqi Sipih, *Nasikh al-tavarikh* (Tehran 1344), Vol. I, p. 69.
18. See the lively account of D. Wright, *The English Amongst the Persians* (London 1977), pp. 4–8.
19. FO 248/27, Jones to Canning, 30 May 1809.
20. FO 248/27, Jones to Adair, 20 May 1809.
21. FO 60/2, Jones to Adair, 23 October 1809.
22. *Ibid.*
23. FO 60/3, Jones to Meerza Shefee, 18 February 1810.
24. *Ibid.*
25. FO 60/3, Abbas Meerza to Adair, 15 February 1810.
26. On these details, see P. Avery, 'An Enquiry into the Outbreak of the Second Russo-Persian War, 1826–28' in C. E. Bosworth, ed., *Iran and Islam* (Edinburgh 1971), pp. 17–45.
27. For a biography of Isfahani, in the usual clerical style, see Muhammad Ali Mudarris, *Rayhanat al-adab* (Tehran 1367), Vol. CXI, pp. 447–8.
28. FO 60/25, Willock to Canning, 31 March 1826.
29. Sipih, *Nasikh*, Vol. I, p. 358.
30. For Russia, the importance lay in the protection of Christian shrines in the area. For Iran, the lands had been conquered in the early period of Islam and therefore were a crucial barometer of Muslim fortunes generally.
31. See Avery, 'An Enquiry', pp. 17–18.
32. The text of the exchange has been published in Jan Malik Sasani, *Siyasatgaran-i daura-yi Qajar* (Tehran 1338), Vol. II, pp. 128–39. It has been analysed by A. Amanat in 'Pishva-yi ummat va vazir-i mukhtar "bi tadlis" Inglis' *Iranshinasi*, 3 (1368), pp. 11–41.
33. Sasani, *Siyasatgaran*, Vol. II, p. 128.
34. Amanat, perhaps, makes too much of this ('Pishva-yi ummat', pp. 11–12).
35. Sasani, *Siyasatgaran*, Vol. II, p. 130.
36. Shafii's subsequent actions do not indicate that McNeill's strategy was successful or that the British gained any influence over him. Shafii issued a *fatva* for *jihad* against the Ottomans following Najid Ali Pasha's raid on Kerbala in 1842. The British were desperate to prevent any Ottoman–Iranian conflict, for this would reduce both empires' abilities to act as buffer states vis-à-vis Russia. Clearly the British were unable to prevent Shafii from doing this and influencing Muhammad Shah in the process. See Litvak, *Shi'i Scholars*, p. 142.
37. That the importance of British agents was recognized by both the Iranians generally and the *ulama* in particular, is also clear from the petitions to the British in the Bastami affair, where an Iranian Babi, was sentenced to death in Baghdad, and the British were approached to negotiate his repatriation to Iran. Rawlinson, the agent in Baghdad, was also approached in 1845 by agents of *mujtahids* to reduce the tensions between the Qajars and the Ottomans. Here the importance of the British as brokers between the political powers was recognized and exploited by the *ulama*. See Litvak, *Shi'i Scholars*, p. 145 and p. 155.

38. FO 84/647, Sheil to Palmerston, 27 April 1847.
39. FO 60/8, Ouseley to Castlereagh, March 1814.
40. FO 60/3, Jones to Babington, 14 September 1809.
41. Details can be found in Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, Vol. IV, pp. 1986–7.
42. FO 248/67, Robertson to Sheil, 30 June 1842.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid. Robertson to Sheil, 1 September 1842.
46. Litvak, *Shi'i Scholars*, p. 170.

THE BRITISH IN BUSHEHR

The impact of the First Herat War (1838–41) on relations with state and society

Vanessa Martin

This paper addresses the effect of the First Herat War, 1838–41, on relations between Iranian state and society in Bushehr and Kharg Island and the British. It sees the war in the context of long-term trends, specifically both the growth of a centralized state in Iran and British strategic and commercial policies, and it examines how it influenced them. Since my current research is on the more ordinary people of the time, they are the focus of this paper, rather than the elite. The discussion is interwoven with the relentless struggle between Qajar government and society over taxation, which affected Iran's relations with Britain and was, in turn, affected by them.

The question of Bushehr must be placed in the context of the deterioration of relations between Iran and Britain in 1837, as a result of Muhammad Shah's determination to restore Iranian sovereignty over Herat. Whilst sympathizing with the Shah's complaints about the affect of Herati brigandage on Iranians, Britain was reluctant to see Iran regain Herat because of the possible extension of the influence of Russia through its relationship with Iran, and thus the undermining of Afghanistan as a buffer between Russia and British India. The position of the British in the Persian Gulf enabled them to bring pressure on Muhammad Shah in support of their campaign to force him to raise his siege of Herat and relinquish the fortress of Ghorian.¹

In order to understand the role of Bushehr in the Herat war it is now necessary to consider the longer-term policies of the British in the Persian Gulf. Their presence there derived initially from trade, especially after the establishment of a factory in Bushehr in 1763. A military dimension was added through the need to protect that trade and, more significantly, the route to India itself, from other powers – Russia and France – and from piracy. For the purpose of this paper the various British strategies on Iran and the Persian Gulf may be reduced to two.

The first was to work in alliance with Iran and build it up as a buffer state against Russia, which also required cooperation with Russia. The Ottoman Empire and

Iran should be looked upon as an indivisible whole in the formulation of British policy, which should be conducted from London. This strategy was preferred by the Government in London, which intensely disliked the idea of military interference in Iran.

The second was to follow an independent Persian Gulf strategy, in particular by gaining control of an island there, preferably Kharg. From this secure base Britain could safeguard the route to India and foster its trade in the Persian Gulf. This strategy was preferred by the Government of India.

For a while relations with Iran were controlled from India, but in 1835 they returned to the London Government. The year 1834 was, of course, the year of the accession of Muhammad Shah, whose aspirations in Afghanistan were deeply disturbing to the British. They feared an alliance between Iran and Afghanistan under Russian influence and, from 1837, the principal aim was to prevent such an alliance and keep these states separate as a buffer for India.

At this point we must note two profound limitations on Britain's room to manoeuvre. The first was the desire not to engage in hostilities with Russia. Indeed, Russia's goodwill was needed to maintain both Iran and Afghanistan as buffer states. As Yapp has pointed out, this meant, for example, that Britain used Russian mediation to end the Herat dispute, which it had embarked on to keep Russia out of Afghanistan.²

The second was finance. India could not be allowed to become a burden on the British exchequer and India's defence should never be more than India could afford. Military action, in particular in the Persian Gulf, was seen as potentially expensive and therefore there was a tendency to try and avoid it. Expenditure was kept down by the relentless maintenance of British prestige.

In the later 1830s, one other significant factor influenced British policy and that was the aspirations of Muhammad Ali, the Pasha of Egypt, to control Syria and ultimately perhaps become Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. Reports of Muhammad Ali's intention to declare himself independent of the Ottoman Empire seemed to presage its collapse. Such an event would in turn have an effect on the European balance of power and possibly lead to a European war.³ The repercussions for British interests of such a war would be of much greater significance than the events in Iran. Britain needed to avoid any developments in Iran that could create problems with Russia; therefore, Britain needed to stay on good terms with Russia in order to control Muhammad Ali.

With regard to Bushehr itself, the collapse of the central power in Iran meant that by the mid-eighteenth century Arabs held most parts of the Persian Gulf. It took Fath Ali Shah some years before he could establish some form of authority on the coast of Fars. Until then only Bushehr, as the principal port of Fars, made any practical acknowledgement of the suzerainty of the central Government in the form of payment of tribute. Such payment, however, was not always regular and much depended on whether the Government of Fars had the power to enforce it.⁴

The population of Bushehr in the early nineteenth century was probably around 6,000–8,000 people, most of whom were Arab speakers, though Persian was the

common language.⁵ It had been a fishing village when Nadir Shah chose it as a port for his projected navy. In 1763 the British EIC established a factory there, having been granted trading privileges by Karim Khan Zand. In 1807 Bushehr was surrounded by a wall with a few bastions, and had three *sara'i*.⁶ By the early nineteenth century the trade of Bushehr had grown considerably, its exports being raw silk and bullion.⁷ These later came to include opium, horses, old copper and dried fruit. It was afflicted with bad water, so good water had to be brought from sixteen miles away. Most travellers describe Bushehr as being wretched in appearance with only one bathhouse and an insalubrious bazaar.⁸ Trade in Bushehr expanded or languished according to the political situation in the interior, most particularly in Shiraz and Isfahan, its two principal outlets. Commercial contact with the opposite shore of the Persian Gulf was sporadic.

Bushehr had an influential merchant community, consisting of Muslims, Armenians and Jews, amongst whom there were both divisions and common interests. In common with other towns in Iran, Bushehr had a Malik al-Tujjar. In July 1837 a rescript from Faridun Mirza Farman-Farma, Governor General of Fars, bestowed the title on Muhammad Baqir, surnamed Isfahani, and requested that the British Resident also respect him.⁹ As with other cities, there was a strong connection between Muslim merchants, members of the clergy and the ordinary people of the town. In 1825 about fifteen merchant ships traded with India, but only half landed at Bushehr. The Governor frequently appropriated goods and then either delayed making payment or used it against duties that were due.¹⁰

The principal family of Bushehr were the Mazkur or Nasiri, one of whom, Shaikh Nasir, was Governor of Bushehr in 1837. The Mazkur came originally from Oman and had initially held Kharg from the Imam of Muscat, who had conquered it in the eighteenth century. From the late eighteenth century the Iranian Government had been able to assert some claim to Kharg and more over Bushehr, where Shaikh Nasir nevertheless claimed to be the hereditary governor. Shaikh Nasir had also consolidated his connections with the Iranian Government by marriage with a Qajar princess.¹¹ The Mazkur were in addition known for their long-term connection with the British.¹²

Kharg had a population of around 300 houses of Sunni Arabs of the Damuk tribe.¹³ It was attractive to the British as a possible base, partly because it had an abundant supply of good water.¹⁴ The main occupations of the islanders were fishing and pearling, although they also made some money from pilotage. The Iranian Government had confirmed the Mazkurs' position of authority in Bushehr and Kharg by a *farman* of indemnity in 1815.¹⁵ Shaikh Nasir was expected to keep 100 soldiers on the island, using revenue from the pilot dues plus around ten pounds a year, being a fifth of the revenue from pearling, but usually he maintained only thirty. Moreover, he occasionally used his responsibility for garrisoning the island as a base for opposing the Iranian Government.¹⁶

The attitude of the people of Bushehr towards the British was complex and, to some extent, contradictory. They depended on the British for the protection and prosperity of their trade, as had been agreed between the British and the Iranian

Government at the time of Karim Khan Zand; on the other hand, the people mistrusted the British presence and intentions. Even before the Shah's attack on Herat, the people in Bushehr had begun to take advantage of the growing disagreement between Britain and Iran, to reduce British influence in Bushehr. By 1836 Britain's determination to interfere in Iran's policies had made her unpopular, and this is clear from the increasing number of anti-British incidents in Bushehr, where dislike of the presence of a foreign power in the protected lands of Iran was particularly strong. At the end of 1836, a radical member of the *ulama* passed through the town, inciting assassination of Europeans and exacerbating anti-British feeling. An effigy of Griboedov, made in the bazaar of Shiraz, was suspended from a sort of gibbet in the bazaar for the edification of the British Resident.¹⁷ The incident was shortly followed by an insult to the Residency *sarraf* by Sayyid Salman, the nephew of the leading local *mujtahid*, Shaikh Hasan.¹⁸ In February 1837, there was a further dispute involving a misunderstanding over the right of the local government news-writer to report on British trade.¹⁹

In the late summer of 1837 Muhammad Shah marched on Herat. Relations in Bushehr deteriorated when a fight broke out between a British apothecary and a dervish.²⁰ When the British complained to the Governor, it was suggested that the apothecary should be tried in the Ghazi's court. In response to British protests, Shaikh Nasir, indicating the prestigious descent of the Sayyid and the seriousness of the apothecary's offence in the eyes of the *ulama*, asked the Resident if he supposed that Fath Ali Shah consented to the assault on the Russian Ambassador.²¹ The Governor thereby indicated that he was subject to pressures that he could not control.

Britain drew up a list of conditions for peace, including an equitable agreement over Herat, a commercial agreement placing British commercial agents on the same footing as Russian consuls, the relinquishment of the claim to punish the apothecary, punishment of those who had made threats to the British residents, and the removal of the Governor of Bushehr. The Iranian Government itself responded to British complaints with a policy of stonewalling and evasion.²² Frustrated, the British cast about for a bargaining counter to be used for a display of strength to force the Shah to accede to their view, and on 19 June 1838 they invaded Kharg. They were immediately visited by Shaikh Nasir who saw an opportunity to attack the Iranians for the many grievances he considered that he had suffered from them.²³ An agreement was reached over the position and lease, for 250 rupees, of the British garrison. The principal local ally of the Iranian Government was identified as Baqir Khan, the Arab Chief of Tangistan, who was considered able to assemble 500–600 men in a few hours and attack,²⁴ though he was not above professing high esteem for the British.²⁵

Meanwhile a final full-scale assault by Iranian troops on Herat on 23 June 1838 had not succeeded, and the Shah raised the siege of Herat and withdrew. The cumulative effect of the failure over Herat and the British occupation of Kharg persuaded the Shah to agree to a variety of British demands on 9 September including the punishment for the attack on the Residency *sarraf*, the dismissal of the

Governor of Bushehr, the evacuation of the fort of Ghorian and the conclusion of a commercial treaty, promises that he did not keep.

In November 1838 relations were further exacerbated as a result of a dispute in Bushehr. The merchants were in disagreement with the Governor, Mirza Abbas (who had replaced Shaikh Nasir) over the payment of certain dues that they alleged had already been given to Shaikh Nasir.²⁶ When the bazaars closed in protest, the Governor sent *farrashes* to force the traders to open their shops. Shaikh Hasan Bushihri of the Usfur family, the principal *mujtahid* of Bushehr, directed the bazaaris not to comply and to gather in arms at his house. Upon the pretext that one of the Governor's *farrashes* has been found intoxicated, the Shaikh ordered that all the wine under the roofs of the Jews should be destroyed. A mob attacked the Jewish quarter, most particularly the house of the British Residency *sarraf*, who was engaged in the wine trade. In this fashion, the people of Bushehr at once resisted higher taxation and vented their displeasure at the British occupation of Kharg and overall policy towards Iran. Fearing for their prestige, the British now demanded the removal of Shaikh Hasan, his nephew Shaikh Salman and their dependants from Bushehr, as well as the punishment of others involved. In view of the circumstances, the Governor was powerless and advised the British to complain to Shiraz. However, the merchants and shopkeepers themselves complained to Shiraz, as a result of which Mirza Abbas was removed and a new governor entered town to a warm welcome by its inhabitants. Hennell, the British Resident, commented that this 'Triumph had been reached by the liberal disbursement of cash and influence of the merchants of Persia when they unite'.²⁷

British representations to the Governor of Fars proved futile, and they were told that their *sarraf* was not a dependant of the residency, but an ordinary retailer.²⁸ In a further demonstration of hostility, Mirza Asadullah, who had replaced Shaikh Nasir as Governor of Bushire, cut off supplies to British ships, in effect placing an embargo on the export of grain to Kharg. Contemplating the significance of this attitude, Sheil wrote to Palmerston that at the beginning of the nineteenth century Bushehr had been under the control of an Arab shaikh and the authority of the Shiraz Government had rarely been pressed. The Governor in those days had been on good terms with the British authorities and could always evade complying with the wishes of the Governor of Fars.²⁹ Hennell was advised that if he could not get redress from the Governor of Fars, and if the Residency was likely to be subjected to further indignities, he should withdraw to Kharg.

In the meantime Mirza Asadullah, following the orders of the Shah to the Governor of Fars, had also prohibited the use of Iranian stonemasons by the British to repair the fort on Kharg.³⁰ McNeill feared the loss to British prestige in the Gulf if the hostility of the Iranian measures continued and that there would consequently be attacks on British commerce. The British Resident now had the options of either withdrawing or occupying Bushehr itself, which he did not feel able to hold in view of popular hostility to the British. Hennell was also in an exposed position as the only official British representative in Iran, as McNeill had broken off relations with the Shah in June and gradually made his way to Erzurum, where the British mission

was temporarily established. Matters finally came to a head in late March 1839, when Admiral Maitland and a British fleet appeared at Bushehr to demonstrate support for the Resident. When the Admiral tried to land, ostensibly to meet the Governor, the people of Bushehr threw sticks and stones at the British; Iranian soldiers, under the command of Baqir Khan Tangistani, fired on the British, who fired back. So the Admiral landed. Later that evening the British Resident decided to withdraw the Residency to Kharg and left Bushehr on 30 March 1839.³¹ Realizing the implications for trade, the merchants of Bushehr and the Ghazi wrote to the British Resident asking him to return. Letters were also sent to the Governor of Bushehr asking him to promise not to impede British trade. Later, the British authorities on Kharg received a message from the Imam Jum'a of Bushehr, presumably prompted by the trading community there, inquiring about the health of Admiral Maitland and remarking that the Governor (Mirza Asadullah) was not used to dealing with the English. Since over the course of a forty-year friendship matters of greater moment than this had been adjusted, he hoped that this too might be settled.³²

Sheil wrote to Palmerston fulminating on the loss of British influence consequent on what he considered a trial of British forbearance over a long series of indignities. He pointed out that the British Admiral and Residency had retired, in the eyes of Iranians, before the 'rabble' of Bushehr. The British were particularly disturbed as the event coincided with a setback in Kandahar.

This conciliatory view of the merchants of Bushehr was not shared by Muhammad Shah, who seized the opportunity, realizing the implications for British prestige. He summoned Baqir Khan Tangistani, the Ghazi of Bushehr and his nephew, Shaikh Salman, to court, where they received robes of honour, decorations and substantial pensions and were received by the Shah with great condescension and respect.³³ It was officially reported that:

An English admiral had arrived in a ship of 80 guns and by a stratagem had obtained possession of Bushire. Baghir Khan with the troops of the Dashtistan attached and defeated the English with great loss and drove out of Bushire the admiral, the resident and the English flag, and had sent a large quantity of English heads to Shiraz.³⁴

The Shah made his version known throughout Iran and down the Persian Gulf,³⁵ undermining British prestige, with of course, the resulting additional financial burdens. This event caused more damage to British prestige in the Persian Gulf than did their retreat from Kabul in 1841–2.

An insight into Muhammad Shah's policies in dealing with the British at this time is provided by a letter from his brother, Faridun Mirza, Governor of Fars.³⁶ On the subject of Kharg, he said: 'At first when the English came, they explained they needed a change of air and water. Now they say they will go immediately they receive the orders from the British Representative. Something must be done or it will be the walls next'.

Faridun Mirza regarded the people of Fars as secretly in league with the British, and indeed Baqir Khan Tangistani sent them friendly messages. The Governor suggested buying ships to take Kharg, especially as there were some available at a good price, but the Shah believed the British would only seize the ships, and so it was better to wait till relations improved.

The British occupation of Kharg marked a distinct downward turn in the fortunes of Shaikh Nasir. His family's long connection with the British, and his own dealings with them, together with common complaints of his failure to remit adequate revenue had led to his being removed from the governorship of Bushehr. He took refuge on Kharg under the impression that his successor, Mirza Abbas, was under orders to take him prisoner. He was further in fear of the Governor of Fars, whom he had defied, by refusing to leave Kharg.³⁷ His presence on Bushehr posed problems for the British, who considered him a nuisance. The military commander on Kharg complained that as he was in rebellion against the Shah, no one would believe that the British were not in league with him. In view of his threatening behaviour, and the number of his blood feuds and enemies, his presence on Kharg was bad for the British reputation.³⁸ The Government of India, however, took a more clement view of the Shaikh. As a person who had demonstrated himself so decidedly friendly to the British, it would be preferable to incur the risk of embarrassment rather than to eject him from his place of refuge, unless of course he showed less good will to the British.³⁹ There was also the possibility of paying him to go if necessary. In the event they induced him to depart for Basra. Presumably anxious not to be thought to have been bought out from his domain he refused an offer of 2,500 rupees for his expenses, and would only accept 400 to pay the crews for navigating his boats on the river.⁴⁰ In nineteen months there were eight governors of Bushehr, including one described as energetic but illiterate, backed by the Imam of Muscat, who offered security for the regular payment of the revenues of that port.⁴¹

After much pressure on Iran by Palmerston, relations between Britain and Iran were finally restored by the treaty of 28 October 1841. The British evacuated Kharg in February 1842. The *karguzar* pointed out to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the necessity of building a proper court of justice on the island and a reliable garrison and that proper arrangements should be made for the provisioning of the garrison and supply of ammunition.⁴² In the meantime, the inhabitants of Kharg had made full use of the opportunity. First they paid no taxes for three years, their main dues being normally paid to Shaikh Nasir to support the garrison through the pilotage tax;⁴³ second they restructured their administration.

In the absence of Shaikh Nasir they had become accustomed to managing their own affairs by council, and they now determined not to have him back, preferring to send remuneration to the Iranian Government themselves.⁴⁴ The Islanders considered that their taxation had increased in the past few decades as a result of obligations to the Mazkur being now combined with taxes due to the Government of Fars.⁴⁵ It would seem that in this view they were supported by some of the British officials out of sympathy, despite the fact that the Mazkur were regarded

as their allies. However, neither the British nor the islanders acted as if Kharg were not part of Iran. They thus persuaded the Shah's agent that Shaikh Nasir should not be allowed to levy any further dues on Kharg, and that the garrison, hitherto provided by Shaikh Nasir should now be supplied by the Government. Shaikh Nasir was hoping to have his former position of power and pecuniary advantage on the island fully restored, but despite considerable efforts and much expenditure on his part, the islanders' request was granted. By a royal *farman* to the Governor of Fars, the Damuk tribe of Arabs inhabiting Kharg were placed under special protection and Kharg was put under a garrison of Lari troops with an injunction that they should not oppress the people.⁴⁶

Inevitably, however, disputes arose between the garrison and the populace of the island. Within weeks there were complaints that the Commander, Lutf Ali Khan Lari, had seized their dues and tried to milch them.⁴⁷ As a result Lutf Ali Khan was ejected from the island.⁴⁸ Emissaries from both the Governor of Bushehr and the *mujtahid* to discover the facts were beaten and dispatched with a message to their respective masters to attend to their own concerns and that any further messengers would be fired upon. Lutf Ali Khan then organized a body of thirty unemployed Shi'a followers to sail to Kharg to punish the Sunnis there. He received encouragement from the authorities of Bushehr who told him not to come back until he had punished both the troops and the islanders. However, the Lari garrison dispatched the invaders. The matter was finally settled when the supply of provisions from Bushehr ceased and the Lari soldiers were recalled to Laristan. Meanwhile the rebellion was followed with interest by the Government of India with a view to an alliance offering Britain a most useful base in the Persian Gulf, particularly with regard to security of the inhabitants.⁴⁹

Having had one experience of being garrisoned by *sarbaz*, the Kharg islanders were reluctant to endure another. They were simply too poor and too few to provide even the basic provisions normally expected.⁵⁰ In October 1843 they took one of the few courses open to the overtaxed and ran away from the island, leaving the *sarbaz* to destroy their homes.⁵¹ Although the Governor of Fars was advised by Haji Mirza Agasi to settle the matter, he was more preoccupied with the continued presence of a British coaling station, whose agent, Haji Mirza Yaqub, had been prominent in the recent display of assertion by the islanders.⁵²

The islanders finally returned to Kharg in February 1844, having received a letter from Haji Mirza Aqasi promising to settle their grievances.⁵³ Central control was now extended over Kharg, one example being that permission for the sale of a graveyard had to be sought in Bushehr.⁵⁴ More significantly, Kharg was henceforth garrisoned by Government troops under the officer in command (*yavar*) of Bushehr, who was directly responsible to the Governor of Fars.⁵⁵ One last disruptive element was removed in June 1844, when the Government of India was finally persuaded to relinquish its coaling depot on the island, and the building was restored to the Iranian authorities.⁵⁶

In the meantime, Shaikh Nasir, having lost all but a foothold in the fort of Kharg, retained fitfully his position as Governor of Bushehr. Failing to understand the

structural changes taking place through the developments in trade and the growth of central Government control, Shaikh Nasir expended considerable sums in his attempts to restore his fortunes. The fact that he was an Arab was seen as having some advantage by the Iranian Government in controlling Bushehr,⁵⁷ but he was also held in suspicion for his connections with the British. He was back as Governor in February 1842, but on condition he pay the large sum of 3,000 tomans in five days to an representative of the Shah.⁵⁸ Removed again in June he made his way to Tehran, where 12,000 tomans were declared to be due from him and members of his family were taken hostage.⁵⁹ He finally left Tehran early in 1845 to be reinstated as Governor of Bushehr, but was waylaid in Shiraz, where the Governor had him bastinadoed in front of the populace of the town for failing to remit 3,000 tomans of revenue.⁶⁰ He reached Bushehr in September 1845, but his position remained insecure as he could not keep up the expected revenues of the governorship.⁶¹ In the next few years, the town was reputed to be more prosperous than elsewhere and it remained tranquil on the accession of Nasir al-Din Shah.⁶²

However, Shaikh Nasir's time was passing. By 1848 there was a considerable deficiency in his accounts, but he was able to stave off the Shiraz tax collector with 3,000 tomans.⁶³ The revenues of Bushehr had fallen off, largely as a result of trade in British merchandise going through the Ottoman Empire and the north of Iran,⁶⁴ but also partly because of trade being increasingly diverted to other ports in the Persian Gulf, particularly Bander Abbas, with a resulting fall in the customs dues of Bushehr.⁶⁵ The yearly assessment expected from Shaikh Nasir was the same as that extracted from his father, but with a reduction in his province and increases in expenditure. As a result of the growth in Iranian Government control, he could not, like his father, please the townsmen by taking a rebellious view over customs dues to the Governor of Fars.⁶⁶ In 1849 he was in difficulties as a result of a quarrel with the bazaar, most particularly Malik al-Tujjar, over the non-payment of debts and failure to remit revenue.⁶⁷ Malik al-Tujjar left Bushehr to obtain help from the Tangistanis.⁶⁸ However, Shaikh Nasir was able to cling on to power against a rival appointed from Shiraz at the end of 1849.⁶⁹ Briefly reappointed in January 1850, partly as a result of pressure from the British, who disliked the disturbance, he lost his position for the last time in the autumn of that year, despite a further rebellion led by his uncle, Shaikh Husain, who understood that there was an underlying policy to remove his family from power.⁷⁰ Other governors were even more in arrears than Shaikh Nasir,⁷¹ so it would seem that the Iranian authorities had their own reasons for desiring his removal. The British estimated that the Governor of Fars was endeavouring to create divisions in the Mazkur family to extend his power and to break their link with the British.⁷² Changes to the administration in Shiraz linked to the rationalizing policies of Amir Kabir meant that from then on the Governor of Bushehr was essentially an Iranian Government official appointed by the Governor of Fars.

Sizing up Kharg in 1853 the British Resident reported that it was much changed from 1838. He wrote that formerly the British could land without opposition in cooperation with Shaikh Nasir. Now Bushehr and the surrounding districts were

under the complete control of Iran, accomplished by the suppression of the ruling Arab family and the maintenance of a garrison in Bushehr and in Kharg. Extensive fortifications now defended the seaports.⁷³

In conclusion, the trend identifiable from the time of Fath Ali Shah towards the extension of central control along the Persian Gulf persisted and was even accelerated by the First Herat War. One result was the elimination of the Mazkur family as a local power, which arose first because of the determination of the Iranian Government to eliminate or reduce the influence of notables who owed their position to an entrenched collaboration with the British. Second, in the emergence of new, more regular, commercial arrangements, the proceeds of trade through customs dues was becoming increasingly removed from local powers and gathered by Government officials. One of the conditions made for peace in 1841 was the punishment for the attack on the residency *sarraf*. The Iranian Government acceded to all conditions but it was understood that it was out of their power to execute, particularly when the authority of the Government was scarcely acknowledged in Fars.⁷⁴ Popular resistance may thus be said to have played an important role in Anglo-Iranian relations in embarrassing the British, in bringing pressure on the Iranian Government to keep them out, and in creating a disincentive for them to invade the mainland. It also led to eradication of intermediaries.

What did Britain therefore gain in Bushehr from the Herat war? The answer is nothing of discernable significance. Shortly afterwards the British are found complaining at the low level of British goods and shipping passing through Bushehr,⁷⁵ a circumstance which does not appear to change significantly till the 1860s at least, when the telegraph and steam were introduced. To understand why they gained so little we must go back to the two factors which shaped their policy. First, if they took Kharg they would provoke the Russians to similar action in the north. Second, on a low level of trade and no visible mineral resources, it was not worth their while, financially, to significantly increase their presence in the Persian Gulf.

Notes

1. For discussion and analysis of the First Herat War and its connection with the role of the British in the Gulf see J. B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf 1795–1880* (Oxford 1968), and M. E. Yapp, *Strategies of British India* (Oxford 1980).
2. Yapp, *Strategies*, p. 373.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 276.
4. Kelly, *Persian Gulf*, p. 42.
5. J. S. Buckingham, *Travels among the Arab Tribes* (London 1825), p. 347. He says the population was less than 10,000.
6. E. Scott Waring, *A Tour to Shiraz* (London 1897), p. 2.
7. J. Macdonald Kinneir, *A Geographical Memoir of the Persian Empire* (London 1813), p. 70.
8. See, for example, Buckingham, *Travels*, p. 348; Macdonald Kinneir, *Memoir*, p. 69.
9. IO R/15/1/75, p. 78, July 1837.
10. Buckingham, *Travels*, pp. 352–4.

11. FO 248/113, Hennell to Sheil, 16 July 1846; FO 248/138, Hennell to Sheil, 16 October 1860.
12. IO R/15/1/83, p. 3, 28 July 1839.
13. FO 248/108, Robertson to Sheil, 4 January 1843, and FO 248/113, Hennell to Sheil, 30 January 1844.
14. Macdonald Kinneir, *Memoir*, p. 18.
15. FO 248/108, Robertson to Sheil, 4 January 1843, referring to Bruce to Morier, 7 September 1815.
16. FO 248/108, Robertson to Sheil, 4 January 1843.
17. FO 248/85, Mackenzie to McNeill, 3 December 1836. Griboedov was a Russian special emissary who had been murdered by a mob in Tehran in 1829 for perceived arrogance towards Islam.
18. The *mujtahid* is referred to as both Shaikh Hasan (see, for example, Mackenzie to the Government of India, 17 September 1840 and 17 October 1840, IO R15/1/87), and Shaikh Husain (see, for example, Hennell to McNeill, 21 November 1838 in FO 248/85) in the British sources, although he is clearly the same person. As he is mentioned in Hasan Fasa'i's *Farsnama-yi Nasiri* as Shaikh Hasan, this name has been preferred. See Busse's translation *History of Persia under Qajar Rule* (New York 1972), p. 260.
19. FO 248/85, Hennell to McNeill, 22 February 1837.
20. FO 248/85, Mackenzie to McNeill, 27 December 1837.
21. A reference to the murder of the Russian special envoy, Griboedov (see above).
22. Kelly, *Persian Gulf*, pp. 295–6.
23. FO 60/59, no. 44, 7 September 1838, enclosure in no. 39, 20 June 1838.
24. FO 60/59, no. 44, 7 September 1838, enclosure in no. 42, 25 June 1838.
25. IO R/15/1/78, 21 June 1838.
26. FO 248/85, Hennell to McNeill, 21 November 1838. A rescript from Faridun Mirza, Governor of Fars, specifically stated that the sale of wine was forbidden in a Muslim country. See FO 248/85, rescript received 14 December 1838.
27. FO 248/85, Hennell to the Government of India, 12 December 1838.
28. FO 248/85, Hennell to McNeill, 28 December 1838.
29. FO 60/65, no. 18, 8 March 1839.
30. *Ibid.*; see also Farman-Farma-yi Fars to Muhammad Shah in I. Safa'i, *Yak sad sanad-i tarikhi* (Tehran, n.d.), pp. 37–8. Although the letter is dated Sha'ban 1256 (September–October 1840), it appears from the tone and content to have been written when he was Governor of Fars, i.e. in 1838–9.
31. FO 60/66, no. 35, 26 May 1839.
32. IO R/15/1/81, no. 80, p. 33, enclosure in 9 April 1839.
33. FO 60/73, no. 13, 7 April 1840; FO 248/99, Mackenzie to Sheil, 17 November 1840.
34. FO 60/66, no. 42, 6 June 1839.
35. It was recorded in Hasan Fasa'i's *Farsnama-yi Nasiri* that Shaikh Hasan, the *mujtahid* of the Usfur tribe, his nephew Shaikh Salman and Baqir Khan had risen in rebellion with the inhabitants of Bushehr and expelled the British regular soldiers and Resident from the town. See Busse *History of Persia*, p. 260.
36. Safa'i, *Yak sad sanad*, p. 37.
37. FO 60/65, no. 26, 16 April 1839; IO R/15/1/79, p. 137, 10 April 1839.
38. IO R/15/1/81, p. 26, no. 69, 5 April 1839.
39. IO R/15/1/83, p. 3, 28 July 1839.
40. FO 60/67, no. 59, 15 August 1839.
41. FO 60/73, no. 6, 4 February 1840.
42. M. Nezhadershadi, ed., *Asnad-i Khalij-i Fars* (Tehran 1375), Vol. V, pp. 468–71.
43. FO 248/108, Robertson to Sheil, 21 June 1842.

44. FO 248/99, Robertson to McNeill, 14 April 1842; FO 248/113, Hennell to Sheil, 30 January 1844.
45. FO 248/108, Kemball to Robertson, 6 January 1843, in Robertson to Sheil, 19 January 1843.
46. FO 60/87, no. 46, 21 April 1842.
47. FO 248/108, Robertson to Sheil, 2 August 1842.
48. FO 248/108, Robertson to Sheil, 3 November 1842.
49. FO 248/108, Robertson to Sheil, 31 December 1842.
50. FO 248/113, Kemball to Sheil, 21 September 1843.
51. FO 248/113, Kemball to Sheil, 6 October 1843.
52. FO 60/99, no. 89, 6 November 1843 and FO 60/99, no. 103, 20 December 1843.
53. FO 248/113, Hennell to Sheil, 24 February 1844.
54. FO 248/113, Hennell to Sheil, 27 March 1844.
55. FO 248/113, Hennell to Sheil, 2 April 1844.
56. FO 248/114, Hennell to Sheil, 25 June 1844. The Government of India itself had renounced any wish to retain the island in October 1842, but its subsidiary in Bombay clung on to the coaling depot. FO 60/90, no. 86, 21 November 1842.
57. FO 60/91, no. 92, 10 December 1842.
58. FO 248/99, Hennell to Sheil, 7 February 1840, and FO 248/113, 7 August 1843.
59. FO 248/108, Robertson to Sheil, 2 July 1842.
60. FO 248/113, Hennell to Sheil, 6 February 1845 and 7 April 1845.
61. FO 248/113, Hennell to Sheil, 9 September 1845. See also FO 248/129, Hennell to Farrant, 15 December 1848.
62. FO 248/129, Hennell to Farrant, 4 October 1848.
63. FO 248/132, Hennell to Farrant, 15 September 1848.
64. Consul Abbott, FO 60/165. It remained low until the 1850s.
65. FO 248/129, Hennell to Farrant, 15 December 1848.
66. FO 248/108, Robertson to Sheil, 23 July 1842.
67. FO 248/138, Kennedy to Farrant, 20 August 1849.
68. FO 248/138, Kemball to Farrant, 26 May 1849.
69. FO 248/138, Hennell to Farrant, 31 October 1849. Busse, *History of Persia*, p. 289. The rebellion is also mentioned in Mirza Muhammad Khan I'timad al-Saltana, *Al-mu'asir va al-asar* (Tehran 1306), p. 39.
70. FO 248/138, Hennell to Sheil, 8 January 1850; FO 60/153, no. 124, 19 October 1850; Busse, *History of Persia*, pp. 294–5; Mirza Muhammad Taqi Lisan al-Milk Sipihr, *Naskh al-Tavarikh*, ed. J. Qa'im Maqami (Tehran 1337), Vol. III, pp. 1111–12. Since Bushehr was of such strategic importance, Mirza Hasan Ali Khan, Sartip in charge of the campaign, tried to avoid war and, as far as possible, exercised patience and calm, thus persuading Shaikh Husain to give up the fight and withdraw, for which he was afterwards awarded with promotion. Muhammad Ja'far Khurmuji, *Haqa'iq al-akhbar*, edited by S. H. Khadivjam (Tehran 1363), p. 87.
71. FO 248/138, Hennell to Farrant, 31 October 1849.
72. FO 60/153, no. 124, 19 October 1850; FO 60/154, no. 141, 18 November 1850.
73. FO 248/150, Kemball to Bombay, 30 November 1853.
74. FO 60/67, no. 75, 19 October 1839.
75. FO 248/108, Robertson to Sheil, 23 July 1842.

ORDINARY PEOPLE AND THE RECEPTION OF BRITISH CULTURE IN IRAN, 1906–41

Morteza Nouraei

The story of the foreign relations of Iran at the level of high politics, of Russia's advance southwards and of the British perception of Iran as a buffer state is well known. But Iranian and British subjects interacted at a number of different levels and in a variety of ways. The nature of that interaction and its consequences varied greatly, with results that were both positive and negative. In the field of historical study the positive side of British cultural influence, primarily in the area of liberal thinking, has been emphasized. On the other hand it is acknowledged that the long-term presence of Britain in Iran had many disadvantages.

