



GREAT BRITAIN II. BRITISH INFLUENCE IN PERSIA IN THE 19TH CENTURY

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British imperial interests in Persia in the Qajar period were primarily determined by the concern for the security of colonial India and, secondarily, by trade, telegraphic communication, and financial or other concessionary agreements. By the early 20th century, two new decisive factors came into the fore: Oil exploration in the southwest and, after 1917, the threat of an imminent Bolshevik penetration from the north. The strategic position of Qajar Persia, perhaps second only to Egypt, turned it into a significant buffer state both for Britain and Russia, and an arena for influence through diplomacy, trade, and concessions. Both powers came to recognize the need for preserving the Qajar state in order to sustain a fragile equilibrium, yet at times they did not hesitate to undermine its sovereignty in domestic affairs, require subservience to their imperial, and sometimes whimsical wishes, and even to breach its territorial integrity. The tacit understanding between the powers, insofar as the stability of Persia was concerned, prescribed that if one power scored an advantage, the other should seek some recompense, hence



persuading the Persian government to perpetuate power rivalry through diplomacy, influence, and maneuvering. It would be a misconception however to regard Persia as a helpless pawn in the imperial game, or to adhere to the belief that it was spared from direct colonization only because of the mutual fear existing between the two powers or perhaps because of their apparent disinterest. There is ample evidence to argue that had it not been for the subtle resilience shown by the Persian government, even when it was at its lowest ebb, and its adaptability, the political integrity of the country would have been compromised far more than it actually was.

From the turn of the 19th century to the end of the Qajar period (1785-1925), British relations with Persia went through four phases: First, guarded collaboration and pursuit of mutual interests up to the end of the Russo-Persian wars (1826-28); second, diplomatic confrontation culminating in the Anglo-Persian War (1856-57; q.v.); third, an era of relative calm followed by commercial and economic expansion leading to the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 (q.v.); and fourth, an era of grand strategy marked by the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 (q.v.), the Anglo-Russian secret agreement of 1915, the Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919 (q.v.), and the events leading to the coup d'état of 1299/1921 (q.v.) and the rise of Reżā Khan. Despite frequent ups and downs, Britain remained committed in essence to the preservation of the stability and integrity of Persia, but opposed to her territorial claims in eastern Khorasan and in the Persian Gulf. Very early in the 19th century, Britain came to realize that it could not treat Persia as a colony or a protectorate, and, moreover, that it was not worth the effort to force her to become one. The unfolding course of events in the following decades confirmed the wisdom of such a resolve, at least up to the beginning of the First World War. To contain Persia within its boundaries, Britain also showed little enthusiasm for any sustained program of material or political reforms either instigated by the state, or driven by economic and trade requirements (except perhaps for the late 1880s, and then with specific British concerns in mind). British diplomacy necessitated instead a search for means of exerting pressure through formal and informal channels, a course condoned by Qajar rulers and statesmen since they viewed Britain less of a threat as a neighbor than Russia and even at times a crucial counterweight in preserving the territorial integrity of their kingdom. This, however, did not prevent Persian statesmen from reacting towards the British envoys and officials with a mixture of suspicion as well as grudging praise for their sagacity and steadfastness often in contrast with stereotypes of Russian haughtiness. A century of troubled diplomacy and



condescending attitudes toward Persia offered ample grounds for Persian suspicion toward both powers.

Shaping the Persian Buffer. With the arrival in Persia of the first major mission of the East India Company (q.v., hereafter EIC) under Captain John Malcolm in 1800, the principle contours of Anglo-Persian relations began to be etched out. The EIC considered the Qajar state a regional power, necessary for the defense of the vulnerable northwestern frontier. It first sought the Persian alliance against the threat of the Dorrāni (q.v.) Afghan ruler of Kabul who appeared as a serious menace at the time. Not yet fully secure on the throne, Fath-‘Ali Shah (q.v.) welcomed the British gesture chiefly in the hope of reclaiming for Persia the eastern provinces of Khorasan and Herat. He was doubtless encouraged by the precious gifts presented to him and his ministers by EIC; and these he conveniently treated as customary tribute (*piškeš*) from a friendly neighbor (see gift-giving v. in the Qajar period). Malcolm and his superior, the Marquis of Wellesley, however, viewed the bestowing of gifts as means of buying influence among the Persian elite. The British practice of offering gifts and monetary pensions, first rehearsed in the princely states of India, proved effective in the protocol-conscious Persian court. The deeply factional Qajar government, marked by insecurity of the ministerial and military offices, guaranteed the success of such a practice. Among the Qajar high officials, Ebrāhim Kalāntar Širāzi (q.v.), the first grand vizier (*sÂadr-e a‘zam*) of the Qajar period, welcomed Malcolm’s friendship and offer of collaboration as helpful to the security of the southern part of the country and as a personal safeguard against the growing hostility of Fath-‘Ali Shah. His advocacy of a closer alliance with EIC, however, may have contributed to his dismissal and execution in 1802 on charges of treason (Malcolm, 1845, pp. 222-24). The prince-governor of the Fārs province, Ḥosayn-‘Ali Mirzā Farmānfarmā (q.v.), who vied with the crown prince ‘Abbās Mirzā (q.v.) for the throne, also sought British backing, a plea the EIC was happy to grant given the crucial importance of Fārs to the British naval presence in the Persian Gulf. The competition among the eligible (or potentially eligible) princes of the royal family for succession was a strong motive for appealing to the powers. Likewise, insecurity in office and fear of losing life, property, and career encouraged high officials to covet British help. Malcolm sneered at Persians for the “art of duplicity” and for their lack of moral scruple though he, and his successors, conveniently ignored their own methods of buying influence to further their objectives (Malcolm, 1815, II, pp. 628, 631-32).



