



GREAT BRITAIN V. BRITISH INFLUENCE IN PERSIA, 1941-79

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Introduction. For the greater part of the Qajar era (1796-1924) Persia was the scene of intense rivalry between the Russian and British empires. Concerned about Russian expansion southward and securing India from encroachments via Persia, the British wanted to ensure their hegemony in Persia while the Russians were relentless in countering British efforts. Greater Russian and British influence was facilitated by the weakness of the Qajar state, but at the same time, the rivalry between the two powers enabled Persia to maintain a fragile and nominal independence. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the British built a telegraph line across Persia to link London with India; they increased their trading and banking activities and concerns, and sought to acquire lucrative concessions. In 1889 the British owned Imperial Bank of Persia was founded (see [BANKING IN IRAN i](#)), and in 1901 the Persian government granted the British subject William Knox D'Arcy (q.v.) a sixty-year concession involving exclusive and comprehensive rights to Persian oil in the whole of the country except for five northern provinces adjacent to the Russian borders.

Russo-British policies, and their maneuvers to counterbalance each other's



influence, also affected and helped to shape a growing movement for socio-political change in Persia which culminated in the Constitutional Revolution. In contrast to the Russians, who sided with the opponents of constitutionalism, the British tended to favor its supporters, despite the latter's anti-Imperialist dispositions. Developments in Europe, particularly the rise of the German threat, led Britain and Russia, however, to seek to resolve their differences through the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 (q.v.). They agreed, inter alia, to divide Persia into their respective spheres of influence, with a neutral zone in between. This development demoralized the Persians, who had benefited from the Anglo-Russian rivalry to escape formal foreign tutelage, and it helped to tarnish Britain's image and provoke deep distrust of the British. The British continued to maintain their influence through a variety of means, including the threat of force, bribery and offers of protection, which helped to attract an assortment of protégés and anglophiles. The discovery of oil in commercial quantities in 1908 resulted in the rapid development of a British controlled oil industry. The conversion of the British Royal Navy from the use of coal to oil in 1914, rendered Britain largely dependent on Persian oil; this, together with the British government's acquisition of a majority of shares in the oil company, known at first as the Anglo Persian Oil Company (q.v.) and later as Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), vastly increased British interests in Persia.

The collapse of imperial Russia, and the victory of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, put an end to the alliance between Russia and Britain, leading Britain to attempt formally to establish itself as the preponderant power in Persia through the ill-fated Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919 (q.v.). Failure to impose this agreement led the British to try to achieve some of their objectives, including countering Bolshevism, through other means. Key elements in the British military and diplomatic personnel in Tehran facilitated, if not instigated, the Coup d'état of 1299/1921 (q.v.), led by the Cossack officer Reżā Khan and his pro-British collaborator, the journalist and political broker Sayyed Żiā'-al-Din (Sayyed Żiā') Ṭabāṭabā'i (Ghani, p. 144 ff.; Zirinski, passim).

The ousting three months later of Sayyed Żiā', who had assumed the premiership, by Reżā Khan, then war minister, was a setback for his British supporters, particularly Herman Norman, the British Minister in Tehran. Norman's successor, Sir Percy Loraine, tended, however, to support Reżā Khan. Despite their differing approaches to Reżā Khan and Persia, British officials generally found his agenda of centralization, order and reform, and his determination to ward off Bolshevism commendable. In their desire to



support Reżā Khan, the British in practice abandoned the protection and support they had extended or pledged to local magnates and protégés such as Sheikh Kaz'al in Kuzestān (Sabahi, p. 167 ff.). They thus helped to pave the way for Reżā Khan's assumption of the throne. Having consolidated his position, Reżā Shah's primary preoccupation proved, however, to be a desire to limit foreign, particularly British, influence in Persia. Disapproving of contacts between Persian and foreign nationals, he gradually moved, through police surveillance, to make such contacts virtually impossible or dangerous. Simmering Persian resentment concerning their share of the oil company's profits, and failure to induce an adequate British response, led Reżā Shah to resort to an abrupt cancellation of the D'Arcy concession (6 Āḍar 1311 Š./27 November 1932). In late April 1933 (Ordibehešt 1312), in the wake of intense British pressure, a new agreement was, however, signed which was to run for sixty years and thus extended the duration of the original concession by a further thirty-two years.

The signing of this agreement, in which the shah had been the key player on the Persian side, and the extension of the concessionary period, could not but be a clear setback for Reżā Shah's nationalist objectives and an unmistakable reaffirmation of British power and influence. Despite their earlier, mutually beneficial cooperation, Reżā Shah had grown increasingly wary and deeply suspicious of the British (Taqizāda, 1993, pp. 262-63). He had been inclined towards the Germans, traditionally regarded in Persia as non-imperialist and capable of countervailing British and Russian influence. He sought German technical assistance in Persian economic, industrial, and military projects. In the context of the growing threat of Nazi Germany, the pursuit of such a policy by Reżā Shah was bound to antagonize the British. With the outbreak of the Second World War and the German onslaught against the Soviet Union, the British and the Russians once again joined forces. Despite Persian pleas of neutrality, Reżā Shah's apparent intransigence and failure to expel the German and other Axis nationals promptly were invoked as grounds for the invasion and occupation of Persia by Anglo-Soviet forces in Šaharivar 1320 Š./August-September 1941.

THE OCCUPATION AND ITS AFTERMATH

The occupation undermined Persian sovereignty and revived overt British influence in the country. Reżā Shah had long been regarded by many of his compatriots as owing his position to a British engineered coup. Now his abdication, having been preceded by increasing denunciation of him in the



BBC's Persian broadcasts (see GREAT BRITAIN xiii. THE BBC) which had started in late December 1940 (relying heavily on material provided by the British Legation, and particularly by its press attaché Ann Lambton), and his subsequent exile, organized by British officials, were seen as a clear indication of the reassertion of British influence.

Distrust not only of Reżā Shah, but also of the Crown Prince Moḥammad-Reżā who was also suspected of harboring pro-German sympathies, led British government officials, including the Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, to consider the possibility of restoring the Qajar dynasty. High level discussions were conducted with Prince Moḥammad-Ḥasan Mirzā, claimant to the Persian throne, and his twenty-four year old British educated son Prince Ḥamid, who spoke virtually no Persian. Following consultation with senior diplomats who had previously served in Persia, and with Sir Reader Bullard, then British Minister and later ambassador to Persia (1939-46), the idea was abandoned. Neither Prince Moḥammad-Ḥasan nor his son had commended themselves. Bullard in particular was, on various grounds, opposed to restoring the Qajars and in this was supported by the Persian Prime Minister Moḥammad-ʿAli Foruḡi (q.v.; Wright, 1985, pp. 212-15; Bullard, 1991, p. 82). The British acquiesced grudgingly in the assumption of the throne by Moḥammad-Reżā Pahlavi, "subject to good behaviour" (India Office, U.K., IOR L/P&S/12/3472A, Bullard to Eden, Annual Political Report for 1941, 17 June 1942). The whole episode served as another indication and reaffirmation of British influence and interest in the affairs of post-Reżā Shah Persia. Such influence and interest were justified in terms of wartime circumstances and Britain's regional strategic and economic interests. Britain was still the predominant colonial power in the world, particularly in the Middle East; India was still part of the British Empire and independence movements were still nascent. The wartime Anglo-Soviet alliance gave Britain a much freer hand in asserting its influence over countries such as Persia.