This article is concerned with British influence at the popular level and will argue that British culture in particular had an important role in the development of Iranian society in a way, especially at this level, that was not conscious or intended. It might indeed be supposed that Britain played an important role in the development of Iranian society as a result of British Government policy. However, on one occasion only, in the 1890s, did British diplomacy propose a measure of socio-economic reform in Iran. The British Minister, Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, was convinced that Iran needed to improve the general living conditions of her people.¹ Furthermore, on occasion, British visitors who witnessed the problems of Iran's Government and society advised their Government to take action to resolve them. But, as Greaves has indicated, British policy-makers were not disposed to extend their responsibilities in Iran in this manner.²

Thus it was left to the ordinary people of the country to make their own sense of the influence of British culture in Iran, which was exercised in such a variety of ways, through newspapers, through trade and through the presence of British subjects. This cultural influx was haphazard and was received by the people in ways that the Government could not control; indeed it was not always conscious of their effect. British cultural influence also became fused with the existing culture of the country, which it necessarily penetrated as the impact of the West advanced.

This article endeavours to look at the subject of British cultural influence at the level of the ordinary people and to define the nature and role of such people in interpreting and absorbing it. In addition, the gateways by which relations between different groups of ordinary people and the British subjects were established will be discussed, as will some British cultural characteristics and their potential impact. It is of course not always possible to say whether a particular form of cultural influence is specifically British, rather than generally Western. However, here we intend to focus on those aspects of culture that, at least in Iran, are mainly recognized as deriving from Britain, though not exclusively so.

Further, this paper is also a part of a research project that attempts to reconstruct the situation of ordinary people with regard to foreign relations from the *karguzaris*' reports,³ and is at the same time supplemented by the consular reports.⁴ Also, use has been made of travellers' books such as those of A. Vambery (1906) and O. K. Merritt Hawkes (1933). For instance, the latter, who was a journalist from Manchester, published her work under the title of *Persia Romance and Reality* in 1933. She had experience of understanding reform and modernity in non-Western societies, and highlighted the situation of ordinary people. Hawkes entered Iran from the south and continued her visit on to the north through Kerman, Isfahan, Qum and Tehran. She tried, with a critical eye, to associate with ordinary people and especially reflected their preoccupations with Great Britain. Information in her book has been studied alongside the aforementioned documents. Otherwise the sphere of life of the ordinary people is little touched upon in documents and reports. Finally, works such as Avery (1967), Ferrier (1991), Keddie (1980) and Gilbar (1977) have been studied for complementary information on more detailed points.

The discourse of the subject

There are some principal points concerning the discourse of the time and subject that could help start our debate. The modern history of Iran since the later decades of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century is witness to the political participation of ordinary people. The Tobacco Regie (1890–1) and Constitutional Movement (1906–11) for instance, show the major interest of the mass of the people in this direction. However, thereafter, in particular with the growth of the media for publicity and the attempt to develop the concepts of state and citizenship, the authorities tried to stimulate ordinary people for their own political purposes. Thus, ordinary people, that is to say, those who were excluded from the realm of officialdom, subjects as opposed to rulers, both inherently and through elite and middle-class encouragement, seemed active, noisy and eminently capable of shaping their own history. They gradually tried to obtain opportunities and a role in political development, in a way that was somehow important for the transformation from the Qajar to the Pahlavi period.

Moreover, in this period, the idea of reform and modernity after a half century among the upper and influential classes gradually extended,⁵ and ordinary people became more familiar with the West and interested in change and participation in

modernity. Thus, inclination towards the West turned into practically the main trend for ordinary people. Hence, they became witnesses to the widely effective elements that changed their cities and lives. The West came to represent both freedom and release from despotism, and a lifestyle that could even be recognized as a model to be emulated. In this regard, the press played a major role. The increase in the number of issues of newspapers that presented different points of view in the areas of ordinary people's interests provided the principal forum for reflecting both 'public opinion' and the governmental perspective. Indeed for the first time public opinion mirrored some of the concerns of the ordinary people, especially in the fields of politics and reform. With the number of educated people increasing, the press gradually found their relevant readership. They began in particular to depict the means of a 'better life' for the people.

The era of the Constitutional Revolution and the establishment of a parliament introduced new factors into politics, which provide other perspectives in our debate. The Constitutional Revolution and the positive role of British authority in Tehran improved Iranians' previously negative view of the colonial power. Later, however, the role of Great Britain in other events during this period, such as the 1907 agreement and the 1919 treaty, and the coup d'état of 1921, followed by the controversial role of Reza Shah, created a different discourse that was largely directed against Britain during the following decades. Those politicians who rose to power in these circumstances were mainly perceived as Anglophile elements.⁶ But afterwards, and specially from the coronation of Reza Shah in 1926 onwards, they largely had a hand in stimulating the xenophobic atmosphere in which the British became the obvious target.⁷ The justification for their policy is unclear. However, the politicians of that time thrived on the nationalist feeling that emerged among people in the region following the end of the First World War. To maintain their own power and position among the public, such politicians not only demonstrated their apparently independent status, but also acted the patriots by playing an offensive role against foreign elements, in particular Great Britain. The most important outcome of such a policy of engaging in a sham quarrel was first 'prestige' for the politician. It was also from time to time generally used as an instrument to convince foreigners of some political achievement at the national and international level. At any rate, there are many reports of incidents showing this trend during the whole reign of Reza Shah, and it was an obstacle to improvement in both political and cultural relations with Britain. The Shah himself, for example, was disgusted with the southern province of the country: for him the people in that region were in collusion with Great Britain.⁸

Among the people, any kind of contact or relationship with foreigners, principally with British subjects, led to punishment.⁹ Hawkes, on her visit to Isfahan in early 1933, complained of the secret police, who had her affairs under constant surveillance.¹⁰ Avery reveals that, particularly in the 1930s, no British diplomat was able to eliminate from public opinion what he called 'suspicions' that affected every angle of foreign relations.¹¹ In this situation, it is difficult to ascertain the nature of British cultural penetration and how extensive it was.

However, besides the official documents on which previous authors have based their accounts, additional material may provide room for a new perspective, as will be discussed below.

In addition, the upper class was normally interested in new fashions coming from outside, especially in the areas that made their life different from that of ordinary people. They usually kept this privilege for their own class. In this period a new elite came into existence, principally from the ranks of the army, and its members tried to establish a relevant justification for considering themselves to be at a high level in the social hierarchy.¹² Although they were in a position to emulate the new lifestyle from the West and apply it to their society, they did not have enough potential and experience to absorb or to practice it at a more than superficial level. They still needed time to acquire influence in the social hierarchy, which remained in many respects traditional.

From the political viewpoint, the centralization of power and the establishment of order in Iran put an end to the autonomies, riots and disturbances that had occurred over two decades around the country.¹³ The unification of the country had been one of the most important aspirations of reformers since the latter part of nineteenth century. It was expressed in the constitutional revolution and embodied in the transformation of power between the Qajar and the Pahlavi eras.¹⁴ This kind of transformation was at the same time influenced by a shift in imperial policy, which meant the objective of direct penetration was changed to the post-colonial one of indirect penetration. The most significant outcome in Iran was the deliberate decline of the political influence of Great Britain introducing, after a century, a new era in Anglo-Iranian relations.

People

First, it is necessary to consider who ordinary people were in this context. Here they are defined as those who had a life in common and a different role and status from the elite, and who could be seen everywhere in the street and bazaar. In addition, they had a different standard of living. Those on whom we have the most source material are the guilds and artisans (*asnaf*) and merchants and businessman (*tujjar*).¹⁵ Ordinary people belonged to different urban and rural groups whose relations were normally managed outside the major political structures and power play of the period under study. Their sphere of influence was over their own life and that of their family, or to some extent over their professions and neighbourhoods. By contrast the non-ordinary ones comprised the people who had power, prestige and wealth, depending on their service in the political and official administration, and who could impose their will on others, with or without the consent of those others. Nevertheless, to use the term 'ordinary people' in the field of foreign relations one must give it a slightly distinct meaning, in particular with regard to contact with foreigners. Basically foreigners could have relations with the local inhabitants, but how often were those particular inhabitants what might be considered as ordinary people? From the other perspective, foreigners were

privileged in the eyes of most of the natives since their origin – mainly European – was also privileged, and they were more or less supported by their own government, to an extent that Iranians were not. The Iranian authorities were also obliged to pay special attention to them and their affairs. Therefore, one could say that the term ‘ordinary people’ had one normal meaning as far as Iranians were concerned and another with regard to the incoming people, because of their specific privileges, which in this context distinguished them as influential. Thus, in this regard in comparison to ordinary Iranians, foreigners would not be considered as being on an equal level.

The composition of the groups of foreigners who came to Iran for different reasons varied but included: diplomats, consular attachés and soldiers; travellers, merchants, missionaries; administrators in advisory capacities – official employees, for example, in the post and telegraph offices and, later, oil engineers and technicians; and teachers and doctors of medicine working in dispensaries. In addition, Westernized examples were provided by upper-class Iranians who had become subjects of Britain, as well as those who worked as British agents and secret agents, mainly from the middle ranks of officialdom.¹⁶ The different classes and groups of Iranian ordinary people who were in direct contact with the above groups of British subjects and institutions, and whose perceptions are mainly reflected in the documents could be classified within the following categories: politicians (of various ranks); merchants (with different amounts of capital, big or medium) and businessman; traders and other bazaaris; and army personnel (of different ranks). Patients, doctors, women and school pupils were other groups of Iranian ordinary people who were in direct contact with British subjects around the country.¹⁷

Furthermore, labourers engaged in the oil and construction industries under the supervision of British advisers were another important group who were involved with British subjects. Employment rose in the oil industry from 1,706, of whom 1,362 were Iranian in 1910, to a peak of 31,249 in the year 1930, of whom 20,095 were Iranian, excluding contract labour, and certain minority groups, such as Armenians and Arabs living in Khuzestan. Artisan technical training schools were started in 1922 and within decades covered most trades, gradually diversifying and advancing in scope. There is a view that the number of jobs for labourers in this industry led to increased opportunities in a variety of occupations, especially as they required training courses. These job opportunities therefore played an important role in the modernization of Iran.¹⁸

Gateways for cultural relations

A. Vambéry in his book *Western Culture in Eastern Lands* in 1906 tried to explain how to measure the influence of the characteristics of Western society on the life of the people in Eastern countries. Although he focused mainly on India, he was an astute witness on Turkey and Iran. In the chapter entitled ‘First Steps Towards Reform’ the measure of Britain’s cultural effect on India in the field of

administration and law was investigated. He revealed that 'the reforms and improvements made in the various departments of public life helped the Hindus to appreciate from the very commencement of the British administration the many blessings they now enjoyed, and which they had never received under the rulers of their own tribes and religion'.¹⁹

With regard to the Ottoman Empire and Iran, he remarked that 'the struggle with despotism and the campaign for liberal institutions must of necessity be far greater in Persia and Turkey'. He differentiated Iran from the Ottoman Empire, explaining that the Government had always been hated and that the culture was under the influence of traditional circles. These two factors had created a fragmented reform movement where people did 'not entertain any great illusions as to the successful introduction of reforms'.²⁰ The principal point here, which Vambéry brought out clearly, is that the definition of reform in the region he was discussing, including Iran, meant an inclination to the West in general and involved the desire to attain the Western model, perceived as ideal, through contact with progressive societies such as Britain. The model that Iranians largely sought to emulate was based on British civil institutions. Therefore one of the principal cultural factors transferred from Britain to Iran was the demand for reform. The origins of this demand go back to the early Qajar period, to military and administrative reforms carried out under the auspices of British advisers.

Yet, it is evident from British policy that cultural affairs were largely neglected. In general what could be considered as British cultural activity was nothing more than the preparation of good order throughout the local administration in the lands under their influence. Thus, their main aspiration in these areas was centred on keeping safe their economic and political interests, rather than paying attention to what could be called cultural behaviour in particular. If certain cultural characteristics of Western influence on Iran can be considered as arising from the cultural presence of Britain in Iran, they do not originate from a conscious British plan or government policy.

The reflection of British influence can be seen in the administrative practice and functions in their zone, in particular after 1907. The *karguzari* department is a good example of this point. The *karguzari* was a part of the Foreign Ministry in Tehran and therefore independent of the local administration in the provinces. The Foreign Ministry appointed the *karguzar* or head of the local office. The holder of the post was thus a Foreign Ministry official assigned to a major provincial city, which had an active foreign community and agency, to look after their affairs, especially commercial and legal matters. The main function of the *karguzari* was managing the judicial affairs of foreigners, and cases between foreigners and Iranians were tried in the *karguzar*'s court.²¹ The *karguzar* also observed and reported on local events, the role of foreigners and their connections with the local people. He normally made daily reports to the Foreign Ministry on the circumstances of foreigners in the region under his charge. He also communicated messages between the local authority and the foreign consulates in the city. This post was important in the political balance of the city and was normally occupied by a

notable considered as a member of the city upper class. In a comparison of the documents that have remained from the southern branches of the *karguzari* with the northern ones, we can see that the former, under British influence, is more regularized, with clear official literature, stamp, signature and date. In similar cases from Khorasan normally such points were neglected.

The *karguzari*'s documents also permit us to understand more about ordinary people from different groups and levels of Iranian society in connection with foreigners. They were in direct contact with foreigners especially before the abolition of the office of *karguzar* in 1928. Later, the duties of this office were partly referred to the police and to the governor's administration in each city.²² The claims by consuls acting in a legal capacity on behalf of their nationals, lawsuits and other inquiries to this official relating to foreigners, demonstrate the situation regarding the relationships between natives and British subjects.²³ The nature of the judicial cases also throws light on their close connections. Relations in different areas were dependent on the size of the foreign community. In the early twentieth century all of the major cities as well as many small ones that had some importance for foreigners, either because of their bazaars or their strategic situation, had a *karguzari* office.²⁴ Obviously, in the area of British influence the number of inquiries was greater than in the northern area of the country (c.1906–25). In the case of cities like Bushehr, Shiraz and Isfahan, the majority of inquiries to the *karguzari* were made by British subjects, but in Astarabad and Mashhad, the main business was from Russian subjects.²⁵ The following categories of cases were referred to the *karguzari* courts by British subjects: robbery (either on roads or in cities), fraud, debt, murder, legacy and heritage, British protection, revenue, ownership of property and land, commercial, import and export disputes.²⁶

In particular, commercial, import and export disputes generated a significant literature for negotiation both in the court and in the bazaar. The main characteristics for such negotiations were systematically worked out based on written materials, which endeavoured to maintain equal rights for Iranians in their transactions with foreigners.

A further form of contact between Iranians and outsiders was through the right of the former so-called 'foreign protection', which many people from different social backgrounds were interested in obtaining. Demand for it arose mainly from the arbitrary and unstable political situation everywhere in the country. A number of British subjects who were formerly Iranians obtained British protection and enjoyed its advantages. Their most significant privilege was security of life and property. It was a point on which ordinary people also observed that there were possibilities for a 'better life': security and rights. Basically, from the later decades of the nineteenth century, there was an increase in such demands from Iranians to foreign consulates, accompanied by offers to pay the foreigners for their protection and their flag. The amount depended on the social and political status of the applicant.²⁷ In disputes, people compared their situation to that of foreign subjects and demanded more rights and equality. For some time, as Gilbar has shown, the merchants 'increasingly, were involved in foreign or long-distance domestic trade,

and felt the growing competition of foreign manufactured goods. They needed a government that would do something to protect commercial and craft interests,²⁸ in the form of a better system.²⁹ Nevertheless, the evidence does not prove that this idea was prevalent throughout the country until the later part of the 1920s when the majority of merchants – of different ranks – and businessmen were involved in foreign trade and materials. As trade increased and communications developed, Iranian merchants found better opportunities to carry out business abroad.³⁰ The awareness of the need for a better system largely came through the western borderland, where different merchants from various countries were trading with Iranians.³¹ From the eighteenth century, Bushehr especially was a hub of commercial activity. Of the many firms based there the majority belonged to British or British-Indian subjects.

Moreover, the *karguzari* documents consistently reveal a movement towards reform and a better life among ordinary people. The reflection of this situation can be found either in the form of claims and complaints or reports on the circumstances of lawsuits and petitions against foreigners.³² In particular, there were requests for a new system, for change and development, improvements in the administration of the law and freedom and justice, as well as demand for new equipment and tools. Perhaps such awareness of people in the earlier stage prepared a suitable atmosphere for modernization later in the Reza Shah period.³³

In this epoch certain institutions emerged whose main function was to be of service to the foreign powers, though they were also useful as a model for the development of Iranian urban life. Such institutions were consulates, hospitals, and banks, trade agencies, customs houses and telegraphs. Perhaps the institutions that played the most significant role in the major cities like Mashhad, Isfahan and Shiraz were the foreign consulates. These were diplomatic missions in a foreign country ranking below an embassy. In early 1889, as part of their overall aims, especially to investigate the activity of their rivals in the region, Russia and Britain extended their consulates everywhere in the country.³⁴ The major British representations normally consisted of the consul general, vice-consul, agency surgeon and military attaché, whilst the minor ones had a consul with support staff.

Two further important means by which people became more familiar with the Western way of life were health and education. The modern practices of foreign institutions provided examples to Iranians. In this regard, an important institution connected to each foreign consulate was the dispensary. For instance, in Mashhad, the dispensary in the British Consulate was the most active in the city, being furnished for the reception and scientific treatment of in-patients and for the undertaking of serious surgical work. Reports show that in the later part of the first decade of the twentieth century there was an increase in the number of medical consultations and of the surgical operations it undertook.³⁵ According to *karguzari* reports these were in high demand in the southern part of the country. Dispensaries were initially established in response to the needs of travellers, traders and sailors in the southern ports of Iran. The fear of epidemics in particular caused the British authorities in Bushehr to expand their health centres to Bandar Abbas, Bandar

Lengeh, Jask and Mohammareh. The centres gave invaluable medical services to the native people of these regions.³⁶ In addition, from as early as 1868 and increasingly from 1900 the medical activities of the missionaries in Isfahan provided a model for Iranians.³⁷

But in the realm of political culture, we have to mention the discourse of the constitution and reform and the role of British elements. 'Moderation' (*i'tida'l*) which became a popular phrase among other political terms, indicated a kind of political principle, mainly coming from the British parliamentary system.³⁸ Also the events leading to the establishment of the National Consultative Assembly in August 1906 show, at least, the important role of the British legation in the formation of the assembly. People connected to the legation found an opportunity for 'public participation' but in a different way to that of the previous times. As Martin shows, 'the decisive event of the revolution was the great *bast* of July–August 1906, when 14,000 people sought sanctuary in the grounds of the British legation'.³⁹ According to Nazim al-Islam Kirmani, the legation became like a 'school' with people sitting in circles under tents, while those 'with a knowledge of politics' taught them. Matters which hitherto no one dared mention were brought to the attention of the people.⁴⁰ Daulatabadi also mentions that those of reformist views mingled with the people and made good use of the occasion.⁴¹ Vakil al-Daula reported that: 'the people in the legation are learning politics and law [. . .] for example: that the meaning of the word "shah" is "representative of the nation". And when the nation no longer wants a shah he is no longer recognized'.⁴²

The spreading of such ideas caused a new era to emerge in Iran accompanied by a considerable degree of change in social stratification as well as in manner of thought. The process of modernization that started in the epoch of the constitutional revolution led to the emergence of new social classes and occupational groups and a period of transition in which the old elite declined. For instance the subject of the fundamental law provoked much argument and challenge among the *ulama*, which as a group had never addressed it before. As Faghfoory puts it, 'the *ulama* as a traditional elite showed a remarkable degree of adaptability in response to modernization and change'.⁴³

Furthermore, it is possible to recognize a cultural link that was active traditionally between Iran and the Indian subcontinent. Particularly during the nineteenth century, above all, publications in the form of books and later newspapers in India, either by expatriate Iranians or by Indians, distinctly influenced Iran. A number of books were printed in Persian in Calcutta.⁴⁴ There was a rewarding route for a book trader between Bushehr and Calcutta, which provided a channel by which the debate in the politically liberated atmosphere of British India crossed the Iranian border.⁴⁵ The *karguzari* papers provide information on some of the boxes filled with books brought into Bushehr by a British India trading ship for a recipient named Shaikh Ali. The consignment was lost and Shaikh Ali claimed compensation for it. He emphasized he had insured the package with the shipping agent and eventually succeeded in obtaining recompense to the value of his lost property.⁴⁶

Closer study of such cultural connection might reveal more clearly the degree of influence of British cultural and political elements in the field of political and cultural reform. For example, the weekly paper *Habl al-Matin* published in Calcutta from 1892 to 1906 and circulated clandestinely within Iran, particularly in the urban areas, appears to have had some degree of influence on a number of levels of society. The role of this paper in awakening people politically was considerable. Its form and contents provided a means whereby Iranian society could become familiar with a different culture.

Finally, it is worth drawing attention to some interesting Western imports which became prevalent among ordinary people and were brought into the country as a result of the British presence and influence. They included swimming pools, parks, household plumbing and drainage, football, and the Singer sewing machine.⁴⁷ The last item was a working model known to have found a place in the majority of Iranian houses in the cities. Women learned to use the machines mainly at the Church Missionary Society (CMS) schools, and they then taught their relatives.

The activities of the CMS, particularly in Isfahan, caused numerous disputes between the *ulama* and pious people on the one hand and the Iranian authorities and the British Consul on the other. The *ulama* argued that the missionary centre was teaching Christian culture to Muslim pupils.⁴⁸ However, the missionaries provided a variety of services, including courses on such subjects as health care and sewing. The growing use of Singers was an indication of the spread of Western culture among ordinary people.⁴⁹ The popularity of football also provides significant evidence of the development of the Western concepts of both citizenship and leisure. After hard work in a dusty field, Iranian youths spent their time practising the game with much fun and cooperation. There were a number of football clubs in Kerman, which were originally started by the South Persia Rifles (1916–21) and later supported by the British legation.⁵⁰

Conclusion

As far as the evidence has allowed, this paper has explained the role of ordinary people and their status in the realm of foreign relations, as well as the manner and ways in which they received British culture. In this regard, it has been emphasized that the cultural element needed to be absorbed into existing attitudes and patterns of social behaviour and accepted by that body of the social hierarchy whom we know as ordinary people. In this respect, although British institutions played their part, the main role in spreading British cultural influence was played by those who were outside the political scene. The sources reveal that British subjects in different positions who lived among Iranians had very close relations with them in the major cities of the country. British subjects in face-to-face relations with Iranians brought new models of social behaviour for ordinary people. Although this point was lost upon travellers, politicians on either side did not pay attention to expanding such relations. The political atmosphere, in particular, indicated different objectives.

Thus two different attitudes to connections with foreigners, especially the British, could be found separately amongst Iranians: the xenophobic attitudes that were mainly disseminated by politicians and the day-to-day relations of ordinary people with them. We can conclude by remarking upon the way in which ordinary people welcomed importations such as parks, cinemas, sewing machines and football to the extent that they became very popular with Iranians. This kind of connection had its own role to play in foreign relations and functioned outside political relations during the decades under study. Thus the nature of the cultural effect and influence of social interaction at a lower level has in some measure been explained in this paper. In the study of Iran's history, the story of the people has been separated too much from the accounts of its government. In cultural affairs in particular there was kind of struggle between government and people. While the Government theoretically rejected foreign cultural elements and emphasized the national identity, the inhabitants showed their interest in such relations by incorporating the new phenomena into their social life. In these circumstances it was the public endeavour that succeeded.

Notes

1. R. Greaves, 'Iranian Relations with Great Britain and British India, 1798–1921' in *Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. P. Avery (Cambridge 1991), p. 407.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 408.
3. The files are under the subjects; *Da'vi* and *Muhakimat* boxes no. 57–8, various years (1900–30), in the Centre for Documents and Diplomatic History, Tehran.
4. In FO 248 and 416 series, and in R. M. Burrell, *Iran Political Diary 1881–1965*, Vol. XII (London 1997).
5. For further explanation concerning the circumstances of reform during the nineteenth century, see V. Martin, *Islam and Modernism* (London 1989), pp. 1–10.
6. For instance, see J. Sheikholeslami, *Afzayish-i nufuz-i Rus va Ingilis dar Iran-i asr-i Qajar* (Tehran 1369), pp. 25–49.
7. C. R. G. Hambly, 'The Pahlavi Autocracy: Reza Shah, 1921–1941', in *Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. P. Avery (Cambridge 1991), p. 220.
8. P. Avery, *Modern Iran* (London 1967), trans. by M. Rafi'i Mehrabadi (Tehran 1377), Vol. I, p. 282.
9. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 77–8. Also see H. Makki, *Tarikh-i bist sala-yi Iran*, Vol. III (Tehran 1357), p. 208.
10. O. A. M. Hawkes, *Persia Romance and Reality* (1933), trans. M. Nazari Nejad and others (Tehran 1371), p. 60.
11. Avery, *Iran*, Vol. II, pp. 132–3, 146–7, 182.
12. Hambly, 'Autocracy', pp. 231–2.
13. See W. Knapp, '1921–1941: The Period of Reza Shah', in *Twentieth-Century Iran*, ed. H. Amirsadeghi (London 1977), pp. 34–5.
14. For instance, see M. H. Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran*, trans. H. Afshar (Tehran 1379), pp. 44–7, 364–98.
15. See W. Floor, *Tarikh-i ijtimai-i Iran dar asr-i Qajar*, trans. A. Serry (Tehran 1365), pp. 31–61.
16. Collection of documents from the *karguzari* of Bushehr, 564 pages, Markaz-e Bushehr Shenasi. This collection is to be published by the centre under the editorship of the author of this article.

17. Extract from the *karguzari* documents for the years 1913–15, p.3/k3/1333, Centre for Documents and Diplomatic History, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tehran.
18. A. A. Zargar, *Tarikh-i ravabit-i Iran va Inglis dar daura-ya Reza Shah* (Tehran 1372), p. 282.
19. A. Vambery, *Western Culture in Eastern lands* (London 1906), p. 160.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 340.
21. I. Sa'id Vaziri, *Nizam-i capitulasiyun va natayij-i an dar Iran* (Tehran 1355), pp. 76–81.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 148–9.
23. There are a variety of documents, including letters, in either English or Persian, indicating the degree of these claims and demonstrating that those involved were from different levels of society. For the years between 1910 and 1914, for instance, see British Legation to Foreign Ministry of Iran, Tehran, p11-k3-1329, p13-k3-1329, p49-k3-1330, p11-k3-1333, p11-k3-1329, in the Centre for Documents and Diplomatic History, Tehran.
24. We know of about thirty-five branches throughout the country in 1904. Later the various branches were consolidated into twenty-three in four categories: first class – Mashhad, Bushehr, Tabriz; second class – Gilan, Mohammareh, Astarabad, Kerman, Kermanshah; third class – Bandar Lengeh, Ardebil, Seistan, Bandar Abbas, Maku; fourth class – Mazandaran, Sarakhs, Kurdistan, Darejaz and Kalat, Quchan, Savajbalagh, and Iraq; fifth class – Sardasht and Saez, Astara and Bandar Jaz. For details see Iranian National Archives, Tehran, posts and officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and their duties, 1328/1910, 240011876, 11 pp.
25. For instance, see Husain Quli Maqsudlu Wakil al-Daula, *Mukhabarat-i Astarabad* (Telegraph of Astarabad), eds I. Afshar and M. R. Daryagasht (Tehran 1363).
26. Information collected from the papers of the *karguzari* of Bushehr, 564 pages, Markaz-e Bushehr Shenasi.
27. IO to FO, encl. 292, 17 September 1903, FO 416/30. Also, for the level of demands for protection and the Iranian Government policy on the subject, see letter from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs to Muntakhab al-Mulk, the *Karguzar* of Khorasan, 4 Safar 1317, k22/p2/1317, in the Centre for Documents and Diplomatic History, Tehran. There are also many reports of abuse of the privilege of protection. See, for example, Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the *Karguzar* of Khorasan, 14 Sha'ban 1332, q-21808, archive of the Institute for the Study of Contemporary History, Tehran.
28. G. G. Gilbar, 'The Big Merchants (Tujjar) and the Persian Constitutional Revolution 1906', in *Asian and African Studies*, 2 (1977), 3, pp. 275–303.
29. N. R. Keddie, *Iran Religion, Politics and Society* (Los Angeles, Calif. 1980), p. 67.
30. On the principal elements for the growth of trade and communications, particularly in the period of Reza Shah, see K. S. Maclachlan, 'Economic Development, 1921–1979', in the *Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. P. Avery (Cambridge 1991), pp. 609–12.
31. Obviously the amounts of imports and exports in the northern provinces were of a higher level than elsewhere because of the trade with Russia. However merchants who came from the Ottoman Empire, later Turkey, Germany, France, Italy and Austria, traded on the western border.
32. Procès-verbal of court of the *karguzari* of Bushehr, 3 August 1903, 1-1/5-14-179/1321, National Archives, Tehran.
33. Muzakirat-i Majlis-i Shishum (Proceedings of the Sixth Assembly), meeting no. 64, 27 Bahman 1305, p. 504.
34. G. N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question* (London 1966), Vol. I, pp. 170–1.
35. L. W. Adamec, *Historical Gazetteer of Iran* (Graz 1981), Vol. IV, p. 486.
36. S. Borumand, *Sar cunsulgari-yi Britannia dar Bushihr 1177–1332/1763–1914* (Tehran 1381), pp. 269–81.

37. 'Persia', *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (London 1927).
38. I. Afshar, *Rapurtha-yi pulis makhfi az shayi'at-i shahri* (Tehran 1367), pp. 98, 174.
39. Martin, *Islam*, p. 89.
40. Mirza Muhammad Nazim al-Islam Kirmani, *Tarikh-i bidari-yi Iraniyan* (Tehran 1363), Vol. I, p. 435.
41. Y. Daulatabadi, *Tarikh-i mu'asir ya hayat-i Yahya* (Tehran 1371), Vol. II, p. 74.
42. I. Safa'i, *Asnad-i mashruta* (Tehran 1348), pp. 78, 101.
43. M. H. Faghfoory, 'The Impact of Modernization on the Ulama in Iran, 1925–1941', *Iranian Studies*, 26 (1993), 3–4, p. 277.
44. For details, see H. Anosheh, ed., *Danishnama-yi Adab-i Farsi* (Tehran 1375).
45. A remarkable number of books were published in Persian in the Indian subcontinent during the colonial period. Some of these texts have been published under the editorship of H. Anosheh, for example, *Danishnama-yi adab-i Farsi: adab-i Farsi dar shibha qara-yi Hind* (Tehran 1375). Most of these texts were imported into Iran through the southern ports of Bushehr and Bandar Abbas. *Muzaffari*, a local newspaper published in Bushehr in the early twentieth century, includes announcements about the arrival of these books. A collection of the editions of this newspaper is held in the Markaz-i Bushehr Shenasi, Bushehr, Iran.
46. *Karguzar* of the Persian Gulf to Haj Muhammad Ali Tajir Dihdashti, 10 Shavval 1330, no. 1125, p. 210; same to the British Consul General of Bushehr, 14 Zi al-hijja 1330, no. 1121, p. 224.
47. P. L. Dorting, *Shahrakha-yi shirikat-i naft-i Iran va Inglis dar Khuzistan 1908–1951*, trans. B. Yaqmorly, in *Faslnama-yi tarikh-i ravabit-i khariji*, 4 (1382), 15, p. 201.
48. The *karguzari* of Isfahan to the British Consul General, 20 Urdibihisht 1304/1925, 2970/100298000030000, Iranian National Archives, Tehran.
49. For more details on CMS in Iran see G. E. Francis-Dehqani, 'CMS Women Missionaries in Iran, 1891–1934', in S. Ansari and V. Martin, eds, *Women, Religion and Culture in Iran* (London 2002), pp. 27–50. See also D. Wright, *The English amongst the Persians during the Qajar Period* (London 1977), chapter 8.
50. Hawkes, pp. 68, 87–9.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BRITISH AND ABD AL-HUSAIN MIRZA FARMAN-FARMA DURING HIS GOVERNORSHIP OF FARS, 1916–20

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‘Historical thinking and writing and study are, by their nature revisionist. The historian, unlike a judge, is permitted to try a case over and over again, often after finding and employing new evidence’.¹

When the First World War began and it appeared that Iran might become entangled in the hostilities, the Government declared the country’s neutrality. Unfortunately for Iran, none of the belligerents agreed to respect this position. Soon after the beginning of the war, the German Government tried to infiltrate Afghanistan and India by way of Iran. Different groups of agents were sent to destabilize these countries and arouse rebellions against the British and Russians. This was the case in Iran as well as other destinations. One group led by the German agent, Wassmus, made its way to Fars, where it won over many of the local tribes and even succeeded in arresting the British Consul in Shiraz in November 1915.² The local tribes of Fars, always unruly, now became embroiled in the larger world war, some taking the British side but most siding with the Germans. In response to these direct German provocations in a region the British historically considered as their sphere of influence, as well as to balance Russian influence in the north, the British organized a military force in Fars and Kerman in 1916,³ with the aim of controlling the security of southern Iran through a proxy armed force.

The South Persia Rifles (SPR) was a force organized into officers and a number of trained Indian soldiers, and paid by Britain. Its declared aim was to counter German influence and to impose order. The Iranian recruits were volunteers from the southern provinces and included members of the Gendarmerie, which had all but disintegrated as a force. Percy Sykes, who was in command, began to organize and recruit men as soon as he arrived in Bandar Abbas in March 1916. However, it took him eight months to reach Shiraz.⁴

In the same month, March 1916, Prince Abd al-Husain Mirza Farman-Farma (1858–1940) was appointed Governor of Fars. He was replacing Mahdi Quli Hadayat Mukhbir al-Saltana who had not been satisfactory as far as British interests were concerned for he had tried to remain neutral, thus giving the Germans the possibility to act freely. Farman-Farma's situation was unprecedented and contradictory as he was positioned between the Central Government he represented and the British Consul Gough and Sir Percy Sykes,⁵ the commander of the SPR. To complicate matters, Sykes's policies did not always coincide with those of the Iranian Government. In addition, at this time Anglo-German rivalries and disputes were being played out at the provincial level in southern Iran. Farman-Farma was in an especially difficult position because in Fars, he acted at times as an intermediary between the British and the Central Government in Tehran, and at other times he negotiated with that government directly. Further, the Central Government was weak, far away, and under conflicting influences and thus not always forthcoming in advice and/or support.

Farman-Farma, as a consummate politician, courtier and large landowner, has generated strong opinions amongst his contemporaries as well as posthumously amongst students of Iranian history. The origins of this perception can no doubt be traced to his force of personality and pragmatism, as well as clear reading of the local and international political forces, and perceived influence with the Russians and later on with the British. The very length of his government service created greater opportunities for criticism. He had been governor of several provinces, including Kermanshah and Fars, minister of the interior in the cabinet of Ain al-Daula in mid-1915, and chief minister for a few months in December 1915. It might be said that he was also criticized for his landholdings and wealth, but he was in no way the largest landowner in Iran. The accusation is often made that he was a shrewd and self-centered politician looking after his own well-being at the expense of national interests.⁶ However, like most Iranian politicians of his age, Farman-Farma was playing a very weak hand vis-à-vis foreign forces with a mixture of guile and Machiavellian tactics. All in all, as his private letters to his sons reveal, he lamented to the end the weakness of the Central Government and his inability to do anything about it.

This paper examines Farman-Farma's relationship with the British and the manner by which this relationship has been represented and interpreted, both by British documentary sources and by British historians, through the prism of his governorship of Fars. To write a history of Farman-Farma's relationship with the British, based solely on British sources, which is often the case, is to perpetuate the falsifications and bias in which the British engaged deliberately.⁷ A more complex version of his life emerges when other sources are consulted, which though perhaps equally biased, reveal contrasting points of view and allow the historian to produce a more objective assessment of Farman-Farma's career and his relationship with the British. In this article the focus is on Farman-Farma's governorship of Fars from 1916 to 1920, his last public appointment and a time in his life when he came in closest contact with the British. This paper will initially

provide a brief overview of the events during his governorship, and then will focus on three episodes and their respective interpretations, the first by the Persian Government, the second by Farman-Farma himself, and the third by British historians.

A note of caution: although the word bias is used here to refer to all of my sources, I would make a distinction between the way in which Farman-Farma's performance was evaluated in Iranian sources versus the British ones. The Iranian official documents put forward the Government's policies. They include the letters of Farman-Farma to the Government, the Government's replies, and often reports by the *karguzar*, an official who represented the foreign minister in the provinces and was generally in touch with the foreign consuls. As they were independent of the Governor, their reports are of great importance. However, because Iranian documents have been rarely read, they have not had the resonance of the British sources, which have been widely consulted.⁸

The main part of the correspondence of Farman-Farma, reflecting sixty years of his administrative career, was destroyed, it seems, when his residence in Tehran was confiscated in 1939 by Reza Shah Pahlavi. Those papers that survived mainly concerned his properties in Azerbaijan, which he had donated to his two eldest sons, Firuz Mirza Firuz Nusrat al-Daula and Abbas Mirza Salar Lashkar. Though these letters deal with farming affairs, a number of them contain important political information and were selected for publication.⁹ It is unfortunate that these letters have not been referred to in the studies that deal with this period, for they contain Farman-Farma's side of the questions under discussion. For this reason this paper by making use of new material, attempts to revise the recent and less recent historical scholarship, which has touched on Farman-Farma in one way or another.

Background

A decade before the war, in 1906, the Shah was forced to grant a *majlis* or parliament, which subsequently passed the constitutional laws and the supplementary fundamental laws.¹⁰ One of the chief aims of the constitutionalists was to establish an elected parliament and to curb foreign encroachments on Iran's independence. This aim of the constitutionalists was difficult to achieve as it ran counter to the influence and might of the two imperialist powers meddling in Iranian affairs. Ever since the beginning of the nineteenth century, Russia and Britain had, through wars and threats, obtained immense privileges and concessions to the detriment of the political, economic and financial independence of Iran. Now inspired by the revolution and influenced by the Social Democrats of the Caucasus, the more radical of the constitutionalists began to organize a political party, which came to be called the Democrat Party.¹¹ Its ideology was inspired by socialist ideas and its main goal was to challenge the imperialist powers, in particular Russia. The acts of the Democrats resulted in conflict, weakened both the Majlis and the Government, and plunged the country in civil war and internal strife. Cabinets made up of various cliques and backed by Russia or Britain came and

went with unceasing frequency. Each minister was chosen to satisfy one side or the other. In fact the nature of Iranian politics was such that it centred round personalities rather than policies.