Indeed the myth of Persian corruptibility nurtured by British diplomats, strategists, officers, missionaries, travelers and casual observers throughout the period was informed by the rationale for the defense of India, first articulated by Malcolm and his protégés. To legitimize British colonial presence in India and to rationalize its economic and strategic worth to Britain, it was necessary to imagine an external threat beyond its precarious boundaries, especially in the northwest, by invoking the memories of the Afghan and Persian invasions of the 18th century. Nāder Shah's Indian campaign in 1739 was less than two decades before the final British consolidation in Bengal and the regaining of Calcutta in 1757. The threat of an external enemy, Malcolm argued, lay in its potential to trigger off an anti-British rebellion inside India, jeopardizing the EIC's precarious rule over the colony. By the beginning of the 19th century however, an Asian enemy, even a threat in the form of Persian or Afghan solidarity with Muslims of India, could no longer carry the necessary weight with London, hence requiring the promotion by the East India Company and its supporters of a new thesis founded on the idea of an imminent European threat to India. This was first advocated against Napoleonic France, and by the second decade of the 19th century, against Imperial Russia. This threat was perceived to be more through the indirect means of an Asian intermediary than through direct invasion. In view of the strategists of British India, Persia was the obvious candidate for such infiltration given its record of collaboration with France against Russia and Britain and its vulnerability to Russian pressure after her defeat in the war (Yapp, pp. 1-124).

This strategic concern also corresponded to cultural attitudes towards India's neighbors, and especially towards Persia. The sense of insecurity which was inherent in British colonial attitudes in India, demanded assuming a sense of English moral rectitude and ethical standards not only superior to the Indians, but to the neighboring Persians (whom the British first encountered in India as an ethnic group with a residue of influence left from the Mughal era). Making the threat of European penetration more plausible, it was necessary to portray the Persians as a nation whose best days had long been spent, morally decrepit and available to be bought by the highest bidder. EIC's diplomacy rested on this assumption, endorsing full engagement with Persia as a preemptive strategy against infiltration by other European powers. In such an engagement, it was believed, informal influence through a network of malleable agents and sympathizers was as important for British India as the formal open diplomacy of negotiations and treaties. Informal means of payoffs



and pensions were convenient and cost effective supplements or even alternatives to formal diplomacy.

The appearance of Napoleonic France on the Persian horizon and the brief but intense tripartite rivalry among European powers between 1807 and 1810, added a new urgency to the British presence in Persia. As an eager Qajar shah gravitated toward Napoleon, largely to solicit military support against the Russian threat in the Caucasus, the displeased EIC began to search for ways to neutralize the accord. The Franco-Persian alliance failed dismally not solely because of Napoleon's fickle opportunism and the diplomatic naivete of the Persians, but also because of British intimidation and intrigue, exercised partly through its allies in the Persian government, particularly in Fārs. Upon the shah's denial of Malcolm's second mission in 1808, the British colonial authorities under Lord Minto for the first time threatened to use naval force in the Persian Gulf and occupy Kārḵ (Kharg) island. Mindful of the British reaction, the powerful *mostawfi-al-mamālek*, Ḥājji Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Khan Šadr Eṣfahāni, later made premier with the title of Amin-al-Dawla I, his son Mirzā 'Abd-Allāh Khan (later Amin-al-Dawla II, q.v.), and their influential relative, Mirzā Abu'l-Ḥasan Khan Širāzi (the celebrated Qajar envoy [*ilči*] to the European courts) advocated the resumption of friendly relations with the Honorable Company. The Ilči's service to Britain throughout his career, even when later he served as Persia's minister of foreign affairs, was rewarded with an EIC monthly pension of 1,000 rupees first established under Ouseley in 1810. It is possible that the Ilči's collaboration was also motivated by his Masonic affiliation under Ouseley's guidance (Rā'in, 1357, pp., 43-45, 65-66, 99-103).

The arrival of three British diplomatic missions in Tehran between 1808-1811: Harford Jones, John Malcolm, and Gore Ouseley, immediately after the dismissal of General Gardane (see gardane mission) and the French withdrawal, reflected the urgency that both London and Calcutta attached to the Persian alliance, primarily out of concern for a recurring French threat. The renewed relations ultimately lead to the 1814 Anglo-Persian Definitive Treaty, which obliged Persia to cancel all treaties with other European powers hostile to England and exclude their armies from entering Persia in exchange for British military and monetary aid to the tune of 150,000 Pounds Sterling annually in case of a European threat (Tāheri, pp. 297-388, 321-454). The British success could not have been achieved without the backing of senior Persian officials in Tehran including Mirzā Šafi' 'Aliābādi (Māzandarāni), the



sÂadr-e a'zam, an ally of Ouseley and the recipient of an EIC pension (Public Records Office (PRO), Kew, U.K., FO 60/7, no. 16, Ouseley to Minto, 15 July 1812 in Ṭāheri, pp. 460, 469).

Yet at the wake of the French threat, the territorial gains made by Russia in the Caucasus, hitherto an overriding fear in Persian foreign policy, was soon to become a British preoccupation as well and a major determinate in expanding her presence in Persia. Defeat in the first round of the wars with Russia (1805-1813) alerted London to a threat which later came to be labeled as the “Persian Question,” i.e. how to contain Persia as a viable but emasculated buffer against Russian penetration. The rivalry between the two powers for influence and territorial gains in Persia as well as Afghanistan and Central Asia, the origins of the so-called Great Game, made a guarded friendship with Persia and an ambivalent support for its resistance to Russia an essential ingredient of British foreign policy. This course was vigorously pursued by Ouseley and his immediate successors up to 1835, through the less costly means of diplomacy rather than military aid. The cost-conscious Foreign Office, and the EIC, preferred mediation for peace both for the Golestān (q.v.) and later the Torkmānčāy treaties, and in both instances the English envoys pressured Persia to comply with the harsh terms imposed by Russia, Britain’s ally in 1813 against Napoleon and by 1819 an awesome contender. In the process, the administration in Tabriz, which under the auspices of the crown prince ‘Abbās Mirzā and his advisors, Mirzā Bozorg Farāhāni Qā’em-maqām I (and later his son, Mirzā Abu’l-Qāsem Qā’em-maqām II) and Moḥammad Khan Amir-Neẓām Zangena, the first chief of the New Army, held an even-handed approach toward the two powers, was obliged to opt for mediation offered by Ouseley in 1812-13 and later by John Macdonald Kinneir in 1827. The change in the Tabriz attitude took place mostly out of desperation than choice, while in Tehran, low morale and financial bankruptcy complemented the already existing strong pro-British sentiments (Ṭāheri, pp., 455- 493; Atkin, pp. 141-44, Yapp, pp., 102-108).

