



GREAT BRITAIN III. BRITISH INFLUENCE IN PERSIA, 1900-21

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In the late 1890s, the Foreign Office in London came to regard Germany as the main threat to the European balance of power and British imperial hegemony around the globe. This perceived German threat required a substantial modification of British diplomacy in other parts of the world and was instrumental in the British Foreign Office's decision to reconsider its policy of rivalry with Russia, despite the Government of India's continued concern with the Russian threat to the security of British India. Attaining Russia's friendship became a primary objective of the Conservative British foreign secretary, Lord Lansdowne (1900-5), who initiated the talks for an Anglo-Russian understanding. However, it would be Lansdowne's Liberal successor, Sir Edward Grey (1905-16), who finally managed to reach a formal accord with Russia in August 1907. By the time of the outbreak of the Persian Constitutional Revolution in 1906, London's rivalry with Berlin had resulted in the abandonment of the British policy of "Splendid Isolation," which precluded Britain's participation in European alliance systems. Britain was now actively pursuing formal friendship with Russia in the European arena of balance of power and attempting to resolve the century-old Anglo-Russian rivalry in



Central Asia and Persia. After the outbreak of the Constitutional Revolution in Persia, the British desire for cooperation with Russia placed the Foreign Office in London on a collision course with the Persian nationalist and constitutionalist reformers, many of whom initially looked to Britain for diplomatic assistance in countering overt Russian support for the Persian autocracy. After the conclusion of the 1907 Anglo-Russian Agreement, the British Foreign Office adopted a policy of ample tolerance towards Russian aggression in northern Persia and St. Petersburg's efforts to obliterate the Persian nationalist/constitutionalist movement, despite periodic objections from the Government of India to London's policy of appeasing Russian ambitions in Persia.

From 1907 until the outbreak of the First World War, British policy in Persia consisted of extensive cooperation with Russia, to the point of legitimizing Russia's repeated violations of Persian sovereignty and substantial military presence in northern Persia. In the process, the British Foreign Office abetted Russia in undermining the Persian Constitutional Revolution in December 1911. After the outbreak of the First World War, Britain and Russia abandoned all pretense of respect for Persia's sovereignty, jointly occupying that country under the pretext of countering German and Ottoman anti-Allied operations in Persia, despite Tehran's declaration of neutrality in the war. The Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia in 1917 resulted in the cessation of Anglo-Russian friendship in general, and Anglo-Russian military and diplomatic cooperation in Persia in particular. With the withdrawal of Russian forces from Persia, already initiated after the March Revolution in Russia, the subsequent Bolshevik renunciation of the 1907 Agreement, and outbreak of military hostilities between Britain and the Bolshevik government after 1918, Britain attempted to establish its absolute imperial hegemony in Persia: first, through the abortive Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919, and later by sponsoring the 1921 coup d'état led by Rezā Khan and Sayyed Żiā'-al-Dīn Ṭabāṭabā'ī.

FROM THE PERSIAN CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION

TO THE ANGLO-RUSSIAN AGREEMENT OF 1907

The political disturbances in Persia in December 1905, that would culminate in the outbreak of the Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1906 (see [CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION ii.](#)), coincided with the Liberal assumption of power in Britain. In Britain, the Conservative government of Arthur Balfour resigned on 4 December 1905, relinquishing office to a caretaker Liberal



administration led by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. In the 1906 general election, the Liberal party achieved a landslide victory, ending nearly two decades of almost uninterrupted Conservative dominance. However, the new British foreign secretary, the Liberal Imperialist Sir Edward Grey, was just as committed as his Conservative predecessor, Lord Lansdowne, to the policy of containing the perceived German threat. Grey's enmity towards Germany was intensified shortly after taking office. In January 1906, Britain faced the prospect of war with Berlin, after a standoff between Germany and Britain's 1904 ally, France, over Morocco. Moreover, in pursuance of Lansdowne's policy of rapprochement with Russia, Grey was convinced of the urgent need for negotiating an Anglo-Russian understanding (B. Williams, "Great Britain and Russia, 1905 to the 1907 Convention" in Hinsley, p. 133; Steiner, 1977, p. 40; Monger, p. 283). Grey had no intention of allowing the political developments in Persia undermine his efforts to enlist Russia's friendship in Europe. He emphatically instructed the British diplomatic staff in Persia to avoid involvement in the political turmoil in that country, so as not to provoke Russia's suspicion of British intentions. But, by July 1906 the deepening political crisis in Persia threatened to firmly embroil London in that country's internal strife. Groups within the Persian opposition, still regarding Britain as Russia's traditional regional foe, were turning to British diplomatic staff in that country for support, particularly in light of the Russian legation's overt encouragement of the shah to resist the opposition's demands. Given the murky political situation in Persia and the uncertainty of obtaining St. Petersburg's friendship in the near future, Grey opted for a policy of keeping open communication channels with the Persian opposition while avoiding direct British advocacy of the opposition's demands (Public Record Office (PRO), Kew, U.K., FO 248/896, minute no. 51 by Grey, 24/25 April 1907, pp. 1-2.)

In July 1906, one of the prominent clerical opposition leaders, Sayyed 'Abd-Allāh Behbahāni, contacted the British legation in Tehran, requesting British financial and diplomatic support (PRO, FO 371/112, Evelyn Grant Duff to the F.O., 11 July 1906; *ibid.*, "Āqa Seyyed Abdullah Mujtehed to Mr. Grant Duff (July 16, 1906)" in Grant Duff to Grey, 19 July 1906; Kasravi, p. 109). Although the British chargé d'affaires, Evelyn Grant Duff, declined the request for financial assistance to the Persian opposition, he advised the Foreign Office in London that Britain and Russia jointly call for the removal of the Persian chief minister, 'Ayn-al-Dawla, which constituted one of Persian opposition's chief demands at this stage. This overture was promptly discarded by Grey and his under-secretary, Charles Hardinge, as an invitation for overt British



involvement in the political conflict in Persia which could provoke Russia's hostility (PRO, FO 371/112, Persia no. 23516, 11 July 1906). This would not be the last occasion Grey considered Grant Duff's analyses of the situation and his advice highly inappropriate. On July 18, two representatives of Persian merchants in the ranks of the opposition paid a visit to the summer grounds of the British legation in Qolhak in the outskirts of Tehran, to inquire from Grant Duff whether the opposition protesters could take sanctuary (*bast*) at the British legation in Tehran. Grant Duff's equivocal response was interpreted to mean that no attempt would be made to bar the protesters from the legation premises (Great Britain. Parliamentary Papers, 1909, vol. 105, cd. 4581, "Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of Persia, December 1906 to November 1908"; Browne, *Persian Revolution*, pp. 118-19; Kasravi, p. 110). The following morning, approximately fifty merchants and theological students arrived at the British legation in Tehran and were permitted to enter the legation grounds. Within four days their numbers swelled to 858 and by August the number of the *bastis* would reach 13,000 (PRO, FO 371/112, Grant Duff to Grey, 21 July 1906; Cambridge, Browne Papers, Box 12 (Letters from Persia 1905-1910), W. A. Smart to Browne (received on 4 September 1906); *The Times*, 24 July 1906, p. 5; 26 July, p. 3; Browne, *Persian Revolution*, p. 119).