In the wake of the Anglo-Soviet occupation, Persia was forced to abandon its neutrality, to expel Axis nationals, to aid the Allies by providing whatever facilities they required, and eventually to side formally with them. A large number of Persian nationals, accused of actively harboring pro-German sentiments, were detained and Britain became increasingly embroiled in Persian domestic politics. Extensive contacts with individual Persians and intelligence gathering activities, which had been very difficult or virtually impossible during the greater part of Reżā Shah's reign, were now revived and



rendered justifiable in terms of vital war-related interests. This was a corollary to the erosion of the centralized authority of the government brought about by the occupation. Similarly, Moḥammad-Rezā Shah's inexperience and vulnerability, particularly in view of the circumstances surrounding his assumption of the throne and the impact of the humiliating fate that had met his father, together with his desire to enhance his prerogatives, despite his avowed undertaking to act constitutionally, facilitated the growing influence of the British legation (embassy from 1943).

The British legation/embassy was consulted or its preferences taken into account in the choice or dismissal of prime ministers, cabinet ministers and other senior civil or military officials. The functioning of the Majles would also be significantly constrained by the legation/embassy's demands and expectations. In 1942, officials at the Legation and the Foreign Office strongly favored the idea of bringing about the dissolution of the thirteenth Majles and the indefinite postponement of the next elections. They and the then prime minister, 'Ali Sohayli, considered the Majles uncooperative. Various obstacles, including the misgivings of the American and Soviet ambassadors as well as the shah, prevented this, but the barely disguised threat itself helped to reduce parliamentary recalcitrance. Subsequently, efforts were made to ensure that the composition of the succeeding parliament would be more favorable. The embassy directly or indirectly intervened in the elections for the fourteenth Majles and among other things favored the candidacy or election of individuals considered advocates of reform. They could include Tudeh (Tuda) party members on the condition that they were "responsible" (Public Records Office (PRO), Kew, U.K., FO 371/35071, Bullard to All Consuls in Persia, 6 June, 1943; FO 371/35075 Bullard to F.O., 30 August 1943). The embassy's influence was also detectable in certain parliamentary factional formations and alliances.

The cultivation of foreign, particularly British, protection or support among politically active Persians also increased considerably. Writing in 1942, Sayyed Ḥasan Taqizāda, then the Persian Minister in London, observed that "The worst consequence of the temporary foreign domination is the pervasiveness of the great degeneracy (*fasād-e 'azim*) of our own people appealing to and ingratiating themselves to foreigners. No pain (*dard*) greater than this can be imagined that people's faith has been corrupted. They believe foreign control over everything to be pre-destined and consider cultivating foreigners to be conducive to personal amelioration. Faith and personal dignity and national



prestige are thus fast eroding” (Taqizāda to Aḥmad Qawām, 8 Aḍar 1321 Š./29 November 1942, in Taqizāda, 1996, p. 8).

The legation/embassy indeed benefited from the willingness of a growing number of Persians to ingratiate themselves with British officials. Its influence was sustained through a network of contacts and informants, and various means ranging from subsidizing newspapers and other forms of financial largesse, promoting or indirectly protecting certain politicians, including tribal leaders, implicitly allowing a variety of individuals to invoke British favor, and supporting those who genuinely or tactically presented themselves as principled Anglophiles. The most renowned Anglophile to play a significant role in domestic Persian politics was Sayyed Žiā’. He returned to Persia in Mehr 1322 Š./late September 1943 to resume political activity after a long period of exile in Europe and Palestine. Welcoming ceremonies for him were reportedly organized by British consular officials in towns and cities on his route (Taqizāda, 1993, p. 288). Assisted by influential pro-British and anti-Communist forces, he was elected to represent Yazd in the fourteenth Majles. Sayyed Žiā’ was not re-elected to later parliaments, nor did he serve in ministerial or other governmental positions. He turned instead to farming, but until the very end of his life remained able to exert considerable informal influence on Persian politics. He appeared to believe firmly that the interests of Britain and Persia strongly converged on many, if not most political issues. As a Majles deputy Sayyed Žiā’'s credentials (*e’tebār-nāma*) were unsuccessfully challenged by another parliamentarian, Moḥammad Moṣaddeq, who strongly castigated him for his links with Britain and his role in the coup of 1921.

Towards the end of World War II ideological rifts and rivalries between Britain and the Soviet Union resurfaced. Left-wing forces in Persia, which in the context of the Anglo-Soviet alliance had assumed the posture of social-democratic and anti-fascist reformers, moved towards an unmistakably pro-Soviet direction. The need to counter communist activities in Persia was therefore proving urgent. Sayyed Žiā’ played an active role in anti-Communist activities and developed close relations with the court. He enjoyed the cooperation of, among others, Robert Charles (Robin) Zaehner, the British assistant press attaché and later press attaché in Tehran (1943-47), who was to return to the country during the oil nationalization crisis. Sayyed Žiā’ also acted as informal adviser to the British embassy, always providing embassy personnel with detailed analysis of Persian politics, along with advice on how



best to protect and promote British interests. The British, in turn, invariably considered Sayyed Žiā' the best prime minister that Persia could potentially have and strove unsuccessfully on a number of occasions to orchestrate his assumption of the premiership. Their failure indicated that perceived British influence far exceeded the actual. Writing in 1945 as Persian ambassador to Britain, Taqizāda, stressing the weaknesses and decline of Britain, strongly castigated his compatriots' belief in inordinate British power and influence as a very grave illusion (*wahm-e 'azim*), which "like a plague (epidemic) has overcome our people" (Taqizāda to Naṣr-Allāh Enteżām, 26 Bahman 1323 Š./15 February 1945, in Taqizāda, 1996, p. 158). Such views, however, were unusual or at least rarely aired in public.

The prevalence of assumptions about the great extent of British influence helped to augment such influence. Whenever Britain's interests were threatened, her representatives had access to a variety of avenues for counter-action. In the summer of 1946 unrest spread among southern tribes (*'ašāyer*) while the government of Aḥmad Qawām, which then included ministers from the Tudeh party, appeared over-inclined to concede to Soviet demands and the autonomy-seeking authorities in Azarbaijan. British consular officials had been approached by tribal elements concerning the possibility of supplying them with arms. Following the arrest of certain tribal leaders, Qawām's government maintained that Alan Charles Trott, the British Consul-General at Ahvāz, had been involved in the affair. The Persians demanded his recall, while the British embassy insisted on his innocence. Eventually the Persians relinquished their demand and the Foreign Office publicly confirmed British non-involvement in the plot. As it happened, British consular officials in Persia had maintained close contacts with the tribes and Foreign Office officials had considered contingency plans to counter undue Persian concessions to the Soviets and their allies in Azarbaijan, and these had included orchestrating an autonomy movement in the south. Factors such as the position taken by the American ambassador and a detectable reluctance on the part of the Persian government itself to concede to the Soviets, however, led the Foreign Office to favor cooperating with Qawām and to view tribal unrest as against British interests (PRO, FO 371/52680, Le Rougetel to F.O., 30 August 1946; F.O. to Tehran, 31 August 1946). Whatever the real attitude or the precise role of British officials, few Persians doubted their extensive involvement in stirring tribal unrest in the south. This episode revealed that actual British machinations, intrigues of certain embassy or consular personnel, deliberately manufactured rumors, or mere pretense could often not be easily



distinguished and unraveled from each other.