Ouseley’s influence within the Qajar state eventually led to the conclusion of the Definitive Treaty of 1814 based on the Preliminary Agreement negotiated by Jones. It guaranteed British military assistance and a subsidy of 200,000 *tumāns* in the event of war with a European power in exchange for Persia barring any European force from the use of the Persian territory to attack India (Hurewitz, pp., 199-201). In reality, British commitment to the defense of Persia weakened as the Napoleonic threat subsided and as an understanding



was subsequently reached with Russia over Persia. After his return, Ouseley was criticized for the treaty, especially by the EIC's Board of Control, thus necessitating a follow-up mission under Henry Ellis to renegotiate the treaty. He was aided by James Morier who had stayed behind in Persia (Yapp, pp., 86-95). The refusal to pay the promised subsidy during the second round of the Perso-Russian wars and in later years, cast a dark shadow over the relations between the two countries which continued into the reign of Moḥammad Shah (1834-48). Relations deteriorated further when in 1828 Russia reasserted its status as the Most Favored Nation, encouraging the British envoy to resort to pressure to extract similar capitulatory privileges from Persia. In the wake of his disastrous defeat, the crown prince 'Abbās Mirzā and his Tabriz administration had to rely even more heavily on the British envoy, John Macdonald Kinneir, for financial and diplomatic assistance. This led to a great enhancement of the British status and later prompted British envoys, John McNeill and Justin Sheil, to adopt a condescending attitude toward Persia at a time when Persian confidence was at its nadir (Watson, pp. 234-35; Yapp, pp. 110-12).

Part of the British success in Persia no doubt was due to military missions which helped train in modern warfare as early as the time of Fath-'Ali Shah, not only the New Army of Azarbaijan but armies under the command of 'Abbās Mirzā's contenders and challengers: Moḥammad-'Ali Mirzā Dawlatšāh (q.v.) in Kermānšāh and Ḥo-sayn-'Ali Mirzā Farmānfarmā (q.v.) in Fārs. Among the officers of the Indian Army attached to Malcolm's third mission in 1810 were Henry Lindesay-Bethune and Charles Christie, (the latter previously traveled incognito in southern Persia along with Henry Pottinger for reconnaissance purposes), who then served in the New Army with distinction. Christie, of stout physique and spirit, who had earned the nickname of Rostam from his Persian troops, was killed as a volunteer in the battle of Āşlānduz (q.v.) in October 1812 shortly after the time when most members of the British military mission were withdrawn by Ouseley's order in deference to a request by Russia, Britain's new ally. Later in 1833, a new British military mission included some of the most influential soldier-diplomats serving in Persia for the next two decisive decades, including Justin Sheil, Francis Farrant, Charles Stoddart, and Henry Rawlinson, all of whom saw Persia through the prism and priorities of Indian Army officers (Wright, 1977, pp. 49-58).

Resisting imperial mastery. The accession of Moḥammad Shah in 1834 clearly demonstrated the commitment of both powers to the continuity of the Qajar



rule and the order of succession in the house of ‘Abbās Mirzā, deemed essential for a lasting buffer state. The Foreign Office and the Indian Government saw to it that Lindesay-Bethune would jointly lead the New Army with Manučehr Khan Mo‘tamad-al-Dawla, the Georgian ex-slave of Fath-ā‘Ali Shah who was close to the Russians, in the march to Tehran and to the Fārs province in order to crush the Qajar pretenders to Moḥammad Shah’s insecure throne (Ingram, 1979, pp. 300-27). The British sense of entitlement however was rudely violated a year later with the appointment of the “acting” premier, Ḥājji Mirzā Āqāsi (1835-48, q.v.), himself a native of Irvān which only a decade earlier had fallen into the Russian hands making Āqāsi entitled, according to the Tork-mānčāy Treaty, to claim that he was a Russian subject. Desperate moves by the embattled premier to ingratiate himself with the bellicose Russians, infuriated the Foreign Office who viewed him as a Russian cipher and refused to offer his administration any backing even before the Herat campaign of 1838. Instead, the British legation in Tehran nurtured a counter network of supporters, protégés, agents, and spies among the princes of the royal family, high and middle rank officials, army officers and tribal chiefs in an effort to check Āqāsi and his pro-Russian cohorts and to gain similar concessions to those acquired by Russia. Among the better known of these protégés were Mirzā Āqā Khan Nuri (q.v., Eqbāl Āštiāni, pp. 101-103), the future premier; prince Farhād Mirzā, a young brother of Moḥammad Shah (Amanat, 1997, pp. 255-63); ‘Abbāsqoli Khan Navā‘i, a rising star in the army (Sheil, p. 261; Amanat, 1997, pp. 239-40) and several Qajar princes of competing lineage exiled to Ottoman Iraq through British mediation. Āqāsi’s policy of restricting the power of the Qajar nobility, for which he was known as the “eliminator of the nobles” in the literature of the period, shepherded a number of them into the British camp.

Moḥammad Shah’s expedition to Herat in 1838–39, to pacify the region and reassert Persian claim over the province, encountered further British opposition. Palmerston viewed the Persian effort as an expansionist move instigated by Russia. The naval engagement in the Persian Gulf and the temporary occupation of Kārk Island forced Persia to abandon the Herat expedition (Kelly, pp. 290-301). Soon after, the terms of the 1841 Treaty of Commerce gave Britain capitulatory advantages in custom duties and other areas on a par with those enjoyed by Russia after 27 years of Persian resistance (Hurewitz, II, p. 280). The conclusion of this treaty was the first serious step in opening the Persian markets to British manufactured goods, which contributed to the further decline of the traditional Persian workshops



and a shift in foreign trade to exportable cash crops (Issawi, pp. 70-82; Abbott, pp. xiv-xxv).