A year after the granting of the constitution, Iran's position vis-à-vis Russia and Britain was changed dramatically by the enactment of the 1907 convention, which settled the rivalry between these powers in Iran. The convention divided Iran into two zones of influence and a neutral zone as buffer in between. Interestingly, the preamble of this agreement reiterated that the British and Russian Governments guaranteed the independence and territorial integrity of Iran. In fact the independence of Iran had never been in more danger, as these powers now began to collaborate and interfere more overtly in the internal affairs of the country.

The convention soon proved unsatisfactory to Britain and the opportunity was taken in 1915 to revise it. By this means the Russians were promised control of the straits into the Black Sea and Britain got control of the neutral zone in Iran. However this arrangement might have been temporary from the point of view of Britain. Olson writes:

Well before the war the British had begun to accept the idea that their interests in the Middle East and Persian Gulf required a more thorough-going settlement than the Persians as an independent state could be expected to give [. . .] The demands of war, however, temporarily suspended the realization of that intention. Nevertheless, the British conducted their relations in Persia with that idea in mind and studiously avoided making any commitments that would embarrass their intentions after the war.¹²

Without doubt the later actions of the SPR and Sykes vis-à-vis the Iranians might have had this object in mind, something that Farman-Farma seems to have realized gradually.

The First World War changed the status quo. The Democrats, seeing an opportunity to oust the Russians and British, sided with the Germans, who were beginning to take an active role in Iran. The war in fact gave the Democrats a new lease of life, and though by this time they had lost much of their ideological base and organization, they were nevertheless ardent nationalists who opposed all those who cooperated with the Russians or British. In fact, they considered their aims and methods of action to be the only rightful way for Iran to free itself from foreign interference. Therefore they opposed all compromise and attacked those who sided with the 'enemy'. They even resorted to demagoguery and false accusations to have their way.

The idealism of the nationalists was unrealistic. The German promises of help were not or could not be kept. But for the professional politicians who had years of experience dealing with Russia and Britain, things looked different. Ever since the beginning of the nineteenth century when Iranian politicians first came into contact with these two powers, they were obliged to seem to take the side of either

Russia or Britain in order to navigate a path in between. Being realists and fearing confrontation with much stronger adversaries, they opted for compromise and cooperation. In fact Iran's independence was safeguarded by this balancing act. During the war allegiances shifted as Germany became involved in Iranian politics.

Before the war, it was said that Farman-Farma chose to attach himself to the British,¹³ but in fact he was considered pro-Russian.¹⁴ It was during the war that he claimed to be the greatest Anglophile of Iran and openly chose the British side because, as he explained to his eldest son Nusrat al-Daula, 'It was my personal belief that if the Turks or Germans won the war it would be a thousand times worse for Iranians than the English. The Turks would interfere openly with our women and our religion'.¹⁵ However Farman-Farma was too astute and calculating to put all his eggs in one basket. His second son, Salar Lashkar, sided with the nationalists and the Germans, a choice which was probably not made without his father's consent.¹⁶

As far as the Democrats were concerned, Farman-Farma epitomized all that they opposed. He was a rich landowner and related closely to the Qajar ruling family. He enjoyed many privileges, which included lucrative posts such as governorships or ministries. The Democrats attacked him vociferously when he was Governor of Kerman in 1906 and Azerbaijan in 1908.¹⁷ In early 1914 he was criticized for his handling of the elections in Kermanshah.¹⁸ In 1915 he was severely censored as Minister of Interior, which brought about the resignation of the cabinet.¹⁹ The Democrats continued their attacks when he went to Fars, especially because of his cooperation with the British. While the Government of Mirza Hasan Vusuq al-Daula, which was brought into power by British backing,²⁰ and in which Nusrat al-Daula was Minister of Justice, lasted and the SPR grew in strength, Farman-Farma was able to curb the attacks of the Democrats in Fars. However he had less influence in Tehran and the press there did not cease to criticize him.²¹ Besides being the avowed enemy of the Democrats, Farman-Farma, like all the politicians of his time, had enemies and rivals among his peers and it was important to be cautious, which was why he informed the Government of all his acts. Once he wrote to his son Salar Lashkar to warn him, as he put it, of the snakes in his sleeves.²²

The Fars governorship

Farman-Farma's appointment to Fars was the result of a deal between the British representative, Sir Charles Marling, and the Iranian Government. In fact Marling pressed the Government to appoint Farman-Farma, as, from the British perspective, his appointment was very important.²³ They wanted him to stop German activity and influence in Fars, to open the roads to trade, to establish peace and to suppress the tribal insurrections, which were often in favour of the Germans.²⁴ From the point of view of the Iranian Government, Farman-Farma was a trouble-shooter and there was a long precedence of sending him on difficult missions.

An important financial agreement was also concluded between the Iranian Government and the British representative Marling to enable Farman-Farma to

proceed to Fars,²⁵ because the collection of taxes had been interrupted for a long time, due to war and famine.²⁶ In fact Farman-Farma was as dependent on the British as on the Central Government for financial aid, which was given as an advance while the war lasted.

Farman-Farma's appointment met with some resistance by two local magnates, Saulat al-Daula, the *ilkhān* of the Qashqa'i tribe of Fars, and Ibrahim Khan Qavam al-Mulk, the head of the Khamseh tribal confederacy.²⁷ During the past, much of the history of Fars had centered round the kaleidoscopic relationship of Saulat, Qavam, other tribes, the Central Government and the Governor. Since the beginning of German activity during the war and British attempts at combating their influence with the tribes that supported them, the affairs of Fars had taken a more ominous aspect. With the coming of Farman-Farma, who was reputed to be a strong and able administrator, Saulat and Qavam allied to oppose him and his deputy, Sardar Mu'tazid, who had come to Shiraz ahead of him.²⁸ They wrote to the Government expressing fear for their lives and property and stated they would not allow him to proceed to Shiraz.²⁹ However the Government was adamant and insisted that Farman-Farma had been appointed because of certain political considerations between the Government of Iran and the British and therefore he could not be replaced.³⁰ Eventually, the conditions under which Saulat accepted Farman-Farma's governorship were agreed through the mediation of Gough³¹ and Farman-Farma made a triumphant entrance to Shiraz on 15 October 1916.³²

Farman-Farma had no illusions about his appointment, and knew it was going to be difficult. He wrote, 'the conditions of a province which for the last ten years has been in a state of constant revolution, without a governor, and has seen insolence and disobedience, with differences of ideologies, ideas and faction, is obvious'.³³ Despite all that, Farman-Farma, with years of experience as a provincial governor, was quite capable of controlling the situation in Fars. What he probably miscalculated was the inimical *behaviour* and policies of the British, and in particular the machinations that Sykes raised on the local scene. His usual nimbleness in manoeuvring and delaying the requests and interventions of the British interests in favour of the Central Government's, was no longer possible due to the exigencies of the war, not to mention local and national interests that demanded he discharge his responsibilities as a strong governor.

When Sykes arrived in Shiraz a month after Farman-Farma, one of the local religious leaders, Sayyid Tahir, declared publicly that people were not to welcome him to Shiraz. Farman-Farma was in a fix. Consul Gough demanded that the Sayyid should be punished and banished. Reluctantly Farman-Farma ordered him to leave the city, which he did but, with the mediation of the other *ulama*, he was allowed to return. The outcome of this wrangling damaged Farman-Farma's reputation in the eyes of the local inhabitants.³⁴

Sykes's opinion of Farman-Farma, as expressed in his book, was positive³⁵ and he wrote that he thought him to be the ablest man in Iran. He even conceded the difficulty of Farman-Farma's position, but it seems in his reports he gave another

impression, for Denis Wright adds that Sykes had accused him of 'robbing his own people and seeking to profit from Britain's troubles'. Moberly also mentions that Sykes complained of Farman-Farma.³⁶ In his turn Farman-Farma thought Sykes was well disposed towards Iran and, at first, before all the difficulties with him began, he wrote to say Sykes trusted him and they got on well. However gradually Farman-Farma began to complain that Sykes was making many mistakes and he doubted the wisdom of his methods.³⁷ He thought the British could do much better if they took him into their confidence. Once he wrote to Nusrat al-Daula that the obstinacy and suspicions of Sykes were leading to disaster and that he put up with everything and tried to alleviate the general hatred of the British.³⁸ One reason for the difficulties between them was the fact that the SPR's position vis-à-vis the Iranian Government was unclear as Vusuq al-Daula refused to recognize the force³⁹ nor did he give Farman-Farma a direct indication of how to act. In general, Farman-Farma got on better with the Consul, Gough, who in turn did not get on with Sykes. According to Safiri, Sykes had no consideration for local conditions and did not understand the general situation.⁴⁰

One of the first matters of contention between Sykes and Farman-Farma concerned the fate of the German and Austrian prisoners.⁴¹ The Consul demanded that these men should be handed over to him to be transferred to Isfahan, giving as excuse that they were in touch with the Democrats and that they might instigate an uprising. The Government wanted the prisoners be sent to Isfahan under an Iranian escort, but Farman-Farma explained that this was not feasible as the Consul would not accept this arrangement. For a time he did not know how to act or how to reply to the imprisoned Germans' many requests. The German Consul, Zugmeyer, even threatened him, stating that as the Iranian Government was neutral the Governor could not remain unconcerned about their fate, and that the German Government could reciprocate with the same treatment of the Iranian prisoners, and that they should not be handed over to the British. Caught between these threats and the demands of Gough, Farman-Farma procrastinated as long as he could and then, at last, handed over the twenty-two prisoners to Gough who sent them to Isfahan under an Indian escort as he did not trust the Iranian soldiers.⁴² At this time he wrote to his son Salar Lashkar to tell him he should press in Tehran that when the prisoners arrive in Isfahan they should be handed over to the Iranian authorities. He added that if this was successful all the better, otherwise the Government should know he had done all he could in this respect and was not responsible.⁴³

A more difficult problem that concerned Farman-Farma was the relationship between the SPR and the Qashqa'is and their tribal allies. As far as the British were concerned, the control of the road to Bushehr through Kazerun was of great importance for whoever controlled Kazerun controlled the road and the southern port of Bushehr.⁴⁴ Sykes's strategy was to take Kazerun, which was governed by Nasir Divan, an ally of Saulat and the Qashqa'is, but the SPR was not successful in the ensuing fight, and in December 1916 Sykes made his peace with Saulat through the mediation of Farman-Farma.⁴⁵ Saulat agreed to patrol the road for three months and the British were to pay him his expenses. As this arrangement went

over the head of Farman-Farma he was dissatisfied but could do nothing. Moberly accused the Government and Farman-Farma of intrigue and double-dealing.⁴⁶

The arrangement worked during the period agreed to, especially as Vusuq al-Daula under threat and pressure from Marling recognized the force secretly in March 1917.⁴⁷ But Farman-Farma had no illusion about the outcome of the deal and thought the SPR was only playing for time until it became strong enough to attack the Qashqa'is again, which was to prove right.⁴⁸

The Russian Revolution had an important effect on the course of events in Iran. When the Bolsheviks took power in 1917, they renounced the previous policies of the Tsarist Government and unilaterally abrogated the agreements and concessions with Iran, which put the British Government in a bad light compared to Bolshevik Russia. The Government of Vusuq too fell in May 1917,⁴⁹ and Vusuq was replaced by Muhammad Ali Khan Ala al-Saltana who was less well disposed towards the British. In an interesting letter to the Iranian minister in London, he asked him to explain to the British authorities the conditions in Fars, the opposition and the excitement against Sykes which he said left no doubt about the lack of success of the force. 'Sometimes when this force wants to subdue people', he wrote, 'it resorts to such severe measures as murder, looting, demolition and burning. This in turn weakens the position of the SPR and encourages the hatred of the people, and makes the position of the government most difficult'.⁵⁰ Ala and subsequent prime ministers refused to recognize the SPR and considered the force to be existing unlawfully.

The relationship of Farman-Farma and Sykes suffered. On the one hand Farman-Farma had lost the unconditional support of the Government and on the other hand his relationship with Sykes was anything but amicable as once again the position of the SPR vis-à-vis the Government was unresolved. Farman-Farma complained that he was never consulted about anything but, as governor, he had to give his consent to their acts. In general, after the Russian Revolution the relationship of Farman-Farma with the British worsened, for now the British were the only great power left in Iran and could act with more impunity. The result of these developments was to enliven the Democrats who became more active and continued to attack Farman-Farma and the British. In fact the Consul asked Farman-Farma rather rudely to impose censorship. He tried to procrastinate but to no avail, as he was ordered by the Consul to act. In his report to the Government he added that he was grateful that at least the Consul did not ask for the packets of the post to be delivered to the Consulate.⁵¹ Farman-Farma at this time began to fear for his own and his family's safety.⁵² He also expressed his fears to the Government of the consequences of British policy in Fars which, as mentioned, proved right. He also felt that perhaps the military were planning to take over the government of Fars and he asked Gough to warn him if this were to take place so he could retire somewhere in India.⁵³

According to Safiri, the British fell out with Saulat al-Daula, who was provoked to attack the SPR. In addition, Farman-Farma complained that the SPR were arming the Abadeh Brigade and seemingly were preparing for war. He was of the

opinion that the British would provoke a war in order to gain medals and decorations.⁵⁴ The war lasted from May to July. The result was disastrous defeat of the Qashqa'is.⁵⁵ The war was fought in three stages and Farman-Farma left without guidance by the Government as usual, became engaged in the war on the side of the British when the tribes besieged Shiraz. He wrote to Nusrat al-Daula that because of the hatred the SPR engendered and because of their huge expenses they could not continue for long in Fars.

From the first I insisted their system would not work, but they replied that this is our system in India. I screamed that the tribes in Fars possess at least 10000 guns and they have been fighting for the last 20 years, and are used to it, they will not fear 2000 Indian soldiers, but they did not listen to me.⁵⁶

He lamented that he was trying to establish peace and did not sleep more than three hours a night. Some of the actions of the British, such as the arrest of the leaders of the Democrats and the execution of a number of the SPR's Iranian soldiers who had deserted, enhanced the enmity of the people against them, and added to Farman-Farma's unpopularity as expressed in the press.⁵⁷ Independent confirmation of the difficult conditions in Fars can be found in the reports of the *karguzar* (agent of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), who reported that the conditions of Fars were awful, people were under great pressure because of the interference of the British, and that the famine had disturbed people, who sought an excuse to revolt.⁵⁸

Farman-Farma was, however, a resourceful person and the solution he found at the time helped to establish peace. No doubt with the consent of the Government, he bestowed the leadership of the Qashqa'is on Saulat's half brother Ahmad Khan Sardar Ihtisham, as *ilkhana*.⁵⁹ Saulat, whose forces had been decimated by the influenza epidemic, had lost many of his supporters and was obliged to lift the siege of Shiraz and make his way back to Firuzabad, his ancestral home. He was followed there and defeated and his house was looted, but he escaped.⁶⁰

Now Farman-Farma, always a man of peace, took it upon himself to mediate between the British and their enemies,⁶¹ beginning with Saulat, who was the most eminent amongst them. Farman-Farma advised Saulat to be patient while he discussed his case and advised him that when a lion fell in a slippery bowl, he needed to use strategy not force. In fact he was successful and Saulat was allowed to return on condition he did not meddle with the affairs of the tribe.⁶²

The defeat of the Qashqa'is was complete but the position and future of the SPR, which the Iranian Government refused to recognize, remained weak and in doubt. In Shiraz one newspaper after another began attacking Farman-Farma, which was interpreted as an indirect attack on the British and the SPR. He was pressured by Gough into imposing a strict censorship, even arresting the offending editors.⁶³

Since the fall of Vusuq al-Daula in May 1917 none of the Cabinets that had come into power with British backing had proved satisfactory and Marling had

undermined one after another because, from his point of view, they were unsatisfactory. Each succeeding cabinet had listed Iran's demands with a view to the end of the war. These included attendance at the peace conference at the end of the war, a revision of Iran's boundaries, the abrogation of the 1907 convention, the organization of a single military force and the payment of indemnity for war damages.⁶⁴ Eventually Marling's intrigues succeeded and Vusuq al-Daula was reinstated as premier in August 1918.⁶⁵ By then Britain's policy with regards to Iran, now formulated by Lord Curzon, the Acting Foreign Minister, had taken shape and it did not accept these demands. Curzon's policy was based on an arrangement whereby the British would have 'paramount control behind a local façade of independence'. An agreement on this basis was negotiated by the new British Representative Sir Percy Cox and the Government of Iran in August 1919. According to this agreement Britain was to provide Iran with financial and military advisers and with a loan of 2 million pounds.⁶⁶ Some of the other demands of Iran were included in two separate annexes.

The military clauses of the agreement envisaged the formation of a uniform army, and when it was ready and operational the SPR would be included in it. Until that time, British forces would remain in Iran. However, this agreement was never implemented and the fate of the SPR remained in the balance until after the coup d'état of 1921, when the agreement was abrogated by the new government. The SPR was at last disbanded in December 1921.⁶⁷ Sykes had left long before.

Farman-Farma remained in Fars until November 1920. When Vusuq al-Daula's Government fell in July 1920 he could not remain much longer as he faced so much criticism by the Democrats.⁶⁸ To refer again to Denis Wright's article on Farman-Farma, he quotes Herman Norman, the successor of Cox, on how Farman-Farma's rapacity was the cause of his unpopularity, but he does not mention the fact that his unpopularity was mostly due, as Gough put it, to his 'supreme work' for the British.⁶⁹

As mentioned earlier opinions about Farman-Farma's political career in general and about his governorship of Fars in particular vary according to the source. Three events are chosen in order to elaborate on this issue:

1. The financial agreement between the British and Iranian Governments in order to make it possible for Farman-Farma to proceed to Fars.
2. The reasons behind the opposition of Saulat al-Daula and Qavam al-Mulk to Farman-Farma's appointment to Fars.
3. Farman-Farma's plans to impose stability in Fars, and his reasons for giving up this attempt.

1

Denis Wright, diplomat and historian, basing his article on Marling's reports, seems to suggest that Farman-Farma made a deal with the British to boost his own personal interests.⁷⁰ According to these reports, the British Treasury had

accepted to pay Farman-Farma 40,000 tomans a month for three months as an advance to the Government recoverable in due course.⁷¹ Marling duly reported that Farman-Farma told him that as the Iranian Government would want a detailed account of this subsidy and that his enemies in Tehran 'would contrive to get a large portion of the expenditure disallowed', he therefore proposed that the 40,000 tomans should be paid in two parts: 30,000 tomans being recoverable from the Iranian Government and 10,000 tomans, non-recoverable, to be paid direct to him.⁷² Marling added that he feared some of this sum would find its way into Farman-Farma's pocket.

This suggestion, if ever made, could just as easily have come from Farman-Farma or Marling as the British Government had never been averse to such arrangements. Furthermore, this was not a private arrangement between Farman-Farma and the British minister, rather, it was an official agreement between the Government of Iran and the British representative. Of course we have no proof as to whether in fact Farman-Farma received such a sum or not, but the existing documents pertaining to this arrangement indicate that he received 60,000 tomans for the first two months and, thereafter, 50,000 tomans a month. Perhaps the extra 10,000 tomans was paid privately for the first two months.

According to Iranian sources, the first letter exchanged between the Iranian Government and Marling about this deal was dated 29 Sha'ban 1334. It stipulated that, in order for Farman-Farma's appointment to succeed, the British Government agreed to help financially with the understanding that the Iranian Government would repay it as soon as it was possible to collect the taxes in Fars, or from other sources.⁷³ The sum agreed upon was to be 30,000 tomans a month. In fact 60,000 tomans were paid in Zhi al-hijja/October 1916.⁷⁴ But in the same month, this allowance was increased to 50,000 tomans. However, Denis Wright, who studied this question, makes a vague reference to the amount being paid for three years, 'with some changes in the sum'.⁷⁵ Marling in fact agreed to this larger sum which was paid to Farman-Farma by the Imperial Bank.⁷⁶ Marling further stipulated that in order that this sum should be spent for the intended purpose, the expenditure would be controlled by the British Consul. Denis Wright, however, doubted whether the Consul actually examined these accounts,⁷⁷ by which he seemed to insinuate that Farman-Farma might have made a personal profit thereby.

2

There are two versions of the reasons for the opposition to Farman-Farma's appointment to Fars. Safiri, basing her research on the views of Sykes, writes that Farman-Farma had asked Saulat al-Daula for 50,000 tomans to appoint him *ilkhān*, and that the latter had refused. Consequently, Saulat begun to intrigue against Farman-Farma.⁷⁸

Farman-Farma, on the other hand, had a different version of the affair. He wrote to the Premier that when he had met Saulat, the latter told him that the British owed him 60,000 tomans for his help to prepare a force for them, but they had only paid

him 20,000. Therefore he asked Farman-Farma to help him obtain the remaining sum promising to pay him 10,000. Farman-Farma had refused and had advised Saulat not to push his claim. He added that he had told this to the British, and that was probably why Saulat opposed him.⁷⁹ In fact Saulat al-Daula was persuaded eventually to agree to Farman-Farma's governorship, and an agreement was signed stating the conditions under which he could proceed to Shiraz. Qavam no doubt accepted the same and Farman-Farma was allowed to enter Shiraz, where he was greeted by the people with enthusiasm, if the reports of the papers are accurate.

3

The last example to illustrate the point mentioned above concerns the establishment of peace and stability in Fars. The province had always suffered from predatory raids by well-armed mounted tribesmen who attacked, pillaged and looted whole villages. The Government's policy was to retaliate in kind and to attack the tribesmen and make them pay or return the looted property. Farman-Farma, on the order of the Government, had organized a force to punish the unruly tribes. However, he decided against this act for, as he explained to his son, certain rumours went round that he wanted to do so for his own benefit, and he accused the British of spreading these rumours.⁸⁰ Moberly, the official historian of the British operations in Iran during the war, who often misrepresented the facts, suggests that there were grounds for supposing, however, that Farman-Farma's real reasons were of a more personal nature.⁸¹

The view of Sykes was that they should attack the tribes by quick military action, whereas Farman-Farma, more aware of the local conditions and the unpopularity of such acts, was of the opinion that the way to pacify them was to punish them only if they engaged in looting.⁸²

It is clear that the purpose of this defamation campaign against Farman-Farma was to enhance the strength and control of the SPR in Fars and replace the authority of Farman-Farma and the Iranian Government with that of the SPR. This is evident from the fact that when he gave up his plan, the SPR took over the task of combating the tribes. By doing so they occasioned the hatred of the people, especially as it was reported that the Indian soldiers looted the villages.⁸³

There were many other issues of contention with the British, which are reflected in Farman-Farma's correspondence. For example, at the end of the war, Farman-Farma, who was always very careful about his personal relationship with the British, had a disagreement with them over his estate in Daleki near Bushehr. This illustrates to a certain point the essence of the relationship. Oil had been found in Daleki, which had naturally attracted the interest of the British. When peace returned, Farman-Farma wished to send his own overseer there, but the British Consul in Bushehr opposed him strongly and put up a different candidate. Farman-Farma resisted for a time, though as he put it his 'hysteries' had been stirred, but he gave up, for as he explained to his son, 'after all I have done to strengthen our relationship, see what they do and what they intend'. In another letter he wrote:

'after all the trouble I have taken on the behalf of the English, I cannot appoint my own servants because their political aim is very important here, they do not want anyone to interfere'. He concluded that: 'I realized that either I had to break my relationship with them over this, or according to the law of nature, which obliges the weak to submit to the strong, accept, which I did'.⁸⁴

Conclusion

The operations of the SPR did not improve the condition of Fars, and raids and fighting among the tribes continued. It was even said that the presence of the force increased insecurity. On the other hand, Safiri, who has made the best study of the SPR, writes that this force helped the British to set up thinly disguised control over southern Iran, but after the conclusion of the 1919 Agreement its existence became of less importance.⁸⁵

As far as Farman-Farma was concerned his relationship with the British was only one aspect of his government of Fars.⁸⁶ There were many more problems facing him and the situation was much more complex than appears from the British documents, which, by their nature, concentrate on matters of importance to them.

In Fars, Farman-Farma dealt with difficult and contradictory situations. Thus assessing him without understanding his personality, aims, and motives, the antagonisms he faced, the possibilities he had, and the solutions he found, and separating him from his contemporaries and his circumstances, is to misjudge him and simplify a complex situation.

Farman-Farma often likened himself to a seasoned wrestler who hit the ground at times. Though he was cautious, he did not flinch from danger and never turned down acceptance of risky appointments or avoided taking unpopular decisions. No doubt he welcomed the governorship of Fars and he might have pulled strings in order to obtain it. He was well aware of the difficulties of Fars and was not particularly worried by the criticisms of the Democrats of his cooperation with the British but, as mentioned earlier, he did not reckon on the unpopularity of the SPR or the British policy in southern Iran. As the representative of the Government he had to safeguard Iran's interests, and if they ran counter to those of the British and he had to withhold his countenance, they retaliated by accusing him of malpractice, a well-known method of defamation policy used by the British authorities as a means of justifying their acts.

Once when Farman-Farma was at his wits end over what to do, this is what he wrote to one of his sons: 'There is no one else more stupid than I, it is not clear why and for whom and to what end I am doing all this, and why I am struggling so'.⁸⁷ Therefore the question arises as to why he did not resign. When he had met with opposition on his way to Fars, he had this to say about himself: 'I do not insist on retaining this post, on the contrary I am upset by all these unexpected events. However, it must be taken into consideration that my house and belongings and life is not situated in some desert, so that I can be fearless, rather all I have is in

Tehran, I cannot disobey the government'.⁸⁸ So perhaps this is one reason why he retained his post despite all the difficulties and vicissitudes confronting him.

Notes

1. J. Luckaks, *Churchill, Visionary, Statesman, Historian* (New Haven, Conn. 2002), p. 21.
2. For more information on German activities in Iran during the War, see U. Gehrke, *Pish bih su-yi sharq, Iran dar siyasat-i sharqi-yi Alman dar jang-i jahan-i avval*, trans. P. Sadri (Tehran 1377).
3. In August 1916, Muhammad Vali Khan Sipahdar, the Iranian Premier, enacted an agreement with the Russians and British by which the Iranian Government accepted the establishment of a mixed commission to control the fund advanced to the Government, the expansion of the Cossack Brigade and the establishment of a British officered force in the south. W. J. Olson, *Anglo-Iranian Relations during World War I* (London 1984), p. 145.

It should be noted that this agreement had been suggested to Farman-Farma when he was Premier but he had refused to sign it. M. Q. Hidayat, Mukhbir al-Saltana, *Khatirat va Khatarat* (Tehran 1344), p. 290.

4. The best study of the SPR was undertaken by Florida Safiri in her Ph.D. thesis, entitled *South Persia Rifles*, which was translated and published in Iran. Safiri made use of the British as well as Iranian documents and interviewed a number of people who had participated in the action in Fars. F. Safiri, *Pulis-i junub-i Iran*, SPR, trans. M. Ettehadieh (Nezam Mafi) and M. Jafari Fesharaki (Tehran 1364).
5. Since 1894 Sykes had traveled around Iran six times and there was no part of the country he had not visited. In 1894 he was Consul General in Kerman where he met Farman-Farma, who was Governor at the time. In 1898 he set up the consulate in Seistan and in 1905 till 1913 he was Consul in Khorasan.
6. Perhaps no other personality of the period has suffered so much accusation of complicity with the British at the hands of Iranian historians as Farman-Farma. However, it should be pointed out that no good scholarly biography of Farman-Farma, nor indeed other politicians, exists. What has been written is often repetitive and based on secondary sources, with few or no references to the official Iranian documents. It is interesting to note, however, the fascination a number of writers who have used him as a fictitious personality in books and television serials have had for Farman-Farma's personality.
7. It should be added that the accusatory remarks concerning Iranian politicians made by British officials in their reports are not limited to Farman-Farma. Others, such as Mukhbir al-Saltana, Vusuq al-Daula, Nusrat al-Daula, to cite just a few, have fared just as badly.
8. There is no independent study of Farman-Farma in English, except the article by Denis Wright, so that here reference is often made to his article. Wright, a diplomat and historian, bases his article solely on the British sources, which are disparaging to Farman-Farma, and is an example of the limitations of a scholarship that depends on one set of documents. 'Prince Abdul-Husayn Mirza Farman-Farma, Notes from British Sources', published in *Iran*, 38 (2000), pp. 107-14.

Beside this article Farman-Farma also features in general books about the history of Iran and its relationship with the British. One contemporary study of the war in Iran was undertaken by James Moberly, entitled *Operations in Persia*. He has a much more negative view of Iran and the Iranian politicians than even British representatives, such as Sir Charles Marling, Sir Percy Sykes or Sir Percy Cox, and sometimes he misrepresents the facts. Interestingly, this book, part of a series of official books on

the British history of the war, was ready in 1927, but was treated as confidential and was not released until 1989. J. Moberly, *Operations in Persia, 1914–1919* (London 1989).

Sykes, who had often met and knew Farman-Farma personally, is laudatory about him in his two books, though not it seems in his reports. P. Sykes, *A History of Persia* (London 1930), p. 373. P. Sykes, *Dah hizar mile dar Iran*, trans. Hosein Saadat Nuri (Tehran 1336), pp. 106–7.

Antony Wynn has also made a recent study of the political life of Sykes and emphasizes the good relationship between Farman-Farma and Sykes. They met when Sykes was travelling in Kerman in the winter of 1893 and Farman-Farma was Governor of the province. The friendship lasted when Sykes became Consul General in Kerman two years later. This friendship was sorely tried, however, during the First World War, as is evident from existing reports. Wynn's study suffers from the same disadvantages of other such studies that are solely based on one set of documents, namely the British documents, without referring to existing Iranian sources, which would give a somewhat different perspective. A. Wynn, *Persia in the Great Game: Sir Percy Sykes, Explorer, Consul, Soldier, Spy* (London 2003).

Olson's study of Anglo-Iranian relations during the First World War (cited above) is the most objective and well-researched book on this particular topic. He has studied both Iranian and British sources, and has a scholarly approach and a balanced argument.

9. M. Ettehadieh and S. Sa'dvandian, eds, *Guzida-yi az majmu'a-yi asnad-i Abd al-Husain Mirza Farman Farma, 1325–1340 HQ* (Tehran 1366).
10. For more information see M. Ettehadieh, *Paidayish va tahavvul-i ahzab-i siyasi-yi mashrutiyat, dar daura-yi yakum va duvum-i majlis-i shaura-yi milli* (Tehran 1381).
11. At the beginning of the constitutional revolution in 1906, a number of radicals inspired and led by those of Baku began to organize a political party. In 1910, when the second Majlis was constituted, their members entered the Majlis as Democrats. This was a socialist party and opposed the two powers of Russia and Britain. Many of the newspapers of this period supported the Democrats' ideas, which also deeply influenced historical scholarship. In their dealings with the Iranian politicians and political parties, the British and Russians either ignored them or doubted their genuineness and sincerity.
12. Olson, *Anglo-Iranian Relations*, pp. 18, 63, 172.
13. Wright points out that Sykes boasted of Farman-Farma's friendship and the ascendancy he had gained over him, which is probably a product of Sykes's imagination, as Farman-Farma was too good a player at this game to be taken in by a junior officer in a minor post.
14. Most of Farman-Farma's lands and properties were located in Azerbaijan and Asadabad, which were in the Russian zone of influence. Therefore, it was often said that he was pro-Russian. He personally was of the opinion that he and his sons should try and remain on good terms with the Russians for this reason. Farman-Farma, *Asnad*, Vol. II, p. 738.
15. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 532.
16. In view of the German and Turkish activities in southern and western Iran, Russian forces marched on Tehran in November 1915. Their opponents were obliged to leave the capital and make their way to Qum but, being in danger of encirclement by the Russians, they marched to Isfahan and thence to Kermanshah. In the meantime, Reza Quli Khan Nizam al-Saltana, the Governor of Luristan, had sided with the Germans and Turks and had organized an army. The nationalists, now known as *muhajirin*, joined Nizam al-Saltana and his war efforts, but they were defeated and had to flee to Iraq in Ottoman territory. Salar Lashkar, the son of Farman-Farma, was Nizam's

- son-in-law, and he chose to follow the *muhajirin* into exile. M. Ettehadieh, *Riza Quli Khan Nizam al-Saltana* (Tehran 1379), Vol. I, pp. 139, 159.
17. Farman-Farma's family had governed for a long time in Kerman, which was divided between several rival factions, some with religious functions. The revolution in 1906 politicized these factions. Farman-Farma, as Governor, was the target of the radicals who agitated from Tehran. His appointment as Governor to Azerbaijan was also resisted on the grounds that he was not favourable to the revolution, though later he was welcomed by the revolutionary Anjuman (society) of Tabriz. See *Ruznama-yi sur-i Israfil* (Tehran 1361), passim; also A. Kasravi, *Tarikh-i mahsrutiyat-yi Iran* (Tehran 1369), p. 427.
 18. In March 1914 Farman-Farma was accused of tampering with the elections in favour of the moderate party and against the Democrats. M. Ettehadieh, *Ahzaab-i siyasi dar majlis-i sivum*, 1333–1334 (Tehran 1371), p. 89.
 19. Raouf Bey, the Turkish commander, invaded western Iran in April 1915, but next month, after a change of cabinet in which Farman-Farma was Minister of the Interior, the Democrats censured him on the basis that he had not done enough to stop the Turkish incursion, which led to the resignation of the whole cabinet. *Nau Bahar*, 4, 39, 3 Jamadi al-avval 1333; and *Asr-i Jadid*, year 1, no. 4, 19 Sha'ban 1333; Olson, *Anglo-Iranian Relations*, pp. 91–2.
 20. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
 21. For instance, it was said that he helped the British and received money from them. See the article in *Sida-yi Iran*, entitled 'The South is Burning', which gave some information about the war and asked people not to be deceived. *Sida-yi Iran*, year 1, no. 67, 6 Muharram 1336. See also *Kaukab-i Iran*, year 3, no. 1, 13 Ramazan 1335; *Sitara-yi Iran*, 56 (a hard copy of the article in this paper is included amongst the documents of the Foreign Ministry but has no date). Farman-Farma had asked the Ministry to remonstrate with the paper, but his request does not seem to have been executed). *Sida-yi Iran*, year 1, no. 67, 6 Muharram 1336.
 22. Farman-Farma *Asnad*, Vol. I, pp. 290–8.
 23. *Asr-i Jadid*, year 3, no. 3, 29 Muharram 1334 claims they awarded him the St Michael Cross. Wright mentions that he was made GCMG.
 24. Gehrke, *Pish bih su-yi sharq*, Vol. I, passim.
 25. MFA 13 and Asnad Melli no. 240/66/66/5.
 26. At the end of the war there was widespread famine all over Iran, but it was worst in Fars, due to years of drought, locusts and war. One of the most important tasks of Farman-Farma on arriving in Shiraz was to deal with this question. He tried to import wheat from Isfahan, which was not successful. He was promised wheat from Karachi, which did not arrive quickly enough. His only resort was to distribute bread, which was made from a mixture of barley and maize and cooked over a fire rather than in an oven. This was called *nan-i taba*. He organized a commission, of which the members were chosen by vote, to oversee the distribution of this bread to the poor from seven centres in Shiraz. He also organized groups of people to gather the locust larva in the country. Farman-Farma has been accused by Sykes, amongst others things, of hoarding wheat, whereas the newspapers reported that it was the SPR that was collecting all the wheat available in Fars. In fact the local people considered the force responsible for part of the famine. Before leaving Tehran, Farman-Farma, expecting this to happen, had discussed it with the British minister and had insisted that the SPR should provide its own supplies. *Sitara-yi Iran*, no. 48, 7 Zhi al-hijja 1335; *Fars*, year 2, no. 28, 29 Rajab 1335, and no. 4, 26 Muharram 1336; *Iran*, year 4, no. 608, 10 Jamadi al-avval 1338, and no. 611, 15 Jamadi al-avval 1338; *Ra'd*, year 11, no. 6, 16 Rajab 1338; Safiri, *Pulis-i junub*, p. 132; MFA Box no. 48, File no. 30 and File no. 1; and Farman-Farma, *Asnad*, Vol. I, pp. 341–8 and 398.

27. P. Oberling, *The Qashqa'i Tribes of Fars* (The Hague 1974), pp. 113–47.
28. Originally Sardar Mu'tazid had been welcomed in Shiraz as reported by the newspaper *Ra'd*. Soon, however, for reasons that are not very clear, resistance against him began, and Consul Gough insisted he should resign and leave Shiraz. It was alleged that he had extorted money, but later resistance against Farman-Farma continued, which makes one doubt that the real reason for the opposition to Sardar Mu'tazid was not so much his extortion of money, but inherent opposition to all government control and officialdom. *Ra'd*, year 7, no. 195, 9 Sha'ban 1334, and Farman-Farma, *Asnad*, Vol. I, p. 384; and MFA Box no. 48, File no. 30.
29. MFA Box no. 48, File no. 27 and File no. 30.
30. Ibid.
31. MFA Box no. 48, File no. 16.
32. *Asr-i Jadid*, 3, 16, 12 Zhi al-hijja 1334.
33. Farman-Farma *Asnad*, Vol. I, p. 398.
34. MFA Box no. 48, File no. 8.
35. Sykes, *History of Persia*, Vol. I, p. 503.
36. Wright, 'Prince Abdul-Husayn Mirza', p. 111 and Moberly, *Operations*, p. 293.
37. MFA Box no. 48, File no. 8 and Farman-Farma, *Asnad*, Vol. I, pp. 291–8.
38. Often the *Karguzar*'s reports corroborated those of Farman-Farma. At this time he wrote that the *behaviour* of the British minister in Tehran differed from British *behaviour* in Fars. The Embassy had agreed to pay an indemnity to the victims of the war, but the British authorities in Fars had laughed and refused to pay. MFA Box no. 48, File no. 14.
39. Olson, *Anglo-Iranian Relations*, pp. 170–1.
40. Safiri, *Pulis-i junub*, pp. 247, 269, 258.
41. For more information on the circumstances of these prisoners, see Gehrke, *Pish bih su-yi sharq*, Vol. I, pp. 342–8; also Farman-Farma, *Asnad*, Vol. I, pp. 264–82.