Grey was outraged by Grant Duff's hospitality towards the *bastis*, which had infuriated St. Petersburg and surpassed Grey's desire simply not to appear inimical towards the Persian opposition (Grey to Cecil Spring-Rice, 12 August 1906, in Gwynn, p. 78; PRO, FO 371/112, Arthur Nicolson to Grey, 1 August 1906). He instructed Grant Duff not to interfere between the Persian Government and the *bastis* and, instead, to persuade the latter to leave the legation grounds (*ibid.*, Grey to Grant Duff, 2 August 1906). To Grey's annoyance, this was not Grant Duff's last gesture of unauthorized hospitality towards the Persian opposition, nor was he the only British diplomatic staff in Persia whose course of action at times deviated from the Foreign Office's instructions (see below). However, Grey approved of advising the shah "that lack of confidence in the Grand Vizier may be the real complaint" (*ibid.*, Grey to Grant Duff, 25 July 1906). Grey's eventual decision to urge the dismissal of the Persian chief minister was intended to bring the political crisis in Persia to an immediate end, so as not to further complicate relations between London and St. Petersburg. However, to Grey's frustration, the political crisis in Persia was to rapidly escalate in the coming weeks.

Grant Duff's hospitality towards the Persian opposition inadvertently



expedited the Persian Constitutional Revolution. At the safety of the British legation, the opposition leaders incorporated an additional demand to their existing list of grievances: the establishment of a constitutional government (E. G. Browne, *Persian Revolution*, p. 122, n. 1). Therefore, the shah's dismissal of the chief minister, 'Ayn-al-Dawla, on 30 July failed to bring the bast episode to an end. Contrary to the still-prevalent conspiratorial mindset among some Iranian commentators, while there is evidence that a number of bastis discussed aspects of constitutional government with the legation staff, the seed of a parliamentary system was not planted in the minds of the Persian opposition by Grant Duff or other British consular agents. The concept of constitutional government in Persian political and intellectual thought dates to the nineteenth century, advocated in various forms by a range of reformers adhering to a diverse spectrum of ideological and political perspectives, and by the turn of the century a number of secret organizations had been formed to advocate an array of "democratic" reforms (see "[CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION. i. INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND](#)").

On 5 August 1906 the ailing Persian monarch succumbed to popular pressures and authorized the establishment of a constituent national assembly (Majles). The bastis began leaving the premises of the British legation, but the constitutional revolutionary struggle had just begun (Abrahamian, p. 85). The shah's vacillation in approving the electoral law resulted in fresh wave of disturbances, with a number of opposition leaders again taking refuge at the British legation, much to Grey's dismay and irritation (PRO, F.O. 371/112, Grey to Grant Duff, 7 September 1906). Finally, on 13 September the shah once more capitulated to the opposition and ratified the electoral law.

Meanwhile, with reports of Tehran's decision to obtain a loan from Berlin, after London and St. Petersburg had jointly turned down a similar loan request in May, Grey was disturbed by the prospect of German intervention in Persian affairs. Despite denials from Berlin, Germany was rumored to be exploring the possibility of forming its own imperial bank in Persia to bypass the provision of the 1900 Russian loan to Tehran which prohibited Persia from borrowing money from other powers without St. Petersburg's prior consent (*The Times*, 3 October 1906, p. 3). Grey, already alarmed by the growing German influence in the Ottoman empire, regarded these reports as further proof of German attempts to disrupt the regional status quo and sabotage the Anglo-Russian talks. He immediately set out to thwart the rumored German loan by persuading St. Petersburg, which lacked the financial resources for



extending a new loan to Persia by itself, to approve a joint Anglo-Russian loan to Tehran (*The Times*, 20 October 1906, p. 5). One of the first steps taken by the newly-established Persian majles was to reject the proposed Anglo-Russian loan in December; instead, opting to raise a loan domestically through the creation of a Persian national bank (a project that ended in failure). The opposition of the majles to the Anglo-Russian loan was indicative of its strong sentiment of nationalism and independence of action, as well as the power struggle between the majles and the pro-court government, which opposed the new constitutional procedures and was determined to deny the majles control over the expenditure of any loan.

By the end of the year, Grey was still striving to reach an understanding with St. Petersburg, while developments in Persia threatened to upset the status quo in one of the countries where Grey hoped to resolve Britain's rivalry with Russia. The accession to the Persian throne of the Russophil crown prince, Mohammad 'Ali, following Mozaffar-al-Din Shah's death in January 1907, and the arrival in Tehran (in February) of majles deputies from the northwestern province of Azarbaijan, who represented the more militant revolutionary factions, resulted in the rapid polarization between the constitutional and autocratic camps, upsetting Grey's calculations. On 31 August 1907, the Anglo-Russian Agreement finally became a reality. However, the long-anticipated Agreement, signed at the Russian foreign ministry, would spell new difficulties for Grey in Persia, as Russia stepped up its assistance to the new Persian autocrat in opposition to the Iranian constitutional camp.

FROM THE 1907 ANGLO-RUSSIAN AGREEMENT TO THE 1908 ANTI-CONSTITUTIONAL COUP D'ETAT

On 31 August 1907, Britain and Russia concluded an Agreement, also known as the Anglo-Russian Convention (q.v.), settling their regional differences over Tibet, Afghanistan, and Persia. The Agreement, which the British Foreign Office primarily regarded as a check against the military rise of Germany in Europe and Berlin's imperial competition around the globe, stopped short of a formal alliance between the two powers, even though both Russia and Britain had concluded separate alliances with France in 1894 and 1904 respectively (Churchill, pp. 212-68).

Persia, which was in the midst of the Constitutional Revolution, was divided into a Russian zone of influence in the north, encompassing most major cities, including the capital, Tehran, a British sphere of influence in the southeastern



part of the country bordering British India, and a neutral zone demarcating the Russian and British spheres of influence. The Agreement was concluded without consultation with Persian authorities. The Persian government was not officially informed of the actual terms of the Agreement until 11 September (British and Foreign State Papers, 1908-1909, vol. 102, pp. 906-907). The British representative in Persia, Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, who had been kept in the dark by the British Foreign Office concerning the full tenor of the Agreement, had been compelled to improvise its terms and inform Tehran of an arrangement between the two powers in a communiqué on 5 September, after the circulation of news reports. This “unofficial” note included a provision (lacking from the subsequently published official text of the Agreement), expressing a firm British commitment to respect the sovereignty of Persia and, along with Russia, to refrain from interfering in Persia’s internal affairs in any manner. In the coming years, British advocates of Persia’s independence would insist that Spring-Rice’s note, drafted as it was by the British representative in Persia, constituted an “official” British undertaking to curb Russian interference in Persian affairs, and that London was reneging on Britain’s alleged obligation (Browne, *Persian Revolution*, pp. 190-94).