British military and financial assistance during the critical months of the accession and consolidation of power by Nāṣer-al-Din Shah (1848-96), also offered Britain further advantages. Moreover, the ascendancy as premier and commander-in-chief of the army of Mirzā Taqī Khan Amir Kabir (q.v.), the secretary of the New Army in Azarbaijan who had British connections, outmaneuvered Russia which had placed its hopes on Bahman Mirzā, an uncle of the shah. Bahman Mirzā had earlier defected to Russia but still aspired to become the young Nāṣer-al-Din's regent. Yet in office, Amir Kabir tilted towards an independent course of foreign policy, especially after the departure of his supporter, the British charge d'affaires Colonel Francis Farrant (Amanat, 1997, pp. 38-39, 105-114). On issues such as the commercial privileges for British subjects and the protégé status, the slave trade in the Persian Gulf, the revolt in Khorasan and the dispute over Persia's sovereignty in Herat, Amir Kabir resorted to a policy of brinkmanship that nearly always resulted in a successfully negotiated settlement (Ādamiyat, pp., 229-43, 508-45). Moreover, British reluctance to agree to the Persian wishes for a substantive defense treaty persuaded Amir Kabir, like Hājji Mirzā Āqāsi before him, to adopt a friendlier course towards Russia. The Foreign Office under Palmerston interpreted this as a dangerous shift in Persian foreign policy. As early as 1814 the British consistently resisted a Persian overture for closer defensive ties while at the same time reproving Persia for building friendlier relations with Russia. The chasm between the premier and the British envoy grew deeper by the time of his downfall and his secret execution in early 1852. His desperate pleas for protection to the British envoy, Justin Sheil, fell on deaf ears. A number of complex considerations, including a desire to consolidate the government of the pro-British Mirzā Āqā Khan Nuri, persuaded Sheil to abandon Amir Kabir to his fate. Later on, however, the Foreign Office was exceptionally vocal in its strong condemnation of Nāṣer-al-Din Shah for the murder. Even Nāṣer-al-Din Shah's appointment of a cunning British protégé, Mirzā Āqā Khan Nuri as the new premier, could not ameliorate the deteriorating relations with Britain. The fall of Amir Kabir demonstrated not only British influence at its zenith, making and breaking the Qajar premiers, but also Persia's inability to steer a course independent of the conflicting demands of the two great powers (Amanat, 1997, pp. 133-99).

Although Nāṣer-al-Din Shah condoned the premiership of Mirzā Āqā Khan



Nuri, a recognized British protégé and a shrewd statesman partially responsible for the downfall and murder of his predecessor, he nevertheless insisted that Nuri relinquished his protégé status before being appointed to the office. Heavily relying on Sheil, who first welcomed his appointment as an ultimate victory over Russia, Nuri was the first among a line of Persian statesmen to seek British blessing as a ladder for promotion and an insurance for security in office (Sheil, pp. 249-50; Amanat, 1997, p. 146). In most instances the dismissal of the premier and high officials was accompanied by the killing or harassment of relatives and associates, as well as by confiscation of property. Given the extremely high “occupational hazards” associated with the office of prime minister, such reliance on foreign protection is understandable, if not necessarily acceptable by modern standards of political ethics. Of the nine Qajar premiers during the first half of the 19th century, three were executed and three were sent to permanent exile (with a safe passage negotiated by European envoys including Mirzā ‘Abd-Allāh Amin-al-Dawla (q.v.) and Hajji Mirzā Āqāsi. To a lesser extent these hazards also existed for all holders of high office and even for the members of the princely class. Nuri’s own miserable end (and those of his many relatives) and later the fate of many of his successors, perpetuated this pattern in the second half of the century. Insecurity in office should be seen as the greatest incentive for seeking foreign protection even though in most instances informal allegiance to European missions and the vague promises of protection did not spare officials from royal reprisal.

In appointing Nuri, Nāṣer-al-Din Shah also hoped to regain the sympathy of the British in order to ward off the excessively haughty Russian minister in Tehran, Prince Dimitri Ivanovich Dolgoroukov. Yet for reasons in part related to Amir Kabir’s downfall and in part to the shah’s unwillingness to comply with the agreement on Persian non-intervention in the Herat affairs, Nuri’s relations with Sheil deteriorated over the 1853 undertaking over Herat (Hurewitz, II, pp. 304-6). Nuri was forced to comply with the British wishes. Yet he was not spared from their grudges largely because of his undeniable skills in political maneuvers and diplomatic juggling. At the same time Sheil also negotiated the safe passage of the shah’s younger half brother, ‘Abbās Mirzā III to Ottoman Iraq where he was to be protected from possible threats of a disgruntled shah. Sheil held the exiled ‘Abbās Mirzā as a guarantee for the shah’s good conduct. Despite a severe crisis in relations with Persia, the British seldom, if ever, used the weapon of exiled princes and statesmen beyond vague threats knowing well that such a measure could easily backfire (‘Abbās



Eqbāl's intr., 'Abbās Mirzā Molk-ārā, pp. 17-43).

With the arrival of the British minister, Charles Murray (1853-59), the tension in relations between the two countries reached a new height. Murray used all forms of informal influence, and above all the weapon of the protégés, to try to compel the shah and his premier to avoid an alliance with Russia and to adhere to British wishes at the eve of the Crimean War (1853-55). Adjacent to two major warring parties, Russia and the Ottoman Empire, the shah and his premier tried to take advantage of the British temporary setbacks in the war to enter into a secret alliance with Russia in the hope of recovering Herat. Murray's granting of the protégé status to Prince Farhād Mirzā, the shah's young and disobedient uncle, and employing Mirzā Hāšem Khan Nuri, a rival of the premier, as the Persian secretary of the legation, infuriated the shah and his premier (Wright, 1977, pp. 23-25; Amanat, 1997, pp. 265-76). By such a move, Murray no doubt intended to alarm Nuri and register his objection to Nuri's policies, although perhaps Murray did not foresee the serious consequences.

The Hāšem Khan affair, with all its personal nuances (which included Nuri accusing Murray of an illicit sexual relationship with Hāšem Khan's wife, a sister-in-law of the shah), served only as the immediate cause, if not a mere pretext, for a break in relations with England. The much greater issue at stake was the Persian claim of sovereignty over Herat, which led to the Persian capture of that city in 1855. From the perspective of the English representative and the Foreign Office, the Persian capture of Herat was an affirmation of Russian designs for Persia and had to be opposed at all cost. The Anglo-Persian war of 1857 in the Persian Gulf and the Fārs province was meant to bring the message home (Kelly, pp. 455-66). Persia's humiliating defeat in the war was precipitated not only by British military superiority and the alleged bribing of the military commanders, but also by the Persian fear of engaging an imperial power and the futility of a confrontation in the battlefield. As in many other instances, the British foreign policy operated on the very impression of power and invincibility. Concern with honor and prestige, perpetuated by Russophobic envoys like McNeill, Sheil and Murray, was as influential in the British decision to go to war with Persia over Herat as the illusionary notion of the vitality of Herat as the "gateway" to India. Depriving Persia of its claim over the Persian-speaking province, which historically was an integral part of the Persian "guarded domains," at least since the Ilkhanid period, may thus be attributed more to an absurd grudge against Persia's territorial assertion than



to any viable threat of Russian infiltration.