The widespread, monolithic Persian perception of the “British” as a harmonious and unified body of officials was illusory. The British legation/embassy contained various personnel with differing views. Nevertheless, there were important commonalities. British policy, influence and attitudes were strongly affected by negative assumptions about the “Persian character.” Bullard readily subscribed to such assumptions. He was even castigated by Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister, for his “contempt for all Persians which however natural is detrimental to his efficiency and our inter-ests” (Bullard, 1991, p, 187). The court minister, Ḥosayn ‘Alā’, complained that Bullard, “the nervous old man,” being influenced by Trott the Oriental Counselor, “does not view Persia favorably; [Bullard] is myopic (*kutāh naẓar*), [and] suspicious (*badbin*); [they] consider us all to be incompetent, thieves, hoarders” (‘Alā’ to Taqizāda, 11 Mordād 1322 Š./2 August 1943, in Afšār, pp. 262-65). Bullard’s unpopularity among the more patriotic Persian politicians is clearly reflected in Taqizāda’s words when he later wrote “Bullard is personally responsible for at least eighty percent of all the corrupt practices (*fasādhā*) and calamities (*balāhā*) which have afflicted Persia in the last few years” (Taqizāda, p. 610).

Convinced of the corruption, duplicity, incompetence, and lack of courage of Persian officials, if not the whole nation, British officials such as Bullard maintained that countries such as Persia needed guardians (*sarparast*; Fāteḥ, p. 473). They would not hesitate to resort to paternalistic interference in order to counter communism, maintain order, or promote “reform” through measures such as the employment of foreign advisers. Refusal to acknowledge the existence of any genuine public opinion or patriotic sentiments in Persia led to the British scheme for a tripartite commission (late December 1944-early 1945), which would promote decentralization in Persia and enable Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union to resolve their disagreements in the country and pursue their interests through cooperation. The scheme, widely viewed in the country as designed to undermine Persian independence and territorial integrity, was rejected by the Soviet Union, causing much relief and deepening the existing distrust of British intentions (Azimi, 1989, pp. 141-43).

Enhanced British influence was in large measure a consequence of the weakness of the state and particularly of constitutional institutions in Persia. Indeed, in the post-1941 period the British legation/embassy, with its vast and imposing compound in the heart of Tehran and its virtually unconstrained



scope for the exertion of influence, became an institutional component of Persian domestic politics. Bullard, although personally unfavorable to the shah or his active involvement in governmental affairs, was received by the shah more than any other foreign official (PRO, FO 371/53072, Bullard to F.O., 13 July 1943). Bullard's successor, Sir John Le Rougetel (1946-50), personally more favorable to the shah and less prejudiced about "the Persians," was also regularly consulted by him. He had, for instance, been informed and consulted by the shah about the latter's plans to convene a constituent assembly (eventually convened in 1328 Š./1949), to revise the Persian Constitution and formally enhance Royal prerogatives, long before senior Persian statesmen knew about such plans (PRO, FO 371/61992, Le Rougetel to F.O., 14 November 1947; FO 371/68711, Le Rougetel to F.O., 8 February 1948; FO 371/68708, Le Rougetel to F.O., 18 October 1948). Without British backing or acquiescence, the shah, although considerably emboldened by the assassination attempt on his life (15 Bahman 1327 Š./4 February 1949) would have felt less confident to proceed with his plans.

The British embassy tended to advocate the emergence of an effective administrative machinery and capable prime ministers; despite supporting the moves to increase royal powers, Le Rougetel disapproved of the shah's preference for weak prime ministers and, authorized by the Foreign Office, opposed court-favored, weak prime ministerial candidates (PRO, FO 371/75468, Le Rougetel to Strang, 18 November 1949; F.O. to Rougetel, 17 December 1949). The need for stronger prime ministers led to the appointment of Ḥāji 'Alī Razmārā, after it was approved by the British and American ambassadors. In the absence of sustained domestic parliamentary or party political support, many Persian prime ministers, including Razmārā, felt obliged to seek the backing of the British or American embassies (Azimi, 1989, pp. 226 ff.). There were, however, those, notably 'Abd-al-Ḥosayn Ḥažir, who actively and gratuitously sought British advice on every occasion or issue (ibid., pp. 192-200). This practice continued for some time after 1953 and was resorted to, for a while, by politicians such as Amir Asad-Allāh 'Alam (PRO, FO 248/1556, minute by Stevens, 5 July 1955; minute by Wright, 14 July 1955, loc. cit.; minute by Wright, 29 July 1955).

THE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT AND THE OIL ISSUE

Nationalists and leftists deplored and opposed Britain's influence, considering it highly inordinate. The Anglophiles, on the other hand, implicitly advocated or invoked British influence since it benefited them, or pronounced it



necessary as a bulwark against communism as well as a corrective to the policies of the United States, which they dismissed as insufficiently familiar with Persian affairs. The major facilitator, justifier and vehicle of British influence in Persia was the AIOC. The company played a crucial role in influencing or determining British policy in Persia. The company's extensive activities, which included providing municipal, health, and educational services in the south, amounted to acting like "a state within a state" (Taqizāda to Qawām, Esfand 1325 Š./March 1947, in Taqizāda, 1996, p. 236). Safeguarding the company's interests was of paramount importance to the British government. Following the 1944 Soviet demand for an oil concession in Persia and the subsequent Soviet support for the autonomy movement in Azarbaijan, the British tried to impress upon the Persian authorities that they should continue to negotiate with the Soviets and that it would be "most unwise" to deprive them of "legitimate access" to Persian oil (PRO, FO 371/61970, minute by Pyman, 22 April 1947; FO 371/61972, F.O. to Washington, 19 August 1947). Such an attitude was motivated by fears that rejecting Soviet demands for an oil concession might trigger moves against Britain's own oil concessions in the country.

The eventual rejection of the Soviet oil demands (30 Mehr 1326 Š./22 October 1947) did indeed contribute to mobilizing vocal discontent against the AIOC and the British government. Such discontent was aimed at forcing an increase in the Persian share of the company's profits. In 1947, for instance, the taxes paid by the company to the British government were more than double the total sum received by the Persian government from the company in that year (Elm, p. 37). The refusal of the company and the British government to make adequate and timely concessions eventually resulted, despite widespread British counter measures, in the nationalization of the oil industry and the premiership of Moḥammad Moṣaddeq (Ordibehešt 1330 Š./April 1951).