One outcome of the Agreement was the fostering of closer, overt cooperation between Russia and the Persian autocracy in opposition to Persian nationalists and reformers, even if the autocratic government of Moḥammad-‘Ali Shah refused to recognize the Agreement. The Agreement provoked vehement opposition from Persian nationalist and constitutional camps. It also led to extensive and protracted condemnation of the British Liberal foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey (1905-1916), in Britain itself, where the Agreement drew sharp criticism from different quarters. The Conservative critics (and their Liberal Unionist allies), whose own party had initiated the talks with Russia during Lord Lansdowne’s tenure as foreign secretary (1900-1905), supported the idea of an Anglo-Russian understanding but found the terms of the 1907 Agreement inadequate in safeguarding and advancing British interests in the region, particularly as the British sphere did not extend to southwestern Persia, where a substantial portion of British (and Indian) commercial and financial interests in Persia were concentrated. Critics on the left of the political spectrum, such as some Radicals in Grey’s own Liberal party, members of the Labour Party, various socialists, a host of other anti-imperialists (including the maverick conservative anti-imperialist champion of ‘Egypt for Egyptians,’ Wilfrid Scawen Blunt), a number of Irish Nationalist members of parliament, and, most notably, the Cambridge orientalist Edward



Granville Browne (q.v.), denounced the Agreement as a violation of Persian sovereignty. The Agreement was also seen as an example of the British government's abhorrent dalliance with Tsarist autocracy, and a hostile provocation of Berlin that could result in a major European war (Brailsford, *passim*; Kazemzadeh, pp. 498-506; Bonakdarian, 1991, *passim*). The secrecy surrounding the negotiation and conclusion of the Agreement, without prior parliamentary deliberation, formed another basis of condemnations of Grey by his steadfast domestic detractors on the left and their associates (hereafter referred to as "British foreign-policy dissenters"). In addition, George Nathaniel Curzon (q.v.), the former viceroy of India (1899-1905), a staunch imperialist and a Conservative member of the House of Lords, and an authority on Persia and Persian affairs, waged his own independent crusade against Grey, frequently concealing his imperialist ambitions in Persia beneath a facade of concern with Persia's independence vis-à-vis Russia (Curzon, *passim*). Also, over the following years, some feminist groups among pro-constitutional Persian women (in Persia and in the émigré communities), whose range of social and political activities attracted international attention and commentary, would solicit the assistance of British and other Western suffragists for the Persian nationalist and constitutional cause (Bonakdarian, 2000b, pp. 160-61; Afary, ch. 7).

The Anglo-Russian Agreement and London's tacit support of Russian aggression directed against the Persian revolutionary camp provoked condemnations in other parts of the world over the coming years, including protests in British-administered India, where nationalist agitation had intensified in the aftermath of the 1905 partition of Bengal. The Indian National Congress, which in 1906 embraced the platform of self-government within the framework of the British Empire, objected to the loss of Persia's independence. A host of militant nationalist groups (both separatist as well as religiously and communally mixed, pan-Indian organizations) hailed the Persian revolution as an example of the "awaken-ing" of the east in the worldwide struggle against imperialism, and expressed support for Persia's nationalist movement, regarding it as yet another precedent for the impending anti-British revolution in India. The Government of India, meanwhile, was highly attentive to Persian developments and their potentially alienating effect on the All-India Muslim League. The League, founded in 1906 and largely supportive of prevailing British imperial rule (prior to the annulment of Bengal's partition in late 1911), repeatedly beseeched British authorities to halt Russian intervention in Persia, one of the last remaining independent Muslim



countries. In addition, members of India's small, but financially powerful, Zoroastrian Parsi community bemoaned the fate of their "ancestral home," while commending the extension of political rights to Persian Zoroastrians after the Constitutional Revolution. At times, Grey emphasized the need to placate Indian opinion in urging Russian moderation in Persia, specifically Indian Muslims whose sympathy the British authorities hoped to cultivate in countering the rapid spread of Indian nationalism. Persians residing in India, including Persian Zoroastrians, also in various ways advocated the revolutionary struggle at home. On at least one occasion, in April 1909, during the Persian civil war (see below), British authorities considered steps for inducing the influential Calcutta newspaper *Ḥabl-al-matīn*, published by the Persian Sayyid Jalāl-al-Dīn Kāšāni, to abstain from vilifying Russian policy in Persia (Public Record Office (PRO), Grey Papers. F.O. 800/70, Sir George Barclay to Grey, 5 April 1909, p. 193).

Grey's Conservative critics in Britain, including Curzon, repeatedly accused the foreign secretary of foregoing British interests in southwestern Persia in the 1907 Agreement (i.e., in the neutral zone). But London's friendly relations with various regional tribal leaders and chieftains, such as Shaikh Ḳaz'al of Moḥammara (Ḳorramšahr), who had been seeking British recognition for his family's autonomous rule since 1897, as well as with political personalities and members of the royal family, such as the governor of the central province of Isfahan, prince Ḳell-al-Soltān, or the financial arrangements between British private interests and the Bakhtiāri tribal leaders in the neutral zone, alongside continued British anti-Russian espionage activities in northern Persia, tended to partially offset the loss of British leverage in other parts of the country. The discovery of substantial oil deposits in Masjed-e Solaymān by the D'Arcy oil company in 1908 (Anglo-Persian Oil Company after 1909) further bolstered London's leverage in the neutral zone. In 1901, William Knox D'Arcy, a British citizen, had received a concession for oil exploration from the government of Moẓaffar-al-Dīn Shah (Ferrier, pp. 15-88).

From 1907 until 1912 Persia occupied a preeminent position in British foreign policy debates, prompting Grey to resort to threats of resignation on two separate occasions: once in 1908 in the hope of restraining the Radical critics in his own party opposed to London's rapprochement with St. Petersburg (McLean, 1978, p. 350), and later, during a private conversation in 1912 with his Russian counterpart, Sergei Sazanov, in reaction to continued Russian barbarities in Persia, the mounting "Grey must go" campaign in Britain, and



protests in India (Grey, p. 164; Steiner, 1977, pp. 142-43; India Office Library and Records (IOLR), London, India Office Political Department, L/P & S/10/270, nos. P. 1354, P.1688).

Russia's transparent support for Moḥammad-'Ali Shah's anti-constitutional endeavors after the 1907 Agreement exacerbated the already deteriorating relations between the Persian autocrat and the revolutionary camp. On the very same day the Agreement was signed, the Persian chief minister, Amin-al-Solṭān (Atābak-e A'żāam, q.v.), had been assassinated by a member of a secret radical revolutionary committee. The subsequent government of Mošir-al-Dawla was forced to tender its resignation only two months after its formation, and after a brief lull in the stalemate between the Majles (the parliament) and the shah, a new cabinet was sworn in, with the Oxford-educated and moderate reformer Abu'l-Qāsem Khan Nāṣer-al-Molk at the helm. By December 1907 there were renewed signs of a major standoff between the royalist and the revolutionary camps and Nāṣer-al-Molk's cabinet resigned en masse on 14 December. The following day the shah summoned the cabinet and summarily incarcerated Nāṣer-al-Molk in preparation for what proved to be an abortive coup d'état, destroying any hope of genuine reconciliation with the revolutionary camp. Through the intercession of the British legation, Nāṣer-al-Molk was released and permitted to leave the country (Browne, *Persian Revolution*, pp. 162-63; Wright, 1985, p. 144).