There were other nationals amongst the prisoners: Afghans, Ottoman Turks and a number of Iranians. In the case of the Iranians, Farman-Farma did his best to mediate and to obtain their pardon, which the British granted reluctantly. An interesting development in this regard was the idea of the British Consul to obtain a fine and to use its proceeds for charitable deeds towards the prisoners (presumably through Farman-Farma). There were occasional rumours that Farman-Farma was making a profit from this. He wrote a letter to the Premier denying it, saying that most of the prisoners were so poor that, when they were released, he had to pay them their fare home from his own pocket. He added that the rumours were false and that everything was done with the knowledge of the Consul.

I swear on your life and on holy Mekka and Medina, I have no intention of making a dinar from these fines. I don't say I am Salman, but I tell you these days conditions in this country stand in the way of personal profit for anyone who respects his own good name. Besides, the Consul, the vice Consul and all the personnel of the Consulate, oversee everything of importance. I would never wish to make myself ridiculous even as much as the tip of a needle.

- MFA Box no. 48, File no. 7.
42. MFA Box no. 48, File no. 4.
43. Farman-Farma, *Asnad*, Vol. I, pp. 282–98.
44. Safiri, *Pulis-i junub*, p. 133.
45. MFA Box no. 48, File no. 16.
46. Moberly, *Operations*, pp. 46, 291; and Safiri, *Pulis-i junub*, p. 236.

47. One way of putting pressure on the Government was to threaten to cut the sum paid by Britain as a moratorium. Olson, *Anglo-Iranian Relations*, pp. 87, 175–6.
48. MFA Box no. 48, File no. 27.
49. Olson, *Anglo-Iranian Relations*, pp. 174–7.
50. MFA Box no. 48, File no. 8.
51. MFA Box no. 48, File no. 30.
52. Even before proceeding to Fars, Farman-Farma was aware of the dangers involved in his siding with the British. Wright mentions that when war was going badly for the allies in 1918, Farman-Farma enquired what his fate would be in case of the collapse of Iran. Sometime later he made his own request and asked for 40,000 tomans a year in compensation for his lost estates in Azerbaijan and Asadabad, which were in the war zone, and for the loss of their income. He also asked the British Government for a guarantee of his life, property and honour and that of his family if forced to leave Iran, and a grant of property in British territory. Though these demands were seriously discussed by the British Government, Farman-Farma was unable to extract a firm commitment. Wright, 'Prince Abd ul-Husayn Mirza', p. 111.
53. Farman-Farma, *Asnad*, Vol. II, pp. 544–6.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 547.
55. Safiri, *Pulis-i junub*, p. 232–3; and MFA Box no. 48, File no. 14.
56. Farman-Farma, *Asnad*, Vol. II, pp. 674–5.
57. *op. cit.*, p. 244. It is interesting to note that the British generally treated these reports as misinformation. MFA Box no. 48, File no. 14.
58. *Ibid.*
59. Safiri, *Pulis-i junub*, pp. 243–7, 263, footnote 44; and Farman-Farma, *Asnad*, Vol. II, pp. 546–7.
60. Safiri, *Pulis-i junub*, p. 246.
61. Farman-Farma, *Asnad*, Vol. II, pp. 551–2, 572–3, 681–9, 705.
62. *Ibid.*, pp. 712–13.
63. In fact Farman-Farma was blamed for everything: famine, hoarding of grain, cooperation with the British, the war, etc. Some newspapers, however, defended Farman-Farma. For instance one paper wrote that as Farman-Farma would not recognize the force, Sykes had gone to Tehran to complain against him. *Sida-yi Iran*, year 1, no. 32, 3 Shavval 1335; also *Rahnama*, year 2, no. 33, Shavval 1338, and 28 Zhi al-hijja; also *Sida-yi Tehran*, year 1, no. 51, 6 Shavval 1338.
64. Olson, *Anglo-Iranian Relations*, pp. 220–1.
65. *Ibid.*, pp. 205–6.
66. *Ibid.*, pp. 224–45.
67. Safiri, *Pulis-i junub*, pp. 251–5.
68. Farman-Farma had many enemies and rivals, and was unpopular in Fars. Besides his connection to the British, which was the main cause of dissatisfaction, his other policies, to cite only two, occasioned criticism. The election to the Fourth Majlis was very unpopular as it was connected to the 1919 Agreement. The Agreement had to be ratified by the Majlis before it would become lawful, and Curzon pressed Vusuq al-Daula to finish the elections, and he in turn put pressure on the provincial governors to return deputies in favour of the agreement. The deputies who were elected at this time, and they included those of Fars, became known as the deputies of the Agreement. They were unpopular, and the governors, including Farman-Farma, incurred much criticism as a consequence.

The other instance of dissatisfaction against Farman-Farma concerned his attempts to collect taxes in Fars. As the country was badly devastated, he asked the Government for a remission of the taxes in Fars. This was refused by the Government, and Farman-Farma's attempts at collecting the long overdue taxes were futile, and cost him his

popularity, which was shaky at best. *Rahnama* year 2, no. 36, 5 Zhi al-qa'da 1338; *Ra'd*, year 2, no. 36, 23 Rabi' al-avval 1338; MFA Box no. 48, File no. 3.

69. Wright, 'Abdul-Husayn Mirza', pp. 111, 113.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 112. Wright gives a breakdown of the sums paid to Farman-Farma under this agreement. About the non-recoverable sum he writes,

There is a certain amount of mystery, perhaps understandably, about the non-recoverable payments made direct via the Imperial Bank and the legation to F.F. The original 10,000 tomans soon became 11,000 tomans monthly, while in 1918 and 1919 there are references to 12,000 tomans, though the reimbursements claimed each month by the Imperial bank remained constant at 11,000. Perhaps the additional 1000 tomans came from H.M. Minister's Secret Service funds.

72. *Ibid.*

73. *Sazman-i Asnad-i Milli*, no. 240/66/66/6.

74. *Ibid.*, no. 240/66/66/9.

75. Wright, 'Abdul-Husayn Mirza', p. 112.

76. *Sazman-i Asnad-i Milli*, no. 240/66/66/7.

77. Wright, 'Abdul-Husayn Mirza', p. 112.

78. Safiri, *Pulis-i junub*, p. 49.

79. MFA Box no. 48, File no. 30. Governors had the power to appoint the *il Khan*, but it had to be approved by the Government, and the Shah, who made it official by issuing a *farma* (royal command).

80. Farman-Farma, *Asnad*, Vol. I, pp. 316–17.

81. Moberly, *Operations*, p. 262.

82. Sykes, *History of Persia*, Vol. II, p. 471.

83. K. Bayat, ed., *Iran va jang-i avval, asnad-i vizarat-i dakhila* (Tehran 1381), pp. 246–59.

84. Farman-Farma, *Asnad*, Vol. II, pp. 674–5.

85. Safiri, *Pulis-i junub*, pp. 283–6.

86. While in Fars, Farman-Farma engaged in pacifying the warring tribes, restoring order, and reforming the administration, which had all but disintegrated. He reorganized the judiciary, the department of education, health and a small local military force. He also repaired some of the buildings that had suffered in the fighting, the most important being the Ark or citadel. He engaged in philanthropic work, as was his habit in most of his governorships, and set up an efficient famine relief. A recent article has been written about his *auqaf*, endowments by M. Ettehadieh and G. R. Salami, 'Mauqufat- va khadamat-i 'am al-manfa'a-yi Abd al-Husain Mirza Farman-Farma', *Vaqf, Mirath-i Javidan*, 10, Spring 1381, pp. 47–62.

87. Farman-Farma, *Asnad*, I, p. 319.

88. MFA Box no. 48, File no. 30.

BRITAIN, THE IRANIAN MILITARY AND THE RISE OF REZA KHAN

Stephanie Cronin

Since the early nineteenth century, Britain had sporadically involved itself in Iranian attempts at military modernization. During the years of the constitutional period and the First World War, this involvement deepened and became more complex and of fundamental significance for the country's political future. The account that follows examines Britain's relationship with the various elements of Iran's military forces in the period 1910–21, focusing particularly on the political circumstances which produced the coup d'état of 1921 under a leader, Reza Khan, drawn from one of these forces, the Cossack Division. Central to this relationship was a paradox: although Britain had been instrumental in founding one 'reformed' military force, the Government Gendarmerie, this force evolved in a strongly nationalist direction and turned against its imperial masters, while it was the Russian-sponsored Cossack Division, of which the British had always been profoundly suspicious, that was ultimately to provide General Ironside with a corps suitable for nurturing as the incubator of a new national leadership.

The Government Gendarmerie

Britain provided much of the impetus for the foundation, in 1910 by the second Majlis, of the Government Gendarmerie and, from the very beginning of its life, the force benefited from British financial support and political patronage. Throughout the nineteenth century, the need for a centralized, efficient military force, an army organized along European lines, had been a constant preoccupation of Iranian reformers, and, with the establishment of constitutional government in 1906–7, demands for the formation of such a force were made repeatedly and with increasing urgency. As well as growing domestic awareness of the necessity for the formation of a corps capable of maintaining internal security, the Iranian Government in these years also came under intense pressure from Britain. As provincial disorder had increased with the slow collapse of the central authorities,

the British Government had demanded, ever more insistently, that some kind of force be set up that could provide protection for trade, particularly in the south of the country. Britain made this a condition of any further financial loans and threatened that, if order were not restored on the southern roads, they would themselves raise and officer a force.

Finally, in 1910, as part of a general programme of reform, the Majlis voted for the establishment of the Government Gendarmerie and, the following May, approved a Swedish military mission to lead the force, Sweden being an acceptable source of foreign officers as it had a tradition of neutrality and was considered a minor power.¹ The Swedes began their work at the end of 1911, taking over the Iranian officers and men of Morgan Shuster's recently disbanded Treasury Gendarmerie.² Between 1911 and 1914 the Gendarmerie made steady progress, gradually consolidating its position and extending its influence over an ever-widening radius from Tehran. Numerical and organizational growth was consistent. By the end of 1913 there were thirty-six Swedish officers and nearly 6,000 Iranian officers and men.³ By 1914 seven regiments had been established, two headquartered at Tehran, the remainder at Shiraz, Kerman, Qazvin, Isfahan and Borujerd, and the Commandant, General Hjalmarson, was planning to raise the force to 12,000. Naturally the Gendarmerie's budget requirements grew accordingly and were met, in this period, largely out of loans from Britain and Russia. Initial mistakes in recruiting were ironed out, and a system instituted of training enlisted men at regimental headquarters, while flourishing NCOs' and officers' schools were established at Tehran.⁴ The Swedish officers accomplished much in terms of popularizing the force among potential recruits by ensuring that, in contrast to the practice prevailing in traditional Iranian military formations, pay was issued regularly and in full, and the Commandant, Hjalmarson, took particular care to conciliate in various ways the *ulama*, who remained well disposed towards the force. The merchants in the capital and in provincial towns such as Isfahan, for whose business security on the trade routes was essential, held the gendarmes in high regard. Indeed the Gendarmerie was quickly becoming a focus of Iranian national aspirations, and the official classes in the capital in particular had high hopes of the force's future.⁵

In its early years the major provincial effort of the force was directed, under British pressure, towards the south, the towns and roads of Fars and Kerman. Here the intrusion of a new and independent authority inevitably alienated the established powers, especially the tribal khans, even where these were pro-British. For example, Qavam al-Mulk, head of the Khamseh and a powerful figure in Shiraz, steadfastly although unsuccessfully opposed the implantation of the Gendarmerie in Fars. Indeed, Qavam's unrelenting and implacable hostility to the gendarmes, which was apparent from the moment of their arrival, was to be an important factor in provincial politics for years to come.

Both in Tehran and in the south the gendarmes were heavily dependent on official British patronage and protection, the British legation in Tehran being particularly useful in extracting cooperation from a fearful and sometimes reluctant

central Government. In the capital itself, the crucial nature of the support provided by Britain was evident in the crisis of 1913 resulting from the Gendarmerie's determination to evict the armed Bakhtiari who had been present there since their arrival as restorers of the constitution in 1909. So serious was this crisis that the Gendarmerie's very survival was in doubt. It might have perished had it not been for the British legation's insistence that the cabinet, which was wavering dangerously, stand by the gendarmes.⁶

In addition to the predictable hostility of those, such as the tribal khans, whose traditional position and interests were threatened by the development of a modern state force, the Gendarmerie also faced other opposition in this period. Certain nationalist elements considered the force tainted by the support, both political and financial, that it received from Britain and viewed the extension of its control as synonymous with a growth in British influence.

British financial and political support was crucial to the Gendarmerie in these years. British insistence that the Iranian Government act to restore security on the southern trade routes had provided a powerful impetus to the establishment of the force, loans from Britain and Russia financed the force and the intervention of the British legation in the capital had been vital to the survival of the Gendarmerie during its attempts to disarm the Bakhtiari in 1913. Acknowledgement of British support led to the Gendarmerie initially devoting most of its attention to southern Iran.

As the Gendarmerie grew, however, it attempted to expand into areas considered part of the Russian zone under the terms of the Anglo-Russian convention of 1907, thus provoking increasing Russian suspicions. By early 1914 the Russian minister, Korostovetz, was declaring that the Swedish officers did not enjoy the confidence of the Russian Government, which did not wish to see the scope of their duties extended in the north of Iran.⁷ Particularly serious was the fact that by 1914 the Russian Government had begun to develop plans according to which the Cossack Brigade would be increased and used exclusively in the northern zone, while the Gendarmerie would be reserved for the southern and neutral zones, thus contributing to the likelihood of the country's eventual partition. Although the gendarmes had been operating in Qazvin, in the Russian zone, almost since their foundation, British commercial interests were strong in that area and provided a powerful source of backing for the force. This support was absent in other parts of the Russian zone, such as Tabriz, Rasht and Mashhad, where Russia was supreme commercially as well as politically, and where in fact the Gendarmerie was unable to organize itself until after the Russian Revolution.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, by 1914 the Gendarmerie already constituted a wholly new development in Iranian military and political experience. But perhaps its most original single feature resided in the human resources that it mobilized, specifically the progress that it made in assembling and consolidating an Iranian officer corps. Many of the Iranians who became officers in the Gendarmerie were, in contrast to the officer corps of older Iranian military formations, drawn from relatively high social strata. In his memoirs, Captain Nyström recalled that from

an early date the officers' college had been obliged to accept some cadets because of their being close relatives of the Shah or some powerful noble.⁸ In keeping with their social status, the Iranian gendarme officers were, on the whole, well educated. Some had, on their own initiative, acquired education and military training abroad, the Military College in Istanbul being the most popular destination, although a few also went to St Cyr in France or to institutions in Austria and Germany, while others had received their schooling in Iran and their military training in the well-organized Gendarmerie colleges. Many spoke a foreign language, usually French. Naturally an officer corps constructed from such material would have considerable prestige within wider society. Morale was high among the officers and an *esprit de corps* well established. Discipline was strictly enforced and, as General Hasan Arfa later commented, the young officers commissioned after training were 'keen and conscious of their standing and prestige as officers'.⁹

The construction of the Government Gendarmerie had originally been undertaken partly in response to British pressure and, in these early years, the force was always assured of British support. The outbreak of the First World War, however, with its radical political realignments and polarization, marked a watershed in the development of the Gendarmerie.

Although Iran declared its neutrality, the circumstances of the early years of the war had a profound effect on the force, both organizationally and politically. One immediate consequence of the outbreak of war was that the Swedish Government decided that all its officers who were still on the active list of the Swedish army must return home. This produced a serious weakening of the Swedish command structure of the force but also allowed the senior Iranian officers to assume greater responsibility and authority. Another important effect of the war was financial. Up until 1914 the Gendarmerie's ever-growing financial needs had been met largely out of loans from Britain and Russia and no sound method of funding the force from internal resources had been established. The war severely disrupted the Iranian Government's already limited ability to pay for the force, and by early 1915 the situation of the Gendarmerie was desperate, salaries were in arrears and even rations were running out.¹⁰ Nonetheless a British offer to finance the Fars Gendarmerie until the end of the war was declined by the Swedes at Shiraz themselves on political grounds, and it was at this point that the Gendarmerie appears to have turned to German sources for money.¹¹

But perhaps the most significant effect of the war was to be found in the growing politicization of the Iranian officer corps of the Gendarmerie and in its new activism in cooperation with the Democrats and nationalists in the arena of national politics. Notwithstanding its patronage by Britain and the suspicion that this engendered in certain nationalist circles, the Gendarmerie had, from its birth, always been clearly identified with Iranian constitutionalism and the struggle for national unity and independence. In 1914 Hasan Arfa had described the force as 'national-minded' and as having been, upon its foundation in 1911, 'the backbone of the new Iranian constitutional regime'.¹² The officer corps of the Gendarmerie seemed to attract young Iranians who were sympathetic to the constitutional

movement and who wished to see reform and progress in their country, and this milieu constituted a favourable environment for the development of a radical political consciousness that found concrete expression in adherence to the Democrat Party. Indeed it seems that the officer-training schools of the Gendarmerie were targeted by the Democrats as fertile ground for propaganda and they insinuated teachers into these schools in the hope of spreading their ideas and broadening their support. In their support for the Democrats and nationalists during the First World War, therefore, the Government gendarmes were continuing to give expression to the political tradition established in their corps since its foundation.

During the early months of the war, the Gendarmerie decisively shook off its association with Britain and, as a result of the new international situation, became drawn, with its Democrat partners, into an alliance with Germany, the reservations of nationalist elements regarding the force quickly evaporating. Iranian nationalism had been trying for some time to enlist the intervention of a third power in Iranian affairs as a means of counterbalancing Britain and Russia. America had been tried without success, but now the war presented the possibility that Germany might play that role.¹³ Iranian nationalists became interested in a German victory in so far as it would hurt Russia and Britain and promote the cause of Iran's independence, and Germany encouraged them in this belief.

Democrat and nationalist sympathies and a tactical alliance with Germany thus explain the political orientation of the Iranian gendarmes. For the Swedish officers, however, who shared this orientation, it seems that genuine admiration and respect for Germany was an important factor in determining their allegiance. However in later years the Swedish officers themselves, when discussing their part in the events of these years, tended rather to stress their desire to help the Iranians in their struggle for freedom and independence, a desire which of course dovetailed neatly with their predisposition towards Germany. At the end of 1916 a group of them made a long statement in self-justification that was published in the Swedish newspaper *Korrespondenzblatt* as part of a public debate in Sweden about the activities of the officers.¹⁴ This statement was made jointly by nine officers, and it is indeed characterized by idealism and sympathy for Iranian aspirations. In fact, the tone of this statement is clearly influenced by the political outlook of the Iranian gendarmes. The Swedes had always been heavily dependent on their Iranian officers. Although occupying the most senior command positions within the Gendarmerie, it sometimes seemed that the Swedes were merely figureheads while the real power lay with the Iranian officers. The Swedes neither spoke nor understood Persian and relied completely on their Iranian subordinates for their local knowledge and intelligence. Certainly, in committing the Gendarmerie to the nationalist cause, it was the Iranian officers who took the lead, so that, by 1915, the British were openly describing the Swedes as the mere dupes or 'puppets' of their Iranian officers.¹⁵

As the first year of the war had progressed, the nationalist and pro-German tendencies of the Gendarmerie had become more overt. By early 1915 various units were accepting money from the Germans, and in the following months the force

gave practical expression to its political sympathies in various ways, some trivial, some more important, despite the periodic issuing of formal orders by the new Commandant, Edwall, as a result of British pressure on the Iranian Government, that officers cease their political activities. For example the small parties of Germans, such as those led by Zugmayer, Griesinger and Niedermayer, who were travelling through Iran towards Afghanistan with the object of gathering support for the Central Powers, received considerable aid, encouragement and protection from the Gendarmerie, as did Wilhelm Wassmuss in his attempts to rouse the tribes of the Persian Gulf littoral against the British. Gendarme officers, both Swedish and Iranian, carried out nationalist propaganda on behalf of the Central Powers and encouraged local chiefs to make preparations to march on Bushehr, the main British base in the Persian Gulf.¹⁶

During 1915 the struggle between the Allies and the Central Powers for control of the Iranian Government and the capital intensified. In early November, in order to pre-empt a pro-German coup, Russian troops began to advance on Tehran. The news of the Russian advance caused panic in Tehran where the population was well acquainted with stories of Russian atrocities in Tabriz and Mashhad in previous years. Majlis deputies and their nationalist supporters decided to organize a mass flight from the capital and to establish a new government beyond the reach of Russian military control. Even the Shah began talking of leaving for the south. On the night of 11–12 November, the *muhajirat* (emigration) began and large numbers of Majlis deputies, Government officials, nationalists and their armed supporters, together with officers and men of the Gendarmerie, and members of the German, Austrian and Ottoman legations left Tehran for Qum on their way to Isfahan.¹⁷ The Gendarmerie in Tehran played an important role in organizing this emigration. As the Russians advanced, both Swedish and Iranian gendarmes collected transport, assisted the Germans in sending away their arms and ammunition, and facilitated the departure of some 200 escaped Austrian prisoners of war. The Gendarmerie assumed control of the entire telephone system, commandeered all carriages, forage and baggage animals, and caused all the toll stations on the road to Qum to be occupied and the tolls to be collected by gendarmes.¹⁸

The *muhajirin* (emigrants) had initially believed that the Shah and the Government were going to leave Tehran, and the Gendarmerie was ordered to precede His Majesty on the road. However, the Shah was eventually dissuaded from flight by the British and Russian ministers and, upon receiving the news that the Shah was to stay in Tehran, the Government also decided to remain. The gendarmes who had set out for Qum were recalled, but many did not obey this order, continuing instead with the *muhajirin*.

Even before the *muhajirin* had left Tehran, the nationalists had seized control of Shiraz in a coup organized by the Gendarmerie against the pro-British Governor, Qavam al-Mulk. Democrat and pro-German influence had greatly increased in Shiraz during 1915. There, as elsewhere, a revolutionary committee was formed called the Kumita-yi Hafizin-i Istiqlal-i Mamlakat-i Iran (Committee for the Protection of Iranian Independence).¹⁹ These committees appear to have grown

out of the provincial Democrat committees, and in Shiraz this movement was dominated by Iranian gendarme officers. The force was by now very popular with local politically active elements,²⁰ and nationalist volunteers enrolled in a militia that was trained by gendarme officers.

On 10 November 1915 the Gendarmerie, under the command of Major Ali Quli Khan Pasyan, and the Committee for the Protection of Iranian Independence took control of Shiraz. Major Pasyan ordered his men to take over the British Consulate, the offices of the Imperial Bank of Persia, confiscating all the notes and silver coin, and the British telegraph office, and to arrest the British residents of Shiraz. The British colony were taken south by a party of gendarmes; the women were released but the men were handed over to a Tangistani khan, in whose fort they were imprisoned until the following August. As the British Consul, O'Connor, left the Consulate under a strong escort of gendarmes, he ironically observed up the road one of the two Armstrong guns that he had ordered for the Gendarmerie from England some months before and paid for with money provided by the British Government. It was now trained on the Consulate gateway.²¹

After the *muhajirat* from Tehran and the establishment of the Committee of National Defence in Qum, gendarme officers in various towns in southern and western Iran took action similar to that taken in Shiraz. The gendarmes came out in open revolt and took possession of Hamadan, Kermanshah, Sultanabad, Isfahan, Yazd and Kerman, forcing British nationals to evacuate these places and confiscating large sums of money from the Imperial Bank of Persia.²² After seizing power in the towns of the south and west, the nationalists and their gendarme allies began making more general military preparations to defend and extend their position. Revolutionary militias were set up in towns such as Isfahan and Sultanabad by pro-Democrat elements, and volunteers were recruited and trained by gendarme officers.

Meanwhile the Russian troops, whose advance on Tehran in early November had precipitated the *muhajirat*, were forcing the nationalists grouped around the Committee of National Defence in Qum to retreat, first to Hamadan, then to Kermanshah. The Committee's armed support, mixed forces of gendarmes, *mujahidin* and tribal irregulars, although on the defensive, engaged the Russians in a series of hard battles. At Kermanshah, a national government was formed, largely of Democrats under the leadership of Reza Quli Khan Nizam al-Saltana Mafi. The latter came to an agreement with the Germans according to which he undertook to assume leadership of Iran's liberation struggle against Russia and Britain and to mobilize for this purpose 4,000 armed men in return for German money, military instructors and war materiel. The National Army thus produced consisted of perhaps 8,000 men, the gendarmes undoubtedly its backbone.²³

However the Russian advance forced Nizam al-Saltanah and the nationalists to withdraw from Kermanshah, to Qasr-i Shirin and finally across the Ottoman border. They sought asylum in Ottoman territory and, in May 1916, they settled down temporarily in Baghdad. In the summer 1916 they re-established a government in Kermanshah, in the wake of a successful offensive by the Central Powers,

which survived for a further six months. Forced by the British to retreat once more, the nationalists and the gendarmes found themselves in political and organizational disarray. The National Government, now deep in Iraq, was clearly a spent force and many of the Iranian gendarme officers went into exile, some to Germany but the majority to Istanbul where they entered the Ottoman army. Some gendarme officers with their men, however, began to filter back into Iran immediately. Initially dispersing to their homes, they soon found their way back into the newly reorganized Government Gendarmerie.

Between 1915 and 1917 the gendarme forces of the National Government in western Iran were defeated and dispersed. The fate of the Fars regiment, however, was rather different to that which befell those gendarmes who had gone to the western front in defence of the National Government. The officers and men of the Fars regiment had not moved westwards after the *muhajirat* from Tehran, as had large sections of other regiments, but had remained at their posts in order to hold the province for the nationalists. However by the spring of 1916, financial difficulties, a general decline in popular support and the demoralization among the nationalists caused by the reverses suffered in the west combined to produce a climate ripe for a pro-Allied counter-coup in Shiraz.

After the gendarme seizure of power, Qavam al-Mulk had fled Shiraz. He had gone to Bushire where, with the help of the British Resident in the Persian Gulf, Percy Cox, who supplied him with money and weapons, he had assembled an army with which to re-establish himself and had begun marching north. While the tribal army was nearing Shiraz, elements within the Shiraz Gendarmerie, led by a Captain Fath al-Mulk, were secretly approached and won over by emissaries sent by Qavam.²⁴ The new Swedish Commandant in Tehran, Captain Nyström, who had been installed by the Allies, handed over formal command of the regiment to Fath al-Mulk. The latter, apparently using money from British sources and exploiting widespread fears of the Qavami army, organized his coup with the particular help of a group of NCOs and, after several days fighting this faction established itself in control of Shiraz and opened the city to Qavam al-Mulk.²⁵

Towards the end of 1916 Sir Percy Sykes arrived in Shiraz and incorporated the Fars Gendarmerie into the new British-officered force he was responsible for raising, the South Persia Rifles (SPR).²⁶ But the continued existence among the ex-gendarmes of nationalist and anti-British feeling was to make them a disruptive element in the new force.²⁷

In summary, the situation regarding the Gendarmerie after the political polarization of late 1915 was as follows: the majority of the Fars and Kerman Regiments, having espoused the nationalist cause, had remained in situ in an attempt to hold the south against the British. After their defeat they were incorporated into the SPR. The greater part of the remaining regiments, having followed the National Government and fought on its behalf in western Iran, had either gone into exile or had dispersed to their homes. Although the bulk of the force had come out in open support of the Committee of National Defence, a small percentage of the first and

second regiments, headquartered at Tehran, a few hundred men, and a handful of Swedish officers had preferred neutrality, remaining in the capital and loyal to their pro-Allied commandants. It was on this last, relatively stable, component of the Gendarmerie that attention was now to be refocused.

Iranian Governments, throughout this period, had remained committed to the principle of a gendarmerie, notwithstanding the turbulence of 1915–16. They possessed, in the Swedish and Iranian gendarmes who had remained at Tehran, the core around which the force could be rebuilt, and throughout 1917 they repeatedly raised the possibility of applying again to Sweden or to another neutral country for more officers. These proposals for reconstructing the gendarmerie were incorporated into wider schemes, reminiscent of pre-war plans, for raising and financing a national army.²⁸ In August 1918, when Mirza Hasan Vusuq al-Daula formed a government, one of his projects was to re-form and re-arm the Government Gendarmerie and, by the late autumn, he was making plans for the restoration of order in the more accessible parts of the country using the force. Vusuq's Government was based on a very close relationship with the British, who seem to have agreed to the project, perhaps because they had succeeded in installing a tame commandant, Colonel Gleerup, and because they were aware of the danger posed to their own strategic aims by a pro-British Government too weak to impose its own authority. Although resolutely opposing any more Swedish officers, when Vusuq asked the British to provide rifles for the Gendarmerie, which was short of arms, they agreed and handed over some captured Turkish rifles.

The Gendarmerie's growth during the next two years was rapid and extensive. Regiments were established both in areas where they had existed prior to 1915–16, and also in new areas that had not previously possessed them. The collapse of Tsarism meant that Russian hostility no longer impeded the development of the force and regiments were formed in such places as Tabriz and Mashhad. But the Gendarmerie was still unable to develop on a truly national scale. Paradoxically, the one area into which it could not expand in this period was the south of Iran. Britain was anxious to keep the south as the exclusive preserve of the SPR, which had, in any case, swallowed up most of the Fars and Kerman gendarmes. In the newly reorganized force the Iranian officer corps had much greater responsibilities and Iranian officers now had command of regiments since only three Swedes remained. Furthermore many officers and men who had been dispersed after the nationalist collapse simply rejoined the force, bringing with them the considerable experience of active service they had gained on the western front. The prestige of the Gendarmerie was high in these years and it continued to be seen by many Iranians as an expression of their national aspirations.

By early 1920 a sophisticated structure had been established. The force had implanted itself in the north, west and east of Iran and schools were functioning at Tehran. The strength of the Gendarmerie was three Swedish officers, including the Commandant, Colonel Gleerup, 242 Iranian officers and 8,158 men.²⁹ However the estimates provided for continued expansion and by the time of the coup d'état in early 1921 the force numbered nearly 10,000.

In the years between its reorganization in 1917 and the coup d'état, the Gendarmerie was undoubtedly the most significant military force possessed by the Iranian Government and spearheaded Tehran's efforts to arrest the centrifugal tendencies so dangerously aggravated by the First World War and to re-establish its authority throughout the country. The Gendarmerie participated, sometimes in cooperation with the Cossack Division, in the campaigns of these years against the Jangalis and the Bolsheviks in the Caspian provinces, against the Kurdish rebellion led by Ismail Aqa Simitqu (Simko) in Azerbaijan, as well as engaging in its traditional duties of guarding the roads and suppressing brigandage.

However, the Gendarmerie's political significance was undoubtedly greater than its military role, and it occupied a central place in the two most significant strategies adopted to halt the country's political and territorial disintegration and to restructure and modernize the Iranian state. These were, first, the proposals to rebuild the Iranian state under British hegemony embodied in the Anglo-Persian agreement of 1919, and, second, the movement that culminated in the coup d'état of February 1921.

In the years 1918–21 the symbiotic relationship between the gendarmes and the nationalist movement continued. The nationalist and Democrat politics of many of the officers and men of the Gendarmerie led them to sympathize with various of the radical movements which appeared in the area in the aftermath of the First World War, including Kemalism, the Jangali revolt, and even, in some cases, to a flirtation with Bolshevism.³⁰ It also ultimately led to their involvement in the planning and execution of the coup d'état of February 1921.

Since the collapse of Tsarism in 1917, the Gendarmerie's nationalism had become focused on hostility to Britain. Nonetheless gendarme officers were centrally involved in the work of the Anglo-Persian Military Commission, which was set up under the terms of the Anglo-Persian agreement of 1919, although their political outlook inevitably affected their contribution to that body.³¹ The Commission was to report on Iran's military needs and to make recommendations as to how best these needs might be met, and four of the Commission's nine Iranian members were gendarme officers. The Commission assembled in January 1920 and at the beginning of April presented a report containing a comprehensive survey of the existing military forces and institutions and recommending the merging of these forces and the construction of a uniform national force under British officers.

The involvement of the gendarme officers was necessary both because of their individual military expertise and because of the prestige of their corps, but they were unhappy with the work of the Commission and the nature of British proposals for building a new army, feeling that they damaged Iranian independence and national dignity. Furthermore there was also resentment within the Gendarmerie specifically towards the military arrangements the British wished to make, particularly the proposal that the new uniform force be placed under British officers. However Gleeup, whom the British had installed as commandant, cooperated wholeheartedly with his patrons regarding the agreement and the Military Commission, passing on to his men the assurances of the Prime Minister,

Vusuq al-Daula, that the interests of the force would not be prejudiced by the agreement. Nonetheless, when the Commission eventually produced its report only two of the four gendarme members, Colonel Zarghami and Colonel Riyazi, actually signed it. Another member, Colonel Farajallah Aqavli had, shortly before, committed suicide, an act that was widely interpreted in Iran as a protest against the agreement and the military subjection of the country.³²

By 1920 the Gendarmerie constituted a factor of considerable political importance in Iran and certain circles within the force were drawn into the coup preparations being made in late 1920 to early 1921 by Sayyid Ziya al-Din Tabataba'i and the Cossack officer, Reza Khan.

Sayyid Ziya, who enjoyed both the confidence of the British – his newspaper *Ra'd* (Thunder) had supported Britain throughout the war – and the reputation of being a moderate reformer, had apparently been cultivating a relationship with individual gendarme officers for some time. He had defended the Gendarmerie in the pages of *Ra'd* and was particularly close to the two officers, Captain Kazim Khan Sayyah and Major Masud Khan Kaihan, who were assisting Colonel Smyth in his work with the Cossack Division at Qazvin.³³ Smyth had, after the dismissal of the Russian officers, been unofficially attached to the Cossack Division at Qazvin and had asked Captain Sayyah and Major Kaihan, whom he had known for some time, to accompany and assist him, thereby greatly facilitating contact and cooperation between the Gendarmerie and the Cossack Division, and between the military and civilian wings of the coup movement. Indeed it has been suggested that it was Captain Sayyah who proposed Sayyid Ziya as the civilian head of the coup.³⁴ In this way the elements involved in the coup preparations were brought together under British auspices.

Although in the light of their past relationship it may seem surprising that the gendarmes and Cossacks were able to agree on joint action, in fact during 1919–20 the traditional hostility and rivalry between the two forces had been modified and even partially superseded by a recognition of common interest. It was their common opposition to British control, implied in the proposals of the Anglo-Persian Military Commission, which first forged political links. When the British contemplated using force to compel the Division to embody itself in the proposed Iranian army, they admitted that, in that event, it was doubtful which side the Gendarmerie in Tehran would take. This sympathy between the two forces was perhaps the first step on the road that led to successful collaboration in the execution of the coup and certainly by the spring of 1920 active liaison between the Cossacks and the gendarmes had been established.

Captain Sayyah and Major Kaihan accompanied the Cossacks on their march from Qazvin to Tehran, and the presence of these officers helped ensure that the coup would take place without any dissent from the Gendarmerie in the capital. The conspirators were in touch with, and had acquired the support of, some of the officers of the Tehran Gendarmerie regiments. Major Habiballah Khan Shaibani, for example, one of the senior officers of the second Tehran regiment, had made contact with Reza Khan in 1920 and was 'working in his interests' before the coup

d'état.³⁵ Shaibani, in his turn, enlisted the aid of junior officers who were likely to be sympathetic to the coup. Hasan Arfa, for instance, then a captain in the second regiment, played a crucial role in organizing the non-resistance of the force in Tehran. On Shaibani's orders he was given temporary command of the regiment, despite his extremely junior rank, and he ensured that his men remained in their barracks throughout the night of the coup and the next day.³⁶ Nevertheless the pre-coup Government of Sipahdar did make an attempt to use the Gendarmerie to defend itself. When the Cossacks were camped at Karaj, a short distance from Tehran, Sipahdar suggested to Gleeup that he lead his men out in an effort to prevent the Cossacks from entering the capital. But this proposal was scotched by the British who, favouring the coup, were able to rely on their protégé, Gleeup, to secure the neutrality of the force.³⁷ Upon the Cossack entry into Tehran, the Gendarmerie and the Central Brigade made their formal submission and the coup was carried out more or less peacefully. In fact there is some evidence which suggests that elements within the Gendarmerie, conscious of the seriousness of the impending political collapse in Tehran and the urgency of formulating a response to it, may have been planning a coup of their own which was only just pre-empted by the march from Qazvin.³⁸

The Iranian Cossack Brigade

The Cossack Brigade had been set up by a Russian military mission in 1879 and was always regarded by the Russians, the British and the Iranians themselves, as a Russian instrument by which Russian influence might be maintained and extended over Iran.³⁹ Intended primarily as a bodyguard for the Shah, who personally nominated the senior Iranian officers, Iranian Government control over the Brigade was always weak and often little more than theoretical.⁴⁰ For the Russian officers of the Cossack Brigade, the furtherance of Russian interests was indissolubly linked to the defence of Qajar absolutism. The Shah, for his part, was entirely dependent on the Brigade. Prior to the establishment of the Government Gendarmerie, it was the only organized body of troops available for the maintenance of order in the capital, and this was undoubtedly its most important function.

Despite its royalist and pro-Russian character, the Brigade remained passive during the revolutionary events of 1905–6 and there appears to have been some sympathy within its ranks for the demand for a National Assembly. In September 1906, at what was a critical moment for the Brigade, both internally and vis-à-vis the wider political situation, a new commandant, Colonel Liakhov, arrived. Liakhov immediately began to tighten discipline, weeding out Iranian officers opposed to Russian influence, although he encountered considerable difficulty as, besides intrigues within the Brigade itself, the leading *ulama*, certain ministers and the Majlis all made efforts to curb his power. In fact, during the first year of its life, the Majlis was the scene of constant attacks on the Cossack Brigade, by deputies, by tribes among whom the Cossack Commandant was accustomed to recruit, and

even by officers of the Brigade itself. In December 1907, when Muhammad Ali Shah had plans to use the Brigade to destroy the Majlis, Liakhov had to confess that his men could not be relied on for that purpose.⁴¹

Nonetheless, in June 1908, the Shah succeeded in doing what he had not been able to do the previous December, and carried out a coup d'état using the Cossack Brigade. The loyalty of the Brigade, already purged by Liakhov, had been guaranteed by the Shah's distribution of a special bonus earlier in the year. On 23 June, the Brigade, commanded by Liakhov and the other Russian officers, bombarded and suppressed the Majlis, martial law was proclaimed and Liakhov appointed Military Governor of Tehran by the Shah, with full powers over the police and military forces.