The primary objective of Moṣaddeq and his colleagues was to lend substance to Persia's independence by asserting her sovereign rights over her natural sources of wealth, particularly oil. They shared the widely held belief in the extensive and insidious influence of Britain and considered the termination or radical reduction of such influence as essential to the affirmation of Persian national sovereignty. They also believed that in order to preserve and promote their influence, the British, and in particular the oil company, had endeavored to hamper the emergence and consolidation of genuine constitutionalism. Moṣaddeq himself strongly suspected the British of having long endeavored to



bring about his political frustration and discomfiture (Moşaddeq, 1365 Š./1985, pp. 216-17). As prime minister, he departed from established practice and refused to consult foreign embassies or to allow embassies such as that of Britain to offer advice on the conduct of Persian domestic affairs. The court also ceased to be an avenue through which these embassies could maintain and exert their influence.

Prior to Moşaddeq's assumption of office, the British embassy, regarding the prevailing nationalist sentiments as spurious and transitory, had tried to orchestrate the assumption of the premiership by Sayyed Żiā'. The latter had been seeking to assume office since the assassination of Razmārā in Esfand 1329 Š./March 1951, with the aim of resolving the oil dispute and, if necessary, arranging for the dissolution of the parliament (PRO, FO 248/1514, minute by Pyman, 19 March 1951). The dissolution of the parliament was favored by the British but not by the shah, who considered it potentially detrimental to his own position. Efforts on behalf of Sayyed Żiā' were abruptly thwarted by Jamāl Emāmi (q.v.), a prominent pro-British deputy, who called upon Moşaddeq to accept the premiership. Emāmi's motives were multifarious but there are indications that in all likelihood he considered the imposition of Sayyed Żiā' unthinkable at such a critical juncture. The British Government and the AIOC did not, however, tolerate Moşaddeq's premiership and the nationalization movement passively, and resorted to extensive overt and covert operations to counter and defeat Moşaddeq. The activities of the embassy's reinforced intelligence gathering and operational networks were expanded. Among other things, Zaehner returned to Tehran, on the advice of Lambton, to join the embassy in order to help intensify the anti-Mošaddeq propaganda and to encourage and organize domestic opposition with the help of local agents such as the Raşidiān brothers (Asad-Allāh, Sayf-Allāh and Qodrat-Allāh). He maintained active contacts with a large number of anti-Mošaddeq elements, including Ernest Perron, the shah's Swiss private secretary. Zaehner's activities were supplemented by the work of other embassy personnel and particularly MI6 officers, including Charles Montague (Monty) Woodhouse and Norman Darbyshire, who played crucial roles in the anti-Mošaddeq campaign leading to the coup of August 1953. They benefited from the collaboration of local agents, who, in addition to the Raşidiāns, included well-placed officials such as Solaymān Behbudi, referred to as "chief of the shah's household" (Wilber, p. 23).

The efforts of Zaehner and others did not immediately appear successful but



they severely complicated Moṣaddeq's task and rendered him exceedingly vulnerable. A major strategy was to undermine Moṣaddeq's position through quasi-parliamentary maneuvers. Virtually all vocal opponents of Moṣaddeq, particularly in the sixteenth Majles, were in contact with the embassy and received its help, financial and otherwise (Azimi, 1989, pp. 263 ff.). The embassy also continued actively to promote Sayyed Žiā' as successor to Moṣaddeq. Such efforts, deemed as unwise even by some staunch Anglophiles and tacitly opposed by the shah, proved futile and were abandoned in favor of Qawām, rebuffed by the embassy since 1947. For his part, Qawām, who seemed to enjoy the support of the majority of Moṣaddeq's opponents, had no chance of success unless he overcame British suspicions and enlisted their support. This was achieved through the extensive mediation efforts of a host of intermediaries. On Sayyed Žiā's advice the British embassy demanded certain assurances from Qawām and he complied by submitting a signed pledge to depart from Moṣaddeq's policies in his approach to resolving the oil issue (Azimi, 1369 Š./1990, pp. 243-69). This resulted in active British support for Qawām, who also enjoyed the backing of the royalist Sayyed Ḥasan Emāmi (q.v.), *emām-e jom'a* of Tehran. A staunch opponent of Moṣaddeq despite their family ties, Emāmi had become the Speaker of the seventeenth Majles with the help of the shah and the British (Azimi, 1989, pp. 282-87).

Moṣaddeq's resignation following disagreements with the shah resulted in Qawām's premiership, but he did not succeed in consolidating his position and within a few days Moṣaddeq returned to power as the result of a popular uprising (30 Tir 1331 Š./21 July 1952). This episode, although underlining the limitations of British influence, did not make them any less adamant in their efforts to unseat Moṣaddeq, if necessary through a coup d'état. Some British officials had at last come to the realization that association with Britain or overt British support was detrimental to the chances of any contender to replace Moṣaddeq (PRO, FO 248/1531, minute by Zaehner, 21 April 1952). General Fażl-Allāh Zāhedī, then a senator, was eventually chosen as a successor to Moṣaddeq because, inter alia, he was not commonly reputed to be pro-British, as he had been arrested and exiled by the British during World War II because of his pro-German activities. Zāhedī was also advised by the embassy to conceal his British links (PRO, FO 248/1513, minute by Falle, 7 August 1952). The Persian-initiated severing of diplomatic relations with Britain (30 Mehr 1331 Š./22 October 1952) did not greatly hamper the British orchestrated anti-Moṣaddeq campaign. The campaign rested on emphasizing the impossibility of reaching a settlement with Moṣaddeq, a continued



embargo on the sale of Persian oil, propaganda about the rise of communism in Persia, and intensified covert operations. With crucial American support, such efforts eventually resulted in the coup of August 1953 and the overthrow of Moṣaddeq's government.

From the outset, the British policy had been to deny Moṣaddeq any oil settlement which would differ in substance from a fifty-fifty share of the profits and would thus be likely to undermine oil arrangements elsewhere, a policy the Americans also broadly supported. Failing to force such a settlement on Moṣaddeq had resulted in determined British efforts to destabilize and incapacitate his government. These efforts became more effective when a number of Moṣaddeq's supporters defected to the ranks of his enemies and when the United States actively turned against him. In their attempts at mediation, American officials generally refrained from initiatives likely to alienate Britain and gradually moved in the direction of a coordinated Anglo-American policy towards Moṣaddeq. Following the Republican victory in the US presidential elections in November 1952, joint CIA-MI6 operations to unseat Moṣaddeq were launched, culminating in the intensive campaign of the final weeks of his premiership (see CIA; [COUP D'ÉTAT OF 1953](#)).

These operations had several stages and interrelated aims: monarchists, particularly in the military, were to be mobilized in support of Zāhedi, who enjoyed extensive Anglo-American support. Preparations were to be made for military action but also for measures to legitimize Moṣaddeq's overthrow by, among other things, ensuring through financial rewards that a majority of Majles deputies voted against Moṣaddeq and in Zāhedi's favor. Every element of opposition would be mustered through a variety of tactics with the purpose of organizing and maximizing anti-Moṣaddeq opposition. Relying on local agents and collaborators, as well as the expenditure of considerable sums of money, a relentless war of nerves and campaign of propaganda and disinformation would be launched to create mass panic and disorientate and immobilize Moṣaddeq's supporters. Among other things, articles and cartoons damaging to Moṣaddeq would be increasingly planted in the opposition press, forged documents purporting to reveal various forms of collusion between Moṣaddeq and the Tudeh Party would be distributed; Moṣaddeq would be portrayed as an enemy of Islam; religious leaders would be threatened or attacked by agents posing as Moṣaddeq or Tudeh Party supporters. Seemingly spontaneous sit-ins and demonstrations would also be organized. The aim was to manufacture a growing and deep sense of apprehension that the country



was on the brink of disaster, that the continuation of Moşaddeq’s premiership would be tantamount to socio-political chaos and economic ruin which would result in collapse of the monarchy, Communist takeover, and serious endangering of religion. (Wilber, Appendix ‘B’: “London” draft of the TPAJAX operational plan).

