



GREAT BRITAIN I. INTRODUCTION

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Under the Safavids and the interregnum (1500-1796). During the 16th century, several unsuccessful attempts were made by the Muscovy (or Russia) Company of London to develop trade between London and Persia via Russia. Continuous relations between Britain and Persia (apart from brief interruptions) date from 1616, when the East India Company shipped its first consignment of English woolens from India to Jāsk, and was permitted to establish trading posts or “factories” on Persian soil.

Under the Qajars (1787-1925). The East India Company’s territorial acquisitions in India during the latter half of the 18th century added an overriding political dimension to the existing commercial relationship between Britain and Persia. The British now saw Persia as an important outer bastion in the defense of their growing Indian empire, and in 1801 and 1809 they concluded defensive treaties with her against the Afghans and the French. The new importance attached to relations with Persia was marked by the opening in 1809 of a permanent British diplomatic mission in Tehran.

By the 1830s, Russia’s expansionist policies were seen by the British as threatening both Persia and India. The preservation of Persian independence



thus became a major factor in British foreign policy, and was reflected in intense Anglo-Russian rivalry for influence there. This, and the weakness of the Qajars, led both countries to interfere in Persian affairs. Britain twice intervened to prevent the Persian seizure of Herat, seen as the gateway to India; strong anti-British feelings were also aroused by the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 (q.v.), the part-occupation of Persia by British forces in World War I, and the abortive Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919 (q.v.).

Improved communications stimulated trade and travel, mostly from the British side but also state visits to London by Nāṣer-al-Din Shah, Moṣaffar-al-Din Shah, and Aḥmad Shah. Britain provided both capital and expertise for a telegraphic link between London and India via Persia, and pioneered her banking and oil industries.

Under the Pahlavis (1925-1979). Reżā Shah's determination to unify his country and eliminate foreign influence, already manifest before his accession, resulted in serious friction between the two countries. Relations suffered further damage when British and Russian forces occupied the country in August 1941. The consequent abdication and exile of Reżā Shah left his son and successor, Moḥammad Reżā Shah, with very mixed feelings about the British. The dispute over the nationalization of the Persian oil industry in 1951 marked a low point in Anglo-Persian relations; this was followed, after the overthrow of Moṣaddeq in 1953 and the settlement of the dispute, by over twenty years of exceptionally harmonious relations. There was close cooperation in many fields—political, economic, military, and cultural—together with a big expansion in trade resulting from Persia's mounting oil revenues and the Shah's ambitious industrial and military programs. Despite some differences, the British government saw the Shah as a valuable ally and a stabilizing factor in the troubled Middle East.

Under the Islamic Republic (1979–). Anglo-Persian political rather than commercial relations suffered greatly from the anti-Western policies of the Islamic Republic. For safety reasons the British ambassador and his staff were withdrawn from Tehran in September 1980, leaving the Swedish Embassy to protect British interests. Subsequent efforts by both sides to improve relations were frustrated by a series of incidents, the most important being the *fatwā* of 1989 calling for the death of a British author. Diplomatic relations were restored in September 1990 but remained under a *chargé d'affaires* until 1999 when Nicholas Browne was appointed ambassador.