After the conclusion of the 1907 Agreement, London's formal relations with Tehran were carried out regularly in the form of joint representations with the Russian legation, even if Grey and other British Foreign Office staff occasionally conducted private communications with Persian political personalities, most notably the private meetings at the Foreign Office in London between Grey and Nāṣer-al-Molk and between Grey and the Baḳ-tiāri strongman Sardār As'ad in 1909. On the other hand, a number of recalcitrant British consular staff in Persia lent unauthorized support to Persian revolutionaries and their British advocates in opposition to Anglo-Russian intervention in Persian affairs (see below).

FROM THE ANTI-CONSTITUTIONALIST COUP D'ETAT TO THE OVERTHROW OF MOḤAMMAD 'ALI SHAH IN JULY 1909.

The successful royalist coup d'état of 23 Jomādā I 1326/23 June 1908 in Persia and the bombardment and closure of the Majles, with the assistance of Russian officers in the shah's Cossack brigade (q.v.), signaled an intensification



of Russian intervention in Persian affairs. The Russian role in the royalist coup in Persia made Grey even more pliant towards St. Petersburg's Persian policy, lest the Russian policy makers doubt London's goodwill, even though the British monarch, King Edward VII, made a direct public plea to the government of the shah for the withdrawal of the Persian Cossack forces from the precincts of the British legation in Tehran, where the forces were harassing constitutional refugees who had taken safe haven at the legation compound (PRO, Great Britain. Cabinet Papers. CAB. 37/94, no. 95; Fraser, 1910, p. 43). In the aftermath of the royalist coup against the Majles, a number of prominent nationalists/constitutionalists fled the country for the safety of exile. Some of these political refugees arrived shortly afterwards in London, where they were assisted by the British foreign-policy dissenters in demanding the restoration of the Majles and an end to Russian and British interference in Persian affairs (Bonakdarian, 1995, pp. 178-86).

On 11 Ša'bān/8 September, at British insistence, a joint British and Russian deputation to the shah recommended the restoration of a Majles. The Russian motivation in making this request stemmed from concerns that Persian royalist forces might prove incapable of defeating the revolutionary camp in the long-run. Russia, therefore, regarded the re-establishment of some form of a Majles as a compromise measure averting the total collapse of the Persian autocracy (*Ketāb-e nāranji*, I, p. 276; Kazemzadeh, pp. 514-15). Grey was reacting to the mounting domestic criticism of his Persian policy, as well as seeking a speedy resolution of the Persian crisis which was diverting his attention away from more pressing European issues and threatening to impede smooth Anglo-Russian cooperation in the region. Moreover, it was hoped that a public pledge from the shah to restore the Majles would undermine the legitimacy of the revolutionary insurgency that had broken out in the northwestern city of Tabriz, led by Sattār Khan and Bāqer Khan (q.v.), and was keeping the Persian nationalist-constitutional movement alive and serving as a focal rallying point for British foreign-policy dissenters. British foreign-policy dissenters, for their part, were insistent that any reconvened Majles should consist of the former members, many of whom were now in hiding or exile, instead of a rubber-stamp parliament, and that the constitution of 1906 should be restored *in toto* (Cambridge, Browne Papers, Box 9, Lynch to Browne, 22 November 1908). Moreover, they demanded the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops from northern Persia, where they were assisting the royalist forces in the Persian civil war.



By early autumn, a number of Persian political refugees (including the former Majles deputies Mo'āzed-al-Saltāna and Sayyed Ḥasan Taqizāda) arrived in London, where they were warmly received by British foreign-policy dissenters. These refugees provided accounts of the developments that had led to the royalist coup and publicly challenged the veracity of the pro-Foreign Office accounts of events. Their presence in Britain prompted the formation of the Persia Committee in London by the British foreign-policy dissenters on 30 October 1908, inaugurating a more organized British opposition to Grey's Persian policy. A number of Conservative politicians broke rank with their own party's endorsement of the spirit of the 1907 Anglo-Russian Agreement and joined Grey's critics on the left by participating in this committee. The objectives of the committee consisted of stimulating British public support for Persia's independence and non-intervention in Persian affairs by Britain and Russia, as well as political amnesty, free elections for the Majles, and the Majles's authority to oversee the country's finances (George Lloyd Papers; GLLD 16/46). The Liberal-Imperialist Henry Finnis Blosse Lynch and the renowned Cambridge orientalist scholar Edward Granville Browne were elected as the committee's chairman and vice-chairman respectively, with the Conservative Lord Lamington as its president (after January 1909). Over the next few years, the committee's organized activities would play a crucial role in exposing British and Russian violations of Persian sovereignty and in provoking public condemnations of Grey in Britain. In its unremitting attacks on Grey, the committee received covert assistance from a number of British diplomatic and consular staff stationed inside Persia, among them Walter A. Smart, a former student of Browne, and Claude B. Stokes, the military attaché at the British legation in Tehran (Bonakdarian, "Selected Correspondence" in Browne, *Persian Revolution*, 1995 repr., pp. xxxi-xxxvi).

Moḥammad-'Ali Shah's refusal to reconvene any form of a surrogate Majles, continued Russian assistance to royalist forces in the Persian civil war, and Russia's stated intention of lifting the royalist siege of Tabriz for the avowed purpose of relieving the starving population of that city and protecting the foreign nationals there, which the Persian revolutionaries considered a pretext for Russian occupation of the city, intensified the Persian civil war, which by now had spread to other parts of the country (particularly Rašt in the northern Caspian province of Gilān and the south-central city of Isfahan and the surrounding areas, where the Bakhtiāri leaders had joined the insurgency). Under pressure from his domestic critics, in January 1909, Grey, who privately was endorsing Russian military intervention in Tabriz, announced Britain's



refusal to extend a joint Anglo-Russian loan to the beleaguered government of the shah prior to reconvening a Majles (The Manchester Guardian, 19 January 1909, p. 7).

The landing of a detachment of British Bluejackets in the southern Persian port city of Bušehr on 10 April 1909, reportedly for pacifying marauder tribesmen who were disrupting British (Indian) trade on the southern roads, caused grave alarm among Persian nationalists, who feared the move signaled a preparatory stage in a definitive Anglo-Russian partition of Persia. The Bluejackets were eventually withdrawn on 22 May. Meanwhile, in late April, Russian forces entered Tabriz. The Russian occupation of Tabriz, and subsequent atrocities committed against suspected nationalists in that city, failed to terminate the Persian civil war. In June, the Bakhtiāri forces from the south, and the revolutionary detachment from the northern province of Gilān, staged a two-pronged march on the Persian capital. Both Britain and Russia warned the revolutionary forces to halt their advance (*The Times*, 28 June 1909, p. 5). Disregarding this warning, on 25 Jomādā II 1327/14 July 1909, the revolutionary forces entered the capital. Within two days, Moḥammad-ʿAli Shah abdicated the throne and took refuge at the Russian legation (to be succeeded by the teen-age crown prince Aḥmad). The nationalist/constitutional forces were now in control of the Persian capital, but Russian military presence in the north continued unabated.