Reconciliation. The 1857 Paris Peace Treaty officially and terminally deprived Persia of any territorial claim over Afghanistan. One of the few concessions, however, in the 1857 treaty won by the Persian negotiator, Farroḡ Khan Amin-al-Dawla, was the undertaking by Britain not to admit Persian subjects as protégés arbitrarily (Hurewitz, II, pp. 341-43). The bestowing of protégé status, one of the thorniest problems in the Anglo-Persian relations, was more often intended as a device for putting pressure on the Qajar government rather than a way of offering legal and humanitarian shelter. In the years that followed, tension over protégé jurisdiction subsided noticeably. The spirit of intrigue and petty conspiracy continued on both sides, however. The British legation did not fail to maintain its secret lines of communication with the Qajar royalty and the state officials. In particular the English physicians of the embassy remained in close contact with the court and especially with the women of the royal harem. Dr. Joseph Dickson, served as a go-between in a number of secret negotiations between Jahān Kānom Mahd-e 'Oliā, the powerful wife of Moḡammad Shah and later queen mother and head of Nāṣer-al-Din's harem, and the English envoy. During the struggle for Nāṣer-al-Din's succession, and later throughout the events leading to the downfall of both Amir Kabir in 1851 and Mirzā Āqā Khan Nuri in 1858, Dickson and his brother William, the legation's dragoman, played crucial parts (Amanat, 1997, p. 89, 151, 346). For the rest of his life up to 1887 while he was physician to the British legation, Joseph Dickson maintained his close ties with the court and the royal harem (Wright, 1977, pp. 124-25). Earlier another physician, Dr. John MacNeill, who was appointed as the British minister in Tehran in 1836, built his career in part on developing a network of contacts and informers among the Qajar ruling house and officials. Out of the concern for the Powers' possible influence through medical channels, the European royal physician of Nāṣer-al-Din Shah, and before him, the physician of Moḡammad Shah, were chosen from a third country: France or Austria. This, however, did not entirely curb English access to the royal harem, and the court physician, although from a third country, still carried some political influence, as witnessed by the career of Dr. Tholozan, the shah's French doctor.

Henry Rawlinson, whose career as a soldier, a politician, and a diplomat is often overshadowed by his scholarship as the decipherer of the great ancient Persian Bisotun (q.v.) relief, remained an almost unique character in the history of Anglo-Persian relations. By pursuing a policy of reconciliation, he



represented a face of benevolent imperialism amiable to the Persians, and Nāṣer-al-Din Shah in particular. Contrary to Sheil and most Palmerstonians who favored an emasculated Persia through sustained peripheral pressure upon it, Rawlinson advocated support for a strong and centralized Persia as a reliable bulwark against Russia, hence anticipating George Curzon (q.v.) at the turn of the 20th century (Rawlinson, pp. 1-135). At the time, however, Rawlinson's thesis was dismissed as dangerous, mainly because Persians were often characterized in political circles as entirely unreliable. He was recalled in great haste and humiliation, revealing a chasm between the Indian Government, which preferred the old forward policy by experienced soldiers, albeit a more conciliatory Rawlinson, and the Foreign Office, who favored ignoring Persia altogether (Amanat, 1997, pp. 368-75).

Equally of great fame as a scholar of antiquity, but more successful in his diplomatic career than Rawlinson, was Henry Layard whose early adventures in southwestern Persia among the Baktiāris in search of ancient ruins was typical of many Victorian adventurers, whose travels in youth as self-appointed agents in oriental clothes, later brought them fame and high office. Layard became a Liberal M.P. and an Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs in the Foreign Office, and adopted a vindictive attitude towards Persians which was at odds with his earlier romanticizing. Contrary to Rawlinson, with whom he ran a personal vendetta, Layard solidly supported Palmerston's gunboat diplomacy in the Herat crises of 1857. Moreover, he was partly responsible for imposing on the Persian government (after Rawlinson's aborted goodwill mission of 1859 to Tehran) the eccentric minister plenipotentiary, Charles Alison, who for more than a decade managed under the direction of his superiors to bring the Anglo-Persian relations to almost total inaction (Wright, 1977, pp. 25-28).

The Foreign Office, which after 1857 took direct control of the Persian affairs, preferred to relegate Persia into diplomatic oblivion and adopt a policy of minimum intervention. From the mid 1860s onward the status of the British ministers in Tehran diminished somewhat in favor of greater Foreign Office's initiative. At the same time, the introduction of telegraph links with Europe provided faster and more direct contact between the Persian government and the European capitals. Both these developments precipitated greater British commercial and technological presence and in turn led to greater British influence among the authorities and notables in the provinces. Beside the Residency in Bušehr (q.v.) which existed since the 18th century and oversaw



British interest throughout the Persian Gulf region, only a few consulates were established in the early 19th century largely because of the the Persian government's resistance. The Tabriz Consulate was established in 1837, Tehran in 1841, and Rašt in 1858. By the beginning of the 20th century, this number had dramatically increased. Whereas by 1871 there were no more than six consulates or vice consulates throughout the country, by 1914 there were twenty (Rabino, pp. 134-49). Before the 1890s, when new consulates in Isfahan, Kermānšāh, Kermān, Mašhad, Yazd and a host of other commercial and strategic cities were established, the British authorities in Tehran had to rely on Persian informants, the so-called "newswriters" (*kabar-nevis*), to collect news from the provinces, to protect the growing British interests, and to exert variable degree of authority in local affairs. The most influential among Persian agents were members of the Nawwāb family of Shiraz (the family came originally from Mazandarān and migrated to India in the 1560s where an ancestor was given a jagir at Masulipatam, an important port on the east coast, north of Madras). From the turn of the century Ja'far Khan Nawwāb, and later his progeny, served as British agents in Shiraz and later as the Oriental Secretary in Tehran. In Isfahan, the Calcutta-educated Armenian merchant Stephen Aganoor served as the British agent from 1858. Later his son Dr. Minas Stephen Aganoor, physician to Ẓell-al-Solṭān, also served in numerous occasion as acting consul. Though it is wrong to arrogate a sinister motive to the activities of these news writers and agents, it is undeniable that they functioned not only as the conduit for news gathering, but also as means of establishing close contacts with provincial governors and urban notables including the *mojtaheds*, prominent merchants, khans of the tribes, and the large landowners. They were familiar with the intricacies of local politics and capable of offering valuable advice to their superiors.

