



DURAND, HENRY MORTIMER

DURAND, HENRY MORTIMER (b. Sehore, Bhopal State, India, 14 February 1850, d. Polden, Somerset, England, 8 June 1924), British diplomat and envoy to Tehran at the end of the 19th century. The second son of a British military family, he was educated in England and entered the Indian Civil Service in 1870. During the second [Anglo-Afghan War ii](#) (1878-80) he served as political secretary to General Sir Frederick Sleigh Roberts at Kabul. In 1893, as foreign secretary to the government of India, he returned to Kabul to negotiate the northern and eastern boundaries of Afghanistan (see [BOUNDARIES iii](#)). Impressed by Durand's distinguished service in India and Afghanistan, the Liberal British prime minister Lord Rosebery, despite Russian protests, appointed him minister to Tehran, where he arrived on 17 November 1894. He spoke Persian fluently, but he nonetheless found his tour in the country trying. Russian influence predominated in Tehran, and at the same time Great Britain was preoccupied with events elsewhere, particularly the Boer war, and unable to counter the Russians.

In private letters, as well as in official analyses dated 27 September 1895 (Foreign Office [F.O.] 60/566) and 12 February 1899 (F.O. 60/608), Durand identified discouraging trends and recommended remedies. Lord [Curzon](#), in a famous dispatch of 21 September 1899 (F.O. 60/615), followed his assessments closely. Durand had outlined three alternative British policies for Persia: agreement with Russia for joint development of the country, which ran counter to the established Russian pattern; clear warnings that advances in the north would provoke responses in the south, which seemed too aggressive;



and continuation of the traditional policy of upholding the independence and integrity of Persia under increasingly adverse conditions, which Durand and Curzon favored.

Although Durand's conduct of affairs in Persia aroused criticism from the Conservative prime minister Lord Salisbury and Herbert Bowen, the American minister in Tehran, he did enjoy some success. Appreciating the strategic importance of Sīstān, he pushed for its development as one of the pillars of British policy; as a result in 1896 the trade route between Quetta and Nushki (Noškī) was reopened, and by 1902 the British were "appreciably gaining ground" in Sīstān (U.S., XI, Griscom to Hay, 25 November 1902). He also raised the standard of professional training, strengthened the consular service, and persuaded the British government to protect and expand the telegraph network.

Durand sustained his most serious defeat in negotiations to obtain a British loan for the Persian government after the assassination of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah (17 Du'l-qa'da 1313/1 May 1896). His efforts foundered on the opposition of the British treasury and the banks' lack of confidence in Persian credit after cancellation of Persian [concessions](#) to Baron Julius de Reuter (1290/1873) and the Tobacco Régie (1309/1892), as well as Malkom Khan's lottery concession. In September 1899 Durand set out on an extended trip through southwest Persia (F.O. Confidential Print 6765), accompanied by his wife and some of the legation staff. The Qajar prince and governor Mas'ūd Mīrzā Żell-al-Solṭān (Żelle Solṭān) was their host in Isfahan. Then they explored the region around the Kārūn river, inspected the new trade route where H. F. B. Lynch and A. Taylor were working, and met several Baḳtīārī chiefs. They returned to Tehran via Lorestān, in order to study the feasibility of a trade route for which the Imperial Bank had acquired rights. The entire tour of 1,200 miles lasted eighty-eight days and involved crossing and recrossing the Baḳtīārī and Lor ranges. The party arrived in Tehran on 14 December 1899.

Although Durand opposed dividing Persia into spheres of influence, he had sketched a line from Kāneqīn, then on the Ottoman-Persian border, through Hamadān, Isfahan, Yazd, and Kermān to Sīstān, defining the northernmost limits of clear British ascendancy, in order to bring into focus the region where British energies should be concentrated. In London the Liberals used this so-called "Durand line" to defend the [Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907](#) in Parliament, arguing, over Durand's own denial, that the policies of the previous British government had simply been carried forward.



Durand's departure from Persia in April 1900 coincided with the granting of a Russian loan, accompanied by severe political restrictions, including continuation of a ban on railway building. Although Lord Salisbury did not blame Durand for the failure of the British loan negotiations, he did hold him partly responsible for the rift with the grand vizier, Mīrzā 'Alī-Aṣṣḡar Khan (see [ATĀBAK-E A'ZAM](#)). Durand liked Persia and its people, but he left without regret, confessing that in Tehran he had felt "like a jellyfish in a whirlpool" (Lord Newton, p. 232).

After serving as ambassador to Madrid Durand was suddenly transferred to Washington, D.C. Sir Edward Grey recalled him in 1906. After his return to England he devoted much of his time to writing.

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