FROM THE OVERTHROW OF MOḤAMMAD-ʿALI SHAH TO THE RUSSIAN ULTIMATUM OF NOVEMBER 1911

On 3 August 1909, Grey met with his Russian counterpart Alexander Isvolsky, who was accompanying the Tsar on an official visit to Britain. After discussing the situation in the Balkans, Grey turned to developments in Persia, suggesting that the best course of action might be the withdrawal of Russian forces from the north. Isvolsky rejected this proposal on grounds of lack of security on the roads and the recent Ottoman forays into northwestern Persia (PRO, Great Britain. Cabinet Papers. CAB. 37/100, no. 109). Yet, Grey was publicly unwilling to voice his difference of opinion for fear of alienating Russia. Shortly after the conversations with Isvolsky, Grey held two private meetings with the former Persian chief minister and moderate constitutionalist, Nāṣer-al-Molk, who was in London. In the course of these conversations, the British foreign secretary insisted that London and St. Petersburg were working in tandem in Persia and that he fully endorsed Russian policy (PRO, Grey Papers, FO 800/70, p. 198).



After the nationalist victory in the Persian civil war, the British representative in Tehran, Sir George Barclay, and his Russian counterpart, Sablin, conducted negotiations with the new constitutional authorities to secure a pension for the deposed shah, who went to exile in Odessa, Russia. This was yet another blatant example of Anglo-Russian intervention in contravention of the stated pledge in the 1907 Agreement that the two powers would refrain from meddling in Persia's internal affairs, even if the Persian authorities still refused to recognize the Agreement.

The second Majles convened on 2 Du'l-qa'da /15 November. The new Majles was chiefly divided between the majority Moderate faction (Ejtemā'iyun-e e'tedāliyun) and the minority, but vocal and powerful, Democrat faction (Ejtemā'iyun-e 'āmiyun), closely affiliated with the radical Social Democrats outside the Majles (Etteḥā-diya, 1982, pp. 199-236; Afary, ch. 10). In addition to their more egalitarian social and political agenda, the Democrats were determined to resist foreign intervention at any cost, continually frustrating British and Russian representatives in Persia. To remedy Persia's dire financial crisis, by December 1909 the authorities in Tehran decided to engage foreign financial advisers. Meanwhile, the Persian government pursued its application for a foreign loan independently of Russian and British Imperial Banks in Persia, contrary to both Britain's and Russia's expressed desire to act as sole lenders to the Persian government (Afary, pp. 284-87).

On 16 October 1910, the British representative, Sir George Barclay, delivered an ultimatum to Persia, giving the government three months to establish security on the southern roads or face the creation of a regular British-officered local police force in the south, to be financed by a special duty imposed on customs revenue from southern Persian ports as well as revenue from the province of Fārs (*British and Foreign State Papers. 1909-1910*, vol. 103, pp. 956-57). This ultimatum, issued after consultation with Russia, which maintained its own military presence in northern Persia, again raised the specter of Persia's partition between the two powers. In keeping with the established British policy of temporarily landing the Bluejackets in southern Persia for the avowed purpose of quelling local disturbances on the roads, and intended to underscore the gravity of the recent British ultimatum, on 30 October a British force of 160 Bluejackets landed in the southern Persian port town of Langa. The authorities in Tehran and Grey's domestic critics requested the immediate withdrawal of the forces which eventually evacuated Persian soil on 9 November, having reportedly accomplished their objective. Evidently,



Grey was concerned that a prolonged British military presence in southern Persia would add greater legitimacy to Russian occupation in the north and result in the formal partition of Persia between the two powers. This would create a coterminous frontier between the two powers, increase the likelihood of future military hostilities between them, divert attention away from European developments (which were foremost on Grey's mind) to the security of India, require substantial increase in India's military expenditure (which was unpopular with the taxpayers in Britain and India), and fully undermine Grey's vision of a European alliance against Berlin.

Grey was extremely apprehensive about the outcome of the Potsdam meeting between the Tsar and the German Kaiser on 5 November 1910. The meeting indicated improved relations between St. Petersburg and Berlin in the aftermath of Sergei Sazanov's replacement of Isvolsky as the Russian foreign minister. Even though the final arrangements resulting from this meeting would not emerge until 19 August 1911, Grey was reluctant to urge moderation of St. Petersburg's Persian policy at this stage, fearing this might further alienate Russia and advance Russo-German cooperation (Robbins, p. 225; Gooch, 1911, pp. 152-53; D. Sweet, "Great Britain and Germany, 1905-1911" in Hinsley, p. 232). It soon came to light that at Potsdam Russia had reversed its earlier objection to the extension of the German-sponsored Baghdad railway to the Persian frontier (i.e. Kāneqin), which would allow Berlin some leverage in the Persian territory designated as neutral in the 1907 Agreement. In addition, Russia was probing the possibility of constructing its own railroad in Persia, originating in Tehran and connecting with the proposed extended German railway at Kāneqin. These measures, while not in violation of the Anglo-Russian Agreement, could seriously undermine Britain's original objectives in improving relations with Russia, including the exclusion of German influence from Persia and attaining Russia's full-fledged friendship in opposition to Germany. Russia, taking immediate advantage of the Potsdam meeting, dispatched additional forces to northern Persia, while discussions got underway in the Russian Duma for the construction of another railway in Persia from the Russian frontier to the British sphere of influence in Baluchistan, bordering India (*The Manchester Guardian*, 18 November 1910, p. 11). Neither of the Russian railway schemes materialized.

Apparently in reaction to the Potsdam meeting and the expanded Russian military presence in northern Persia, on 19 November London issued yet another ultimatum to Tehran, reiterating its threat to create a British-officered



force in southern Persia. With the approach of the three-month deadline in the earlier British ultimatum prior to the formation of a British military force in southern Persia, in late December the Persian minister for foreign affairs, Ḥosaynqoli Khan Nawwāb, a Democrat, resigned his post in protest. For his part, Nāṣer-al-Molk, who had been appointed regent to the new shah (Aḥmad) and was on his way to Persia from Europe, stopped short his journey in Vienna. But, when the deadline for the British moratorium expired Grey abruptly expressed satisfaction with the makeshift steps taken by Tehran to curtail disorders on the southern roads, only restating London's commitment to direct, long-term military intervention in southern Persia in the event of future neglect of security in that region by Persian authorities (*The Spectator*, 28 January 1911, p. 134). In February 1911, St. Petersburg announced its planned troop withdrawal from the garrison in Qazvin, and the new Persian minister for foreign affairs, the moderate Moḥtašam-al-Saltāna, made conciliatory remarks towards Russia, in what appeared to be a thawing of relations between Tehran and St. Petersburg (*The Manchester Guardian*, 13 February 1911, p. 7; 27 February, p. 7).