With the establishment and growth of the Indo-European Telegraph Department (hereafter IETD) in Persia from the mid-1860s, the British networks for news-gathering and local influence grew in size and efficiency. Some of the telegraph offices were in remote towns and villages and clashes with the locals were not rare nor were frequent recruiting from the local population. Creating a vital link with colonial India, IETD became the most significant British investment in Persia up to the early 20th century. The officers and employees of the IETD, whose security and well-being was the responsibility of the British government, often acted as informal British representatives at their posts and invariably exerted some measure of authority through their Persian contacts. Qualified members of the Armenian



and Bahai communities were among the employees of IETD which offered them jobs and a degree of security. Like British consuls and agents, IETD often happened to be the only refuge for members of religious minorities at the time of crisis and persecution, particularly for the Babi-Bahais and the Jews. Like the British consulates, the telegraph offices were recognized as the inviolable property of the British government, and were used as sanctuary (*bast*) by those escaping from persecution of some *mojtaheds*, of mob frenzy, and from tax collectors and oppression of the government agents (Momen, pp. 268-73).

From the middle of the century, and more consistently since the 1870s, the British legation and consulates adopted a policy of reporting instances of outrage and persecution against recognized minorities especially the Nestorian Christians, the Zoroastrians, the Armenians, and the Jews, and occasionally mediated on their behalf with the Persian authorities. From the 1850s onwards, the Parsee community of India, which had long enjoyed excellent terms with the British, became more concerned with the plight of the Zoroastrians co-religionists in Persia. They often sought British diplomatic channels to ameliorate the pressure exerted by local authorities or by some troublemakers among the ulama. During the residence in Persia (1854-90) of the Parsee representative, the celebrated Mānakji pur Limji pur Hushang Hatāriā, there was some improvement in the condition of the Zoroastrian communities of Yazd and Kermān partly thanks to the British support (Šahmardān, pp. 617-42). His Parsee successor, Sir Ardeshir Ji Reporter (1893-1933), however, served as one of the most influential British agents in Persia at the critical juncture at the end of the Qajar period and the rise of Rezā Khan to power (Wright, 1977, pp. 44-45).

During the 1873 and 1889 royal tours of England, with the help of the British government, influential Jewish figures such as Sir Moses Montefiore, Baron Lionel de Rothschild, and Sir Albert Sassoon urged Nāṣer-al-Din Shah to improve the condition of the Persian Jewry. These concerted efforts, to which the shah responded positively, no doubt helped curtailing the recurrence of severe persecutions and eventually led to the lifting of the hated religious tax (*jeziya*) in 1882 for Zoroastrians but only partially for others. Seldom, however, before the 20th century, did the members of the Jewish community act as instruments of British influence in Persia. In dealing with persecutions, though the Foreign Office did act on humanitarian grounds, often it went only far enough to satisfy the concerned constituencies at home. Occasional British efforts to save the Babi-Bahai communities from merciless killings, torture and



imprisonment were far less successful not only because of the ingrained enmity towards them among the government and religious authorities, not to mention the shah himself, but also for the want of any representation on their behalf outside Persia. Despite groundless accusations in the late 20th century anti-Bahai literature, only few Babi-Bahais acted as British commercial agents in Yazd and Bušehr. Nor did they receive any blanket protection from any foreign power except in local level and in severe cases of persecution. Only in the late 19th century when a Bahai community emerged in the city of Ashkabad in the Russian Turkestan (today's Turkmenistan), was there any sign of Russian attention to the fate of the Bahais in Persia.

Concessions and resistance. The granting and then repealing of the Reuter concession (1872-1873), and its long-term consequences, introduced a new kind of British economic and financial presence in Persia beyond the familiar areas of strategy and diplomacy. The all-embracing concessions which included a monopoly over construction of railroad, mining and exploitation of natural resources, finance, and banking, was largely the brainchild of the reform-minded premier, Mirzā Ḥosayn Khan Mošir-al-Dawla, and his Persian minister plenipotentiary in London, Mirzā Moḥsen Khan Mo'in-al-Molk. At a time when European capital was pouring into the Ottoman Empire, Egypt and Tunisia in the 1870s, granting a large concession to Baron Julius de Reuter, a German financier with British citizenship, was not rare. For a skilled diplomat such as Mošir-al-Dawla, well versed in the Ottoman Tanzimat and aware of its perils, negotiating such a concession was, however, out of character. No doubt the shah and the premier both rationalized the greater British investment in Persia as a safeguard against the growing Russian menace but they also were motivated by personal gains.

The British authorities were lukewarm about the concession, given the complexity of the task and the concessionaire's credibility. The opening of Persia to private investment and hence the Russian reaction was also a concern. The combination of a palace coup, conservative princes and mojtaheds opposed to Westernizing reforms, and possible Russian intrigue brought down Mošir-al-Dawla's government and put a halt to his program of reforms. In due course, the Foreign Office's lukewarm attitude towards Reuter encouraged the humiliated shah to cancel the embarrassing concession. William Taylour Thomson, the British minister in Tehran did, however, intercede on behalf of Mošir-al-Dawla who later that year was reinstated as minister of foreign affairs, a balancing act no doubt to deny Russia's upper



hand in the affair (Kazemzadeh, pp. 100-130).