Liakhov remained practically dictator of Tehran until the entrance of the nationalist armies in July 1910. Liakhov, through the mediation of the Russian legation, arranged terms for the Brigade's surrender and formally accepted service under the new Government, but he was too closely identified with the old regime to remain long and was replaced as commandant in November 1909 by Colonel Prince Vadbolsky, Chief of Staff of the Cavalry Division of the Caucasus.

Although Russian pressure for the increase of the Cossack Brigade had been constant in this period, the growth of the Government Gendarmerie from 1912 onwards added a new urgency to their demands. Both Russian diplomatic staff and the Cossack officers feared and resented the development of the new force and were extremely jealous of the successes of the Gendarmerie. In terms of military organization the Brigade was clearly inferior to the Gendarmerie, which was better trained, better armed, better equipped and whose morale was infinitely superior.

A race now began between the Russian and the Swedish officers to establish the ascendancy of their respective forces in different areas. But the conflict between the Cossacks and the gendarmes was more serious than mere rivalry between the two sets of foreign officers. In May 1913 Vadbolsky had stated openly that he intended to get the gendarmes ousted from the Russian zone, and the task of policing the roads there entrusted to the Cossacks.⁴² Apparently Russia wished to see the Cossacks increased in such a manner that they alone would be used in the northern zone, while the Gendarmerie would be reserved exclusively for the neutral and southern zones, exacerbating Iranian fears of the country's partition.

Russia consistently attempted to use favourable political circumstances to press for an increase in the strength of the Brigade. In January 1910 the still confident Majlis refused Vadbolsky's request that the Brigade be increased by 400 men with three additional Russian officers. Nonetheless immediately after the dissolution of the Majlis at the end of 1911 Russia again began to demand an expansion of the Brigade, suggesting that Russian troops might be withdrawn from northern Iran once the Cossacks were strong enough to maintain order. The Iranian Government was unable to resist this pressure, and in July 1912 announced the formation of a branch of the Brigade at Tabriz.⁴³ In December the Iranian Government further succumbed and agreed to an overall increase in the strength of the Brigade and, yet again, at the end of 1913, the Government agreed to the doubling of the force

at Tabriz. In 1908 the Brigade had possessed a paper strength of 1,800, although only about 1,500 were being maintained. By early 1914 Vadbolsky gave the total strength of his force as 2,754 men in all, with a further 716 pupils at the Cossack school in Tehran.⁴⁴

More than ever, the main function of the Brigade had become that of a Russianizing agency.⁴⁵ All the members of the Brigade, Iranians as well as Russians, enjoyed Russian protection, and under that cover many abuses were committed. The Treasurer-General considered them to be among the very worst of the wheat cornerers, as his men were unable to control caravans conveyed by Cossacks. This lucrative practice annually created a bread crisis and caused starvation. Furthermore in northern Iran both Russian troops and Iranian Cossacks were accused of intimidating those Iranians who refused to make over their lands to Russian subjects or protected persons. In Tehran large numbers of Iranians, in quasi-Cossack uniform, whose connection with a drill-ground was nil, were to be seen in every quarter carrying on all sorts of callings, while the number of children, aged six and upwards, in uniform was obviously greater than the Brigade schools were instructing. In fact the Cossack uniform had become a convenient form of *bast* for any Iranian who desired it. What was true of Tehran was equally true of Tabriz.⁴⁶ There the Cossacks were entirely withdrawn from Iranian control and practically formed part of the Russian army of occupation.

The outbreak of the First World War brought organizational and financial difficulties for the Cossack Brigade as it did for the Government Gendarmerie. Some of its Russian officers, including the Commandant, Vadbolsky, were recalled to their regiments, thus weakening the Brigade considerably, and the arrangement whereby the Brigade was financed out of the revenue of the northern customs collapsed. But the Russian Government came to the Brigade's rescue, assuming directly the cost of the force.⁴⁷

However, during the critical years of 1915 and 1916 the Cossack Brigade was of little or no use to either the Russian or the Iranian Governments. Unlike its rival, the Gendarmerie, it played no significant role in the political events of these years. Indeed by January 1915 the Russians in northern Iran were themselves scoffing at the Brigade as protection, even for Europeans and local Christians,⁴⁸ and the British had come to the conclusion that the Cossacks were too scattered and too weak numerically to be able to stabilize the internal situation.

Iranian nationalists had always hated the Cossack Brigade and, from the beginning of 1915, as they grew stronger and forged an alliance with the Gendarmerie, so they began openly to agitate against the Cossacks, and even made attempts to subvert the rank and file, apparently with some success.

The political antagonism between the Cossack Brigade and the Gendarmerie had always been complicated by international factors. Now the two groups of powers to whom the Cossacks and the gendarmes looked, the Allied and the Central Powers respectively, were actually at war, the internal political situation in Iran had polarized, and an open clash between the two forces became inevitable. However the clash, when it came, revealed clearly the relative morale and competence

of the Gendarmerie and the Brigade. In November 1915 the gendarmes seized control of Hamadan in a clever coup, the 300 Cossacks stationed there surrendered virtually without resistance, and a considerable number went over to the nationalists. The news of the Cossack defeat caused a great sensation in Tehran.

In late 1915, after the *muhajirat*, Britain and Russia began to consider means by which they could defend their interests in Iran without further major troop commitments. In 1916 these discussions resulted in the Sipahsalar agreement, which provided for the expansion of the Cossack Brigade to a Division and the establishment of the British-officered SPR. However the Sipahsalar agreement was extremely unpopular in Iran and was never fully accepted by the Iranian cabinet. Its status left in doubt, the legitimacy of the Cossack Division and the SPR remained in limbo. Nonetheless, the Russians, without waiting for the resolution of formal negotiations with the Iranian Government, proceeded immediately to expand Cossack numbers. As well as enlarging the Tabriz contingent, new Cossack formations were raised at Isfahan and Mashhad.

Towards the end of 1917, the Russian Revolution and the overthrow of Tsarism transformed the position of the Cossack Division. Its links with the Russian Government were severed, its Russian officers were officially recalled and the new Soviet Government refused to recognize the force in any way.⁴⁹ However at this point, in early 1918, the Cossack Division in fact embarked upon a new and more active period as a result of two complementary developments, the assumption by Britain of political and financial sponsorship of the Division, and the seizure of command by an energetic and determined White Russian officer, Colonel Starroselsky.

Towards the end of 1917, Marling, the British minister, sounded the Russian officers of the Division in Tehran as to whether they would disregard their recall order if Britain guaranteed their pay. Receiving satisfactory responses from the Russian officers, Marling instructed the Imperial Bank of Persia to hold about 34,000 pounds per month at the Commandant's disposal, the same amount the Division had been receiving from Russia.

In early 1918 a recently arrived White Russian officer, Colonel Starroselsky, apparently with British backing, or at least acquiescence,⁵⁰ organized a coup against the existing Cossack leadership, and established himself in unchallenged command of the Division.

Throughout 1917, as a result of the unfolding revolution in Russia, the Cossack Division had been in turmoil. The Kerensky regime had appointed as Commandant an officer, Colonel Clergi, who displayed considerable sympathy with Iranian sensibilities. Clergi's liberalism, however, was extremely unpopular with the other Russian officers who were already uneasy at the impact of the new political situation on their men. Iranian Democrats, having witnessed the disintegration of the Tsarist armies and apparently in touch with revolutionary Russian soldiers, were now attempting to win over the rank and file of the Iranian Cossack Division.⁵¹ The Division had in fact become a particular target of revolutionaries within the remnants of the Russian army still in Iran, who agitated against it amongst the

Democrats, warning them that it would assist the oppressors to crush Iranian nationalism.⁵² Even the Valiahd (the Crown Prince), when reviewing the Cossacks in Tabriz, had spoken out against the humiliating position of the Iranian officers of the Division.⁵³

Although Clergi had declared unambiguously that he refused to recognize the new Soviet regime, Starroselsky's plot to get rid of him was already underway. Starroselsky had the unreserved support of the other Russian officers who were all unhappy with Clergi's attitude. However he believed, apparently correctly, that the direct intervention of a Russian would cause discontent among the Iranians, so he turned to an Iranian officer, Reza Khan. By early 1918 Reza Khan had the rank of lieutenant-colonel and was apparently a figure of considerable significance within the Division. It seems that Starroselsky secured Reza Khan's support by promising, once in command, to advance his career. Although the coup against Clergi was initiated and organized by the Russian officers led by Starroselsky, Reza Khan was entrusted with the task of winning over the Iranian officers. It was indeed Reza Khan who, in mid-February, marched the troops from their billets to Cossack Headquarters, entered and demanded Clergi's resignation. The latter complied after some two hours' discussion in which the Russian minister and other officers took part, and was taken to Enzeli, from where he sailed to Russia, leaving Starroselsky to take over the Division.

As well as consolidating the Division as an instrument of White Russian influence in Iran, two further consequences of Starroselsky's action may be noted here. First, the complete exclusion of the Iranian Government from participation in, or even knowledge of, decisions concerning the command of one of its major military forces highlighted the independence of the Division and the practical irrelevance to it of any legal authority. In fact Starroselsky's coup greatly annoyed the Iranian Government, who would have been 'only too glad' to turn out all the Russian officers, and added much force to arguments then being put forward that the Division ought to be under Iranian officers.⁵⁴ Second, it seems that it was the operation against Clergi that planted the idea in Reza Khan's mind of himself regenerating his army and his country by means of a military coup.⁵⁵ From that time on he apparently exercised a very great influence within the Division, although he was by no means one of the most senior officers.

When Colonel Starroselsky took over the Division there were major Cossack formations stationed at Tehran, Tabriz, Mashhad and Isfahan. In late 1917, as the Russian army in Iran disintegrated, the Cossacks were able to restore and maintain order and, in some places, such as Isfahan and Tabriz, the departing Russian troops handed over their weapons and ammunition to the Cossacks.⁵⁶ During 1918 the British, since they were now paying for the Cossack Division, discussed the possibility of using it in support of their own strategic projects of checking the Turks and operating in southern Russia. However this proved impossible, owing both to the military weakness of the Division and to the political difficulties surrounding its use. In the capital and in towns such as Isfahan, the Cossacks were useful for keeping an eye on the Gendarmerie, described as being in a 'sulky and

dangerous mood',⁵⁷ and it was clear everywhere that their most important function was political rather than military.

The Division's fighting capacity was still extremely limited, and its efforts against the Kurdish leader Simko met only with disgrace.⁵⁸ However, in keeping with its political and military traditions, the Division was successful in its suppression of the Democrat regime of Shaikh Muhammad Khiyabani in Tabriz in September 1920.

In Tehran, as in Tabriz, the Cossacks were important primarily because of their capacity to intervene in the political arena. During 1918 it had become clear that Britain was preserving the Division not for its military usefulness but because of its political significance in the capital.⁵⁹ Sponsorship of the Division gave Britain leverage over the Iranian Government and the Shah, and also helped to preserve the friendship of the White Russians.

With Marling's help, Starroselsky had warded off the various challenges to his position and had consolidated his command. The British, now the principal patrons of the Division, used particularly their financial support to bolster Starroselsky's position within the Division both vis-à-vis other Russian officers,⁶⁰ and in relation to the Iranian Government, and also to attempt to control and reduce Starroselsky's own political manoeuvring.

However, from the beginning it was clear that Starroselsky was an unpredictable and unreliable ally. Although benefiting greatly from British backing, Starroselsky had consistently sought to ward off British political control, but it was the signing of the Anglo-Persian agreement in August 1919 that brought to the surface the conflict between them and wrought a profound transformation in their relationship. Many of the Russian officers with the Division clearly resented the extension of British influence into areas traditionally regarded as theirs and, towards the end of the year, Starroselsky informed Sir Percy Cox frankly that he regarded himself and his Division as the one remaining bulwark of Russian influence in northern Iran, and that he felt he had a definite mission to uphold that influence to the utmost until a new Russian Government took shape to which he could hand over.

However Starroselsky had specific fears regarding the implications of the military clauses of the agreement. The Division was to be merged into a new uniform force, along with all the other military formations in Iran, and placed under British officers. The Division would, in effect, disappear and there was no apparent place in this scheme for himself and the other Russian officers.

As General Dickson and the Military Commission established by the agreement began their work, the hostility of the Russian officers was undisguised and it seems that an influential body of Iranian officers was also actively but secretly hostile to the British. Apparently a secret society of a number of senior officers had been formed within the Division with the object of resisting its transferral to British control. Furthermore, as the year progressed, the feeling amongst the Cossack rank and file against British control of the Division, which was certainly being fostered by the Russian officers, gained strength and was more openly expressed. There were rumours that the Division was preparing to resist the proposed changes

by force and by mid-May 1920 a further complication had become evident. The British were now unsure, in the event of force being necessary to compel the Division to embody itself in the new army, which side the Gendarmerie in Tehran would take. Active liaison had been established between the forces to coordinate their opposition to British control. Indeed, Starroselsky's opposition to the agreement had caused Iranian nationalists to modify somewhat their traditional hatred for the force. Starroselsky had seized the opportunity presented by the growing feeling against Vusuq al-Daula and the British to pose as the protector of Iranian nationalism against British aggression.⁶¹

The Anglo-Persian Military Commission presented its report at the beginning of April 1920. The report recommended the formation of a uniform army into which the various existing military formations, including the Cossack Division, should be merged. Although publicly silent regarding the fate of the Russian officers, the British members of the Commission made it quite clear in their confidential supplement to the report, intended only for the British Government, that the Russians would have to go.⁶²

In response to soundings from the Prime Minister, Vusuq al-Daula, Starroselsky steadfastly maintained his attitude, saying that he had no authority to agree to any alteration in the organization of the Division that was based on agreements which, in his opinion, were still in force, and the only suggestion that he could make was that the force should be reduced but kept separate in its present form. A deadlock appeared to have been reached. However Britain and the Iranian Government failed to get the Anglo-Persian agreement ratified by the Majlis, the work of the Military Commission was suspended and the dispute with Starroselsky fell temporarily into abeyance. The British had acquired an acute awareness of the extent to which the Division under Starroselsky, and the more than one hundred Russians with it,⁶³ now constituted an obstacle to the successful realization of their strategic plans.

During 1920 the Cossacks became embroiled in a major campaign against the Jangalis and their Bolshevik allies in Gilan. This campaign both brought Starroselsky to the height of his power and then, a little later, provided the British with the opportunity of getting rid of the Russian officers altogether.

Meanwhile, in Tehran, Norman, the new British Minister, and Starroselsky were engaged in a violent propaganda war, with Norman using every imaginable argument to persuade the Iranian Government and the Shah that Starroselsky was not only a military liability but a political menace. In June Vusuq al-Daula fell from office and was replaced by Mushir al-Daula. During the negotiations concerning the conditions on which Mushir would form a government, Norman extracted a pledge from him to dismiss the Russian officers of the Cossack Division as soon as the crisis caused by the Bolshevik incursion into Gilan was over. However Mushir insisted this pledge to be kept very secret and did not reveal it even to his own colleagues.⁶⁴

For a brief period the Caspian campaign gave Starroselsky the upper hand vis-à-vis the Iranian Government. He insisted on being made commander-in-chief of

all Iranian troops in the north and became practically a dictator in the Caspian provinces, with full authority over all the civil governors there.

However, at the beginning of October, General Sir Edmund Ironside arrived in Qazvin to take over command of the British North Persia Force then stationed in Qazvin. It was Ironside who was, apparently, the decisive figure in determining that the Russian officers should finally be removed. He provided Norman with a powerful argument to use in favour of this step with the Iranian Government by declaring that, unlike his predecessor, he considered himself able, with the troops at his disposal, to guarantee the defence of the capital against an attack from the north. Ironside easily convinced Norman that the time was ripe to act against Starroselsky and the two laid contingency plans for dealing with the Cossack retreat from their forward position in Rasht, which Ironside confidently and eagerly awaited.

As Ironside had expected, after a disastrous engagement in Rasht, the Cossacks collapsed and retreated behind the British lines. Indeed so convenient and fortuitous for Ironside's plans was the Cossack retreat that it was widely believed to have been the result of a British trick. Ironside seized his opportunity. The Cossacks were shepherded by North Persia Force troops into a camp where Ironside separated the Russian officers from their men.

It was now necessary for Ironside and Norman to obtain the ratification of the Iranian Government and the Shah for their fait accompli. At a joint interview they urged Mushir al-Daula, in line with his pledge, to dismiss Starroselsky at once and to appoint an Iranian to command the Division as a fighting head, with British officers to assist him. Norman reinforced this advice by warning Mushir that, if Starroselsky were allowed to remain, no more British money would be forthcoming for the Gilan campaign.

Mushir had no love for the Russian officers; he later commented, for example, that they were accustomed to treating Iranians like dogs and resented any sort of representations being made to them by the Iranian authorities, but he feared possible action by the dismissed Russians and also especially wished to avoid the creation of a vacuum which could be filled by British officers.

Mushir al-Daula resigned rather than acquiesce to British demands whereupon Norman forced the Shah to appoint Sipahdar-i Azam as prime minister, Sipahdar having already privately agreed to dismiss the Russian officers, to expedite, as far as possible, the holding of elections, to assemble the Majlis and to try to obtain the Majlis's ratification of the Anglo-Persian agreement.

Norman was anxious that British reorganization of Iranian military forces should be got under way as soon as possible. Indeed the removal of the Russian officers and the subjection of the Cossacks to informal British control was, apparently, the first step in a scheme devised by Norman and Ironside for the implementation, in a piecemeal and unofficial fashion, of the military provisions of the Anglo-Persian agreement, independently of its ratification by the Majlis. Accordingly, immediately after the formation of the new Government, Norman and Dickson put detailed proposals before Sipahdar and the Minister of War regarding the formation of a

new force at Qazvin out of the best elements of the Cossack Division, with British officers in executive command and with complete financial control.⁶⁵ They argued that this was an indispensable means of defence independent of the Anglo-Persian agreement. However, Sipahdar's cabinet, although under intense British pressure, declined to acquiesce in a project certain to arouse widespread hostility. Sipahdar's promise and ability to convene a compliant Majlis, willing to ratify the Anglo-Persian agreement, similarly evaporated. Thus Norman had achieved only another stalemate and he and Ironside now began to contemplate even more desperate measures.

Following the dismissal of Starroselsky and the other Russian officers, the Shah had appointed an ineffective figure, Sardar Humayun, as Commander of the Cossacks. At the same time Ironside appointed Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Smyth in control of the administration and finances of the Cossacks. During November the reorganization of the Division, its strength now fixed at 3,500, began at Qazvin under the nominal command of Sardar Humayun but under the effective, though informal, control of Smyth, assisted by Colonel Huddleston and Colonel Lamont of the British Military Mission. Despite the failure of attempts to extract some sort of official Iranian recognition of the presence of British officers with the Cossacks, yet Smyth and his colleagues continued undaunted, although 'almost secretly', their work at Qazvin.⁶⁶

At Qazvin Ironside was soon successful in his efforts to persuade Sardar Humayun to go on leave to visit his estates. This left Ironside and Smyth free to select a deputy,⁶⁷ and Reza Khan, apparently a more energetic and efficient soldier than was typical among the Cossacks,⁶⁸ quickly came to their attention. Reza Khan, who had joined the Cossacks as a stable boy at the age of fifteen and had risen through the ranks to be promoted colonel at the beginning of the war, had commanded the infantry in Starroselsky's Gilan campaign in 1920 and, in the autumn of that year, had been appointed to command the Hamadan *atriyad* (regiment), then stationed at Qazvin. By sending Sardar Humayun on leave Ironside put Reza Khan in effective command of the Division.

Reza Khan had become a figure of considerable significance among the Cossacks by early 1918 when he had demonstrated a considerable aptitude for intrigue by his involvement in the plot against Colonel Clergi. Both his political ambition and his penchant for coup-making were again in evidence in the spring of 1920 when the British were preoccupied with the problem of bringing the Division into the proposed uniform force. At that time Reza Khan made an offer to Dickson to betray his Russian officers, perhaps hoping to emulate Starroselsky's triumph over Clergi. Now he was in control of the Cossacks in Qazvin and, when Sayyid Ziya and his fellow conspirators looked around for a military man to provide a striking force, Reza Khan's record clearly indicated him for the role.

It seems that the idea of a coup d'état was germinating in the minds of many Iranian leaders throughout the June 1920–February 1921 period. The formation of a strong central government had been a long-standing goal among politically articulate Iranians and the recent accelerated disintegration of the state was lending

a new urgency to this demand. However the political realities of the period and the dynamics of Anglo-Soviet rivalry had also led to a general acceptance that British power in Iran was too great for any coup-maker to bypass. This perhaps begins to explain the conjunction of Sayyid Ziya and Reza Khan.

Apparently the coup of February 1921 was the result of the conjunction of two separate movements, one arising among the Cossack officers, and one centred on Sayyid Ziya. It seems that when it became clear that the departure of the British North Persia Force was imminent and that the Iranian Government was incapable of making any serious efforts to oppose a Bolshevik advance, the Cossack officers at Qazvin began to discuss their position. They agreed that if no resistance were to be offered to an invasion, the only course was to allow their men to disperse and return to their homes. However this appeared to be a rather ignominious step, especially to the more dynamic elements such as Major Masud Khan Kaihan and Captain Kazim Khan Sayyah, two gendarme officers then assisting Smyth at Qazvin. In fact there had been a considerable improvement in the morale of the Cossack officers in general since the departure of the Russians and, under these circumstances, the project of a coup to secure control of the Government was accepted. The support of the Cossack rank and file was secured by the declaration that the Shah was in urgent need of their help.⁶⁹

The next step for the officers was to find a civilian capable of acting as head of a new government. Apparently Captain Sayyah suggested Sayyid Ziya and he was approached with a view to coordinating action. Contact between Sayyid Ziya in Tehran and Reza Khan in Qazvin was maintained by Captain Sayyah and Major Kaihan. The latter two officers travelled to Tehran regularly to report to Sayyid Ziya on conditions in Qazvin. Sayyid Ziya had himself been contemplating a coup for some time but, until receiving proposals from the Cossacks, had lacked a sufficiently powerful instrument to execute his plans.

The coup of February 1921 was therefore the result of the confluence of three sets of needs and plans: those of certain British elements, of Sayyid Ziya and of the Cossack officers. Although the coup itself was executed by Iranians, the role of the British was crucial. Ironside and Smyth had revived the Cossack Division and placed Reza Khan in command, Smyth had brought Kaihan and Sayyah to Qazvin, thus facilitating contact between Reza Khan and Sayyid Ziya and ensuring the cooperation of the other important Iranian military formation, the Gendarmerie, while Sayyid Ziya, of course, had a long-standing friendship with the British. It seems that in planning the Cossack coup, Ironside and certain other British officers and officials acted on their own initiative, without the formal sanction of the British Government, or even the British Minister in Tehran, as they had done in the matter of the dismissal of the Russian officers.

Ironside was well aware of, and clearly approved, the preparations that Reza Khan and the other officers at Qazvin were making for a coup. He was seriously worried about the consequences of the North Persia Force's withdrawal, scheduled for the spring of 1921, and believed that only a strong military dictatorship could save Iran. Meanwhile a pretext for Reza Khan's mobilization had been engineered

by Smyth who, on a visit to Tehran in early February, had discussed with Norman the lamentable condition of the 600 Cossacks then stationed in the capital. The two agreed to propose to Sardar Humayun that the Tehran Cossacks should be sent to Qazvin where they might benefit from British supervision and contact with their reorganized comrades, while an equal number of the latter might take their place at Tehran. Smyth then expressed his intention of sending Reza Khan, 'one of his best officers', to Tehran with these reliefs.⁷⁰

A week later Sardar Humayun accordingly, at Smyth's suggestion, sent a telegram to Qazvin ordering the whole of the Tehran and Hamadan detachments of the Division, amounting to 2,200 men, to come to Tehran. The Shah was alarmed by the mobilization of such a large force and its movement towards the capital, and instructed Sardar Humayun to send a counter-order. This was done but the Cossacks refused to obey and continued their advance. The Shah now decided to send Sardar Humayun in person to meet the Cossacks and to try to induce them to return to Qazvin. The Sardar met the advanced guard on 19 February near Karaj but was unsuccessful in his mission and returned to the capital.

After Sardar Humayun's failure, Sipahdar, the Prime Minister, sent for Smart, the Oriental Secretary at the British legation, in order to discuss the situation. Smart scuppered Sipahdar's suggestion of using the Gendarmerie against the Cossacks but accepted his alternative proposal that representatives of the Iranian Government and the British legation should go out to meet the Cossacks and try to persuade them to return to Qazvin. Smart then went to see the Shah whom he found in a very agitated state and talking of immediate flight. Neither the Shah nor his ministers knew anything of the intentions of the Cossacks then approaching Tehran and were inclined to panic. However, Smart managed to calm the Shah sufficiently to make him abandon this idea and obtained his consent to the plan decided upon with Sipahdar. Smart then submitted the plan to Norman. The latter approved it and appointed as representatives of the British legation Lieutenant-Colonel Haig, Acting Counsellor, and Lieutenant-Colonel Huddleston, Acting Military Attaché. Norman did not apparently have much confidence that the Cossacks would be halted since his next step was to summon General Westdahl, the Swedish Chief of Police, and impress on him the importance, if the Cossacks should enter Tehran, of ensuring that his men confined themselves to the maintenance of public order and did not become involved in any fighting that might take place. Thus any possible resistance from the police was forestalled.

A deputation of four, Haig, Huddleston, Adib al-Saltanah, the Prime Minister's assistant and the representative of the Iranian Government, and Muin al-Mulk, the Shah's private secretary, started from Tehran in the evening of 20 February. They met the advanced guard of the Cossacks near Mihrabad, about four miles outside Tehran. They found there the leaders of the movement, Reza Khan, Sayyid Ziya, Captain Sayyah and Major Kaihan.

The deputation endeavoured, in the course of a discussion lasting an hour, to persuade Reza Khan to refrain from entering the capital. Reza Khan stated that the Cossacks were tired of successive governments who failed to take any steps for

the organization of a force to oppose the Bolshevik invasion that might follow the withdrawal of British troops. They were therefore resolved to come to Tehran to establish a strong government that would remedy this state of things. Reza Khan continued that they had no hostile intentions towards the Shah, to whom, on the contrary, they were loyal and devoted, but they were determined to remove the evil counsellors by whom he was surrounded and who for years past had been plundering the country, which they had gradually reduced to its present lamentable condition. He added that the leaders of the coup had no intention of asking for financial help from any foreign power, for there was plenty of money in Iran, and they well knew where to find it. He expressed goodwill towards Britain, and said that no foreigners had any reason to fear the presence of his men at Tehran.⁷¹

The deputation returned to Tehran at about 11 p.m. and reported their failure. Shortly after midnight the Cossacks, with eight field and eighteen machine guns, entered the town practically without resistance. The Gendarmerie and the Central Brigade submitted to the Cossacks, who at once proceeded to occupy all government establishments. The Iranian Government collapsed immediately. On the morning of 21 February the Shah sent for Norman and asked his advice. Apparently the Shah was still nervous, but much less frightened than on the previous day, presumably because no harm had come to him since the arrival of the Cossacks, and he no longer spoke of flight. Norman reassured him regarding the intentions of the leaders of the coup towards him and advised him to get in touch with them, ascertain their wishes and grant whatever demands they might make. The Shah readily accepted Norman's advice and on the following afternoon, 22 February, sent for Sayyid Ziya and asked him to form a government.

A few days after the coup, Norman observed that 'perfect order' prevailed in the capital, where a very rigorous state of siege had been established.⁷² The gendarmes, Major Kaihan and Captain Sayyah, had been appointed Minister of War in the Sayyid Ziya cabinet and Military Governor of Tehran respectively, Reza Khan had been appointed Commander-in-Chief of the army and had received the title of Sardar Sipah and a jewel-studded golden sword, while all the officers and men who had taken part in the coup received a pecuniary reward, the officers being promoted.

Conclusion

British intervention in Iran peaked with the coup of February 1921.⁷³ Although the coup itself was executed by Iranians, it received vital assistance from, and was probably actually initiated by, certain British military officers and officials in Iran, most importantly Ironside, Commander of the North Persia Force, Smyth, who was unofficially and 'almost secretly'⁷⁴ attached to the Cossacks at Qazvin and Smart, the Oriental Secretary. Herman Norman, the British Minister in Tehran, was apparently not an original party to the plan, but gave his full support to the coup as soon as he was informed of it, although this was probably not until the Cossacks were actually marching on Tehran. Curzon at the Foreign Office knew

nothing, and even after the coup's success, the British personnel in Iran continued to deny responsibility, both publicly and in internal correspondence.

For the British involved in its planning, the coup was envisaged as an alternative route to the achievement of the main objectives of the 1919 agreement. The role of Ironside and Smyth at Qazvin and Smart in Tehran had been crucial in a number of ways. First, the leadership of the coup was assembled at Qazvin by the British. Second, Ironside and Smart encouraged the planning and facilitated the execution of the coup. Third, Smart neutralized any potential political and military opposition in the capital. Finally, Norman, in the days immediately following the coup, threw Britain's weight fully behind the stabilization of the new regime.

At the end of October 1920 Ironside had removed the Russian officers from the Cossack Division without the authority of either the Iranian Government or the Shah and Norman had installed Sipahdar-i Azam as prime minister expressly in order to obtain ratification of this action. Ironside and Smyth then revived the Cossack Division, arranged the departure of the new Iranian Cossack commander appointed by the Shah, Sardar Humayun, and personally placed Reza Khan in command. Smyth brought with him to Qazvin two gendarme officers, Captain Kazim Khan Sayyah and Major Masud Khan Kaihan, who were close to Sayyid Ziya, thus facilitating contact and cooperation between the military and civilian wings of the coup movement, and between the Gendarmerie and the Cossack Division.

Ironside encouraged the preparations that Reza Khan and the other officers at Qazvin were making for a coup while Smyth engineered a pretext for Reza Khan's mobilization when he asked Sardar Humayun to order the Tehran and Qazvin Cossacks to change places to assist with the force's reorganization.

In the capital, Smart calmed the Shah and dissuaded him from fleeing. He and Norman neutralized the Gendarmerie and the police and Smart then arranged with the Prime Minister, Sipahdar, that representatives of the Iranian Government and the British legation should go out to meet the Cossacks, ostensibly to try to persuade them to return to Qazvin. Norman appointed as representatives of the British legation Lieutenant-Colonel Wolseley Haig, Acting Counsellor, and Lieutenant-Colonel H. J. Huddleston, Acting Military Attaché, both of whom had in fact been, with Smart, deeply involved in the coup preparations. The deputation met the leaders of the coup near Mihrabad on the evening of 20 February and, after some rather ambiguous discussions, returned to Tehran and 'reported their failure'.⁷⁵

Shortly after midnight on 21 February, the Cossacks took possession of Tehran, and the Iranian Government collapsed immediately. Next morning Norman reassured the Shah regarding the intentions of the leaders of the coup towards him and advised him to get in touch with them, ascertain their wishes and grant whatever demands they might make, advice the Shah readily accepted. Meanwhile the Imperial Bank of Persia made available to Sayyid Ziya, who still lacked any legal authority, a large amount of government funds, which he distributed among the leading officers of the coup. Although the coup left the Shah in place

as constitutional head of state, it brought about fundamental shifts in the distribution of power, between the old elite and the rising generation of nationalist politicians, between the army and civilian institutions such as the Majlis and the monarchy itself, and between Tehran and the provinces. Most crucially, the coup allowed Reza Khan to position himself to such strategic advantage that he was able to establish his personal ascendancy, through the posts of war minister, prime minister and finally shah, without recourse to any further violent political rupture.

The central role played by certain British elements is now beyond doubt. But the question remains: why did they choose as their instrument so unlikely a figure as the Cossack officer Reza Khan?

Despite much recent research into the nature of Reza Khan/Shah's rule, the man himself remains an enigma.⁷⁶ As a figure of historical significance Reza Khan only emerges as late as 1918, and then solely as an intriguer, assisting the White Russian Colonel Staroselsky to take command of the Cossack Division from the liberal Colonel Clergi. Then, in 1920, he is suddenly placed by the British general, Ironside, in effective command of the Iranian Cossack Division at Qazvin. Although already in his early forties, he had been hitherto invisible in Iranian political and even military life. Regarding his early life and career, all the extant biographical fragments make only some brief references to his participation in various tribal campaigns. Of his political views at this time we know nothing, and there is no indication that he expressed any interest in or even possessed any knowledge of the constitutionalist and nationalist struggles that were taking place while he was a young man. By early middle age, Reza Khan had made no mark on national life. The blankness of Reza's early life contrasts strikingly with the biographies of other nationalist officers of the period, particularly that of Colonel Muhammad Taqi Khan Pasyan. The charismatic Colonel Pasyan, though more than a decade younger, had by 1921 already acquired a reputation of considerable substance by his participation in the political and military conflicts of the preceding years.⁷⁷ Reza Khan's apparent detachment from the formative political and ideological experiences of his generation and the singular environment, the Russian-officered Cossack Division, in which he grew to maturity, perhaps may go some way to explain the paradoxes that later beset his regime.

In 1920–1, Reza Khan and his instrument, the reactionary and anti-constitutional Cossack Division, were unlikely candidates to carry out the task of national salvation. Although the circumstances of political collapse were ideal for the emergence of a 'man on horseback', there were other, much more obvious, potential candidates, both individual and collective, ready to assume this role. One of the many myths about the pre-history of the coup asserts that the Cossacks were the only effective military force in the country. This view was first expressed by General Ironside, whose role in facilitating the coup and in selecting its leadership was absolutely central. Ironside totally disregarded, for reasons of pragmatic politics, the Government Gendarmerie, which was in purely military terms at least as effective, if not considerably more effective, than the Cossack Division. The Gendarmerie, however, was unpalatable to Ironside because of its nationalist

inclinations, and the British, one-time patrons of the Gendarmerie, had had their fingers badly burnt by the force's defection to the nationalists during the war. In addition, it was practically as well as politically much less amenable to British control, being stationed in relatively well-organized units throughout the country under the leadership of a much more professionally and politically mature officer corps. Reza Khan was allocated the role of coup-maker by Ironside and the main reason for his suitability in Ironside's eyes must have been precisely that he seemed to be a soldier and not a politician. The British minister in Tehran, Herman Norman, reiterated this view even after the coup, with the extraordinary description of him as an 'honest and capable officer without political ambitions'.⁷⁸ Ironside could have found no protégé within the Gendarmerie so apparently yet deceptively ready for grooming as the Cossack, Reza.

The coup marked a watershed in British power in Iran. Although the British had been instrumental in bringing Reza Khan to power, their influence in Tehran after the coup diminished rapidly and visibly. Norman was unable to prevent Sayyid Ziya's fall and by the end of 1921 another powerful tool of British policy, the South Persia Rifles, had also ceased to exist, while British officers serving with the Cossacks on the Gilan front and British financial advisers had all had their contracts terminated. Curzon's hostility towards the new regime of Reza Khan was unrelenting, and his aversion to Herman Norman, whose career was effectively ended by his Iranian escapades, hardly less. It was only with the arrival of Percy Loraine as new British minister in December 1921 that relations began to be repaired and re-established on a new basis. The ensuing two decades saw a profound transformation in both the character and the scope of Britain's role in Iran. Although Britain remained an imperial power, its capacity to intervene directly in Iranian politics collapsed and there was a gradual abandonment of traditional clients and friends, especially in the south, in favour of good relations with Tehran.⁷⁹ It was only in the context of another world war that Britain once again reverted to direct military and political involvement in Iran.

Notes

1. For a discussion of Sweden's motivation and role as a supplier of military advisers to foreign governments, including Iran, see Nils Palmstierna, 'Swedish Army Officers in Africa and Asia', *Revue Internationale d'Histoire Militaire*, 26 (1967), pp. 45–73.
2. See W. Morgan Shuster, *The Strangling of Persia* (New York 1912).
3. Annual Report, 1912, Townley to Grey, 18 March 1913, FO 371/1728/15876; Annual Report, 1913, Townley to Grey, 18 February 1914, FO 371/2073/10393.
4. Major Steel, Report on Visits to the HQ of the 1st and 2nd Regiments and Officers and NCO schools, 4 February 1914, FO 371/2066/10374.
5. For the Government Gendarmerie, see Stephanie Cronin, *The Army and the Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran, 1910–1926* (London and New York 1997); Lieutenant-Colonel. Parviz Afsar, *Tarikh-i zhandarmiri-yi Iran* (Qum 1332); Jahangir Qa'im Maqami, *Tarikh-i zhandarmiri-yi Iran* (Tehran 1355).
6. For a discussion of this episode see Cronin, *The Army*, pp. 24–5.
7. Townley to Grey, 17 March 1914, FO 371/2066/16181.