In March 1911, a new organization in Britain, the Persia Society, commenced its activities. The society was co-founded by the president of the Persia Committee, the Conservative Lord Lamington, and the Persian representative in London, Mehdi Khan Mošir-al-Molk. Professing a desire to remain aloof from political matters, the chief stated objective of the society was the promotion of greater cultural awareness of Persia in Britain and friendship between the two countries (*Browne Papers*, Box 11, G. Hogg to E. G. Browne, 14 March 1911). In practice, the society, the membership of which included some of the more outspoken critics of Grey's handling of Persian affairs, among them individuals in the Persia Committee, repeatedly violated its non-political platform.

On 2 May, the Majles finally approved Tehran's application for a loan of 1,200,000 Pounds Sterling from the British-owned Imperial Bank of Persia, after earlier attempts to secure a loan independently of Russia and Britain were thwarted by the two powers (*The Times*, 3 May 1911, p. 8). It appeared as though Grey's Persian ordeal may be coming to an end. In the summer of 1911 strained Anglo-German relations reached a new intensity with the second round of Franco-German conflict over Morocco since Grey's assumption of office in 1906, briefly pushing the Persian question to the background in British foreign-policy debates. Just as in 1906, the appearance of a German



warship off the Moroccan coast of Agadir on 1 July drew a sharp warning from London, backed by the threat of military support for France. Once again, Britain appeared on the verge of a major European military confrontation, which was only averted after Germany and France reached a consensus over their respective claims in Africa in late July and the former abandoned its claim to Morocco. Soon, the Persian question re-emerged as a chief topic of British foreign-policy debates.

The attempts by the Persian government to remedy the country's desperate financial situation which, among other things, was contributing to the lack of security on the southern roads, would generate a major showdown between Russia and the Persian Majles before the end of the year, eventually resulting in occupation of the country by the Tsarist forces and the termination of the Constitutional Revolution in Persia. In late January 1911, the Persian government had secured the appointment of American financial advisers. The American team reached Tehran on 13 Jomāda/12 May, headed by William Morgan Shuster, who was determined to fulfill his mission without regard to Russian and British objectives in Persia. He immediately encountered opposition from the pro-Russian Belgian chief of Persian Customs, Joseph Mornard. Mornard's refusal to cooperate with the American advisers and adhere to their guidelines resulted in altercations with Shuster, with the Russian legation publicly backing Mornard. The willingness of the British-controlled Imperial Bank of Persia to cooperate fully with the American advisers won Shuster this first round of confrontations with the Russian legation (Shuster, pp. 66-67; McDaniel, pp. 129-33; *New York Times*, 31 July 1911, p. 4). In the ensuing disputes, however, Grey would align British interests in Persia with Russian policy in opposition to Shuster.

In July 1911, the exiled former shah and forces loyal to him made a bid to regain the throne. Moḥammad-'Ali and his entourage crossed into Persian territory from Russia with the full knowledge and consent of Russian authorities, in contravention of the 1909 Anglo-Russian guarantees to Tehran not to recognize the former shah's claim to the Persian throne. In reaction to vigorous protests from Persian authorities, in early August a joint Anglo-Russian note was delivered to Tehran, brashly characterizing Moḥammad-'Ali's military foray as Persia's internal affair, though conceding that the ex-shah had violated the terms of his pension agreement arranged by British and Russian legations following his abdication. Shuster's part in the conflict between Tehran and the forces loyal to the former shah and, more



importantly, his decision to appoint the British Major Claude B. Stokes as the commander of the treasury gendarmerie (q.v.) would bring Shuster into open confrontation with both Russia and Britain. Stokes, the military attaché at the British legation in Tehran, was renowned for his sympathy towards radical Persian nationalists affiliated with the Democrats in the Majles and for his hostility towards Russian and British policy in Persia.

The Russian legation in Tehran, which had stepped up its blatant opposition to Shuster, immediately objected to Stokes' appointment on the specious grounds that since he was a British citizen and his duties as commander of the treasury gendarmes would extend to the Russian sphere of influence in Persia (which included the capital), such an appointment would be in violation of the 1907 Agreement. Not only had the Persian government refused to recognize the 1907 Agreement, but the Russian position was also at odds with Grey's interpretation of the 1907 Agreement expressed during a private meeting with Nāṣer-al-Molk in London in August 1909. The British foreign secretary had assured the then former Persian chief minister (now regent) that the 1907 Agreement in no way stipulated Tehran's obligation to appoint only Russian advisers in the Russian sphere and only British advisers in the British zone, and that such an arrangement would imply the formal partition of Persia by the two European powers (PRO, Grey Papers, FO 800/70, p. 198). In fact, Grey's initial reaction to the news of Stokes' appointment by Shuster was one of approval, so long as Stokes first resigned his commission in the Indian Army (IOLR, India Office Political Department, L/P & S/10/195, Persia, no. 28641). Stokes' term of service at the British legation was due to expire before he assumed his new post in the Persian gendarmerie. On 8 August 1911, however, an official British note of protest was delivered to the Persian government in opposition to Stokes' appointment (Shuster, pp. 377-79).

News of the intended dispatch of a British cavalry regiment from India to the "neutral sphere" (Shiraz and its vicinity), for the stated purpose of allaying local disturbances, renewed Persian fears of formal British occupation of the south in conjunction with continued Russian military presence in the north. Meanwhile, Russia concocted new objections to Shuster. On 9 October 1911, a standoff occurred between the Persian treasury gendarmes and the Russian consular Cossacks in Tehran. The Russian Cossacks were attempting to prevent the gendarmes from confiscating the property of Šo'ā'-al-Saltāna, a brother of the ex-shah, on grounds of his complicity in the former shah's bid to regain the throne and for tax evasion. This event and London's earlier objection to



Stokes' appointment led to Shuster's public condemnation of British and Russian transgression in Persia, hastening Grey's desire to seek Shuster's dismissal from Persian government service. The row with the Russian consular Cossacks and the landing of 300 Indian army reinforcements in southern Persia in late October, failed to check Shuster's determination to act independently of the two great powers. He now appointed another British subject and well-known sympathizer of Persian nationalists, Mr. Lecoffre, already an employee of the Persian Treasury in Tehran, as the financial inspector in Tabriz, i.e. in the heart of the Russian sphere of influence. As Shuster must have anticipated, both Russian and British representatives in Persia, Stanislaw Poklewski-Koziell and Sir George Barclay, immediately objected to the appointment (Kazemzadeh, pp. 613-24).