A significant component of the British and later joint Anglo-American campaign against Mosâaddeq was to concentrate on enlisting the shah’s unequivocal and active support for such a strategy. Dissolution of the Majles by Moşaddeq, following the referendum of Mordâd, 1332 Š./August 1953, thwarted a vital component of the joint plan by the CIA and the MI6, which was to utilize the parliament to overthrow Moşaddeq’s government. This development increased the urgency of procuring royal support for the coup. As the campaign intensified, a host of intermediaries or envoys were dispatched by the Americans and the British to win the shah’s cooperation, if necessary by employing implicit threats (Wilber, pp. 22-36). Not surprisingly, the shah harbored deep suspicions about British intentions. As late as May 1953 he told the US Ambassador that “The British had thrown out the Qajar Dynasty, had brought in his father and had thrown his father out. Now they could keep him in power or remove him as they saw fit. If they desired that he should stay and that the Crown should retain the powers given to it by the Constitution he should be informed. If, on the other hand, they wished him to go he should be told immediately so that he could leave quietly” (PRO, FO 371/104659, Makins to F.O., May 21 1953).

Aiming to rebut these assumptions, Churchill sent the shah his assurances of goodwill and support, and the shah seemed reassured (PRO, FO 371/104659, F.O. to Makins, May 28 1953; Makins to F.O. June 2 1953). He was nevertheless inclined to suspect British agents of being responsible for the failure of the initial stage of the coup of August 1953, which had prompted his hasty flight to Baghdad (Henderson, Tehran, to the Department of State, August 23 1953, text in Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, X, pp. 762-65). Not only did the shah’s support, albeit halfhearted, for the anti-Moşaddeq campaign prove crucial, but even his flight from the country helped further to galvanize and mobilize pro-monarchist sentiments avidly stimulated by Moşaddeq’s domestic and foreign opponents. In the eyes of many of his nationalist minded compatriots, the shah’s credibility and legitimacy suffered significantly, however, as the result of his unmistakable association with foreign-sponsored moves to defeat a movement whose primary aim had been to promote Persian



national sovereignty and to contest foreign influence.

THE POST-1953 ERA

To a large extent the coup helped reestablish British influence in Persia, but British prestige was not left unscathed. The British had not succeeded in removing Moṣaddeq without American support, and the fruits of their joint endeavor, including the control of Persian oil, also had to be shared. The Consortium Agreement of October 1954 was in essence the reaffirmation of the principle of profit sharing on a fifty-fifty basis and a clear negation of nationalization as advocated by Moṣaddeq; pre-1951 oil arrangements were not, however, revived. On the other hand, by eliminating Moṣaddeq's government and reversing the nationalization of Persian oil, the British gained a degree of unwarranted self-confidence which led to the Suez debacle of 1956 and further erosion of British influence and prestige in the Middle East.

In Persia, despite concerted Anglo-American efforts to discredit Moṣaddeq, the strength and resilience of pro-Moṣaddeq sentiments could not be denied. Following the resumption of diplomatic relations with Persia in December 1953, Denis Wright, the British Charge d'Affaires, observed that there was "still much latent support for Moṣaddeq throughout the country," adding that no Persian government "in the foreseeable future can afford to ignore the nationalism which he stirred up" (PRO, FO 371/11009, Wright to Eden, January 7 1954). In fact, Zāhedi found it difficult to disregard Moṣaddeq's decree of Āḍar 1331 Š./December 1952, which prohibited re-admittance for active service of diplomats who had previously served in Persia. With one exception, Zāhedi did not agree to the return of British diplomats who had previously served in the country. The new British Ambassador, Sir Roger Stevens (1954-58), had formerly served as Ambassador to Sweden.

The British embassy abandoned or reconsidered some of its past practices and contacts, acted with greater discretion, and repeatedly emphasized its adherence to a policy of non-involvement in internal Persian affairs. The embassy was certainly no longer in a position to play its previous role in influencing the selection of ministers and other high-ranking officials. The embassy also tried to distance itself from many of the Anglophiles who invoked its support, including those who had contributed to the eventual success of the anti-Moṣaddeq campaign. Even the Rašidiāns, although assisted by the embassy in their business transactions, would be discouraged from invoking their British links to reap political benefit (PRO, FO 371/127075;



Master to West, 30 March 1957; FO 371/127075, Hiller to West, 1 June 1957).

The Rašidiāns did, however, continue to use their links to maintain or enhance their political influence as well as their commercial interests and advantages. Their friends, particularly former British diplomats in Tehran such as Sam Falle, continued to insist that “we can not afford to neglect those who over a long period of time have proved their loyalty to us” (PRO, FO 371/127074, Letter by Falle, 28 February 1957). They maintained a circle of powerful friends, in both London and Tehran, which included Princess Ašraf, the shah’s twin sister, politicians such as Rezā Šarrāfzāda, Faḥ-Allāh Forud and Sohayli, as well as generals such as Teymur Baḳtiār and Meḥdi-qoli ‘Alawi Moqaddam (PRO, FO 371/127075, British embassy minute, n.d.). The brothers’ links with the court would also continue and Asad-Allāh Rašidiān would later act as a direct intermediary between the shah and foreign leaders such as Indira Gandhi, the Indian Prime Minister, bypassing the Persian Foreign Ministry. (‘Alam, III, pp. 57, 73, 98, 110). Others with putatively close ties to circles of power in Britain would also emerge to exert considerable influence or reap personal benefits. Shapoor Reporter, knighted in the early 1970s, worked in various capacities as teacher of English, foreign correspondent and primarily as a political and business broker with links with the Persian royal court. Reporter had worked as an MI6 agent during Mošaddeq’s premiership. Having joined the U.S. embassy following the rupture of Anglo-Persian diplomatic relations, he resumed his work with MI6 when relations were restored. Utilizing his extensive and influential contacts both in Persia and Britain, he was later able to act as a successful middleman brokering large commercial deals with Britain, including arms purchases (Mo’assasa-ye moṭāla‘āt wa paḏuhešhā-ye siāsi, 1370 Š./1991, p. 290 ff.). Claims made on his behalf that he was “undoubtedly the most distinguished and important British intelligence official dealing with Persia” (ibid., p. 294), seem exaggerated and have not been corroborated by the available documentary sources. In 1958, when he worked as a *Times* reporter, he was described by Denis Wright as “the shah’s man,” adding “I have yet to read a message from him containing a word which might induce His Majesty’s displeasure” (PRO, FO 371/133006, minute by Wright, 7 August 1958).