8. P. Nyström, *Fem Ar i Persien som Gendarmofficer* (Stockholm, 1925), pp. 27–8.
9. Hasan Arfa, *Under Five Shahs* (London 1964), pp. 51–2.
10. Ahmad Ali Sipih, Muvarrikh al-Daula, *Iran dar jang-i buzurg 1914–1918* (Tehran 1362), p. 210.
11. See, for example, the diary of Dr Zugmayer, dated 13 March 1915 (trans.), FO 371/2982/177904; McDouall to Marling, 28 August 1915, FO 248/1112/171/15.
12. Arfa, *Under Five Shahs*, p. 52.
13. W. J. Olson, *Anglo-Iranian Relations during World War I* (London 1984), p. 29. Olson provides the clearest account of the war years in Iran. Also useful is Houshang Sabahi, *British Policy in Persia 1918–1925* (London 1990). German activities in Iran and German relations with the Democrats are dealt with by Ulrich Gehrke, *Persien in der deutschen Orientpolitik während der Ersten Weltkriege* (Stuttgart c.1960), 2 vols.
14. *Korrespondenzblatt*, 15 December 1916 (trans.), IOL/P&S/10/585/322.
15. See, for example, the remarks of the British Consul regarding the role played by Major Muhammad Taqi Khan Pasyan in the gendarme coup at Hamadan in November 1915. Cowan, Qazvin, to Marling, 30 November 1915, FO 248/1106. According to Cowan the Swedish officer, Major Kaellstrom, ‘was a puppet in the hands of his subordinate’, Major Pasyan.
16. See, inter alia, Sir P. Cox, Basra, to Government of India, 11 April 1915, IOL/P&S/10/484/p1389; O’Connor to Marling, 12 April 1915, IOL/P&S/10/484/1434.
17. Olson, *Anglo-Iranian Relations*, p. 115.
18. Marling to Grey, 30 November 1915, IOL/P&S/10/585/83.
19. These committees were generally known as ‘Committees of National Defence’, as was the principal body then at Qum.
20. Afsar, *Tarikh-i zhandarmiri*, p. 96.
21. Sir William F. T. O’Conner, *On the Frontier and Beyond: A Record of Thirty Years Service* (London 1931), p. 235.
22. The gendarmes gave receipts for the confiscated money. See, for example, the receipt given by the Swedish officer, Major Nils de Mare, in his official capacity of commander of the 7th regiment, to the Imperial Bank of Persia at Hamadan for the confiscated sum of 1,365,000 krans. Archive of the Imperial Bank of Persia, British Bank of the Middle East, 757, HSBC Group Archives, London.
23. For a British acknowledgement of the competence of the gendarme component of the National Army, see Marling to FO, 11 June 1917, FO 371/2983/145843.
24. Afsar, *Tarikh-i zhandarmiri*, pp. 101–5.
25. It was in fact a different Qavam al-Mulk, Ibrahim Khan, who recaptured Shiraz, the elder Qavam, his father, having died while on the march.
26. For the SPR, see F. Safiri, *The South Persia Rifles*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1976; Olson, *Anglo-Iranian Relations*, pp. 153–213.
27. Sir Wolseley Haig, *Reminiscences*, Private Papers, Middle East Centre, St Antony’s College, University of Oxford, p. 19; Safiri, *The South Persia Rifles*, p. 270.
28. See, for example, the scheme outlined by the Prime Minister, Ala al-Saltana, in July 1917. Memorandum from Ala-us-Saltana (*sic*) to Marling, 30 July 1917, FO 371/2981/200656.
29. Report of the Anglo-Persian Military Commission, FO 371/4911/C197/197/34.
30. See Cronin, *The Army*, pp. 45–50.
31. On the Anglo-Persian Military Commission see Kavih Bayat, ‘Qarardad-i 1919 va tashkil-i qushun-i muttahi al-shikh dar Iran’, in *Tarikh-i mu’asir-i Iran, majmu’a-i maqalat*, (Tehran 1369), Vol. II, pp. 125–40.
32. The British demurred from this interpretation, it has been largely accepted by Iranian sources. See, inter alia, Muhammad Taqi Bahar, Malik al-Shu’ara, *Tarikh-i*

- mukhtasar-i ahzab-i siyasi-yi Iran*, 2 vols (Tehran 1371), Vol. I, p. 40; Arfa, *Under Five Shahs*, pp. 91–2; Afsar, *Tarikh-i zhandarmiri*, pp. 201–5.
33. Capt. Sayyah, Major Kaihan and other Gendarmerie officers were, for example, involved in the Kumita-i Ahan (the Committee of Iron), an association of moderate reformers headed by Sayyid Ziya. Husayn Makki, *Tarikh-i bist sala-i Iran*, 8 vols (Tehran 1323), Vol. I, pp. 188–9.
 34. J. M. Balfour, *Recent Happenings in Persia* (Edinburgh and London 1922), p. 220. Balfour was in Tehran as a financial adviser to the Iranian Government under the terms of the Anglo-Persian agreement.
 35. Report on Personalities in Persia, 1940, Bullard to Halifax, 7 February 1940, FO 371/24582/E832/826/34.
 36. Arfa, *Under Five Shahs*, pp. 106–8.
 37. Norman to Curzon, 1 March 1921, FO 371/6403/E4926/2/34.
 38. Afsar, *Tarikh-i zhandarmiri*, p. 272.
 39. F. Kazemzadeh, 'The Origin and Early Development of the Persian Cossack Brigade', *American Slavic and East European Review*, 15, 3 (October 1956), pp. 351–63. This article is based on the memoirs of the first and fifth commandants of the Brigade, Lieutenant-Colonel Domantovich and Colonel Kossagovsky. The memoirs of Kossagovsky have been translated from Russian into Persian and published under the title *Khatirat-i kulunil Kasakufski*, trans. Abbas Quli Jali (Tehran 1344). For the early history of the Brigade, see also Ahmad Amirahmadi, *Khatirat-i nakhustin sipahbud-i Iran, Ahmad Amirahmadi*, 2 vols (Tehran 1373); Cronin, *The Army*; Reza Ra'iss Tousi, 'The Persian Army 1880–1907', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 24, 2, April 1988, pp. 206–29; R. M. Burrell, *Aspects of the Reign of Muzaffar al-Din, Shah of Persia, 1896–1907*, Ph.D. thesis, SOAS, University of London, 1979; Report on the Organization of the Persian Army, Lieut. Col. H. P. Picot, Durand to Salisbury, 18 January 1900, FO 881/7964.
 40. Amin al-Daula, Mirza Ali Khan, *Khatirat-i siyasi*, ed. H. Farmanfarmayan (Tehran 1380), p. 226, quoted in Tousi, *The Persian Army*, p. 218.
 41. Military Report on Persia, 1911, compiled by the General Staff, Army Headquarters, India. IOL/Mil/17/15/5.
 42. Townley to Grey, 20 May 1913, IOL/P&S/10/334/348 part 1.
 43. Ala-us-Saltaneh [*sic*] to M. Poklewsky-Koziell, 11 July 1912, FO 371/1424/35916/3.
 44. Notes on the Persian Cossack Brigade, Maj. Richard A. Steel, Military Attaché, 6 March 1914, FO 371/2070/16176/1487.
 45. *Ibid.*
 46. W. A. Smart, Tabriz, to Townley, 18 November 1913, FO 248/1079.
 47. Townley to Grey, 28 December 1914, FO 371/2077/87668.
 48. Townley to Grey, 10 January 1915, IOL/P&S/10/585/P187.
 49. Marling to FO, 23 January 1918, FO 371/3264/14692.
 50. Bahar, *Tarikh-i mukhtasar*, Vol. I, p. 75, Ahmadi, *Khatirat*, Note 91, p. 553.
 51. Marling to FO, 21 December 1917, FO 371/2988/242011.
 52. Meshed Intelligence Summary no. 28, 14 July 1917, WO 157/1258.
 53. Consul, Tabriz, to Marling, 20 February 1918, FO 371/3264/33414.
 54. MA, Tehran, to GOC, Mesopotamia, 27 February 1918, WO 157/1251/100.
 55. Arfa, *Under Five Shahs*, p. 91.
 56. MA, Tehran, to DMI, 21 January 1918, WO 157/1250/91; Marling to FO, 23 January 1918, FO 371/3264/14692.
 57. Haig, *Reminiscences*, ch. 7, p. 7.
 58. Intelligence Summary no. 55, 16–29 February 1920, 36th Indian (mixed) Brigade, AIR 20/581.
 59. DMI to FO, 3 May 1918, FO 371/3268/78870.

60. Marling to FO, 25 February 1918, FO 371/3268/35672.
61. Note on the present (September 1920) situation regarding the Anglo-Persian agreement, Dickson, Tehran, 25 September 1920, FO 248/1299/59.
62. The confidential supplement may be found, together with the Report, in FO 371/4911/C197/197/34.
63. The Cossack Division by 1920 contained 122 Russians, fifty-six officers and sixty-six NCOs. Report of the Anglo-Persian Military Commission.
64. Norman explicitly requested the FO not to divulge this secret to the Iranian delegation to the Paris peace conference. Norman to FO, 3 July 1920, FO 371/4927/C7570/7570/34.
65. Norman to Curzon, 25 November 1920, FO 371/4915/C12323/267/34.
66. Norman to Curzon, 24 January 1921, FO 371/6400/E1188/2/34.
67. Lord Ironside, ed., *High Road to Command: The Diaries of Major-General Sir Edmund Ironside, 1920–22* (London 1972), p. 148.
68. See, for example, the comments from Ironside's unpublished diaries quoted in Dennis Wright, *The English Amongst the Persians* (London 1977), p. 181; also the remarks of the British officer, Forbes-Leith, who had met Reza Khan at Qazvin in 1919. F. A. C. Forbes-Leith, *Checkmate: Fighting Tradition in Central Asia* (London 1928), p. 22.
69. Balfour, *Recent Happenings*, p. 220.
70. Norman to Curzon, 1 March 1921, FO 371/6403/E4926/2/34.
71. *Ibid.*
72. *Ibid.*
73. For wider background on the British and the coup, see especially Homa Katouzian, *State and Society in Modern Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis* (London and New York 2000), pp. 214–67. See also Cyrus Ghani, *Iran and the Rise of Reza Shah: From Qajar Collapse to Pahlavi Power* (London and New York 1998).
74. Norman to Curzon, 24 January 1921, FO 371/6400/E1188/2/34.
75. Norman to Curzon, 1 March 1921, FO 371/6403/E4926/2/34.
76. Some of the best and most recent research on early Pahlavi Iran is collected in S. Cronin, ed., *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society under Riza Shah, 1921–1941* (London 2003).
77. On Pasyan, his rebellion in 1921 and its general significance, see Stephanie Cronin, 'An Experiment in Revolutionary Nationalism: The Rebellion of Colonel Muhammad Taqi Khan Pasyan in Mashhad, April/October 1921', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 33, 4 (October 1997), pp. 693–750.
78. Norman to Curzon, 3 March 1921, FO 416/68.
79. For the case of the Bakhtiyari see Stephanie Cronin, 'Reza Shah and the Disintegration of Bakhtiyari Power in Iran, 1921–34', in Cronin, *Making of Modern Iran*.

OIL IN IRAN BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS

Mohammad Malek

It was on 28 May 1901 that Muzaffar al-Din Shah Qajar granted a British subject, William K. D'Arcy, a sixty-year oil concession in all areas of the country except the five northern provinces bordering on Russia. The concession provided its holder with the exclusive right to explore for, exploit and export petroleum. Article 2 (of the concession) granted the holder the sole right of transportation of oil in the area of the concession. Article 10 stipulated that a royalty of 16 per cent of the net profits on all operations should be paid to the Iranian Government.

Oil was discovered in commercial quantities in the south-west of the country in late May 1908. The Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC, Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) from 1935) was founded in London in April 1909. It was formed with an initial capital of 2 million pounds to take over all D'Arcy's rights and responsibilities. The first royalty was paid in 1913.

On 20 May 1914, an agreement was signed between the British Government and the APOC by which the British Government became the major shareholder of APOC owning 51 per cent of the shares. The agreement gave the British Government the right to appoint two directors on the board who would have the power of veto on any questions relating to British national interests. Also, on the same day, a contract was signed between APOC and the British Admiralty by which APOC guaranteed the supply of oil to the Admiralty for thirty years at fixed prices.¹ The contract was to have a significant effect on the relations between Tehran and APOC in so far as the royalties were concerned. Tehran did not protest against the conditions of the contract until 25 August 1920 when it ordered its financial advisor (Sydney Armitage-Smith) to negotiate with APOC on royalties.²

Talks started in London and an agreement was signed on 22 December 1920 as result of which APOC paid 1 million pounds in settlement of Iran's claims on royalties.

The Pahlavi dynasty replaced the Qajar dynasty in late 1925 and began talks on the revision of the concession in London in late July 1928. But before the talks started, the new regime strongly attacked the legality of the 1920 agreement on the basis that it had never passed the Majlis.³

In London, the Court Minister Abd al-Husain Taimurtash told Sir John Cadman (the chairman of APOC) in July 1928 that the Iranian Government would grant APOC a new sixty-year concession if, in return, APOC would agree

- to reduce the area of the concession,
- to accept a complete cancellation of the exclusive right of transportation,
- to give the Iranian Government a substantial block of the shares,⁴
- to register itself in Tehran as well as London,
- to be exempted from tax by both Governments.⁵

The talks continued in Lausanne in August 1928. In Lausanne, Taimurtash made it clear that his Government should be given 25 per cent of the APOC's total shares. 'If this had been a new concession, the Persian Government would have insisted not on 25 per cent but on a 50–50 basis', he said.⁶ He also demanded a minimum guaranteed interest of 12.5 per cent on dividends out of the shares, plus 2s per ton of oil produced. Also he specified that 50 to 60 per cent of the existing area should be relinquished at the time of the ratification of the new concession, and 60 per cent of the remaining area should be reduced in three years. Cadman viewed Taimurtash's demands as extravagant but promised that he would examine them with his company's major shareholder, the British Government.

In order to consolidate his position in any further talks with the British, Taimurtash took action soon after he returned to Tehran. He made up his mind that Iran needed to demonstrate that it was in absolute control over the south-west where the APOC's operations and installations had been centred. He also decided that the Shah, Prime Minister and the press should criticize the D'Arcy concession. So he took the Shah, all cabinet ministers, the Majlis deputies and hundreds of other civil servants, high-ranking military officials and journalists to inaugurate the newly constructed road to the south-west and to visit oilfields and the APOC's installations. In Ahwaz, the capital of the south-west province of Khuzestan, the Shah showed his anger towards APOC and the concession by refusing to make a visit to the installations and by sending the following message to Cadman in London:

the authorities of the company must know that neither the Iranian Government nor the Iranian people agree with the D'Arcy concession. [. . .] Now, I explicitly notify the authorities of the company that they must rectify the matter and if they do not give it due attention, they will be responsible for any action which might result. No more can Iran tolerate the enormous profits from its oil going into pockets of foreigners while at the same time being dispossessed of its oil wealth.⁷

Taimurtash himself threatened that, if by the following spring he found his demands made in London and Lausanne had not been met, he would then turn against APOC and fight it.⁸

In its meeting of 20 November 1928, the British Cabinet agreed to 20 per cent of the shares for Iran. Cadman, who had attended this meeting, was told that the following principles would form the basis for any further talks with Taimurtash.

- Under a new prolonged concession, an extension of the contract between APOC and the British Admiralty should be guaranteed.
- The controlling position of the British Government in the shares should be maintained.
- Shares to the Iranian Government should be inalienable.

Cadman arrived in Tehran on 18 February 1929. To Taimurtash, Cadman specified that APOC would agree to the 20 per cent of the shares only. Furthermore, he stated that APOC would not guarantee the interest on the shares being exempted from taxation in London.⁹ Having realized that the British would never agree to his demand for 25 per cent of the shares, Taimurtash stated that in the proposed new sixty- year concession, both Iran and APOC should have the right to cancel the concession at the expiry date of the D'Arcy concession. Cadman left Tehran empty-handed with no agreement.

From the talks in London, Lausanne and Tehran, it is clear that Taimurtash had been planning to confine the concessionary area of APOC to the south-west of the country, making it possible for his Government to develop any possible oilfields outside the south-west using a non-British company. Also, he had been planning to limit the influence of the British Government over APOC as much as possible.

In 1930, Taimurtash adopted a policy of extracting more money from APOC, putting a levy on its operation inside Iran. Nothing had been stated in the concession to prevent him from doing so. He submitted a Bill to the Majlis by which APOC would pay a tax of 4 per cent on its profits earned in Iran as from 22 March 1930. The Bill passed the Majlis on the same day, i.e. 1 April 1930. APOC offered a guaranteed consolidated payment of 145,000 pounds per annum for ten years, or 150,000 pounds for eight years in return for immunity from any tax.¹⁰ Taimurtash did not agree. 'The Company must show the amount of its profits earned in Persia'.¹¹

Tehran was under extreme financial pressure in March 1931. The inflation rate had risen to nearly 45 per cent and the Shah needed a huge sum to go further with his railway and the army. In such a situation, APOC requested a new longer concession in return for a royalty of 4 shillings per ton plus 10 per cent of the net profits. Taimurtash was adamant. He was entirely against the idea of a new longer concession, stating that: 'The D'Arcy concession is a law [. . .] it is a sacred document [. . .] It resembles an old and sick father who cannot be got rid of. We have to wait until he dies'.¹²

Preparing for a visit to Europe during which he was to enroll the Crown Prince in a school in Switzerland, Taimurtash let it be known that he would be happy to deal with Cadman on the two questions of tax and royalties while in Europe.¹³

The talks started in Paris and continued in London in November 1931. The main concern for both sides was to find the real amount that would cover all the claims relating to the royalties and tax in the past. On these talks, Cadman writes that Taimurtash gave him 'a piece of paper showing that, according to his calculation, the amount due to the Persian Government was £3,250,000, from which he made a deduction of three quarter of a million, putting in the bill at 2.5 millions'. Cadman was prepared to pay only a 'round sum of £500,000 to cover everything, tax included'.¹⁴ He finally offered 1 million pounds. He stated that his company would pay 20 per cent i.e. 16 per cent as royalties plus 4 per cent as tax for the financial year 1931 and thereafter. Taimurtash agreed¹⁵ and the Iranian Cabinet approved. The Finance Minister, Taqizadeh, asked APOC to pay his Government a temporary '£200,000 against its receipts'. Refusing the request, APOC indicated that it should first receive a letter from the Iranian Government that it would accept the APOC's offer of 1 million pounds as the final settlement of all difficulties in the past.¹⁶ The Shah was waiting to receive the final draft of the agreement. Iran's oil commissioner, Feiz, was discussing with the APOC's officials a clearly worded version of it in English. Taimurtash telegraphed Feiz to send it without delay. 'If discussions with the Company are not finished yet, please finish at once and send the text to Tehran. His Imperial Majesty admits no delay and the business must be terminated immediately'.¹⁷

The draft agreement was in Tehran on 29 May 1932 but the Shah did not agree with it. Cadman's estimation of the royalties for the year 1931 (306,872 pounds made on 2 June 1932) was the reason.¹⁸ The royalties for 1931 were to compare extremely unfavourably with 1,437,000 pounds and 1,288,312 pounds for the years 1929 and 1930 respectively. Tehran officially refused to accept its royalties. The press attacked APOC and the D'Arcy concession. Taimurtash asked APOC to increase the royalties and prepared himself to 'offer to overcome year 1929 differences'. It was an abortive move because APOC responded that it could not see any other possible arrangement except what had been 'provided in the draft Agreement'.¹⁹

On 18 August 1932, Jacks reported that all talks with APOC would be handled by 'the Minister of Finance, and not as hitherto by the Minister of Court'.²⁰ Taqizadeh informed APOC that the Shah wanted his Government 'at all costs to force the Company to reopen negotiations for a complete revision'. Nothing happened until 26 November 1932 when the Shah cancelled the D'Arcy concession.²¹ But in its cancellation announcement, Tehran did not close the door to APOC as it stated that it would not 'refuse to grant a new concession to that Company'.²²

Both APOC and the British Government asked Tehran to immediately withdraw the cancellation announcement. Tehran did not agree and the British Government referred it to the Permanent Court of International Justice, 'as a matter of urgency' and threatened that it would regard itself 'as entitled to take all such measures as the situation may demand for that Company's protection'.²³ Tehran refused the Court's competence to examine a dispute between itself and APOC, and London took the dispute to the League of Nations on 14 December 1932 followed by

Tehran three days later. The Shah dismissed Taimurtash and sent his delegation to the league on 23 December 1932.

In the Security Council of the league on 3 February 1933, the Rapporteur Edvard Benes, Foreign Secretary of Czechoslovakia, proposed that both Iran and APOC negotiate a new concession that could be accepted by both parties.²⁴

Talks started in Tehran in April 1933. One week passed but Taqizadeh put nothing on the table. Cadman met the Shah on 11 April and realized that the Shah had no wish to go back to the league. Under pressure from the Shah, Taqizadeh deployed his demands, a summary of which is as follows:

- The area should be reduced to 15 per cent of the area of the D'Arcy concession.
- The exclusive right of transportation should be completely cancelled.
- APOC should give 20 per cent of its total shares, free of charge, to the Iranian Government.
- A royalty of 4 shillings (gold) per ton of the oil produced should be paid to Iran.
- Iran should enjoy the right of veto in the board.
- APOC should attempt to minimize the number of its non-Iranian employees.
- The new concession would not be longer than the remainder of the D'Arcy concession (twenty-eight years).²⁵

As it became clear that Taqizadeh and his colleagues would not agree to a new sixty-year concession, Cadman, on 23 April 1933, stated that he and his colleagues would leave Iran as soon as possible. This meant that the dispute over the cancellation would, once again, be taken before the League of Nations.

The Shah asked Cadman to see him in the palace, where he told Cadman that he would not let APOC's officials leave Iran until agreement over a new concession had been reached. Two meetings were held in the palace on 24 and 26 April 1933, and the Shah agreed to a new sixty-year concession in return for:

1. a minimum guaranteed payment (of 750,000 pounds annually) plus a royalty of 4 shillings (gold) per ton of oil produced;
2. 4 per cent as tax to Iran (with a minimum guaranteed tax of 230,000 pounds annually);
3. Iran's representation on the board;
4. payment of 1 million pounds (by APOC) as settlement of all past claims;
5. investment by APOC on Iranians so that this would minimize dependency on skilled foreign employees;
6. reduction of the area to 100,000 square miles;
7. full cancellation of the exclusive right of transportation of oil;
8. 20 per cent of the share to Iran;
9. cheaper oil for Iranians.²⁶

The considerable achievement on the reduction of the area and the cancellation of the exclusive right of transportation provided the opportunity for the Shah to develop possible oilfields out of the south-west in non-British hands. Germany showed interest in acquiring an oil concession.²⁷ The Germans might have had the technology, money and the equipment needed, but the Americans were seen as politically an altogether better proposition. Talks with the Americans started and resulted in a concession in mid-January 1937. The Americans were granted a sixty-year oil concession on 100,000 square miles in the east leaving a huge buffer zone between them and the British. They were also granted the right to build a pipeline to the Sea of Oman. This concession was similar to that of the 1933 concession for the British.²⁸ No progress was made until July 1938 when the Americans notified Iran that they had lost interest in their concession. They had acquired more beneficial concessions in the Arab countries that meant far easier transportation to the Persian Gulf.

It is noteworthy that there were disputes between Tehran and AIOC on their new concession in the years up till 1941, when the Shah abdicated. Those differences were as follows:

1. The dispute on the Iranianization process of the company's technical staff

The APOC's foreign technical staff numbered 2,050, i.e. 8 per cent of the total employees, in 1933. According to Part III of Article 16, APOC should 'recruit its artisans as well as its technical and commercial staff from among Persian nationals'. But Part I of the same Article had stipulated that both parties 'accept as the principle [...] the supreme necessity [...] of maintaining the highest degree of the efficiency and of economy in the administration and the operations of the company in Persia'. They negotiated their difference on Article 16 as a result of which an agreement was reached on 2 April 1936. By this agreement, APOC (now AIOC) promised to replace its 'foreign artisans, technical and commercial staff with Iranians' in a progressive manner in so far as this would be 'compatible with the attainment of the highest degree of efficiency'. The company's foreign staff decreased in percentage in accordance with the 1936 agreement from 14.84 per cent in 1936 to 11.36 per cent in 1941, but increased in numbers from 2,050 in 1936 to 2,457 in 1941.

2. The dispute over oil exports

Oil exports increased to their highest level of 10.16 million tons with the highest royalties of 3.54 million pounds in 1937. They dropped in 1938, and the Shah wrote to Cadman of the drop as follows: 'You will of course agree how unpleasant it is for a progressive country like Iran, which must administer its affairs according to a definite programme [of modernization]'. To go further with his army and railway, the Shah had turned to London for a loan of 5 million pounds (in October

and November 1938) and expected AIOC to help him to overcome his financial difficulties. Disregarding the Shah's expectations, Cadman replied that the drop was due to over-production of oil by the Americans and Russians.²⁹

Dissatisfied with Cadman's argument, the Shah responded: 'the explanation tendered is a mere repetition of the usual given by the Company' and that he would 'abstain from direct discussion' with Cadman.³⁰ Cadman sent a special envoy, Gass, to Tehran on 11 February 1939. In Tehran, Gass confronted a strong attack on AIOC in the press and failed to meet the Shah who had refused to see anybody else from the company apart from its chairman. Gass reported that the Shah might have been suspicious that the company was acting on recommendations from the British Government to obstruct his programme of modernization.

The accusation is made and was mentioned to me by both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance that the Company has deliberately curtailed its production [. . .] to impede the national economy of the country by restricting the revenue which is so vital for the internal development [in Tehran, and the Shah would probably] go to any length, regardless of the consequences, to try to get it in order that the development scheme shall not be interrupted.³¹

Cadman left for Tehran and met the Shah on 29 May and 3 June 1939. To avoid any possibility of a request by the Shah to borrow from AIOC, Cadman stated that AIOC would spend all its 16 million pounds cash available on the oil industry in Iran. He further stated that he could arrange 5 million pounds from the British Government in such a manner that it would be liquidated out of the future royalties. The Shah agreed.³² Talks were undertaken by the two Governments in London and resulted in an agreement on 16 February 1940. Tehran cancelled this agreement in July as a result of another drop in oil exports.

The outbreak of the world war in Europe resulted in the drop of oil exports from Iran in March 1940. In response, the Shah made an unplanned journey to the south-west. In Abadan, he stated 'People from outside the country are coming and taking all the profits and benefits of the oil away and doing nothing to help the Iranians'. The drop was compounded by London establishing an official rate for gold lower than the rate in the free market. Based on the free market, royalties would be 2,703,689 pounds for the year 1939 and not 3,379,611 pounds – a substantial difference of 675,922 pounds.³³ Tehran protested in mid-April 1940. The situation in Tehran was such that the AIOC's officials expressed the view that: 'Local rumours include immediate cancellation of the concession'.³⁴ Tehran demanded that a difference be paid between whatever the royalty was to be and a sum of 4 million pounds for the loss brought about by both the drop and the rate 'otherwise the Iranian Government will revise the oil Concession fundamentally'.³⁵ To avoid confrontation at a very crucial moment when German troops had advanced as near as possible to the British mainland, AIOC agreed to pay the difference demanded.

Notes

1. For further details on these agreements and contract, see J. Marlin, 'The Purchase of the British Government's shares in the British Petroleum Company, 1912-1914', *Past and Present*, 39 (April 1968), pp. 139-68.
2. For the full text to the Cabinet authorizing Armitage-Smith to enter into talks with APOC, see M. Farmanfarmaiyan, *Az Tehran ta Karacas: Naft va siyaset dar Iran* (Tehran 1412), pp. 133-5.
3. For the full text of this letter, dated 9 May 1928, see League of Nations, *Official Journal* (LNOJ), 1933, pp. 292-3. The question remains as to why the Iranian Government accepted the 1 million pounds as settlement of its claims on royalties, before the agreement had passed the Majlis. It should be remembered that the Majlis was in recess from 1915 and, at the same time, the Government's treasury was empty. The Cabinet had constantly been urging Herman C. Norman (the British Minister in Tehran) to induce the Imperial Bank of Persia to grant it 'a monthly credit of 30,000 tomans [around 10,000 pounds] for three or four months only'. Tehran was in desperate need of money. The Gendarmerie had been unpaid for two months and even Cossacks at the front had not received all that was due to them. Norman to Curzon, 21 September 1920. See also, Norman to Curzon, 2 December 1928, DBEP, 1919-39, First Series, 13, p. 650.
4. 'Give the Persian Government a share in the business. Let them feel that they are real partners in whose interest it is to further the Company's development and progress in the country', Taimurtash said to Cadman. Thus Cadman was under pressure to grant a substantial block of shares to the Iranian Government. Sir John Lloyd, one of the British Government's two directors on the board, had stated that 'any participation given [to the Iranian Government] must not impair the government's voting preponderance'. Lloyd to Cadman, 21 August 1928, in BP H16/20.
5. For the full detail of those talks in London, see 'The Memorandum on Talks between Taimurtash and Sir John Cadman', dated 28 July 1928, in BP H16/20.
6. A record of the discussion held at Lausanne, BP H16/20.
7. For the full text of this message, see M. Fateh, *Panjah sal naft-i Iran* (Tehran 1397), p. 586.
8. See Jacks to Cadman, 15 November 1928, BP H16/100 (B). In the Majlis, Prime Minister Hedayat criticized the concession. If any 'assistance from the Government' was needed, APOC should realize that it must 'revise and amend the terms of the concession' to those offered to it in London and Lausanne. For a summary of this speech, see Clive to Chamberlain, 6 December 1928, PRO, FO 416/83, pp. 137-8.
9. See Taimurtash's draft of 30 March 1929, BP H16/21. See also Taimurtash to Feiz, not dated, in Fateh (1979), pp. 287-8. See also Cadman to Taimurtash, 30 March 1929, BP H16/21.
10. See the report of the meeting of Jacks with Taimurtash in Sa'd-Abad, on 11 July 1931, BP H10/1748.
11. See the meeting of Jacks and Fateh with Taimurtash, held on 22 March 1930, BP H10/174A.
12. See report of the meeting held in Sa'd-Abad on 30 August 1931, dated 5 September 1931, BP H10/174B.
13. Ibid.
14. Cadman to Jacks, 17 February 1932, BP H10/175.
15. Cadman to Taimurtash, 11 January 1932, and Taimurtash to Feiz, 17 January 1932, BP H10/175.
16. Cadman to Jacks, 17 March 1932, BP H10/175.
17. Taimurtash to Feiz, 8 May 1932, BP H16/50.
18. See Cadman to Jacks (telegraph), 2 June 1932, BP H10/176.

19. Jacks to Cadman, 17 July 1932 and 19 July 1932, BP H10/176.
20. Jacks to Cadman, 18 August 1932, BP H10/176.
21. For the full text of the cancellation announcement of 27 November 1932, see LNOJ (1932), p. 2301.
22. See Jacks to Lloyd, 29 August 1932, BP H10/176.
23. See the British Government's note of 8 December 1932, in LNOJ (1932), p. 2303.
24. For the full report of this meeting, see LNOJ (1933), pp. 197–253.
25. See Cadman's diaries, dated 19 April, 22 April and 23 April 1933, all in BP 96659.
26. See Cadman's diary on both the meetings, in BP 96659. The new concession was ratified on 28 May 1933 and the formal liquidation of the dispute between the two Governments was announced in December 1933.
27. With this in mind, Dr Hjalmar Schacht, the German Minister of Economic Affairs, visited Tehran. See A. R. Aruzi, *Khatirat-i Abu'l Hasan Ibtihaj* (Tehran 1371), p. 66.
28. For a summary of the different terms of the oil concession for Americans, see Memorandum by Raymond A. Hare (of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs), dated 5 April 1937, FRUS, 1937, Vol. II, pp. 744–7.
29. The Shah to Cadman, 18 December 1938, and Cadman to the Shah, 5 January 1939, in BP 84881.
30. The Shah to Cadman, 25 January 1939, BP 84881.
31. Memorandum by Gass, 16 May 1939, BP 85905.
32. See 'Cadman's visit to Tehran, May/June 1939', in BP 84881.
33. Gass to Forde, 28 May 1940, BP 69457.
34. Telegraph from AIOC in Tehran to AIOC in London, 2 July 1940, BP 69457.
35. See telegraph from AIOC in Tehran to AIOC in London, 16 July 1940, BP 69457.

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE WITHDRAWAL OF BRITISH FORCES FROM THE PERSIAN GULF (1971) WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF DISPUTED ISLANDS

Reza Nazarahari

In January 1968, the British Government announced that it would withdraw its military forces from the Persian Gulf region by the end of 1971. In the course of around four years from the announcement of the British withdrawal till its implementation, hard and intensive negotiations were held between Iran and Britain to reach an agreement in the aftermath of this withdrawal, and to devise acceptable arrangements for the future of the region. Concurrent with these negotiations in 1971, newly independent states such as Bahrain, the UAE and Qatar, which were officially recognized not only by the Arab states but also Iran, emerged in the region. Further, the old contentious issue between the two Governments of Iran and Britain of the three islands of the Big and Small Tonbs and Abu Musa was settled by the presence of Iranian forces in the Big and Small Tonbs, and the conclusion of the 1971 memorandum of understanding between Iran and the ruler of Sharjah.

This case dates back to an earlier confrontation of Iran and Britain in the Persian Gulf. In the first half of the seventeenth century, Britain asserted her effective presence in the Persian Gulf by capturing Hormuz and Qeshm islands from the Portuguese, and then reached a status of neither war nor peace with the existing regional forces. It was within this context that a dispute occurred in 1887 between Iran and Britain over the sovereignty of four islands, the Big Tonb, Small Tonb, Abu Musa and Sirri, which continued till 1971, at least with regard to the first three of these islands. Therefore, the year 1971 and the agreements reached between Iran and Britain are considered as the end of the dispute over the Persian Gulf islands. In this article, some points will be made on this issue. The dispute over the three

islands, which will be looked into mostly from a legal and sometimes from a political dimension, will be analysed within the afore-mentioned context. This article will argue that the settlement of the dispute over the islands was related to the decision to withdraw the British forces from the Persian Gulf. Further, the settlement of the dispute was due not merely to the legal or political agreements between the two countries, but to more basic and profound causes.

First, it would seem necessary to look at the history of the dispute between Iran and Britain, and the arguments of both sides in support of their claims. Second, attention will be focused on the efforts made by the two sides to settle the dispute within the four years from 1968 to 1971. The intention will be to demonstrate the mechanism employed for removing one of the most important disputes between Iran and Britain, and one which certainly played an important role in the formation of Iranian thinking on British policy in the era of colonization. In a third section, one or two of the most important evaluations that have been made since 1971 concerning the withdrawal of the British forces from the region will be examined. The purpose will be to explore within this context the possible outcome of the present era of Anglo-Iranian relations. The last, or concluding section, recognizes a connection between tension in the region, most particularly over the islands, and the present relations between Iran and Britain.

Past record and historical background

This article does not intend to examine the presence of Britain in the whole region, nor its role from the beginning.¹ Instead, by focusing on the issue of islands to which Iran claimed sovereignty, this article will directly examine the ups and downs in Anglo-Iranian relations.

Britain entered the Persian Gulf in the second half of seventeenth century and started first its economic and business relations, and then its political relations with Iran, under the rule of the Safavid Shah Abbas. Britain was subsequently dependent on using the Persian Gulf islands, and even some cities in Iranian territory, in order not only to provide support for the activities of the EIC and protection for British interests in India, but also to preserve the vital waterway and ultimately the route for transporting oil.

This was realized on a contract basis in the region that became gradually established between the Iranian Government and the representatives of the British Government, or the representatives of the EIC, as in the case of the presence of the British in Bushehr. But the trend of events was different in the case of some of the islands, resulting in a dispute between the two countries over their sovereignty and ownership. Big Tonb, Small Tonb, Abu Musa and Sirri on the entrance point of the Persian Gulf were a source of contention between Iran and Britain. After the death of Nadir Shah in 1747, Iran's influence and power in the region declined and an Arab tribe called Ghasemi (or Javaseh), who were resident on the southern shore of the Persian Gulf, and who were repeatedly involved in piracy from the seventeenth century, came to prominence. A group of Ghasemi residents in Bandar

Lengeh were appointed deputy governors of that place, as well as of the Tonb islands and Abu Musa, by the Iranian Government.

In the era of Nasir al-Din Shah, the internal differences among Lengeh's Ghasemi tribe, which led from time to time to the murder of the ruler and the substitution of another member of the tribe, drove the Shah in 1887 to appoint a non-Ghasemi ruler in Lengeh. The Chief Minister Ali Asghar Amin al-Sultan, and Brig. Haji Ahmad Khan tried to establish a regional union dependent on Iran in the Persian Gulf, but the news of this move reached the British. Consequently Britain obtained a commitment from Abu Dhabi's Shaikh Zayed according to which he was not allowed to communicate with any foreign government without the consent of the British Government, nor to undertake any commitment or to receive the representative of any foreign government except Britain's.²

In 1869 a British warship anchored in Bahrain and, while thus nullifying Iran's sovereignty, deployed a British agent there. As a result, in order to exert more control over Lengeh and the islands, Nasir al-Din Shah decided to substitute the Ghasemi ruler of Bandar Lengeh with an Iranian one. In 1887, the Iranian Government therefore appointed Haj Muhammad Mahdi Malik al-Tujjar Bushihri, who was, for some time, in charge of the customs departments of the islands, as the ruler of Lengeh. Then he had the existing ruler Shaikh Ghasib Ghasemi, whose tribe had ruled Lengeh for around a hundred years on behalf of the Iranian Government, arrested and sent to Tehran.³ At the same time, the Iranian flag was raised in Sirri after the dismissal and arrest of the Ghasemi ruler.