Russia raised the stakes on 2 November 1911, demanding an official apology from the Persian government for the alleged affront to Russian consular Cossacks by Persian treasury gendarmes attempting to confiscate Šo'ā'-al-Saltāna's property. This request was renewed as an ultimatum on 11 November, backed by the threat of military action, rupturing of diplomatic ties, and the added demand for withdrawal of treasury forces from Šo'ā'-al-Saltāna's property. Tehran was given 48 hours to comply with this ultimatum. In reaction, the entire Persian cabinet resigned rather than submit to Russian demands. After the expiry of the deadline and the crossing of additional Russian forces into Persian territory, Britain insisted that full compliance by Persia with the terms of the Russian ultimatum would result in a speedy withdrawal of Russian forces (*The Times*, 23 November 1911, p. 5). The eventual compliance of Persia with the terms of the Russian ultimatum, however, was met with additional Russian demands. On 29 November, Russia issued a new ultimatum to Tehran, this time requesting the dismissal of the American financial adviser and the cancellation of Lecoffre's appointment. Grey had personally recommended Shuster's dismissal to the Russians in the hope of averting their occupation of Tehran, which could jeopardize Grey's tenure as foreign secretary (PRO, Great Britain. Cabinet Papers. CAB. 37/108, no. 150).

The Russian ultimatum was met with overwhelming opposition in the Majles, despite the fact that many members of the majority Moderate faction privately considered Shuster a grave liability. Revelations of two Russian plots to assassinate Shuster provoked further Persian opposition to Russian demands and various nationalist organizations prepared for military confrontation with



Russian forces. Under intense pressure from his critics at home, Grey sought to legitimize the latest Russian ultimatum by chronicling Shuster's antagonism towards Russia's Persian policy. Meanwhile, the recently reassembled Persian cabinet, dominated by Bakhtiari khans, again turned to the British Foreign Office for advice. The Bakhtiari leaders did not consider Shuster worthy of a military showdown with Russia, particularly the Bakhtiari prime minister, ŞamsÂâm-al-Salţana, who resented Shuster's collusion with the Majles in denying the cabinet full control over the country's finances (Klein, 1980, pp. 66-67). Bakhtiari secretly informed London and St. Petersburg of their willingness to remove Shuster from office and obstruct the Majles, particularly underlining their readiness to take vigorous steps against the minority Democrat faction, which had steadfastly resisted Russian policy. In return, the Bakhtiari sought assurances from the two foreign powers that Russia would refrain from occupying Tehran and Bakhtiari interests in south-central Persia would remain inviolable. To allay suspicion of Bakhtiari attempt to establish their own dynastic rule, the powers were informed of Bakhtiari willingness to go as far as considering the restoration of the ex-shah to the throne in the event that both powers strongly favored such a move. The two powers finally concluded that a Bakhtiari military intervention was the best solution to the crisis, averting the Russian occupation of the Persian capital, which Grey could not countenance without risking his own career. The British foreign secretary also opposed Russia's desire to restore the former shah (Kazemzadeh, pp. 638-40; Kelin, 1980, pp. 66-67; Garthwaite, pp. 122-23).

After canceling Lecoffre's appointment, on 2 Moḥarram 1330/24 December 1911 the Bakhtiari-led cabinet took matters into its own hands, closing down the Majles premises, and announcing Shuster's dismissal. In the aftermath of the coup, the British foreign secretary faced the most acerbic condemnations yet from the British foreign-policy dissenters, as well as mounting British public criticism of the government's culpability in undermining the Persian constitutional movement. The summary execution of a number of prominent Persian constitutionalists, including the highest ranking cleric, Teqat-al-Eslām, in the city of Tabriz on Christmas Day 1911 by Russian forces and their Persian henchmen loyal to the ex-shah, further amplified the "Grey must go" campaign in Britain, which got underway in early 1912 due to a broad array of objections to Grey's over-all handling of foreign affairs (Steiner, 1977, pp. 142-43; Browne, 1912b, pp. 3-15).

FROM THE RUSSIAN ULTIMATUM TO THE OUTBREAK OF THE FIRST WORLD



WAR

In February 1912, the Bakhtiāri-led government officially recognized the 1907 Agreement in return for a joint Anglo-Russian loan of 200,000 Pounds Sterling. In August, however, the two powers would only extend a loan of 50,000 Pounds to Tehran, instead of the amount pledged earlier. Continued Russian aggression in northern Persia, particularly the bombardment of the holy shrine at Mašhad in early April, for ejecting Persian nationalists who had sought refuge there, generated further opposition to Grey at home and in India, where the British authorities were apprehensive of further alienation of the embittered All-India Muslim League in the aftermath of the revocation of Bengal's partition in December 1911 (ILOR, India Office Political Department, L/P & S/10/270, no. 1354). With recent signs of improvement in Anglo-German relations and mounting criticisms at home and abroad, Grey sought to distance himself from the latest round of Russian atrocities and adopted a more resolute stance in his private communications with the Russians.

The Russian foreign minister Sazanov, upon his arrival in London on 20 September in preparation for private talks with Grey at Balmoral, was confronted with protesters and hence witnessed the extent of British public hostility towards Anglo-Russian friendship, and Russian policy in Persia in particular. During the talks between Sazanov and Grey, which got underway on 24 September, Persia was the first topic of discussion, despite the worsening situation in the Balkans. Grey emphatically disapproved of Persia's partition between the two powers, pointing to large-scale opposition at home and in India. He further expressed London's reluctance to back the Russian candidate as the new Persian regent, the Russophile chief minister of the former shah, Sa'd-al-Dawla, and obtained Sazanov's consent to deny the ex-shah official recognition in the event he made a successful bid for the throne (Crewe Papers, C/17, [Grey 1912]). Yet, in public Grey continued to display a pliant attitude towards future Russian intrigues in Persia. In mid-November, when the Bakhtiāri prime minister, Šamšām-al-Saltāna, was censured by critics at home and abroad for welcoming Sa'ad-al-Dawla from exile in Russia, the prime minister admitted to prior consultation with the British legation in Tehran (*The Manchester Guardian*, 19 November 1912, p. 16).

By February 1913, Grey was desirous of giving Persia "another chance to set her house in order" and endorsed a new British loan to Tehran (*The Spectator*, 22 February 1913, pp. 298-99). In March, Grey even entertained the possibility of renegotiating the 1907 Agreement (Crewe Papers, C/17 [Grey 1913]; *ibid*,



[Grey 1914]; Curzon Papers. Mss. Eur. F112/251). The outbreak of war in Europe in late July 1914 and London's entry into the war on 4 August spelled a turning point in British policy in Persia.

THE FIRST WORLD WAR

With Ottoman entry into the war on the German side in November 1914 and the Turkish invasion of northwestern Persia, where the Russian forces were stationed, Persia declared its neutrality. Yet, the belligerent powers disregarded Persian neutrality. The Ottomans occupied northwestern Persia. Russia increased its military presence in the north. Germany engaged in anti-Allied espionage activity in Persia (with the German agent Wilhelm Wassmuss acquiring a legendary reputation). Germany also regarded Persia as the only route for reaching Afghanistan (bordering Persia, Russia, and India), where Berlin planned to establish a base for its anti-Allied activities. And, the policy makers in London and India sought to secure southern Persian oil fields and prevent enemy presence in the Persian Gulf. In 1914, the British Admiralty had become the largest shareholder in the British-owned Anglo-Persian Oil Company, and Persian oil was considered essential for the operation of its fleet of dreadnoughts, as well as to the British military campaign in general. The war also halted British parliamentary criticisms of Grey as a gesture of national unity. The Persia Committee, which had remained in existence right up to London's entry into the war, despite Lynch's death in 1913 and numerous setbacks, ended its activities completely. Only a small number of Grey's veteran critics expressed concern about Persia's sovereignty during the war and continued their castigation of the foreign secretary's pre-war performance. Furthermore, the war placed British foreign policy under direct supervision of the cabinet for smooth coordination of London's war effort.

