



## COX, PERCY ZACHARIAH

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**COX, SIR PERCY ZACHARIAH** (b. Herongate, near Brentwood, Essex, England, 20 November 1864, d. Bedford, England, 20 February 1937), officer of the political service in the British Indian government who held several diplomatic posts in the Persian Gulf region in 1893-1923 and played a leading role in negotiating the [Anglo-Persian Agreement](#) of 1919.

Cox was the youngest son of Arthur Zachariah Cox, of an old East Anglian family; after his father's death in 1870 he was raised in Brighton and educated at Harrow and Sandhurst, then served with the Cameronians in India from 1884 to 1889, when he joined the Indian staff corps, moving to the Indian political department the following year. He married Louisa Belle Hamilton, whom he had met in Lucknow in 1889. From 1893 to 1904 he served in consular and political posts in British Somaliland and Muscat. In the latter he was instrumental in restoring good relations with Sultan Fayṣal, winning the esteem of the viceroy, [George Lord Curzon](#), and rapid promotion. In April 1904 he was named consul-general in Būṣehr, responsible to the British foreign office through the British minister in Tehran, and assistant political resident in the Persian Gulf, responsible to the government of India. In May 1909 he was promoted to resident (Tuson, pp. 4-5; Graves, pp. 15-93).

In order to protect British strategic interests and to impede the progress of other powers, Cox consistently sought peace and stability in southern Persia and the Persian Gulf region, forming alliances with local tribal chiefs and urban notables and thus indirectly undermining the central Persian authority (Ansari, p. 301; Graves, pp. 95-112; Wright, pp. 70-71). His alliance with Shaikh



Ḳaẓ'al, the semi-independent shaikh of Moḥammara (later Ḳorramšahr), in Ḳūzestān, provides a clear example (Ansari, pp. 174, 176, 181-203, 315). Cox first met Ḳaẓ'al in 1905, and the two formed a close friendship, which proved very useful to the British during World War I. The shaikh's domain was strategically important for the control of the Persian Gulf and development of the [Anglo-Persian Oil Company](#), founded in 1909 (Wilson, 1919, pp. 63-73). It was Cox who conducted the difficult negotiations, in July 1909, for an agreement between Ḳaẓ'al and the oil company, permitting the latter to build a refinery at Ābādān, in the shaikh's territory, and a pipeline to it from the oilfields (Wilson, 1941, p. 92). Between 1908 and 1914 the British government, represented by Cox, renewed and upgraded its assurances to Ḳaẓ'al four times (Ansari, pp. 186, 390-97). On other occasions Cox gained the confidence of Ebn Sa'ūd of Najd and Mobārak of Kuwait (Cox, apud Bell, 1930, p. 411). In person he was quietly persuasive, with a "commanding appearance" (Wilson, apud Graves, p. 14), linguistic skills, vast knowledge, and a sympathetic attitude that invited trust and admiration (Bell, pp. 307, 343, 377; Skrine, p. 58).

On 6 April 1914 Cox took up an appointment as secretary of the foreign department of the government of India in Bombay. With the outbreak of hostilities, he became chief political officer to Indian Expeditionary Force D in Mesopotamia. At the same time he remained titular political resident in the Persian Gulf until October 1920, when he was appointed high commissioner in Iraq (Tuson, p. 4).

The critical period of Cox's career in Persia began when, at Curzon's insistence, he was detached from service in Iraq and took up his duties as chargé d'affaires and acting minister in Tehran in September 1918 (Cox,

apud Bell, p. 422). In that turbulent political setting his main task was to implement the policies of the foreign office, headed by Curzon, aimed at consolidating British power over Persia. The Anglo-Persian Agreement, which he negotiated with the cabinet of Woṭūq-al-Dawla, was designed to make Britain sole guardian of Persia. Cox considered it "transparently so simple and innocuous that the more it is studied, the less justification will there be for hostility to it" (letter from Cox to Wilson, cited in Safiri, p. 304), and he was still hopeful about its reception when he left Tehran in June 1920. A master at wielding indirect influence, Cox was equal to the task of reaching agreement on terms with the shah, members of the cabinet, and various groups and individuals. He was, however, unable to quell popular fears of British tutelage or to appease all the politicians in Persia. The agreement was never ratified.



Cox is said to have disliked Tehran and to have felt more at home among the Arabs, who called him simply Cokkus (Bell, p. 338). He retired from active service in Iraq in 1923 and returned to England but continued to travel abroad on occasional diplomatic missions. He died in 1937 (*The Times* [London], 22 February 1937, pp. 15, 19; 26 February 1937, p. 18; 27 February 1937, p. 14).

In addition to his published works and diaries recording mainly hunting expeditions and journeys of exploration, a number of Cox's private papers survive (see Wainwright and Matthews, pp. 68, 105, 120, 194, 325); for his official correspondence, see P. Tuson, *The Records of the British Residency and Agencies in the Persian Gulf* (India Office records and guides to archive groups), and the following files and series from the British foreign office: FO series 60, series 248 [Būšehr consular correspondence]; FO 371; FO 460 [Moḥammara consular archives]; FO 416).

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- (Floreeda Safiri)