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BOUNDARIES I. WITH THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

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i. With the Ottoman Empire

The boundary separating the Ottoman and Iranian empires was shaped by conflict over an ill-defined strip of territory with constantly shifting outlines extending from the Caucasus to the Persian Gulf. The consolidation of expansionist Ottoman power and the establishment of the Safavids in Iran in the first half of the 11th/16th century opened a phase in which the two powers continually advanced and retreated across this strip. The Ottomans eventually proved the stronger of the two and Shah Esmāʿīl (907-30/1501-24), after suffering a major defeat at the battle of Čālderān in 920/1514, lost much of western Azarbaijan, including the main city, Tabrīz (Ramazani, p. 14). The western Kurdish areas of the Iranian empire were also gradually lost during this period. In the reign of Shah Ṭahmāsb (930-84/1524-76) the Ottomans annexed further Iranian territory, including much of Kurdistan and Mesopotamia, though the Treaty of Amasya, signed in 962/1555, led to some stabilization of the frontiers. According to the terms of the treaty, the frontier was not a line but a broad zone running through Georgia, Armenia, and the western Zagros mountains as far as the Basra area. This arrangement, humiliating for Persia, was confirmed in large part by the Treaty of Constantinople, signed in 998/1590, after an Ottoman attack on Baghdad. Shah

ʿAbbās I (996-1038/1588-1629), perhaps the most able of the Safavids, managed to push the Ottomans back to the west of Tabrīz, and his successor, Shah Ṣafī (1038-52/1629-42), eventually signed a new agreement at Zohāb on 14 Moḥarram 1049/17 May 1639, in which the same general boundaries that persist today were specified. Rivalry between the two empires continued, however, and the border regions remained unsettled. Control from the distant capitals was difficult, and local considerations were often more important than imperial policies in settling the spheres of Iranian and Ottoman influence in the borderlands. Furthermore, the Ottomans hesitated to define the boundary too precisely because of the potential loss of large revenues collected from client tribes in the area, whereas the Iranian rulers "were . . . reluctant to leave a region that harbored the principal Shīʿī sanctuaries, and where Shīʿīs constituted the majority of the population, in the hands of Turkish Sunnī sulṭāns" (Barthold, p. 206). The arrangements made at Zohāb were therefore reasonably flexible, and both powers were sufficiently preoccupied elsewhere so that the border remained largely unchanged until an outbreak of war in 1237/1821-22, which ended in the first Treaty of Erzurum (19 Ḏu'l-qaʿda 1238/29 July 1823).

From that time on repeated conflicts and developments in the larger geopolitical sphere led to concerted efforts to draw the boundary more precisely. First, throughout the 13th/19th century both the Iranian and Ottoman governments experienced increasing difficulty with the Kurds along the frontier, as developing Kurdish national consciousness led to intensified fractiousness and episodes of revolt (Chaliand, pp. 12-13). Second, in 1254/1838-39 the Ottomans attempted to destroy Iranian commercial interests at Moḥammara (now Ḵorramšahr), which appeared to be adversely affecting the prosperity of Basra. Furthermore, this period was also one in which Western imperial powers took a growing interest in the region. Great Britain in particular feared that unceasing and savage raiding on both sides of the border would weaken both the Ottoman empire and Persia, thus exposing them to Russian territorial or commercial expansion. A border commission composed of representatives of the Ottoman government, Persia, Great Britain, and Russia was therefore established. It sat from 1259/1843 to 1263/1847, and its work culminated in the second Treaty of Erzurum, which was signed on 16 Jomādā II 1263/31 May 1847. The treaty stipulated that Iran would cede the region west of Zohāb to the Ottomans in exchange for guaranteed sovereignty over islands and territory near the Persian Gulf. Particularly significant were two provisions in article 2: first, "the Persian

Government abandons all claim to the city and province of Suleimani [Solaymānīya], and formally undertakes not to interfere with or infringe the sovereign rights of the Ottoman Government over the said province" and, second, "the Ottoman Government formally recognizes the unrestricted sovereignty of the Persian Government over the city and port of Muhammara, the island of Khizr [Ḵeżr], the [Ābādān] anchorage, and the land on the eastern bank—that is to say, the left bank—of the Shatt Al-Arab, which are in the possession of the tribes, recognized as belonging to Persia" (Ismael, pp. 41-42). Iran's right to "navigate freely without let or hindrance on the Shatt Al-Arab from the mouth of the same to the point of contact of the frontiers of the two parties" was also recognized (League of Nations, *Journal*, February, 1935, p. 197; for a full discussion of the events leading up to the signing of this treaty see Ādamīyat, pp. 62-154, esp. pp. 135-38, where the full text is given). Nevertheless, the Iranians considered themselves at a disadvantage because the border was defined as the east bank of the river, which they "universally considered foreign imposed, archaic, and inequitable" (Cottam, p. 336).