Even though the English minister in Tehran was eager to endorse the vulnerable Mošir-al-Dawla, the shah could not afford to entirely abandon his own balancing act in the endless game of diplomatic wrangling between the two rival powers. Throughout the latter part of his reign Nāṣer-al-Din Shah tolerated, and even at times endorsed, Anglophile and Russophile ministers and officials in high office. Whereas up to his death in 1301/1884 Mirzā Saʿīd Khan Moʿtaman-al-Molk, a recognized Russophile, served as the minister of foreign affairs, his successor, Maḥmud Khan Nāṣer-al-Molk Qaragozlu, enjoyed British blessing and support. Soon however, to assuage Russian anger, the shah dismissed Maḥmud Khan and appointed in his stead his own old friend and confidant, Yaḥyā Khan Mošir-al-Dawla (brother of the deceased Ḥosayn Khan Mošir-al-Dawla), whose Russophile reputation was seen by the British as a setback. Moreover, the shah seems to have encouraged another of his confidants, the celebrated historian and court official Moḥammad-Ḥasan Khan Eʿtemād-al-Saltāna, to develop close ties with the Russian legation, one of many who served as royal intermediaries with foreign missions. Nāṣer-al-Din Shah not only employed contacts to gather intelligence and conduct secret negotiations (or give such an impression when necessary), but to pit one mission against the other, as a pretext to deny excessive demands and persuade European powers to comply with his wishes. It had the additional advantage of offering the shah a wider spectrum of political views and interests, a substitute to the nonexistent political parties. This policy of bipolar factionalism was later misunderstood by the nationalistic historiography of the Pahlavi era as evidence of Qajar feebleness and betrayal rather than as a strategy to circumvent imperial pressure. It is not undeniable, however, that such policy did carry its own risks. A Qajar official close to a European mission, could, and often did, utilize his foreign ties with little moral scruples to negotiate with the shah for a higher office, to undermine his enemies, and to pocket commissions for the sale of concessions. A lion's share, however, was reserved for the shah to avoid royal disfavor. The British representatives, like their Russian counterparts, condoned this strategy of endorsed agents in the hope of avoiding diplomatic frictions with the shah without compromising their influence upon the monarch and his government through informal negotiation, persuasion, and threats.

The career of Mirzā ʿAlī-Aṣḡar Khan Amin-al-Solṭān (q.v.), the gifted premier during the last decade of Nāṣer-al-Din Shah, best characterizes the complex



dynamics and the fluidity of such a strategy. At the earlier stages of his premiership, beginning in 1886, he cultivated an Anglophile reputation, no doubt as a counterbalance to Yaḥyā Khan Mošir-al-Dawla's Russophile reputation. He especially drew favor with the British by persuading the shah to open up the long resisted navigation on the river Kārun and the more important concession for the establishment of the Imperial Bank of Persia. The appointment in 1887 of a new minister of foreign affairs, 'Abbās Khan Qawām-al-Dawla, an ally of Amin-al-Solṭān, consolidated the premier's position. Yet after the Regie fiasco in 1892, Amin-al-Solṭān switched sides to the Russian camp, at least for the sake of appearance. The premier's change of heart was mainly driven by political expediency shared by the shah. In lieu of the rising anger toward the Regie concession, it was inevitable that the shah and his premier would try to assuage the Russians, whom they saw as the chief perpetrator behind the protests. The British envoys never again trusted Amin-al-Solṭān and later withdrew their support at a crucial juncture in 1897 during the ministerial crises of the early Moẓaffar-al-Din Shah period.

Acquiring concessions in Persia during the 1880s was part of a new initiative championed by the British charge d'affaire, Arthur Nicholson, and later more energetically by the new envoy, Sir Henry Drummond Wolff (1887-91). By developing new commercial and economic ties it was hoped that Persia would become less vulnerable to the rising tide of Russian expansionist pressure, demonstrated in the scramble for annexation of the entire Turkestan (i.e. Central Asia), while at the same time generating new markets for British goods and businesses. To obtain a foothold in the south for capital investment and expanding the consumer market, the opening of the Kārun river to British navigation seemed an essential communication line even though for more than a decade the shah had resisted the granting of such a concession. The opening of a major waterway in the south of Persia, with road access there from Isfahan through Šuštar, was an ominous prospect for the shah with the inevitable outcome of Persia's partition and even occupation; a fear confirmed further after the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, a few years after the British purchase of the Egyptian shares in the Suez Canal company.

The shah and his premier, moreover, were increasingly weary of Mas'ud Mirzā Zell-al-Solṭān's warm relations with British representatives. The shah's powerful son, and the prince-governor of vast provinces of central and southern Persia, had promised to facilitate the conclusion of the Kārun negotiation and other concessions in exchange for assurances from Britain



that in the event of his father's death he would be reinstated in the south under the virtual protection of British India (while his brother Moẓaffar-al-Din Mirzā would rule the north under Russians domination). Though the British had reservations about such a partition scheme, they toyed with the idea and the prince's ambitions. Yet the dramatic demotion of Z̤ell-al-Solṭān in February 1888 was a serious setback, coming immediately after he had received his long-desired wish and was granted the Grand Cross of the Star of India in September 1887. The scheme carried all the signs of Amin-al-Solṭān's machinations to dis-lodge the prince and divert British attention to Tehran.

Wolff's arrival promised a fresh start. Kārun navigation seemed to the British a safe alternative to many a failed railroad project proposed after Reuter. A railroad network, the most potent of all 19th century modernizing technologies, and a longstanding dream of any Middle Eastern reformist state, was denied to Persia primarily because of the neighboring powers' strategic concerns. The British viewed any north-south line not initiated through their agency as a potential Russian threat to gain access to the Persian Gulf, and consequently a danger to the jealously guarded Indian colony. To Russia, on the other hand, any British or British-backed railway plan reaching Tehran and beyond was a challenge to its long-assumed supremacy in the north and a threat to its gradual advance in Central Asia. The failure of numerous railroad schemes because of this irreconcilable contest, and because of reliance on foreign capital, persuaded the Foreign Office to seek alternative objectives to the Reuter Concession's principal aim. By supporting the renewed claims of George Reuter, Julius Reuter's son, Wolff hoped to salvage new concessions out of the overgenerous terms of an annulled concession. The Tehran government intended to reward London's wishes in the hope of discouraging it from further dangerous liaisons with the secessionist prince in Isfahan.