The British representative in Tehran demanded an explanation from the Iranian Foreign Ministry. To prove Iran's sovereignty over these islands, the Iranian Foreign Ministry responded that 'Lengeh rulers have always occupied this Island, obtained tax and ruled there'.⁴ The British representative, in reply, said that,

It is true that the deputy to the ruler of Lengeh rules in Sirri, but he rules there not in the capacity of the ruler of Lengeh but as Shaikh of the Ghasemi tribe. Ghasemi Shaikhs, in addition to being under the leadership of the Iranian Government as the rulers of Lengeh, have had traditional rights in this Island and their Arab relatives on the Oman Coast have shared with them that right. The role of the Lengeh Shaikhs in Iran cannot annul the rights of their partners.⁵

This argument, which was used for the Big Tonb, Small Tonb and Abu Musa as Lengeh dependencies, is the basis of the dispute that remained until 1971 between Iran and Britain. Meanwhile the challenge to the Iranian claim to Sirri was allowed to subside.⁶

In 1903, the British representative, Colonel Kemball, who was residing in Bushehr, submitted a report to his Government according to which he proposed that Abu Musa be used as a base for the ships of the Iran-Bombay Navigation Company of Bandar Lengeh. On the basis of the above-mentioned difference of opinion on the sovereignty of the islands, he further persuaded the Shaikh of

Sharjah to hoist his flag as a sign of his ownership of the island, and even of the Tonbs.⁷ Shortly afterwards, Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India, paid a visit to the Persian Gulf and delivered a lecture to heads of tribes and Arab Shaikhs in Sharjah, which indicated Britain's long-term strategy for dominating these islands. After the Shaikh of Sharjah had duly hoisted his flag, the Iranian Government reacted in response, and pulled down the Shaikh of Sharjah's flag, raising that of Iran in April 1904. This action was carried out largely at the behest of Mr Joseph Naus, the Belgian who was in charge of regulating and administering the customs offices during the reign of Muzaffar al-Din Shah. Having observed the flag of the Shaikh of Sharjah hoisted over these islands, which had to pay tax to the central Government, he ordered the Iranian flag to be raised. The British interpreted this reaction as being influenced by provocation by the Russians in order to confront British attempts at domination over the islands.⁸

Sir Arthur Hardinge, who was Britain's Minister Plenipotentiary from 1901 to 1905, threatened the foreign minister, Mirza Nasrullah Khan Mushir al-Daula and the chief minister, Abd al-Majid Mirza Ain al-Daula, through Mr Naus, with the use of force, thus making the Iranian Government remove its flag from the islands. The British representative told Mr Naus and the Iranian officials that if Iran claimed sovereignty over the Tonb islands and Abu Musa, the British Government would again call into question the sovereignty of Iran over Sirri. The British Government considered the status quo to be represented in the hoisting of the flag of the Shaikh of Sharjah in Abu Musa, and the removal of the Iranian flag. Though a request by Iranian officials for prompt negotiations over the islands was agreed to, it never came to fruition.

In 1923, the Iranian Government of the Reza Shah era strove to bring the dispute with Britain over Abu Musa and Bahrain before the League of Nations. This move was paralysed due to British threats and pressure. However, Iran's claim to Bahrain was officially brought up in the League of Nations, but to no avail. The moves by Iran to settle this dispute with Britain reached a culmination in 1928, when negotiations started between Taimurtash, Iranian minister of court, and the officials of the British Foreign Office, but proved fruitless. In fact, in the first half of the 1930s, the issue of the islands remained one of the main causes of dispute between Iran and Britain. Nevertheless, serious and efficient negotiations that were held with the intention of settling the dispute formed the basis of later negotiations aimed at removing differences and exploring probable solutions.

In 1935, Baqir Kazimi, the Iranian Foreign Minister, proposed that Iran should relinquish its claim to sovereignty over Bahrain, and in return Britain should allow Iran to establish its sovereignty over the Shatt al-Arab and the three islands. This proposal did not work either and, as a result, the case remained unsolved till the start of the Second World War.

After the independence of India and Pakistan and the change in the traditional geopolitics of the subcontinent in 1948, the Iranian Government expected to see a fundamental alteration in Britain's regional policies. But although India did not occupy as significant a place as before in Britain's foreign policy, the Persian Gulf

retained its strategic significance for Britain as much as before, because of its vast resources of oil.

Arrangements for the settlement of the dispute over the islands

In 1968, the British Government (Labour Party) announced that it would withdraw its armed forces from the Persian Gulf within three years at the most, and change regional security arrangements completely. This decision, which was historically of high importance, was tantamount to the end of the direct presence of Britain in the Persian Gulf after around two centuries.⁹ A lot has been said about the reasons behind the withdrawal. They included the reduction of the cost of armed forces deployment and modernization of the modality of presence, and much else that is beyond the scope of this article. But the point that should be mentioned here is that international and global conditions played a great part in the adoption of such a strategy. Amongst the most important manifestations of new international conditions were the emergence of the United States as a superpower in the Persian Gulf, and the end of the era of colonization with the establishment of newly independent states. In addition, international relations and the role of the UN in facilitating relations among countries became more sophisticated. British protection of her interests in the Persian Gulf by a direct presence in the Persian Gulf contributed to the vulnerability of these interests. In the long term, the change of global and regional conditions, which had no direct connection to the dispute, that is, concerning sovereignty over the three islands, led to the settlement of this historical dispute.

After the announcement of the British Government of the withdrawal of her forces from the Persian Gulf by the end of 1971, the Iranian Government, while welcoming this decision, declared that the withdrawal of Britain, must be genuine and real. In 1968, Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi made a few points in this respect at a press conference in New Delhi, which indicated the Iranian position on the modality of the settlement of the crisis of the islands. He said that now that the British wanted to leave the Persian Gulf, the evacuation of this region should be 'real and genuine'. If the British left through the front door, they should not re-enter by the back door. Iran could not accept that the islands separated from Iran by the British should then be transferred by them to others on her behalf. If the people of Bahrain were not interested in joining Iran, she would never resort to force against them because such action, i.e. occupation by force, was against the policy of the Iranian Government.¹⁰

The policy followed by the Iranian Government after these statements was based on the proposal of the Iranian Foreign Minister in 1935, i.e. ceding Bahrain and taking the three islands from Britain (but not as tit for tat), and thus exerting sovereignty over them. But there is a difference of opinion on whether this kind of arrangement was on the agenda in Anglo-Iranian negotiations in the period 1968–71, or whether Britain agreed to it from the beginning. The point I want to

make is that when a decision is taken at a high level for the settlement of a dispute, a solution is likely to be found.

Some researchers such, as Shahram Chubin¹¹ and Ruhollah Ramazani¹² believe that Iran unsuccessfully tried to negotiate and reach agreement with Britain on different issues in the form of a package. Others like McMunn¹³ believe that there must have been a clear agreement on the basis of which the fate of the three islands and Bahrain were determined.

Amir Asadollah Alam, the Shah's Minister of Court writes in his memoirs¹⁴ that, from early 1969, Iran strove hard to link the issue of the islands to Bahrain in order to reach an agreement with the British. He mentions his talks with the British Ambassador to Tehran, and implies that the British party was convinced that the issues of the islands and Bahrain were interrelated, and an agreement on them could be reached after persistent negotiations. However, Amir Khosrow Afshar, who was nominated to hold talks on the issue of islands, says that there had never been such give and take on a deal on Bahrain on the one hand and the islands on the other.¹⁵

Anyway, the Shah took a fundamental step in attempting to show his good intention from the start by entrusting the issue of Bahrain to the UN after obtaining the consent of the British, who had been present there for 150 years. In March 1970, the Iranian Government sent a letter through its permanent mission to the UN Secretary General requesting that the organization should use its good offices to find out the true will of the people of Bahrain regarding their fate. In the aftermath of this letter the UN Secretary General expressed his agreement to the proposal by sending letters to the Governments of Iran and Britain and appointing Mr Venispir Gichardi, Director General of the UN office in Geneva, as his envoy for exploring the will of the Bahrain people. On 30 March 1975, Gichardi heading a delegation, visited Bahrain and submitted a report in Document N.9772 to the UN Secretary General. Paragraph 57 of this document stipulates that, 'I am convinced from the results obtained that the majority of the people of Bahrain are for the official recognition of that country as autonomous and independent, thus enjoying the freedom of decision-takings in her relations with the other nations'.¹⁶

When this report was submitted by the Secretary General to the Security Council, Mr Vakil, Iran's representative in the Security Council session, said that now that the era of colonization had come to an end, and the British Government had decided to withdraw her forces from the regions East of Suez, the settlement of the question of Bahrain under arrangements that contributed to peace, stability and friendship in the Persian Gulf was of high importance. He declared that he respected the desire of the Bahraini people for independence and wished them happiness and prosperity. After the declaration of the independence of Bahrain in 15 August 1971, the Iranian Government was among the first to recognize her independence. By this measure the Government of Iran also obtained the support of the Arab countries to a great extent.

It has already been mentioned that the Iranian Government expected to regain its sovereignty over the three islands in return for Bahrain, and that the

representatives of Iran and Britain held negotiations on the matter for two years. As a result, a report was prepared by the Iranian Foreign Ministry in 1971. It stated that when the question of the withdrawal of British forces from the Persian Gulf was raised in 1968, the issue of sovereignty over the three islands was addressed as a separate matter. The Iranian Government decided to settle this issue with the British Government before the departure of the British forces. The reason for Iran's emphasis on the quick settlement of the issue of islands was that Iran considered the British Government as its counterpart in the matter. The British Government, which had previously impeded the assertion of Iranian sovereignty over the islands, had to settle her account on the islands with Iran before terminating her responsibility and obligations in the Persian Gulf. These negotiations, which took two straight years, resulted in late 1971 in an agreement on the basis of which the Iranian Government regained its violated right over the three islands by deploying its forces there. As to Abu Musa, it was agreed that under certain arrangements half of the oil revenue of this island and its off-shore fields would be allocated to the welfare of Sharjah, and concessions would be allowed to the residents of Sharjah in terms of fishing. The memorandum of understanding exchanged between the British Government on behalf of Sharjah and Iran's Foreign Ministry was indicative of the consent of the British Government to the adopted arrangements. The Shaikh of Sharjah also expressed his full satisfaction with the presence of Iran's forces and the agreement made between the two sides. It was on the basis of these agreements that Iran's armed forces were deployed at the strategic points of Abu Musa and, of course, on the same day, Ras al-Khaima's armed forces fired at Iran's armed personnel as a result of which some individuals on both sides were killed.

After this incident some Arab countries such as Libya, South Yemen, Algeria, Iraq and Kuwait protested to the UN Security Council against Iran, and the Iraqi Government severed its diplomatic relations with Iran as well. But since these measures did not impinge upon the agreements made between Iran and Britain they had no effect. From this date, one can claim that one of the main disputes between Iran and Britain, that is, sovereignty over three islands was settled. In 1972, the Iranian Government recognized officially the Federation of Emirates consisting of the Shaikhdoms of the Persian Gulf and again tried to show that its sole aim of exerting its control over the three islands had been achieved.

Post-1971 era

The discussion in the above two sections was mostly related to the dispute concerning the islands in the development of Anglo-Iranian relations. The withdrawal of British forces from the region and the presence of Iran on the three islands could and can be seen as an encouraging break-point in the relations between the two. Some have argued that the withdrawal implied that Britain had not intended to colonize them, and have used the point to refute long-standing Iranian suspicions of the British. The traditional presence of Britain in the Persian Gulf, which had

always been considered a threat against the security of the southern half of the country, had come to an end, and the agreements made with Britain had meant to Iran the resolution of the long-standing differences over the islands.

Therefore, the argument that Anglo-Iranian relations entered a new era of mutual understanding in a healthy and constructive atmosphere after the withdrawal of the British in 1971 and the settlement of the dispute over the islands, gains added weight.

Nevertheless, certain events in the past thirty years have called into question the above-mentioned argument and particularly caused suspicious Iranians to believe that the withdrawal of Britain from the region has not been real and genuine. For example, a few months after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the British journal, *The Economist*, proposed that the USA capture the three islands in order to force the Iranian Government to release American hostages kept at the US Embassy and, at the same time, to safeguard the security of tankers in the Persian Gulf.

Later, from time to time, Western news agencies and even Western officials have raised the issue of Iran's sovereignty over the three islands, as if a conflict might occur at any time. Since 1971, this kind of statement and posturing has occurred repeatedly, and incited reaction among Iranian researchers, experts and officials. In the third section of this article, three approaches towards anti-Iranian statements and their impact on Anglo-Iranian relations will be examined. But, before that, we are going to review in brief the events of the past thirty years. After 1971 and the withdrawal of the British forces from the Persian Gulf, three periods are noticeable. The first period covers the years from the withdrawal of the British forces to the victory of the Islamic Revolution. In this period, due to the establishment of new security arrangements between Britain and the Government of Iran, no protest was lodged against the preservation of the status quo. Although, in this period, some Arab countries complained strongly about Iran's policies in the Persian Gulf, this protest did not aggravate the existing tensions. In other words, in this period, Western support for Iran was the main cause of the preservation of the status quo and, for this reason, other claims to the islands were not taken seriously. It was in this era that Iran was considered as an ally of the West in obstructing the influence of Communism and to this end played a key role in maintaining the security of the Persian Gulf.

In the next period from 1979 to 1992, we face a relatively different picture. In these years, which coincide with the establishment of the Islamic Government in Iran, from time to time, particularly when the issue of the threat of Islamic fundamentalism was brought up by the Western media, suspicions about Iran's claim to sovereignty over the islands were disseminated in the press. In the course of the Iran-Iraq war, the question of the deployment of Iran's military equipment in Abu Musa and the Tonbs were repeatedly brought up, and referred to as a threat against the security of the transfer of energy from the Persian Gulf.

The third period starts in 1992, since when the issue of the islands has been contested by the Emirates in the aftermath of a series of events, and still stands

out as one of the most basic differences between Iran and the Emirates. The Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, and even outside the region, have consistently supported the Emirates from the outset of the crisis, and have called into question Iran's right to sovereignty over these islands.

Iran's responses to these statements since the revolution can be categorized into three groups. The first group has reviewed thoroughly the events without giving their own analysis. The second group has analysed the events based on an adverse interpretation of the measures of the West. The viewpoint of this group reflects the abiding pessimism and suspicions of Iranians about the presence of Britain in Iran. According to this group, the West believes that Iran's activities can be contained by the issue of islands. Any time the West wants to put Iran under pressure, it calls into question Iran's sovereignty over these islands, and asks Iran to present her relevant documents. From the viewpoint of this group, a conclusion can implicitly be drawn that the withdrawal of Britain from the Persian Gulf has not been genuine. This is in particular so because the regional Arab countries, that enjoy the full support of the West, can place the same restrictions on Iran by reiterating their claims. This group is of the conviction that the ambiguity of the British in providing the final documents of the settlement of the dispute in 1971 is in line with the Western policy of exerting pressure on Iran by making Iranian documents of sovereignty seem suspicious. For instance, Hooshang Amirahmadi's article in the book entitled *Small Islands, Big Politics* may be categorized as belonging to this view.¹⁷ He believes that the legal, historical and territorial aspects of this issue should be examined in the light of Britain's anti-Iranian policies in the Persian Gulf. He mentions elsewhere that the dispute over these islands revives whenever a change to Iran's behaviour is on the agenda. Referring to the Kuwait Syndrome which, in his view, came into being after the US Desert Storm Operation repelled the Iraqi army from Kuwait, he says the Kuwait Syndrome has made the Arab countries, including the Emirates, feel that, as long as oil and its revenue are put at the disposal of the USA, they can enjoy the firm and unsparing support of the USA and the West in any dispute with Iran, including the islands.

But the third group, while taking a legalistic approach towards the issue of islands, has tried to collect documents to prove Iran's sovereignty over them. Of course, the same approach has been taken in the Emirates. Valid Hamdi's book, which aims at submitting legal documents to prove the sovereignty of the Emirates over the islands can be cited as one example of this course of action. This book, entitled *The Dispute Between the Emirates and Iran on Abu Musa and the Tonb Islands in British Documents*¹⁸ examines the British documents from 1764 to 1971 and attempts to prove that the islands belong to the Emirates.

In response to this book, Mohammad Ali Mavahed, legal adviser to the Ministry of Oil in the Pahlavi era, who was personally present at the Anglo-Iranian negotiations to find a solution to the dispute, compiled a book in 2001 on the basis of existing records and documents in the Center for Public Documents and the Library of the Indo-British Court, in which he calls into question Hamdi's arguments. Hamdi derives his documents from a report prepared by the Government of India

in 1928. Although this group of experts do not express their suspicions towards the British as frankly as the first group, they follow the same objectives. It would seem necessary to mention that legal disputes have, to some extent, replaced the era of direct conflicts and confrontations among the countries concerned. The existence of these legal disputes is indicative of the continuation of the direct traditional conflict and clash, but in another form.

Conclusion

By reviewing the case of the withdrawal of the British forces from the Persian Gulf and the consequent events, we can reach the conclusion that reviving questions over claims to Iran's sovereignty over the three islands and spreading suspicions about it, has an adverse impact on Anglo-Iranian relations. Raising these questions intensifies a fair or unfair suspicion in the minds of Iranians about the British performance in Iran in the past one or two centuries, and supports their argument that the British have left this dispute unsolved in order to use it against Iran at later stages. Those who believe that the British performance on the issue in 1971 was done on purpose and pre-planned are more than a few. On the other hand, the British Ambassador of the time to Iran believed that Britain was then unable to settle the dispute forever or, in other words, Britain did not enjoy enough power to convince the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf to officially recognize Iran's sovereignty over these islands.

Further, considering the increasing tendency towards documentary research on this dispute, one can conclude that whenever a claim has been brought up against Iran's sovereignty over these islands, particularly in the past decade, researchers on both sides have based their arguments on existing historical documents and maps in the archives and libraries of different countries in order to prove their claims, thus reviving the question of the intentions of Britain, which was directly and considerably involved in the dispute. The continuation of this trend has led to the revival of the name of Britain within a negative context in the minds of Iranians. In a nutshell, as a result, this dispute, which was labeled 'Westernized' or 'Americanized' in past decades, has become 'Britainized'.

Notes

1. For further information refer to S. Nashat, *Tarikh-i siyasi-yi Khalij-i Fars* (Tehran 1344); A. T. Wilson, *Khalij-i Fars*, trans. M. Sa'idi (Tehran 1366).
2. H. Amirahmadi, *Small Islands, Big Politics* (New York 1996), p. 43.
3. M. A. Movahed, the author of *Mubaligha-yi mustamar* (Tehran 1419) has assembled many of the documents on these events in a collection called 'Events on Iran's Coasts and Islands from 1854 to 1903' based on the documents of the Political and Secret Office of the Indian Government.
4. Movahed, *Mubaligha*, p. 59.
5. Internal Bulletin of the Foreign Ministry, Department for Information and Publications, Iran's International Policy, 111 (July 1997), p. 16.
6. After Iran captured Sirri in 1888, in the map offered to the Shah of Iran by the British

- War Department in the same year, the island was designated as part of Iranian territory.
7. Collected documents on the issue of the sovereignty of Sirri, the Tonbs and Abu Musa islands in the discussions of 1903–5, Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
 8. J. Sheikh-ol-Eslami, trans., *Khatirat-i siyasi-yi Sir Arthur Hardinge* (Tehran 1370).
 9. H. Elahi, *Khalij-i Fars va masala-yi an* (Tehran 1368).
 10. Foreign Ministry's Internal Bulletin, International Policy, p. 69.
 11. See S. Chubin and S. Zabih, *The Foreign Relations of Iran* (Los Angeles, Calif. 1974), p. 222.
 12. See R. Ramazani, *Iran's Foreign Policy: 1943–1973* (Charlottesville, Va. 1975), p. 424.
 13. See J. D. McMunn, *Great Britain's Withdrawal from the Persian Gulf: An Analysis of the Policy and the Process* (MA, Georgetown University, Washington, DC 1974), p. 60.
 14. A. Alikhani, ed., *The Shah and I: Confidential Diary of Amir Asadollah Alam* (London 1991), p. 251.
 15. H. Amirahamdi, *Small Islands, Big Politics* (New York 1996), pp. 62, 63 and 64.
 16. The Report of UN Secretary General's Special Envoy (UN Documents 1975).
 17. Amirahmadi, *Islands*, pp. 10, 11.
 18. V. Hamdi al-Azami, *Dispute Between the Emirates and Iran on Abu Musa and the Tonb Islands in the British Documents, 1764–1971* (London 1993).

ANGLO-IRANIAN RELATIONS OVER THE DISPUTED ISLANDS IN THE PERSIAN GULF

Constraints on rapprochement

Hossein H. Moghaddam

The dispute between Iran and Britain over the three islands of the Tonbs and Abu Musa is one of the recurring cases of international conflict, which has continued into the present period. It began almost a century ago. A dispute between the two countries over other islands had started some eighty years earlier. Here, my intention is not primarily to discuss the right of ownership to the islands, as other scholars, though with little consensus, have previously dealt with this question. The main purpose of this paper is to explore and evaluate the obstacles to the wrapping up of the question of the islands, which has been a thorny problem in Anglo-Iranian relations in the past, and still is in relation to the Arab states of the Persian Gulf littoral, particularly the UAE. The outcome of this investigation may then be used to suggest possible ways of resolving disputes in the future.

To give a wider picture of the dispute, I have reviewed its events from the early stages of the conflict in the 1820s onwards. For this purpose, I have consulted the original documents in the Public Record Office and India Office, as well as those documents that have been made available to the public by the Iranian Government.

I divide the constraints on rapprochement between the two countries into two related categories, those involving Iran and those involving Britain. The first consists of the factors conditioning Iran's move towards rapprochement.

As the first factor, I discuss the nature of Iranian Governments of the time and their notion of territoriality in general, and the question of the islands as part of that. The patrimonial nature of the Qajar Governments did not allow for a systematic routinized reaction to Britain. The central administration was an extension of the shah's household, and his power over the administration was absolute and discretionary. The bureaucracy was organized on patriarchal lines.¹ Despite the intention of increasing centralization in the latter part of the Qajar period,

governmental bureaucracy and function remained limited. The chief function of the bureaucracy was to generate revenues in the form of taxation during the greater part of the nineteenth century. Provinces like Fars, in the south, enjoyed a high degree of autonomy. Both the Governor and the local powers maintained independent military organizations, levied taxes and customs duties, entered into agreements with outside powers and made war and peace among themselves. Efforts made by later Qajar Governments to centralize and reabsorb the remote Shaikhdoms along the Persian Gulf littoral into the central administration system did not succeed because of the incompatibility of the plan with the real concerns of a traditional society. In brief, the Iranian Government's ineffective authority in the areas remote from the centre, such as the islands, provided an opportunity for the expansion of British influence. Interestingly enough, Qajar Governments were so concerned by the feebleness of their own command over the islands that they were anxious for the recognition of their authority at any price. To achieve credibility for their claims, they found it practicable to make concessions or agreements with a stronger power, such as Britain, provided that it entailed acknowledgement of the original ownership of the islands. This seems to have been the case with Basidu and Henjam islands in particular.

A second dimension to Iran's limited control was its lack of military power. A preliminary step towards developing Iranian naval power had been taken as early as 1886. This effort led, in 1887, to Iran's assertion of control over Sirri. Subsequently a restructuring of the provincial administration of the country included the creation of a new province of the Persian Gulf ports and islands, labelled the twenty-sixth province. This achievement was the first outcome of Iran's growing military confidence. In the next century, once again, Iran endeavoured to improve such facilities. The army always constituted a key institution of Pahlavi rule. At the outset, Reza Shah ventured to construct a modern, unified, national army, free from foreign control. Developing a naval force was put on the agenda. The Iranian Government apparently hoped, by itself policing the Gulf, to render less necessary the presence there of British patrols and consequently to diminish British influence over the semi-independent Shaikhs. In the early years of Reza Shah's rule, the Iranian Government put forward the demand that the policing of the Persian Gulf to stop the illicit arms traffic should be entrusted exclusively to Iran rather than Britain. This proposal was part of the wider demand made by the Iranian Government in these years that its own forces should be exclusively responsible for the maintenance of security in Iranian territory and territorial waters.² In November 1923, the Iranian Government required the British Government not to allow their vessels to enter Iranian ports without prior arrangements.³ To this effect, the Iranian Governor of the Gulf ports, acting on orders from the central Government, asked the British Political Resident in Bushehr to report the comings and goings of British vessels.⁴ Furthermore, the Iranian Finance Minister informed the Iranian authorities in Abadan port that no vessel should be given permission to berth without receiving authorization from the Iranian Government. The British Foreign Secretary protested against the

recent Iranian activities. A series of negotiations took place between the two countries, and eventually the British Government agreed to provide a list of their vessels in the Gulf at the beginning of each month, to notify the Iranian authorities in advance if British navy vessels intended to visit Iranian ports, and finally to report the names of British navy crews to the Iranian authorities a few days prior to their visits to Iranian ports. However, various obstacles to the development of the naval force, mainly a lack of trained naval personnel, meant that Reza Shah did not accomplish his aim of securing control of all the areas in the Persian Gulf to which Iran laid claim. Iran, under Reza Shah, was still unable to predicate its foreign policy on its military strength and the army was not oriented towards external roles such as reasserting the country's ownership of the islands.

During the reign of Mohammed Reza Shah the campaign to strengthen the country's power machine was sustained. However, Iran seemed increasingly keen to see Britain continue her Persian Gulf role due to Iran's own inability to safeguard her interests in the Gulf. The need for a much greater army was felt only in the 1970s. The acquisition of weaponry from the USA during the 1970s was almost twenty times higher than in the two previous decades put together. Iran's wishes for the return of the disputed islands to her care and control had to take second place until her other military objectives had been accomplished and the means were therefore available. Nonetheless, it was noticeable that Iran took much firmer and more serious measures to enhance her Gulf presence towards the end of the 1960s, once the plan for the expansion of her army had been put on the agenda.⁵ Even before attaining the actual arms, the anticipation of power stimulated Iran to start her island campaign. Comprehensive negotiations in 1968 occurred long before Iran received her supplies of weapons. Nonetheless, during such negotiations, Iran carried out a more dynamic and assertive policy. The Shah himself was explicit in saying that Iran would use force, if necessary, to capture the islands. Denis Wright refers to this matter in his memoirs, which I have been given the privilege of reading, and states at the time that 'the Shah is determined to seize them by force if we cannot arrange some settlement with the Shaikh concerned before we leave the Gulf'.

In October 1969, the Shah made an official visit to America. According to the press the talks centred on the Persian Gulf, defence issues and a possible 200-million-dollar loan for Iran to purchase US weapons, including Phantom jets, over a five-year period. The *New York Times* reported that Iran was pushing the issue of the defence burden she would bear after the British departure from the Gulf in order to gain US Government support for more credit facilities and increased oil sales to the USA.⁶

The mood of self-reliance gained momentum in Iran. After his return from Washington, the Shah embarked on preparing public opinion for Iran's new responsibilities and the enormous defence costs that would follow the British withdrawal from the Persian Gulf. He addressed the Majlis in October 1969, justifying Iran's new interest in a major defence programme:

I should say that the world's situation is, unfortunately, very disturbing. It is for this reason that we are forced to increase our defence capabilities – especially because others are doing this with increasing determination around us – while continuing to strive for general and complete disarmament until the day this idea is achieved.⁷

When some Arab countries claimed that the Gulf was originally Arab rather than Persian, the Shah responded,

This means that the islands we have in the Persian Gulf cannot belong to Iran since Iran is alien to the Gulf. It means that this country's oil wells in the region, around [Kharg] and elsewhere, are all 'usurped property'. One could only remain silent in the face of such a system of logic. But this is verbal silence only [. . .] The real answer lies in our material and military preparedness, which also provide the final answer. This is not a matter for verification.⁸

It seemed that the stage was set for an escalation in Iran's military purchases from the West, particularly the USA. According to the *Military Balance*, in 1971, Iran purchased 700–800 British Chieftain tanks.⁹ Her transport force was expanded by the purchase of thirty US-made C-130 aeroplanes in December 1970.¹⁰ During 1971, the navy was strengthened with four British-made naval patrol hovercrafts and the Seacat naval missiles. Iran's navy, though lacking experience, outclassed those of Iran's Arab neighbours.¹¹ In terms of manpower, in 1971, Iran managed to have an army almost twice the size of Iraq's and over four times the size of the Saudis'. By the end of 1971, according to one US official, Iran had already achieved a 'credible deterrent' against any threat in the Persian Gulf.¹²

Having considered the degree of Iran's demand for military progress, and her increasing attempt to reach her goal of self-reliant control of her influence in the Gulf, one can argue that Iran's diplomacy in the final stages of the negotiations on the question of the three islands in the Strait of Hormuz was greatly supported by her military prospects. It could be argued that it was for this reason that senior Iranian officials, having been disappointed at the outcome of the diplomatic negotiations on the issue of the islands, went on to stress the alternative solution of military action. Alam noted that at his meeting with Denis Wright on 29 May 1970, he warned Denis 'his country would forfeit all credibility if there were no new initiatives soon'.¹³ On 13 July 1970, Alam noted that he had said to Wright,

there can be no way forward until the issue of the islands has been resolved. If Britain refuses to act, then it is we who shall be forced to make the running by resorting to military occupation. The ambassador replied that, whilst he fully appreciated the depth of Iranian feeling over the matter, he regarded a military solution as being unlikely to cause anything but harm to our standing in the Persian Gulf. Even so, I told him, the

strength of public opinion is not to be denied; we cannot go on forever presenting our people with nothing but defeat'.¹⁴

The result, evidently, was not to Iran's full satisfaction, as it led to the independence of Bahrain and the creation of the UAE, without recognizing Iran's ownership of the three islands. However, for the first time in the history of the Anglo-Iranian island conflict, Iran demonstrated unprecedented commitment supported largely by her military confidence.

The third factor influencing the dispute between Iran and Britain was the individual idiosyncrasies of Iranian decision-makers, which were of great significance in the game of the islands. This, together with inconsistent diplomacy, delayed any settlement of the islands question. Only sporadic attempts were made during the time of the Qajars to address it. The nature of these efforts, in most cases, was uniquely personal and non-conventional. For example, Haj Mirza Aqasi, the chief minister in the 1840s, on his personal initiative and led by nationalistic fervour, put the question of the islands on the agenda and made an inclusive claim on all the islands of the Persian Gulf. Not surprisingly, due to the inflexibility of his approach, his claim met with total rejection by the British and failed to restore any territory to Iran. Mirza Aqasi was viewed by the British as a 'madman' and a 'Russian protégé'.

In another diplomatic attempt in 1887, after retaking Sirri, Iran stood by her claim and reiterated her right of ownership to the island in the following years. This entailed a lengthy and frustrating correspondence with the British Government. Surprisingly, this was a one-off effort, and did not include other disputed islands, such as the Tonbs and Abu Musa, despite the fact that the latter islands shared the same circumstances as Sirri, and were probably even more rewarding to own in terms of their potential mineral deposits. Iran's choice of Sirri could have led to more promising results, if it had been part of a collective, consistent and calculated diplomatic strategy.

Under the Pahlavis, decisions made by Iranian statesmen were also erratic in nature, causing ambiguity and confusion. As to the islands, some Iranian officials adopted a bargaining approach. This was evident in the so-called 'general treaty negotiations' of 1928–34. The Iranian Minister of Court, Taimurtash, for example, was remarkably easy-going, offering a compromise that included trading off one set of islands for another. This not only contradicted his own former stand, but also was detrimental to Iran's position in general for future negotiations. In the 1950s, the Iranian Foreign Ministry, in negotiations with the British Embassy, demonstrated willingness for reconciliation on the unsettled issue of the islands. Although Iran's sovereignty over the islands of Tonb and Abu Musa was emphasized, the Iranians were anxious for a 'general settlement'. The Iranian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mohammad Ali Foroughi, told the British Ambassador in Tehran, Roger Stevens, that he thought that the Iranian claim to these islands was cast-iron. He implied that this was by no means the case with other Iranian claims and hinted that the Government might drop the claim to Bahrain if offered a quid pro quo.¹⁵

The Iranian Minister for Foreign Affairs, once again in August, hinted at a deal involving the abandonment of Iranian claims to Bahrain in return for Tonb and Abu Musa. He also suggested that a plebiscite might be held in Bahrain to determine 'the will of the people'.¹⁶ In another attempt, the Iranian Head of the Legal Department of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs tried to use the islands of Tonb and Abu Musa as bargaining counters by offering Britain the recognition of their economic rights on the islands in return for recognition of Iran's right to sovereignty.

Much later, Mohammad Reza Shah gave his surprising statement at a press conference in New Delhi on 4 January 1969 that Iran would not use force to regain what belonged to it by right, 'it prefers to see the Bahraini people make their own free choice'.¹⁷ This option was based on the Shah's individual idiosyncrasies. At the time, the Iranian authorities regarded this decision as justifiable. Iranian Foreign Minister, Ardeshir Zahedi, in a statement in the Majlis said that, 'It was on the basis of these considerations that the Shah, in his New Delhi press conference, declared a logical policy acceptable to the world with regard to solution of the Bahrain problem'. However, considering the unsatisfactory outcome of the final negotiations on the islands, particularly leaving the destiny of the Tonbs, which remained undetermined and open to question, one can only speculate on the logic of this move.

Now that we have looked at what prevented the Iranian side from making useful progress in settling the islands dispute, let us consider the constraints on the British. The behaviour of the British throughout the period of their ascendancy on the islands hampered, in turn, the prospects of the settlement. In the early stages, and due to the limitations of the communications of the time, British political residents and agents could take considerable initiatives within the broader framework of British and British-Indian policy (the two were not always the same). The British Government had entrusted the responsibility of securing their interests in distant areas to those on the ground. They were the means of Britain's informal control over the islands. As a result, it was, to a great extent, up to these figures to determine or at least to suggest whether the occupation or abandonment of an island was deemed necessary. The pioneer of such initiatives was John Malcolm, who prescribed the occupation of a number of islands including Kharg and Qeshm in the nineteenth century. He argued, for thirty years, that the British should take the initiative and build an island fortress in the Persian Gulf, ideally with Malcolm in command.¹⁸ However, it was not until the early twentieth century that Lord Curzon brought the Russian threat to the attention of his Government, and consequently a decision as to the occupation of the strategic islands at or near the straits of Hormuz was made. Such influential figures encouraged the British penchant for acquiring and presiding over territories not their own. This was behind the episode of 'island-grabbing' in the early twentieth century that Iran found unacceptable.

To implement its policy, the British Government found establishing agreements with smaller local units on the ground a more suitable method to creating relations with a distant regional power. Less resistance could be expected from these local

entities. As a result, the general treaty of peace of 1820 was concluded with the littoral Arabs, which was followed by the supplementary maritime truce of 1835 and the treaty of perpetuity of 1853. Relations with Iran were overshadowed as a consequence of Britain's commitment to these local rulers.

The treaty of peace¹⁹ contained a preamble of eleven articles, the salient points of which were as follows: the first article provided that 'there shall be a cessation of plunder and piracy by land and sea, on the part of the Arabs who are parties to this contract for ever'. The third article provided that 'the parties to the agreement shall carry by land and sea a special flag' described as 'the flag of friendly Arabs [. . .] and no others'. The fourth article clearly defined the implications of flying the flag. The signatories to the treaty 'shall [. . .] continue in their former relations, with the exception that they shall be at peace with the British Government, and shall not fight with each other; and the flag shall be a symbol of this only, and of nothing further'.²⁰

The working of this article shows that the treaty-builders intended to confine the significance of this flag to a sign of friendly relations among the Arab tribes on the one hand, and between the tribes and Britain on the other, to the exclusion of any other interpretation. Other articles directed that all Arab vessels should carry 'a register' and a 'port clearance' both signed by their chiefs, containing initial information on the tonnage of the vessel, its cargo, port of origin, port of destination, number of men, arms carried, etc., and that these two documents were to be shown to the British vessels that they met. This article secured a legal authority for the operation of the British navy in the Gulf, for it authorized them to monitor the movements of Arab ships.

The general treaty of peace marked the formal beginning of British Indian policing of the Persian Gulf.²¹ The 1820 treaty was supplemented by bilateral agreements concluded between the British authorities in the Gulf and individual Arab tribes due to the incessant quarrels of the various Shaikhs among themselves, especially during the pearl-fishing season. They were, therefore, induced in 1835 to bind themselves by a maritime truce not to engage, under any circumstances, in hostilities by sea for six months. Thereafter the truce was renewed until 1843, when it was prolonged for a period of ten years. When the period of the ten years' maritime truce ended, an agreement of a still more permanent nature, known as the treaty of peace and perpetuity, was concluded in May 1853.²² The terms were similar to those of the ten years' truce, but included an important additional stipulation, namely that the 'perfect maritime truce' now established 'for evermore' should be watched over and enforced by the British Government.²³ In effect, the rulers of the pirate coast recognized the existence of a British protectorate over their shaikhdoms. From that time onwards, the old pirate coast found itself a new name and became known as the Trucial Coast.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Russian threats to British interests in Iran, in general, and in the Persian Gulf in particular, were denounced by the British Government on several occasions. In anticipation of such aggression, the British Government issued orders for the occupation of a number of islands.