On the perceptual level the gulf separating the British officials from the Persians was not likely to be easily bridged. The underlying assumptions deployed frequently to explain the seemingly less intelligible aspects of Persian affairs began noticeably to change. Nevertheless, the protracted



conflict with Persia or the “two and a half years of frustration” would be attributed by Stevens merely to “Persian indecision, ignorance, emotionalism and guile” (PRO, PREM 11/726, Stevens to Eden, 13 August 1954). Similarly, Wright considered “xenophobia, corruption, intrigue, agitation and a strong inferiority complex” to be at the “root of the Persian’s suspicion of all foreigners” (PRO, FO371/109998, Wright to Eden, 13 February 1954). Earlier more explicit pronouncements about the “Persian character” ceased to be readily aired, but such assumptions continued to be deployed by British officials, notably but not exclusively by Ambassador Geoffrey Harrison (1958-1963), in order to make sense of a whole range of problems facing Persia. The quality of his assessments and comments on Persian politics reveals Harrison to be intellectually less nuanced than his predecessor, Stevens, or his successor, Wright. Concerning the prospect of successful reform in Persia, Harrison wrote “given the defects of Iranian character, it would be rash to be over optimistic” (PRO, FO 371/140790, Harrison to Selwyn Lloyd, 30 September, 1959). In explaining the failure of democratic arrangements in Persia he typically wrote, “Iranian character does not readily accept the process of give and take which seems to be essential to the success of a parliamentary system” (PRO, FO 371/149755, Harrison to Selwyn Lloyd, 4 March 1960).

On a different level, the coup had revealed the extent of the measures to which the British and the Americans were prepared to resort in order to safeguard their interests. Although widely regarded as American engineered, the coup helped to reaffirm the existing belief in inordinate British influence in Persia. Writing in September 1956, Stevens reported: “We are now believed to be exerting our influence more subtly by making the shah our creature, by supporting and encouraging his system of government and by showing ourselves indifferent to the consequences except in so far as our interests are directly affected, viz. foreign policy and oil supplies and revenues” (PRO, FO 371/120714, Stevens to Selwyn Lloyd, 29 September 1956). Later, while regretting that in the post-War years the popular image of the British had been “magnified, distorted and denigrated by our enemies and ill-wishers,” he observed that the mass of the Persian people now considered the British to be powerful and capable but “selfish and conservative complacent about the Iranian situation and unwilling to perform altruistic services to help the Iranian people” (PRO, FO 371/133009, Stevens to Riches, 15 April 1958).

Similarly Lambton, then a professor at London University, following her visit



to Persia in the summer of 1956, found the extent of Persian belief in the “myth” of British influence “astonishing” and observed: “Britain is believed by all classes, down to the peasants, to support the shah and the government, and therefore, is held responsible for the ills of the country” (PRO, FO 371/120714, Miss A. K. S. Lambton’s impressions of Iran, Summer 1956). Indeed, few Persian politicians were prepared to believe that the British no longer actively involved themselves in Persian domestic affairs and at least some continued to try to enlist the embassy’s support or favor. Many politicians, unhappy with the shah’s assertive disregard of constitutional principles, wanted the embassy to help steer him away from personal rule. British professions of non-involvement in domestic Persian affairs were, however, welcomed by the shah (PRO, FO 371/133006, Russell to Brown, 24 September 1958). Such an attitude on the part of British diplomats implied condoning, if not supporting, his efforts to enhance his personal power. Several diplomats both in Tehran and London regretted the shah’s inadequacies as a leader and his intolerance of effective prime ministers; others, believing that Persia was drifting, continued to favor the premiership of Sayyed Žiā’, who had remained a trusted adviser to the embassy (PRO, FO 371/114810, Fry to Wright, 25 July 1955, minute by Samuel, 18 July 1955; FO 371/114811, Wright to Macmillan, 3 August 1955). The shah’s merits, however, outweighed his failings. He was not averse to consulting the British ambassador on significant issues or implicitly heeding his advice or preferences. He also saw Sayyed Žiā’ on a regular basis. Moreover, the shah’s preferences and those of the British appeared to converge on many issues. The British supported a stable pro-Western regime in Persia which would be firmly anti-Communist, opposed to Moṣaddeqists and clerical influence, as well as Arab radicalism, and would favor reformist measures and close political and commercial links with Britain. The shah also seemed firmly committed to such objectives, particularly a pro-Western foreign policy.

The shah had played a crucial role in Persia’s membership of the pro-Western Baghdad Pact of 1334 Š./1955 (renamed the Central Treaty Organization [q.v.] following the Iraqi revolution of July 1958), which had provoked considerable Soviet enmity but not, in the shah’s view, adequate Western commitment or assistance to Persia. In early 1959, secretly and without informing his Western allies, he conducted negotiations with the Soviets with the aim of signing a non-aggression pact. The shah hoped to lessen Soviet hostility while maintaining close ties with the West. In the event, negotiations proved abortive, primarily as the result of pressure from the American and British officials,



who had been tipped-off by the court minister, Ḥosayn ‘Alā’ (PRO, FO371/140787, Harrison to Stevens, 2 February 1959). Anglophiles, particularly Sayyed Žiā’, whom the shah invariably regarded as faithfully representing British views, had also actively advocated and continued to favor the improvement of Soviet-Persian relations, creating the impression that this was favored by the British. In the words of Harrison “the fifth column of self-professed Anglophiles is once again busily touting the canard that we are actively in favour of arrangement [with the Soviets]. Our old friend Say-yed Žiā’, seems to be unrepentantly active in this sense” (PRO, FO 371/140787, Harrison to Brown, 18 May 1959). Clearly the Anglophiles, including Sayyed Žiā’, did not always reflect British preferences and nor was the shah as unambivalent in his purportedly strong pro-Western leanings as he appeared to be.

As for domestic Persian politics, any British approach to the shah on how to rule was deemed by embassy officials to be deeply sensitive and difficult, and likely to be construed as improper interference or sabotaging of royal efforts to “save” his country (PRO, FO 371/ 114811, Wright to Macmillan, 3 August 1955). There was, moreover, no clear agreement among British officials on how the shah should behave politically. The predominant view, despite occasional reservations, was that Western-style constitutional monarchy in Persia would be impractical and “might prove disastrous” (PRO, FO 371/120714, Stevens to Selwyn Lloyd, 29 September 1956). Similarly, it was maintained that given the prevailing circumstances, the existing regime in Persia, despite its failings, was better than any available alternative (PRO, FO 371/133004, Stevens to Selwyn Lloyd, 24 March 1958). Entertaining no illusions about the shah, Stevens maintained that as long as he was on the throne there was no prospect of a “genuine popularly based government”; stability was “both tenuous and spurious,” and it was “hard to imagine that there will be a decent Government, let alone social justice.” Evaluating the alternatives, Stevens’ recommendation was that “we must adjudge the shah’s Government from our own point of view as distinctly the lesser evil and cooperate with it, especially in the international field, as best we can” (PRO, FO 371/133006, Stevens to Selwyn Lloyd, 21 August 1958). Less critical of the shah, Harrison was more emphatic in underlining the virtues of the existing regime: “No foreseeable alternative regime is likely to be as favourable to our interests as the present one” (PRO, FO 371/170374, Harrison to F.O., 13 February 1963). Advocating constitutionalism was clearly not a British priority, nor was it deemed conducive to any beneficial result, and yet, at least for some time, they



regretted too undisguised a disregard of constitutional arrangements and procedures by the shah and wished that the governments which he appointed were credible enough to deflect criticism of the monarchy (PRO, FO 371/157611, Harrison to F.O., 23 October 1961).