The 1888 royal firman declaring Kārun a waterway open to shipping of all nations, however, was not what the British expected for the monopoly of the southern trade because the trade resulting from the opening never competed successfully with the trade of the north through the Caspian and Tabriz or even with the traditional Persian Gulf routes through Bušehr or Bandar 'Abbās. Its impact on the southern markets was minimal.

The establishment of the Imperial Bank of Persia in January 1889, however, has to be seen as Britain's crowning achievement and its most effective economic tool in penetrating the Persian markets. Thanks to Wolff's persuasion and Amin-al-Solṭān's consent, the Imperial Bank enjoyed a number



of privileges based on a liberal interpretation of the resuscitated Reuter concession. They included the monopoly for issuing banknotes, control of the borrowing market, and regulation of the interest rates, privileges that eventually drove out of the market local moneylenders unable to compete with the bank's larger capital and efficiency. By the end of the Qajar era the Imperial Bank, which operated with little competition from its Russian counterpart, held a near total sway over Persian finances, both public and private. The merchants in the bazaar and the Qajar government were equally in debt to the Bank not only because of its control of the currency and the interest rates, but also because the Bank often utilized its financial power in the service of the British government and the policies emanating from its Tehran legation. Moreover, the Imperial Bank reserved the monopolies of the original Reuter concession dealing with mining in Persia (including petroleum). Under Joseph Rabino, its energetic director and Reuter's representative in Tehran, the Bank grew from eight branches in Persia in 1890 to seventeen in 1920. The incurring debts were often an effective weapon in the hands of the Bank to put pressure on the Qajar state, as well as the princes and the officials, to comply with British wishes in exchange for rescheduling loans or alleviating the desperate financial plight.

Despite the success of the Imperial Bank, the granting of the Imperial Tobacco Regie to Major Talbot in 1889 during the shah's third European tour (later ratified in 1890) proved to be a major fiasco leading to a near revolution and the government's public disgrace. At the outset it was Wolff who pushed for the granting of Tobacco concession while the shah was in England. Later the representatives of the Regie in Tehran bribed not only the shah and his premier but a number of influential princes and officials including Z̧ell-al-Solṭān and his brother, Kāmṛān Mirzā Nā'eb-al-Salṭana. By 1891 the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Salisbury, was more cautious however in backing the Regie. Despite the intransigence of the charge d'affaires in Tehran, Robert J. Kennedy, Salisbury sensed the revolutionary mood arising from the resistance of the Persian tobacco-growers and merchants, supported by the high clergy. The exploitative concession not only generated strong protest from Russia, which felt its interests had been compromised by a series of concessions to Britain, but resulted in the tilt-ing of the Persian public opinion in favor of Russia, a dangerous shift incompatible with longstanding British strategic objectives in Persia. The anti-Regie protests instigated in some instances by Russia, especially in Tabriz, convinced the new British envoy, Sir Frank Lascelles, a diplomat with a Russophobic reputation, that further support for



the concession might run the risk of destabilizing the Qajar rule in favor its northern neighbor. These considerations no doubt encouraged Lascelles and the Foreign Office to turn a blind eye to Amin-al-Solṭān's expedient switch to become a Russophile. However, they also remained adamant on the Persian payment of a huge 500,000 Pounds Sterling cancellation penalty claimed by the Regie to be financed in 1892 through a loan from the Imperial Bank of Persia. As collateral the Bank secured the revenue from the customs of the Persian Gulf ports, the first of such revenues to be held as security for payment of foreign loans in the forthcoming decades.

The Regie episode was a turning point in the shaping of the British strategy toward Persia. Successful public protests against the concession, instigated by the ulama, demonstrated the deep antipathy toward the Qajars rule and its gradual demise as a dependable buffer state. The *fatwā* which was issued in the name of Mirzā Ḥasan Širāzi, Shaikh Mortazā AnsĀri's successor as sole *marja' taqlid*, by another of AnsĀri's students and of the most prominent *mojtahed* in Tehran, Mirzā Ḥasan Āštiāni (q.v.), prohibited the consumption of tobacco until the repealing of the Regie concession. The fact that this *fatwā* was observed by all sections of the society, displayed the ulama's remarkable popular influence. More than ever this episode made the British representatives aware of the ulama's potential power and the need to accommodate them. Furthermore the Regie tarnished Britain's prestige as the supreme power, an image upon which British diplomacy had rested for nearly a century. No doubt the unraveling of the myth of Russian threat to India, even before the rise of Germany as a third force on the world scene, encouraged Britain to begin a rapprochement with Russia over Persia and Central Asia. Instead of petty rivalries and frequent frictions, which could result in similar upheavals to that of the Regie with a perilous outcome, it offered as early as 1893 an understanding between the powers concerning their zones of influence, an understanding that called for Persia's virtual partition. The Qajar government viewed the adoption of such a rapprochement as a mortal blow to its sovereignty and to Persia's integrity. One can attribute the temporary shelving of the partition thesis not only to the hesitation on both sides to abandon the traditional buffer doctrine, but also to the skillful Persian maneuvering to keep the two powers sufficiently apart, and to prevent them from declaring it a protectorate, or its provinces being annexed by one or the other powers. Those hesitations on the side of the powers, however, evaporated with the rise of an imperial Germany on the Middle East horizon at the turn of the 20th century, just as the political maneuvering of the Qajar



state proved less effective under Moẓaffar-al-Din Shah and on the eve of the Constitutional Revolution. The 1907 secret agreement for the partitioning of Persia into two zones of influence, which was reaffirmed by the 1915 agreement erasing the Persian buffer in between, in effect put an end to the doctrine of a buffer state which was championed by John Malcolm and Lord Palmerston. Even pro-development imperialist strategists such as Henry Rawlinson in the 1860s and George Curzon in the 1890's – whose influential Persia and the Persian Question at the eve of the Regie called for Persia's economic development as a bulwark against Russian expansionism – essentially complied with Persia's contingency as a buffer state. As foreign secretary, Curzon shifted to the protectorate alternative, as evident in the 1919 Anglo-Persian agreement. But this was only after the collapse of Imperial Russia, Britain's counterbalance and traditional rival, and at a time when the threat of Bolshevism, and the British Oil investment in Persia, dictated a shift in British imperial paradigm.

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