The arrival of the Russian vessel, *Giliak*, at Bandar Abbas early in 1900, and her captain's overtures to the Governor of Bandar Abbas for a berth there, supported the view among the British authorities that the Russians were seeking a naval base in the Gulf. Suspicion grew when it was reported that the Russian Minister in Tehran had forwarded a request to the Iranian authorities for a fuelling station at Bandar Abbas, or at any other ports or islands of the Persian Gulf in the vicinity of the Strait of Hormuz.²⁴ The prospect of this happening had been viewed by Curzon with great seriousness: Russia's plan to establish a port and a naval base in the Persian Gulf prompted Curzon to state categorically: 'I should regard the concession of a port upon the Persian Gulf to Russia by any power as a deliberate insult to Great Britain, as a wanton rupture of the *status quo*, and as an international provocation of war'.²⁵

In November 1900, the British India Office reiterated its concern about the Russian threat to the British interests in the Gulf region. In the early part of this year a report was received to the effect that

the Russians might land men or hoist flag at Bandar Abbas. Authority was given on 14th February [. . .] under certain conditions, for hoisting the British flag on Hormuz or Hengam [*sic*], or Qeshm, or whatever island might be considered by the Naval authorities to offer the best advantages for a naval base in that neighbourhood [. . .] it would be advisable to occupy more than one of these islands.²⁶

In response, the Foreign Office suggested that 'the islands of Hengam, Qeshm and Hormuz' were most suitable for the said purpose.²⁷

Early in 1902, at a secret meeting at the British Foreign Office, it was decided that, in anticipation of Russian expansion in the Persian Gulf, the strategic islands at, or near, the Straits of Hormuz should be occupied. British officials in the region were informed of the decision.²⁸ In line with this concern, in May 1903, the British Foreign Secretary stressed that the presence of the Russians in the Persian Gulf zone would not be tolerated: 'I say without hesitation we should regard the establishment of a naval base or of a fortified port in the Persian Gulf by any other power as a very grave menace to British interests, and we should certainly resist it with all the means at our disposal'.²⁹ He continued:

It cannot reasonably be supposed that Great Britain would abandon a position attained by so many years of constant effort, or would acquiesce in attempts on the part of other powers to acquire political predominance in the south of Iran. Therefore, His Majesty's Government [. . .] could not admit that such commercial facilities should form the pretext for the occupation by Russia of points possessing strategic importance or for the establishment of such ascendancy in the south as she already enjoys in the north.³⁰

He then cautioned the Iranian Government to the effect that 'Great Britain could not consent to the acquisition by Russia of a military or naval station in the Persian Gulf, for the reason that such a station must be regarded as a challenge to Great Britain and a menace to her Indian Empire'.³¹ The Iranian Government, under the circumstances, gave her assurance to the British Government. The Shah's personal reply, which was subsequently embodied as an official document, contained a general assurance that his Government would never come to an understanding with any foreign power against Great Britain. Nor did the Government intend to alienate any portion of Iranian territory to a foreign power for a military station. The Shah further assured the British that he would not pledge any of the state revenues.³²

The British were so apprehensive at, and disturbed by, the prospect of Russian influence in the Persian Gulf that they prepared a plan to cope with such a contingency. The British Secretary of State for India instructed the Viceroy of India that

if the Russians should appear to contemplate hoisting flag at Bandar Abbas or had a force there or attempt to occupy or control the port, he is to protest in a manner indicated in his instructions; then if in spite of such protest the Russian flag should be hoisted at Bandar Abbas, he is to hoist the British flag on Hormuz, or Henjam or Qeshm, or whatever island is considered by Naval Authority as offering the best advantage for a Naval Base in the neighbourhood.³³

The authenticity of such fears seems to be doubtful, especially considering Britain's indisputable imperial presence in the Gulf on the one hand and Russia's trivial activities in the Gulf on the other. In other words, Britain's increasing influence on the Gulf islands was caused partly by a disproportionate fear of Russia, which might have been expected to fade away promptly with that country's internal as well as external crises.

Another limiting factor to the settlement was the rigidity of the British negotiating position. As the twentieth century progressed, Iran and Britain tried to settle the question of islands in the framework of comprehensive negotiations, called later the General Treaty Negotiations, of 1928–34. Under the circumstances, the subcommittee of the Committee of Imperial Defence concluded that, if possible, a general comprehensive agreement with Iran should be secured by direct negotiation. Britain sought to attain her objectives using the following arrangements: trading off one set of Iranian islands for another set; offering her cooperation in preventing smuggling activities from the southern coast conditional upon Iran renouncing her outstanding claims to Bahrain and Abu Musa and, finally, as a last resort, making some kind of deal over the Tonb islands. Formal and informal conversations were held between the British Minister in Tehran (Clive) and the Iranian Court Minister (Taimurtash) on the subject of the treaty negotiations, but no progress was made. The British documents reveal that the Iranian negotiators wished to withdraw from the negotiations because of the rigidity of the

position consistently maintained by the British Government.³⁴ The Foreign Office eventually realized that the basic difficulty in their negotiations for a general treaty settlement was that they wanted more from Iran than they were prepared to offer Iran in return.

The main advantages to be obtained by the British Government under the proposed treaty were considered to be:

1. the continued use of Henjam by British ships;
2. the abandonment of the Persian claim to Bahrain;
3. the abandonment of the Persian claim to the islands of Tonb and Abu Musa;
4. a non-aggression clause to cover the Arab Shaikhdoms under British protection on the Arabian side of the Persian Gulf;
5. a clause to provide for the settlement of outstanding claims.

The main concessions the British Government were prepared to offer Iran in return, and admitted that their offer conceded nothing, were:

1. the remission of the war and post-war debt, i.e., about 1.5 million of so-called 'agreed debt'; however, the Persians had already practically repudiated this debt and there was no hope of recovering it from them in any case;
2. the elucidation of British rights at the former naval station of Basidu by Persia, but their claim to Basidu was most doubtful;
3. the recognition of Persian sovereignty over Sirri, which had been, however, under Persian control since 1887;
4. the transfer to Persia of the Persian section of the Duzdab railway and continued working of the railway by the Government of India; but they could not prevent the Persians taking over the Persian section, while the continued operation of the Indian section had clearly only been agreed to by the Government of India because it would be to the ultimate benefit of Indian trade;
5. the abrogation of the slavery convention of 1882, but this was in any case out of date and in practice was of little value.
6. the removal of the British Residency from Bushehr, but the Resident was already regarded only as a Consul-General in Persia and his removal from Persian soil could hardly be described as a major concession.³⁵

In terms of policy-making, one cannot deny the systematic nature of British diplomacy in dealing with the question of the islands, a crucial factor that gave the upper hand to the British throughout their time in the Gulf. However, conflicting interests and occasional disagreements between different layers of the British decision-making apparatus delayed the settlement of the dispute over the islands. This can be seen in the exchange of correspondence at the time.

In the case of Henjam, for example, the Foreign Office was in favour of evacuating the island in 1931. The Foreign Office argued, 'British Government had no treaty justification for maintaining a naval depot on the Persian island of

Henjam'.³⁶ The Admiralty, on the other hand, was firmly opposed to any withdrawal from Henjam because of its great advantages as a naval base over any other place in the Gulf.³⁷

Iran's claims to the Tonbs and Abu Musa and the customs activity on the islands met with a different reaction from the British authorities. The India and Foreign Offices agreed that British officers in the Gulf be authorized to order Iranian *dhow*s off Abu Musa and Tonb, if they appeared; however, no force was to be used to secure their compliance.³⁸ The Admiralty was of the view that the Senior Naval Officer in the Gulf must be given precise instructions in case the Iranian customs *dhow* did not leave Abu Musa and Tonb area and recommended 'one shot to miss, a second shot to hit'.³⁹ The Foreign Office replied, 'to open fire upon a Customs launch engaged in carrying out the orders of the Iranian Government would be an act of war'.⁴⁰ However, in August 1928, the Admiralty was informed that it was 'undesirable to allow the Senior Naval Office to fire on Iranian launches'.⁴¹

In another case, the Foreign Office was of the opinion that both Farrur and Nabi Farrur islands belonged to Iran, but the India Office held a different opinion, believing that only over Nabi Farrur did it have undisputable rights.⁴² These differences of opinions among themselves scarcely helped the British move towards settlement.

To sum up, considering the above factors, it seems that the Iranian and the British behaviour in regard to the settlement of the island question included variables dependant not only on their capabilities and wishes, but also on possibilities and practicalities. As far as Iran was concerned, the slow process of state-modernization contributed to the delay in settlement. What they achieved must be seen as contingent on the Government's growing military and diplomatic strength. In the final negotiations of 1971, out of three issues, the independence of Bahrain, the creation of the UAE federation and the question of the three islands, Iran only managed to reach an understanding on Abu Musa.

As to the British, it seems that the general policy of holding on to the islands and preserving their control on them was necessary for their supremacy in the Gulf. This was made possible by individual initiatives as well as collective and consistent bureaucratic measures. At their departure, they sought a settlement that could save face and secure the stability of the region, at least for the time being. Now that the British era is over and it seems that they no longer seek any official involvement in the affairs of the islands, it is for Iran to tackle the remaining differences on the islands with the Emirates. Her achievements, again, as the above assessment suggests, will be intimately tied to her military and diplomatic capabilities.

Notes

1. For Qajar central administration and bureaucracy, see Ali Reza Sheikholeslami, *The Structure of Central Authority in Qajar Iran 1871-1896* (Atlanta, Ga. 1997), pp. 90-110.

2. See for Reza Shah's domestic reforms, Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner, eds, *The State, Religion, and Ethnic Politics: Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan* (Syracuse, NY 1986), pp. 204–11; also Stephanie Cronin, *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society under Riza Shah 1921–1941* (London 2003).
3. FO 371/9036, E 11188/248/34, 16 November 1923.
4. FO 371/12292, 9 May 1927.
5. For an account of Iran's military capability under Mohammed Reza Shah, see George Lenczowski, ed., *Iran under the Pahlavis* (Stanford, Calif. 1978).
6. *New York Times*, 24 October 1969.
7. Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Kayhan International in English, 7 October 1969.
8. Kayhan, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, 15 October 1969.
9. *The Military Balance*, 1971–2, p. 70.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
12. *New York Times*, 25 June 1971.
13. Asadollah Alam, *The Shah and I: The Confidential Diary of Iran's Royal Court 1969–1977* (London 1991), p. 154. Alam claimed here that Denis Wright offered in response a solution to the dispute, whereby Iran would avoid insistence on the question of legal sovereignty over the islands and said that it would be far simpler just to occupy them. 'Solve the issue at one fell swoop'. Sir Denis in an interview with the author on 23 May 2001 denies he ever said such a thing to Alam.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 163, 164.
15. FO 371/109852, 10225/4/54, EA 1089/1, Roger Stevens, British Embassy, to Fry, FO, Confidential, 17 June 1954.
16. FO 317/109852, 10225/5/45 EA 10614/54, Confidential, Stevens to Fry, 14 August 1954.
17. Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 14 January 1969.
18. The plan was thwarted in part by the reluctance of London to take any action in the Persian Gulf that might provoke a corresponding move by Russia in the north, a constant preoccupation of British policy-makers in the area. However, a good example of a local official taking independent action occurred in 1822, when, upon the evacuation of the British from Qeshm, Captain William Bruce concluded an agreement with Husain Ali Mirza, the Prince-Governor of Fars, in which Iran's right to Bahrein was asserted. Once the news reached the British Government, the agreement was pronounced invalid, and Bruce was summoned home. J. B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf 1795–1880* (Oxford 1968), pp. 188–9.
19. For the full text of the treaty, see C. U. Aitchison: *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, Vol. XI (Calcutta 1933), pp. 245–7.
20. *Ibid.*
21. IO/LP&S/20/C248C, the preliminary treaties and the general treaty of peace, 1820.
22. For the full text of the treaty, see *Guzida-i az asnad-i Khalij-i Fars*, Vol. IV (Tehran 1413), pp. 596–8.
23. Kelly, *Persian Gulf*, pp. 209, 210.
24. Davoud Bavand, *The Historical, Political and Legal Bases of Iran's Sovereignty Over the Islands of Tumb and Abu Musa* (New York 1994), p. 12. For an account of negotiations between the Giliak's captain and the local governor of Bandar Abbas about establishing a Russian coaling station there, see Firuz Kazemzadeh, *Russian and Britain in Persia: A Study in Imperialism* (New Haven, Conn. 1968), pp. 437, 438. For evidence of foreign activities in the Gulf, including those of the Russians, see

- J. A. Saldanha, *Precis of Correspondence on International Rivalry and British Policy in the Persian Gulf, 1872–1905* (Calcutta 1906), Chapter 1.
25. Arnold Wilson, *The Persian Gulf: A Historical Sketch from Earliest Times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford 1928), p. 259.
26. FO 60/733: confidential from IO to FO, 1 November 1900, enclosure no. 2.
27. FO 60/733: from George Hamilton to the Governor-General of India in Council, secret no. 30, dated 23 November 1900.
28. FO 416/10; Confidential Memorandum by Sir T. Sanderson, July 154, 1902.
29. J. A. Saldanha, *Precis of Correspondence on International Rivalry and British Policy in the Persian Gulf, 1872–1905*, Chapter 4, 'Important Pronouncement and Declaration of Policy by the Marquess of Lansdowne, 1902–03, Calcutta, 1906'; see also, G. N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question* (London 1892) pp. 620–1.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., see for the text of document, Secret E., Nos. 244–306, Enclosure, Proceedings nos. 279, July 1902.
33. FO to IO, the Secretary of State for India to the Viceroy of India, no. 35, 14 February 1900, in Bavand, p. 65.
34. FO 371/16070, Reports by Hoare on the latest efforts to progress the Anglo-Persian General Treaty, 15 September 1932.
35. FO 371/16071, E 5789, FO Minute on Anglo-Iranian Negotiations by G. W. Rendel, 30 October 1932.
36. Ibid.
37. FO 371/15351, no. 3 Archives, E 6073/8411/34, Persia Confidential, enclosure in no. 1, Admiralty to FO. Admiralty Memorandum on the Question of the Removal of the British Naval Depot at Henjam and the Practicability of an Alternative Base, 7 December 1931.
38. Ibid., E3973/421/91, FO to Admiralty, 16 August 1928.
39. Ibid., E4112/421/91, Admiralty to FO, 17 August 1928.
40. Ibid., E4111/421/91, Lord Cushendun, FO to Lord Birkenhead, IO, 24 August 1928.
41. Ibid., FO to Admiralty, 24 August 1928.
42. IO L/P and S10/153, 42315, no. 1 A. Godley, Correspondence from the IO respecting mining concessions on the islands of Sirri, Small Tonb and Nabiyyu Farur, 2 December 1908.

THE RESTORATION OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH IRAN, DECEMBER 1953

Denis Wright

On Saturday afternoon 5 December 1953 a joint communiqué was issued in London and Tehran by the British and Iranian Governments announcing they ‘have now decided to resume diplomatic relations without delay. They will thereafter proceed at the earlier mutually agreed moment to negotiate a settlement of the oil dispute which has recently clouded relations between them and thus complete the restoration of their traditional friendship’. The choice of a Saturday afternoon for such an important announcement ahead of a statement in Parliament was most unusual but, so too were the circumstances leading up to it. Let me recall those events of half a century ago.

In May 1951 Dr Mosaddeq, the Iranian Prime Minister, had become a national hero for defying the British and nationalizing the Iranian oil industry, then all but 100 per cent British-owned and their most valuable and prestigious foreign investment. The fact that the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (now BP) had created this great industry built in Abadan – what was then the world’s largest oil refinery – counted less than the Iranian conviction that they had been exploited and dominated by the British far too long. A bitter and long-drawn-out dispute between the Governments followed. Appeals to the International Court and the United Nations only exacerbated feelings on both sides; attempts by the Americans and the World Bank to find a solution failed. In October 1952 Mosaddeq, who had already expelled British consuls and the British Council, broke off diplomatic relations and expelled all our diplomats, leaving the Swiss Embassy to protect British interests.

The last such break in relations had occurred a century earlier in 1855 when Charles Murray, the British Minister – no ambassador in those days – was involved in an acrimonious personal dispute with the Shah and the Sadr Azam (Chief Minister). As a result he hauled down his flag and left Tehran for Baghdad with his staff and a baggage train of over one hundred mules. The situation was aggravated by the Iranian seizure in October 1856 of Herat, regarded by the British as the gateway to their Indian Empire, and by the one-sided Anglo-Persian war

that followed. Diplomatic relations were not restored until 1857, nineteen months later, under the humiliating terms of the treaty of Paris. Among other indignities the Iranian Chief Minister was to write, in the name of the Shah, a letter of full apology inviting Murray to return with his staff to Tehran where, on arrival, the Sadr Azam would himself 'go in State to the British Minister and renew friendly relations'; then, and then only, would the British Minister, Murray, escorted by both the Foreign and Chief Ministers, pay his respects to the Shah.

This was very different to what happened in 1953. Early in the oil dispute with Iran, the British had concluded that so long as Mosaddeq was in power a satisfactory settlement was impossible. The detailed story of the coup that unseated him is now common knowledge, and much absorbing discussion has taken place between British, Iranians and Americans on the subject. The fall of Mosaddeq on 19 August 1953 (28 Mordad in the Iranian calendar) raised high hopes in London of immediate resumption of diplomatic relations.

I was then working in the Foreign Office as Head of the Economic Relations Department in which a single desk officer dealt with oil (today a separate department deals with it). As I had no previous experience of Iran, it was because of this that I was now told to be ready to fly out to Tehran to re-establish diplomatic relations as *chargé d'affaires*. During the next few days a team of fourteen – consul, political officers, typists, etc. – was quietly earmarked to accompany me. The four senior members of my team had all previously served in Iran and would compensate for my own ignorance of the country. However, contrary to British views, the Iranian Government was in no hurry and insisted that an oil settlement must precede diplomatic relations. The British Government for their part argued that diplomatic relations were essential before embarking on difficult oil negotiations.

It took over three months of delicate diplomacy, in which the American and Swiss Ambassadors in Tehran were involved, before the Shah and his new Prime Minister, General Fazlullah Zahedi, gave way and accepted the painstakingly drafted communiqué from which I have just quoted. It was for fear that the Iranians would change their minds that it was rushed out that Saturday afternoon. I and the others in my team then gave up our jobs in the Foreign Office and got ready to fly to Tehran.

Then came a bombshell. When the Swiss Ambassador handed my and the others names to the Minister for Foreign Affairs he was told that Mosaddeq had decreed that no British diplomat who had served in Iran should be allowed to return. Would the British Government accept such rebuff? This was a hot political issue that only ministers, not officials, could decide. The two key ministers, Churchill, the Prime Minister, and Eden, the Foreign Secretary, were away in Bermuda conferring with President Eisenhower. I was instructed to see Eden the moment he returned – this I did on Saturday 12 December (we worked on Saturdays then), when he told me that, subject to my having one 'old hand' who knew his way around, he would drop the other three. He left the choice to me. I opted for John Fearnley, who was then working in the Foreign Office's United

Nations department and had previously served in the commercial department of our Tehran Embassy. The Iranians accepted him without demur and replacements were hurriedly found for the other three.

Close though we were to Christmas, there was no question of our delaying our departure. A small Viking plane was chartered, there being no direct commercial flights then between London and Tehran. We were delayed by fog and only reached Tehran late in the afternoon of 21 December after overnight stops in Athens and Baghdad. The Swiss Ambassador, Alfred Escher, met us at the airport, along with a member of the Foreign Ministry's protocol department, the No. 2 at the American Embassy and a few journalists and photographers. Armoured cars were much in evidence in case of anti-British demonstrations – but there were none. In striking contrast to the British return to Tehran in 1857, there was total absence of ceremony, and in the company of the Swiss Ambassador I was driven to our embassy. I did, however, disappoint the Swiss Ambassador, who rather enjoyed the limelight, by cancelling a ceremony, to which he had invited journalists and photographers, next morning, for the raising of our flag over the embassy. I judged it better to keep our heads down to avoid publicity. As we drove into Tehran from the airport Escher told me that, at the request of the Shah, he had arranged for me to meet at the dinner the next evening two men: Ernest Perron, a Swiss close to the Shah, and a certain Bahram Shahruckh about whom he knew nothing. I was very uneasy about this as I had no wish to get involved with the Shah or others until I had found my feet. I should have been even more apprehensive had I known what I learnt later about both men. Perron was the son of the gardener at the Shah's school in Switzerland, Le Rosey, where they had been close friends, and he had returned to Tehran with the then Crown Prince. The late Queen Soraya has this to say about Perron in her autobiography:

The most mysterious person I ever encountered at the Court of Tehran. Many people described him as the Persian Rasputin, and though this was certainly an exaggeration he did, nevertheless, play a sinister role in the Shah's circle [. . .] he was said to be the Shah's closest adviser and visited him each morning in his bedroom.

As for Shahruckh, he came from a well-to-do Zoroastrian Kerman family, had been educated in Germany and England, spoke excellent English and during the Second World War had broadcast for the Nazis from Berlin before changing sides and becoming a double agent.

So the evening after my arrival in Tehran I met Perron and Shahruckh at dinner with the Swiss Ambassador and his English wife, who duly withdrew to leave me alone with the Shah's two emissaries. Shahruckh made the running. He probed to discover the terms of the oil settlement he imagined I had in my pocket. He then criticized General Zahedi and asked whether the British Government would object if the Shah dismissed the Minister of Court, Hosein Ala. I was taken aback and replied that I had no oil solution with me, my job was to explore the possibilities,

and Zahedi, I said, was held in high regard in London, while what the Shah did with his Minister of Court was no concern of ours.

Next morning, accompanied by the Swiss Ambassador, I presented my credentials as chargé d'affaires to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Abdullah Entezam, to whom I took an instant liking as someone I could trust. I told him, without going into details, of my meeting with Perron and Shahrukh.

Two days later, Christmas Day, the pair came to see me at the embassy. Speaking from notes, Shahrukh told me that the Shah wished to know how I proposed settling the oil problem; also he wanted an assurance that we would not interfere in his country's internal affairs. I repeated that I carried no proposals with me, but could say that any settlement must provide fair compensation and not leave Iran better off than oil-producing neighbours. I assured them about non-interference. The pair left me but returned a few hours later after lunch, this time with a piece of paper or *bout de papier*, which they handed me with the claim that it represented the Shah's views. It was type-written and in fairly good English, and amounted to a demand that on all questions of 'high policy' affecting oil, my proposals should first be submitted through them to the Shah for his approval and that a plane was standing by for my response to be carried to the Shah, who was spending a few days at the Caspian. An extraordinary document worth quoting in full:

All matters of diplomatic routine, including the oil matter, should be discussed by you with the Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr Entezam). All matters of high policy, i.e. matters above or outside the diplomatic routine should be presented to His Majesty through M. Perron and myself jointly. Since, however, the oil matter is of preliminary importance in the relations of the two countries, His Majesty wishes that, after you have made your studies and reported to your Government, and have received suggestions on the manner the oil matter should be or could be settled, that you inform through this channel (Peron and myself) His Majesty in advance before you present them to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. You await His Majesty's approval or counter proposals. Thus His Majesty wishes to avoid any serious difficulties arising during the negotiations. His Majesty accepts the principles suggested by your Government (1) that the principle of compensation to the AOIC should stand firm, subject to generous treatment by your Government and (2) that the profits of Persia in oil should not be higher than in other countries of the Middle East, though the formula must be face-saving for the Persian Government. With regards to the nomination of your ambassador, His Majesty is not opposed to your approaching Mr Entezam for an agreement, but His Majesty emphatically wishes that (1) this should be done without much publicity, and (2) that the Ambassador comes when oil negotiations have reached their final stage near a settlement. His Majesty states as the following reason: (a) the Persian public opinion has already got used to Mr Wright

and regards him already with certain sympathy. Thus it would be much easier to conduct the negotiations with Mr. Wright without a new embarrassment. The Persians would thus keep favourably quiet until the results of the negotiations are known. (b) His Majesty wishes to make the best use of the day when the new British Ambassador presents his credentials to His Majesty. His Majesty intends to speak very friendly words that would subsequently switch over the Persian public opinion to a friendly spirit vis-à-vis Britain. His Majesty wishes to add to this morning's statement that in his conversations with Mr Nixon, His Majesty did not only strongly suggest non-interference in the internal affairs of Iran, but His Majesty also emphatically asked Mr Nixon, i.e. the US Government to coordinate her policy in and for Persia with the United Kingdom, for otherwise it would only be the Russians who would profit. His Majesty wishes to have the real views of your Government on this point, and would appreciate any suggestions your Government might have. On Sunday 27th December His Majesty will leave for a holiday of 10 to 12 days for Ramsar on the Caspian. However a plane will stand ready for any message you may wish to convey to His Majesty through this channel.

After reading the paper I once again expressed my dislike of dealing directly with the Shah through his two emissaries and suggested that I should see the Shah to explain my views. I also told them that I already had the name of the ambassador whose *agrément* I intended seeking as soon as I judged the moment right; also that we were working closely with the Americans and had no intention of interfering in internal affairs. I spent a troubled Christmas evening wondering what my response should be. The next morning I telegraphed the whole story to London with the recommendation that rather than comply with the Shah's wishes I should inform Entezam of his game and assure him that I would not negotiate behind his back. Eden, the Foreign Secretary, as with Curzon's personal handling of the ill-fated Anglo-Persian agreement negotiations of 1919, was taking a keen personal interest in my mission and agreed immediately – in those days the British Government had little confidence in, or respect for, the Shah. A few days later I called Entezam and spoke accordingly. Next the Prime Minister, Zahedi, was reported as having flown to see the Shah at Ramsar, where he must have scolded him, for Tehran was soon buzzing with the news that the Shah was furious with me, was refusing to see me, had turned Perron out of the palace and exiled Shahruckh to Kermanshah. Meanwhile my job was to carry out my instructions, described by Eden in his memoirs as 'formidable'. In essence they consisted of four points – to establish good relations with the Iranian authorities, to assess the possibilities of an oil settlement, to prepare the way for an ambassador and to maintain a united front with the American Embassy. Luckily all went well. I ignored a few anonymous letters from self-professed Anglophiles warning me against the Americans, who, I was told, were rigging the coming Majlis elections,

etc., etc. The Tehran public seemed friendly rather than hostile; I was well received by the ministers and officials on whom I called and was given an unexpectedly warm welcome by young Iranians who recognized me (the papers were full of photos of me those first days) on the crowded ski slopes at Lashkarak. I made no attempt to seek an audience with the Shah and my first – and friendly – meeting with him was on 11 February at the glittering reception at the Marble Palace to mark the third anniversary of his marriage with Queen Soraya. A few days later, with the arrival of Roger Stevens in Tehran and Ali Soheily in London, as ambassadors, full diplomatic relations were restored with no more than the customary formalities. Two months later a team of top oil men – British, American, Dutch and French – arrived to negotiate an oil settlement which, after some tense moments, was achieved in August.

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INDEX

- Abadan, 134, 149, 161
 Abbas Mirza, 44–7
 Abu Dhabi, 139
 Abu Musa, 6, 137–46, 152–8
 Achaemenids, 15, 17, 31
 Afghanistan, 44, 55, 56, 60, 80, 104
 Afshar, Amir, Khusrow 142
 Ahmad Shah, 104, 115–17, 120–2
 Ahwaz, 129
 air force, Iranian, 151
 Ala al-Saltana, Muhammad Ali Khan, 87
 Ala, Hosein, 163
 Alam, Amir Asadollah, 142, 151, 158
 Algeria, 143
 Amin al-Sultan, Ali Asghar, 139
 Amir Kabir, 63
 Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, 161, 164
 Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919, 69, 89, 92, 97, 108, 115–18, 122, 165
 Anglo-Persian Military Commission, 108–9, 116
 Anglo-Persian Oil Company, 128–33
 Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1907, 5, 69, 83, 89, 100
 Aqa Muhammad Qajar, 37
 Aqasi, Haj Mirza, 49, 62, 151
 Arab states, 6, 142, 144–5, 148, 154, 157
 Arabs, 11, 16–17, 56, 71
 Arfa, Hasan, 102, 110
 Armenians, 57, 71
 army, Iranian, 71, 99–127, 149–51, 158
 art and artefacts: Iranian, 21–2, 27–34
 Asadullah, Mirza, 59–60
 Atabat, 41, 45–6
 Austria, Austrians, 86, 101, 104
 Babis, 53
 Baghdad, 4, 53, 105, 161
 Bahrein, 137, 139–43, 151–3, 156–7, 159
 Bakhtiyari, 101
 Bandar Abbas, 21, 38, 63, 80, 155–6, 159
 Baqir Khan Tangistani, 58, 60–1, 65
 Bolsheviks, 108, 116, 119, 121
 Borujerd, 100
 British treaties with Arabs, 154
 Bushehr, 4, 21, 38–40, 50, 55–64, 74, 86, 91, 104, 138, 149, 157
 Cadman, John, 129–34
 Chardin, John, 11, 13
 classical tradition, 10–14, 16, 23, 25
 Clergi, Colonel, 113–14, 118, 123
 Constitutional Revolution 1906, 68–9, 75, 82, 94–5, 99
 Cossack Brigade, Division, 5, 93, 99ff, 108–24
 coup d'état 1921, 69, 108, 119, 121
 Cox, Percy, 89, 106, 115
 Curzon, George Nathaniel, 89, 122, 124, 153, 155, 165
 D'Arcy Oil Concession, 128–34
 Damuk tribe, 57, 62
 Dar al-Fanun, 28, 31,
 Democrat Party, 82–4, 86–87, 89, 92, 94, 102–3, 105, 113, 115
 East India Company (EIC), 21, 38–9, 41, 46, 57, 138
 Eden, Anthony, 162, 165
 Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art, 27, 29, 31, 24
 Entezam, Abdullah, 163, 165
 Faridun Mirza, 57, 59–60
 Farman-Farma, Abd al-Husain Mirza, 5, 80–98
 Farrur and Nabi Farrur, 158

INDEX

- Fath Ali Shah, 13, 25, 37–8, 40–7, 51, 56, 58, 64
 Fearnley, John, 162–3
 football, 2, 7
 Foroughi, Ali Mohammad, 152
 France, French, 13, 28–9, 31, 41–3, 46, 50, 55, 101
 Fraser, James Baillie, 11–12, 21
- Gendarmerie, 5, 80, 99–113, 119
 Georgia, 46
 Germany: Germans, 80, 83–86, 94, 103–4, 106, 133–4, 163
 Ghasemi tribe, 6, 138–9
 Ghorian, 59
 Gibbon, Edward, 12–13, 22
 Gilan, 116–17, 124
 Gleerup, Colonel, 107–8, 110
 Gokcha, 46
 Griboedov, Alexander, 58
 Gulistan Palace, 26
 Gulistan, treaty of, 36, 45
- Habl al-Matin*, 76
 Haji Khalil, 40–1
 Hamadan, 105, 112, 118, 120, 125
 Hasan, Shaikh, 50–51, 58–60, 62, 65
 Hellenic tradition, 10
 Henjam, 155, 157–8
 Herat, 47–8, 55, 57, 161
 Herat War, First, 4, 55, 64; Second, 161–2
 Hjalmarson, General, 106
 Hormuz, 137, 151, 153, 155
- India: Indians, 4, 13, 22, 36–7, 40–1, 43, 47–8, 56, 60, 62, 71–2, 75, 87–8, 91, 140, 153, 156–8, 161
 Iran–Iraq War, 144
 Irano-Russian War, First, 41–5
 Irano-Russian War, Second, 46–7
 Iraq, 47, 106, 143, 145, 151
 Ironside, Edmund, 99, 117–19, 122–3
 Isfahan, 11, 21, 27–9, 57, 68–9, 73–4, 86, 100, 104–5, 113–14
 Isfahani, Ali Muhammad, 3, 31, 34
 Isfahani, Aqa Sayyid Muhammad, 46
- Jangalis, 108, 116
 Jews, 50, 57, 59
jihad, 45–6, 51
 Jones, Harford, 41–5, 47, 50
- Jones, William, 14, 16
 Judaic tradition, 10
- Kaihan, Major Ma'sud Khan, 109, 119, 121–2
 Karabagh, 46
karguzar, 72–5, 78, 88
 Karim Khan Zand, 38–40, 57–8
 Kashani, Abu'l Qasim, 34
 Kazerun, 86
 Kerbala, 37, 41, 53
 Kerman, 76, 80, 84, 93, 100, 105, 107
 Kermani, Mirza Aqa Khan, 16
 Kermanshah, 80, 84, 105
 Khamseh, 85, 100, 106
 Kharg Island, 50, 55–64, 151, 153
 Khiyabani, Shaikh Muhammad, 115
 Khorasan, 47, 193
 Khuzestan, 71, 129
 Kuwait, 143, 145
- Lengeh, 6, 75, 139
 Liakhov, Colonel, 40
 Libya, 143
 Loraine, Percy, 124
 Luft Ali Khan Lari, 62
- McNeill, John, 21, 37, 47–9, 53, 59
 Mahdi Ali Khan, 40
 Majlis, National Consultative Assembly, 82, 94, 97, 128–30, 150, 167
 Malcolm, John, 13–15, 36, 40–1, 153
 Malik al-Tujjar of Bushire, 139
 Marling, Charles, 84, 88, 90, 113, 115
 Mashhad, 73–4, 101, 104, 107, 113–14
 al-Mazkhar family, 4, 57, 61
 al-Mazkur, Shaikh Husain, 63, 66
 al-Mazkhar, Shaikh Nasir, 50–1, 57–9, 61–3
 merchants, 57, 59, 70, 73–4
 Mirza Abbas, 59–60
 missionaries, 75–6
 Mohammad Reza Shah, 7, 17, 141, 150, 153, 161–6
 Mohammareh, 75
 Morier, James, 45, 47
 Mosaddeq, Mohammad, 161–2
muhajirat, *muhajirin*, 104–6, 113
 Muhammad Ali Shah, 111
 Muhammad Baqir Shafii, 38, 47–9, 53
 Muhammad Shah, 37–8, 47, 49, 51–2, 55–6, 58, 60–1

- Murdoch Smith, Robert, 3, 21–35
 Muscat, Imam of, 57, 60
 Mushir al-Daula, 116–17, 140
 music, military, 26–7, 31
 Muzaffar al-Din Shah, 128, 140

 Nadir Shah, 11, 19, 57, 138
 Najaf, 37, 40–1
 Nasir al-Din Shah, 2, 25–7, 30, 34, 37, 63, 139
 national army, 105
 National Government, 106
 navy: British, 60, 128, 149–50, 156;
 Iranian, 149–50, 158
 Nizam al-Saltana Mafi, Hasan Quli Khan, 105
 Norman, Herman, 89, 116–18, 120–2, 124, 135
 Norperforce (British North Persian Force), 117, 119, 122
 Nusrat al-Daula, Firuz Mirza Firuz, 82, 84, 86, 88, 93
 Nyström, Captain, 101, 106

 oil, 1, 2, 6–7, 71, 91, 128–36, 161–2, 164–5
 Oil Concession of 1933, 132
 Oman, 57
 Orientalism, 8, 10
 Ottoman Empire (*see* Turkey)
 Oudh Bequest, 37, 41, 52
 Ouseley, Gore, 45, 50

 Pasyan, Muhammad Taqi Khan, 105, 123
 Perron, Ernst, 7, 163–6
 Persian Gulf, 1–2, 4, 6, 38–9, 42, 49, 55–6, 60, 63–4, 83, 104, 133, 137–46, 148–58
 popular leisure and culture, 75–6
 press, 75–6, 79, 84, 94, 97, 109

 Qashqa'i, 4, 85–8
 Qavam al-Mulk, 85, 89, 91, 100, 104, 106, 125
 Qazvin, 100, 109–10, 117–23
 Qeshm, 137, 153, 155
 Qum, 104–5, 159

 Ramsar, 165
 Ranke, Leopold von, 15
 Ras al-Khaima, 143
 Rasht, 101, 117

 religious language, 38–45
 Renaissance, 12
 Reza Khan (also Reza Shah), 5, 6, 69, 74, 82, 99–124, 140, 149
 Russian Revolution 1917, 5, 87, 101, 113
 Russia: Russians, 1–2, 4, 7, 36–7, 41–7, 52–3, 55–6, 58, 64, 67, 73–4, 80, 82–4, 87, 93–4, 100, 102, 104–5, 107, 109, 111–19, 122, 134, 140, 154–5, 159, 165

 Sadiq Khan, 38–9
 Safavids, 11, 13, 38, 138
 Salar Lashkar, Abbas Mirza, 82, 84, 86, 94
 Salman, Sayyid, 51, 58, 60, 65
 Sardar Humayun, 118, 120, 122
 Sardar Ihtisham, Ahmad Khan, 88
 Sardar Mu'tazid, 85, 94
 Saudi Arabia, 151
 Saulut al-Daula, 5, 85–91
 Sayyah, Captain Kazim, 109, 119, 121–2
 Shafi, Mirza, 42–3
Shahnameh, 13–17
 Shahrukh, Bahram, 7, 163–7
 Shaibani, Major Habibullah Khan, 109–10
 Sharjah, Shaikh of, 137, 140, 143
 Sheil, Justin, 4, 37, 49, 50–52, 60
 Sherley brothers, 11, 18
 Shiraz, 38, 57–9, 63, 73–4, 80, 85, 88, 91, 94, 100, 102, 105–6
 Shuster, Morgan, 100
 Simko, Ismail Aqa Simitqu, 108, 115
 Singer sewing machines, 76
 Sipahdar, Muhammad Vali Khan, 110, 117, 120, 122
 Sirri Island, 6, 137–40, 149, 152, 157
 slave trade, 37, 49, 52, 157
 Smart, Oriental Secretary, 120–2
 Smyth, Henry, 118–22
 Soheily, Ali, 166
 Soraya, Queen, 163, 166
 South Kensington Museum (Victoria and Albert), 27–31
 South Persian Rifles, 4, 76, 80, 89–90, 91–3, 106–7, 113, 124
 South Yemen, 143
 Starroselsky, 113–17, 123
 Stevens, Roger, 152, 166
 Sweden: Swedish officers, 100–7, 111, 120, 125
 Switzerland: Swiss, 161–4
 Sykes, Percy, 2, 4, 80–3, 85–7, 106

INDEX

- Tabataba'i, Sayyid Ziya al-Din, 109, 118–22, 124
- Tabriz, 101, 107, 111–12, 114–15
- Taimurtash, Abd al-Husain, 6, 129–32, 135, 140, 152, 156
- Taqizadeh, Sayyid Hasan, 131
- Tehran, 25, 27, 31, 37, 41, 49, 63, 68, 104, 110, 112, 114–16, 120–4, 129, 162
- telegraph, 22, 25–7, 29, 31
- tiles, ceramic, 27–34
- Tobacco Concession 1890–91, 68
- Tonb Islands, 6, 137–46, 152–8
- Trucial Coast, 154
- Turkey: Turks (Ottoman), 11, 22–3, 36, 40–4, 48–55, 63, 84, 94–5, 102, 104–6
- Turkmanchai, Treaty of, 46
- ulama*, 2, 4, 36–52, 58, 60, 75, 85, 110
- United Arab Emirates, 6, 7, 137, 144–5, 148, 151, 158
- United Nations, 142–3, 161
- United States, America, 133–4, 144, 150, 161–3, 165
- Vadbosky, Colonel, 111–12
- Victoria, Queen, 26
- Vusuq al-Daula, Mirza Hasan, 84, 86–7, 89, 93, 97, 107, 109, 116
- Wahhabis, 41–2, 44
- Wassmus, Wilhelm, 80, 104
- Willock, Henry, 45–6
- World War I, 2, 69, 80, 99, 102, 108
- World War II, 134, 140
- Wright, Denis, 86, 89, 90, 93, 146, 150, 158, 161–6
- Zahedi, Ardeshtir, 153
- Zahedi, Fazlullah, 162–5
- Zoroastrians, 12, 16, 163