Whatever the public or private attitudes of British diplomatic personnel, Persian belief in inordinate British influence was not likely to wane. One British official, recognizing the clear benefits of their perceived widespread influence, suggested that “ideally our object in dealing with the Iranians should be not so much to persuade them that this belief of theirs is a myth as to persuade them that we do not misuse the tremendous powers we are supposed to possess” (PRO, FO 371/133009, Riches to Stevens, 25 March 1958). British diplomats would continue to be viewed as much shrewder in understanding or affecting the domestic politics of the Middle East than their American counterparts. An indication of the way in which they continued to be perceived was the shah’s tendency—in crisis situations and when he deemed it desirable to underline his nationalist credentials—to reiterate and emphasize publicly the instances of his past resistance to various British pressures and schemes against Persian national interests. This was a tactic he resorted to following the Iraqi revolution of July 1958, which resulted in the overthrow of the pro-British monarchy and caused the shah considerable panic. The shah used the occasion also to underline his policy of “positive nationalism” (PRO, FO 371/133006, the shah’s press conference of 9 September, 1958; Russell to Brown 17 September, 1958; Russell to Selwyn Lloyd, 24 September, 1958; Russell to Selwyn Lloyd, 30 September, 1958).

The shah’s allusions to past British interference in Persian affairs was meant, as he told John Russell, the British chargé d’affaires, to assert Persia’s independence of action. No longer were any decisions taken on the basis of anything other than “positive nationalism” and Persia’s interests. “He was happy in the knowledge that at the present day we were not intervening in any way in the internal affairs of the country, job pushing, or influence peddling” (PRO, FO 371/133006, Russell to Brown, 24 September 1958). The shah’s guarded denunciation of Britain’s past diplomatic record in Persia was followed by the brief arrest of Moṣṭafā Fāteh (q.v.)á, a former senior employee of the AIOC, and a journalist, Ḥasan Ḥā’eri-niā. The shah accused them of spreading “alarm and despondency,” adding that “both traded on their reputation as British agents.” Russell responded by asserting that none of the current embassy staff knew Fāteh, while describing Ḥā’eri-niā as “a small-time



confidence man and hack journalist with whom we have never had more than the most superficial of contacts” (PRO, FO 371/133006, Russell to Selwyn Lloyd, 30 September 1958). Russell was not oblivious to the utility of such ploys for the shah (ibid.). The shah’s gestures were meant not only to imply that Britain had ceased to play her previous role in Persia, but also that her current influence would be countered and restricted.

Certain other developments had helped to restrict the scope for the exertion of foreign influence. The “Qarani Affair,” uncovered in Esfand 1336 Š./late February 1958, was one such instance. General Moḥammad-Wali Qa-rani and his collaborators had apparently plotted to bring about a strong reformist executive, and to force the shah to cooperate with it and confine himself to the role of a constitutional monarch (Gasiorowski, 1993). At the outset foreign powers, implicitly the Americans, were blamed as instigators of the plot, but any foreign role was subsequently played down. One of the intended or unintended consequences of the Qarani affair was, however, to reduce the contacts between the British and US Embassies and opponents of the regime and to deter locals from contacting foreigners or seeking their support.

The creation of the State Security and Intelligence Organization (SAVAK) in late 1335 Š./1957, and its expansion was a further development detrimental to traditional modes of foreign influence. The organization was used, inter alia, to monitor and limit the activities of foreign embassies. “I have no doubt,” wrote Ambassador Stevens, “that our movements and contacts are being carefully watched” (PRO, FO 371/133009, Stevens to Riches, 25 March 1958). Not surprisingly, British help in training SAVAK members was viewed by some Persian officials as likely to add to Britain’s unpopularity, particularly since “Savak, in the process of controlling subversion, was working off a lot of private grudges” (PRO, FO 371/140787, minute by West, 23 February 1959).

Despite the apparent rapport between the shah and British officials, his distrust of the British was never far from the surface; he also fully subscribed to the existing assumptions that the British opposed and actively tried to derail closer links between America and Persia. He was unhesitant in perceiving or portraying opposition to his policies as being anything other than foreign inspired. In Mehr 1343 Š./October 1964, the extent of parliamentary opposition to an immunities bill for the United States’ forces stationed in Persia (the Status of the Forces Act), greatly surprised and angered the shah. The bill was approved in the Majles by a vote of 74 to 61, while 52 deputies absented themselves (Safari, II, pp. 661-717). The shah had expected little opposition and



had assured the American ambassador of this. He initially blamed the prime minister, Ḥasan-‘Ali Maṣṣūr, but subsequently appeared convinced that the British were responsible. He not only wanted Horace Phillips, the embassy counselor, to be declared *persona non grata*, but instituted inquiries to ascertain whether the Foreign Office, or just the ambassador and embassy staff, were responsible; in the words of the ambassador, Sir Denis Wright (1963-71), “to clear the matter up I sought an immediate audience and challenged the shah to tell me why we would wish to cause trouble in this way: he had no answer (and accepted my word)” (Wright, 1991, pp. 265-66). By the late 1960s, the British embassy was increasingly active in the area of enhancing the British share of trade with Persia, including the sale of military equipment, or in procuring contracts for British companies. Despite occasional misgivings, British officials were generally inclined to believe that, led by the shah, Persia was moving in the right direction. In the assessment of Ambassador Wright, the shah’s regime “for all its faults and for all the increasing worry that it causes us, is the best that the country can hope for in the foreseeable future” (PRO, FO 371/186664, Wright to Brown, 26 August 1966).

The shah was becoming not only increasingly autocratic but also overly self-confident; by the early 1970s he acted as a seasoned world leader playing an important role in efforts to increase the oil producing countries’ share of oil profits. Bypassing the foreign ministry, the shah conducted foreign policy personally and granted audiences to foreign ambassadors and officials through ‘Alam, court minister and the second most influential man in the country. As revealed by the diaries of ‘Alam, the shah tended to be conspicuously imperious not only in his attitude to foreign ambassadors but also foreign leaders. He found occasions to express satisfaction about current British attitude towards Persia (‘Alam, II, pp. 246, 354; III, p. 154) and described Ambassador Wright as “well-meaning” (I, p. 215). His lurking suspicion of the British would not, however, go unvented as he persisted in his delusion that they had a hand in everything (‘Alam, II, p. 289).

He invariably attributed the vagaries of the British media coverage of Persia to the British government and sometimes threatened to retaliate by suspending arms purchases (‘Alam, I, pp. 325-26). He even attributed the recent failed attempt on his life (21 Farvardin 1344 Š./10 April 1965) to “British inspired communists (‘Alam, I, p. 374) and repeatedly castigated the British for having instigated the riots of Ḳordād 1342 Š./June 1963, which Prime Minister ‘Alam



had violently suppressed (*ibid.*, II, pp. 128-29, 387). He considered India to be heavily under the British sway (*ibid.*, III, p. 154), described Iraqi leaders as stooges of Britain (*ibid.*, II, p. 86), and blamed the failure of a Persian engineered coup against the Iraqi regime on Britain alerting the Iraqis (*ibid.*, II, p. 97, 116; III, p. 154).