The new treaty also provided for a new international boundary commission charged with examining and attempting to settle disputes arising under the treaty. Its principal task, however, was to prepare an accurate topographic map on which the boundary could be plotted. It began work in 1264/1848, discontinued its surveys during the Crimean (1269-72/1853-56) and Anglo-Persian wars (1273/1856-57), but resumed soon afterward, and by 1281/1865 it had produced two separate maps; there were, however, 4,000 discrepancies in the first eight sheets alone (Ramazani, pp. 55-56). Two different scales had been adopted (1:84,000 above latitude 36' N and 1 inch : 1 nautical mile from there to the Persian Gulf), which necessitated elaborate corrections on the maps and further negotiations. Finally, in 1286/1869, the Carte Identique was issued, and the mediating powers informed the two neighboring empires that they should themselves establish the precise boundary line within certain limits fixed on the maps (Ramazani, p. 56).

Immediately after the signing of the second Treaty of Erzurum fighting broke out over the region around Qoṭūr and Ḵᵛoy in northwestern Azarbaijan; the dispute was settled in 1295/1878 by the Treaty of Berlin (Ramazani, p. 56), in which the Ottoman and Qajar governments formally acquiesced to the terms of the 1263/1847 agreement. Iran later denied its concurrence with the notes of clarification accompanying the treaty (see below).

The expansion of British navigation and commercial interests in Mesopotamia

tended to strengthen imperial interest in firm border controls (Yapp, p. 50; Ferrier, pp. 165-66), an interest that was further enhanced in 1319/1901, when Iran sold the concession to exploit most of its oil resources to the Englishman William D'Arcy. Drilling was initiated by the Anglo-Persian Oil Company on the Qaṣr-e Šīrīn-Mandalī plateau; although this region was in Ottoman territory, according to the Carte Identique, the authorities at Constantinople had accepted the provision in the second Treaty of Erzurum that "the concession granted to the Anglo-Persian company had to remain in full and unrestricted force throughout the territories transferred." Subsequently the British negotiated with the Ottomans for a similar concession in Mesopotamia (Ferrier, n.d.).

A German proposal for a Basra rail link increased the incentive to prevent local conflict between Ottomans and Iranians that might provide opportunities for further German penetration of Mesopotamia. Following the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, in which the two great powers' respective zones of influence in Iran were drawn, there were further efforts to settle the border issue to the satisfaction of both parties and to end the fighting between the Ottomans and the Iranians. A new protocol was signed in Tehran on 28 Ḏu'l-qaʿda 1329/21 Dezember 1911. It called for precise delimitation of the boundary in conformity with the provisions of the second Treaty of Erzurum. Work was slow, however, and it was not until Sir Edward Grey intervened with Ḥaqqī Pasha, the Turkish foreign minister, in Šaʿbān, 1332/July, 1913, that the commission became more active. In the same year Britain and Iran signed a new protocol giving the Anglo-Persian Oil Company anchorage rights at new and enlarged anchorage facilities off Ḵorramšahr (Moḥammara), in the Šaṭṭ al-ʿArab, an arrangement that violated the letter of the 1263/1847 treaty but enabled the British to evade Ottoman levies on port traffic. This dispute led to still another protocol, signed in Constantinople in 1331/1913, in which the southern portion of the boundary was described as following the *medium filum aquae* in the Šaṭṭ al-ʿArab north of the confluence with the Ḵeyyen canal and the high-water line on the left bank from there to the Gulf (U.S. Department of State, 1978, p. 3). The lower Šaṭṭ al-ʿArab was thus effectively placed under Ottoman sovereignty, except for Iranian anchorages off Moḥammara and Ābādān with their associated islands, principally the four islands between the Kārūn (Šoṭayṭ) river and Moʿāwīa and the two islands opposite Mankūhī (Ismael, p. 54). In anticipation of future disputes, the protocol limited claims arising from physical changes brought about by tidal movements (i.e., creation of new islands). The negotiators also sought to

separate Kurdish tribes according to whether they were of Sunni or Shiʿite persuasion (see Harari), and farther south population groups were divided so that ethnic Arabs were concentrated west of the boundary and Turks and Iranians east of it. A definitive map of the boundary was produced between 21 Ḏu'l-ḥejja 1331/21 November 1913 and 4 Ḏu'l-ḥejja 1332/24 October 1914.

Subsequently the areas of Naft-ḵāna and the zone immediately to the north, around Qaṣr-e Šīrīn on the east bank of the Sīrvān (Dīāla) river northeast of Baghdad, together with the oil rights of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, were transferred to the Ottoman authorities, on 18 Jomādā II 1332/15 May 1914; after World War I these concessions were confirmed by Iraq, on 10 Ṣafar 1344/30 August 1925.

For many years the Iranian government contested the interpretations placed on the protocol of 1331/1913, especially the clauses that placed control of the navigable Šaṭṭ al-ʿArab in Ottoman hands. It argued, first, that the protocol was invalid because it had not been ratified by the Iranian Majlis and, second, that it was based on the second Treaty of Erzurum, which had previously been renounced by the Iranian authorities. Indeed, it has been noted in support of the Iranian position that the Constantinople protocol never provided for other than shared control of the Šaṭṭ al-ʿArab and that drawing the boundary on the left bank of the waterway reflected a questionable interpretation of its provisions (Schofield, p. 51). The deep dissatisfaction of the Iranian government with the arrangements imposed on it in 1331/1913 laid the groundwork for continuing friction over the border along the Šaṭṭ al-ʿArab. The fall of the Ottoman government during World War I simply exacerbated the situation (McLachlan and Joffe, p. 4).

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