‘Alam no longer readily shared such assumptions and seemed more concerned about American influence; he considered the British incapable of exerting anything of the magnitude of their previous influence (‘Alam, II, p. 289). He had ceased to treat them with awe and enjoyed good relations with Wright, whom he regarded as his friend and a “Persophile” (*Irānkvāh*; ‘Alam, II, p. 137). ‘Alam was amused at the extent of near-sycophantic attention he allegedly received when occasionally attending embassy functions (III, pp. 78-79, 142-43). On the other hand, his revulsion to freemasons (I, pp. 142-43, 179; II, pp. 42-43), traditionally regarded as linked to Britain, affected his attitude. He also suspected the British of still harboring links with the clerics (*ākun-dhā*; ‘Alam, I, p. 271). He implicitly blamed the British for having instigated the Americans and the shah to replace him with Manšur (17 Esfand 1342 Š./8 March 1964), whom he regarded as an American stooge (II, p. 129; III, pp. 119-20).

Mindful of the ineradicable residue of assumptions about British intrigues and links, embassy personnel also knew that such assumptions could be easily invoked in order to curb British contacts with Persians critical of the regime. Embassy personnel, watched by SAVAK and primarily preoccupied by their efforts to enhance British exports to Persia, were increasingly and noticeably distancing themselves from involvement in domestic Persian politics or from any move which could be construed as such or as a critique of royal behavior. Soon after his arrival in Tehran, Ambassador Anthony Parsons (1974-79) “realized” that the embassy’s “observation of the internal scene must be conducted with discretion.” He “needed therefore to observe the political scene without arousing any suspicion of improper involvement in Iran’s internal affairs or of making clandestine contacts which, if discovered, would severely damage our [Britain’s] relations with the Shah” (Parsons, pp. 4-5).

No longer a major world power, Britain had long ceased to enjoy her previous position in post-1953 Persia. Yet the residual influence of Britain, whether real or perceived, resting on a long history of preponderant presence on the Persian political scene as well as in the collective memory, was sufficient to ensure that she continued to play an important role in Persian politics. Such



influence would be unhesitatingly deployed to safeguard immediate British interests. The end of the British Empire in the Persian Gulf created new opportunities for growing Persian military and political influence in the region and yet there were major issues which could not be settled without British cooperation.

In 1968 the British Labour Government announced that British forces would be withdrawn from the Persian Gulf by the end of 1971 and a federation or union consisting of seven Trucial States as well as Qatar and Bahrain would emerge. There followed protracted negotiations between Persia and Britain, complicated by issues of security in the Persian Gulf, Britain's traditional links with Arab sheikhs in the region and, most significantly, Persia's historic claims over Bahrain. The issue of Bahrain had been on the agenda of Persian politics at least since the mid-1940s. The shah had publicly asserted that Persia would never renounce her claim to Bahrain (PRO, FO 371/133006, Embassy to F.O., 30 September 1958). British pressure succeeded, however, in suppressing this issue and eventually forcing the shah to eschew earlier claims and to agree to Bahrain's independence in 1971. The shah acquiesced when a face-saving arrangement was found to ascertain the views of the Bahraini population. This was done not through a referendum as he had preferred, but through a United Nations delegation which found the inhabitants to be overwhelmingly in favor of independence.

There were three other islands, the two Tonbs and Abu Musā (q.v.), which Persia historically regarded as hers. In their dealings with British officials both the shah and 'Alam insisted that without resolving the issue of these islands, Persia would not settle over Bahrain ('Alam, I, pp. 126, 165, 194). The shah failed, however, to link the renunciation of Persian claims over Bahrain formally with Persia's takeover of the three islands. The British acquiesced in the Persian takeover of the islands although for years they "had upheld the Arab sheikhs' claims to them" (Wright, 1991, pp. 267-69). Later, following the revolution of 1979, the issue of the three islands would re-emerge to mar Persia's relations with some of her Persian Gulf Arab neighbors. Even at the peak of royal power the near paranoid belief in the ineradicable, mysterious and often insidious British influence and intentions survived. Critical articles in the British press, or the tone, manner and extent of the coverage of Persian events by the BBC Persian Service continued to be attributed to calculated policies and ulterior motives (Radji; Parsons, pp., 72-73, 102-4). In 1978, as Desmond Harney, a former British diplomat in Tehran noted, listening to the



BBC's Persian broadcasts became "an obsession" reviving "the old Iranian conviction of 'the hand of the English' (*dast-e Englisihā*)" (Harney, p. 107). "There seems to be little doubt," Harney observed, "that the BBC Persian Service is biased and is subversive to morale, if not actually inflammatory." He added that obsession with the BBC was "colouring Iranian attitudes to Britain for years far more effectively, for good or ill, than the embassy" (Harney, p. 109). According to another observer, the BBC's coverage of opposition activities and pronouncements against the shah came to be viewed as "highly suspect"; London's "repeated pleadings of innocence in the shah's ouster have never been believed"; such disclaimers "had little effect on the skeptical monarchists" (Amuzegar, pp. 87-88).

Conversely, the opponents of the shah strongly suspected the British and the Americans of trying to bolster him, save the monarchy, or to affect the course of events with the aim of salvaging their interests and influence. Indeed, one of the objectives of the revolution which commanded enormous appeal was the termination of Anglo-American hegemony, widely considered responsible, through the coup of August 1953, for engendering and subsequently sustaining royal authoritarianism. Such sentiments were underscored by an assault in early November 1978 by a group of revolutionaries on the British embassy, which resulted in the destruction of its communications facilities. This event would, however, fail to persuade the monarchists to revise their assumptions concerning British designs against the shah.

In the last year of his reign, the visibly disoriented shah, in desperation, turned increasingly to the Americans and the British for advice. He saw the American Ambassador William Sullivan, and his British counterpart Parsons, almost on a daily basis (Sick, p. 67). While later blaming both envoys and countries for undermining his regime, the shah attributed greater responsibility to the Americans (Pahlavi; Sick, p. 48; Amuzegar, pp. 226-27). Some members of his entourage would continue, however, not only to view Britain as the culprit but also the potential redeemer. Moḥammad-Ja'far Behbahāniān, a deputy court minister, reportedly believed that the British deposed the shah because he had at one time publicly "insulted British workers." He told a British journalist that "if only the shah apologized, then the British would restore him"; he advised the shah accordingly, but his advice was rejected. Behbahāniān "sincerely and deeply believed this would do the trick," and six years later "still believed it with absolute conviction" (Shawcross, pp. 78-79).



Indeed, the attribution of extraordinary capabilities to the British had proved to be a resilient component of Persian political culture which to a considerable extent, and particularly at the level of the popular imagination, survived the fall of the monarchy, contributing to the complication of relations between the two countries. Such a belief had been at times tactical and geared to promoting or achieving specific political objectives. It also provided a facile explanation of events, and served as a convenient ploy for domestic actors to shrug off responsibility and deflect blame. Historically, such a belief constituted a defense mechanism and reflected the frustrations and phobias of a society which had not fully escaped the consequences of informal colonial subjugation.

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