In the meantime, elections to the third Majles were underway in Persia. The elections were held because in accordance with the constitution Aḥmad Shah, who had reached majority, was required to take an oath of office in the Majles prior to his coronation (Etteḥādiya, 1995, chapter 5). The Democrats, who dominated the third Majles (convened in December), and a large section of the Moderates, were determined to extricate Persia from the clutches of Russia and Britain. The war and the enmity of Germany towards the two traditional imperial interlopers in Persian affairs offered Persian nationalists a new conduit of hope. The first military incident in Anglo-Persian relations during the war was the attack launched against British forces in the southern Persian port city of Bušehr by Tangestāni tribes in July 1915, with Wassmuss's



encouragement. British forces managed to disperse the Tangestānis quickly, but this attack signaled willingness on the part of some Persian groups to collaborate with Germany against the Allied presence in Persia. In addition to various Persian nationalist or tribal groups, Germany could also count on the sympathy of Persia's Swedish-officered gendarme force. The Tangestāni assault on British forces was followed by other German-inspired attacks on British consulates in southern, central, and western Persia, as well as against British forces in the south, with the government in Tehran unable to curb such activities while demanding the withdrawal of Allied forces from the country (Olson, pp. 93-113). In 1916, Berlin would even arrange for the formation of an anti-British united front of radical Persian nationalists and militant Indian nationalists, a collaboration that failed to yield the intended results in both Persia and India (European Central Committee of Indian Nationalists, *Der Freiheitskampf*, passim; Majumdar, p. 408; Taqizāda, pp. 175-76, 183-84).

In October 1915, Britain and Russia began providing financial assistance to Tehran in exchange for the government's accommodating attitude towards the Allies. According to this plan, Britain and Russia would suspend the collection of loan interests owed to them by Tehran (a "moratorium"), allowing Tehran access to customs revenues collected by the two powers in lieu of loan interests. This scheme, which lasted until May 1917, further enabled the Allies to impose their will on the government in Tehran. During the war, the various short-lived Persian cabinets had to obtain the prior approval of British and Russian representatives in the country. The "moratorium" scheme, as opposed to extending a direct loan to Tehran, circumvented the prior approval of the Majles, which was rife with anti-Allied sentiments (Olson, pp. 57-60). By November 1915, Russia had resolved to occupy Tehran after consultation with the British legation. The anti-Allied members of the Majles (Committee of National Resistance), along with other nationalists and all German nationals, left the capital for the city of Qom just south of Tehran. In Qom, the Committee of National Resistance declared the formation of a provisional anti-Allied nationalist government (Government of National Defense), independent of the government in Tehran. The shah, who intended to join the exodus, was induced by British and Russian representatives to remain in the capital. Between November 1915 and May 1916, the nationalists and their entourage who had left the capital retreated before the advancing Russian forces, and subsequently British forces, to Isfahan in central Persia, and then to Kermānshāh in the west, and finally to Qaṣr-e Šīrin on the western frontier with the Ottoman Empire, from where many eventually fled to the Ottoman



Empire, while others were incarcerated by British troops (Abrahamian, p. 111; Avery, pp. 194-97).

The cabinet of the pro-Russian premier Sepah-sālār (February-August 1916), consented to the formation of a police force staffed with British officers in southern Persia (the South Persia Rifles/*Polis-e janub*), which was to serve as a British bulwark against German and Persian anti-Allied activities, without distracting the regular British forces from their war effort against the Ottomans (Olson, chapter 5; Safiri, *passim*). The force would remain intact after the end of the war. This force was also intended to bolster the post-war British domination of southern Persia in keeping with the secret Anglo-Russian treaty of March 1915, arranging for a complete British occupation of southern Persia, including the neutral sphere in the 1907 Agreement, in return for Russian occupation of Istanbul (Fromkin, pp. 137-40).

On 5 December 1916, Grey resigned his post when the new coalition war cabinet headed by the Liberal David Lloyd George replaced the Liberal prime-minister Herbert H. Asquith's war-time coalition administration of 1915. He was succeeded by Arthur J. Balfour. Yet, it was Curzon who oversaw British policy towards Persia after the formation in July 1917 of a Persia Committee (not to be confused with its pre-war non-governmental namesake, which was critical of British policy in Persia), consisting of representatives from the War Office, the Foreign Office, and the India Office, and chaired by Curzon (Stanwood, pp. 28-29).

The Russian Revolutions of March and October 1917 had a profound impact on Persian nationalism, British policy towards Persia, and the range of anti-British activities in Persia. The withdrawal of Russian forces from northern Persia at the behest of Alexander Kerensky's provisional government after the March Revolution, and the subsequent Bolshevik decision in February 1918 to renounce most tsarist treaties concerning Persia (including the Anglo-Russian Agreement), left Britain as the sole imperial power with a military presence in Persia. From May 1918 to October 1920, Britain, along with France, the US, and Japan, would join the Russian Civil War with the aim of toppling the Bolsheviks from power. Northern Persia would become a British base for anti-Bolshevik military operations.

At the end of World War I in November 1918, Britain also emerged as the dominant imperial power in the former territories of the Ottoman Empire in Mesopotamia (although the Allied war against Turkey continued until the



Sevres treaty of 1920). In addition to British rule in India, and the importance of the Persian Gulf and southern Persian oil fields, the post-war British hegemony in the former Ottoman territory of Iraq, bordering western Persia, reinforced London's and the Government of India's concern with regional security. This factor, and the centrality of Persia as a British buffer against the spread of Bolshevism in the region, particularly given the absence of strong central authority in Persia and the various nationalist and autonomous armed uprisings in different parts of the country, were instrumental in London's formulation of the abortive Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919 (q.v.; see below). In 1915 a nationalist revolt had broken out in the northern Caspian province of Gilān, directed against the central government, corrupt local landowners, and foreign intervention in Persia. This revolt, led by Mirzā Kuček Khan, and known as the Jangali (forest) movement, posed the most serious military challenge to British post-war prestige in Persia and would be a factor in precipitating the British-sponsored coup d'état of 1921, led by Reżā Khan and Sayyed Ziā'-al-Dīn Ṭabāṭabā'ī.

After much maneuvering, in August 1918 Britain had secured the reappointment of the pro-British Ḥasan Khan Woṭuq-al-Dawla as Persian prime minister, in exchange for a pledge of personal protection and payment of subsidy to Aḥmad Shah. The September 1918 appointment of Sir Percy Cox, the former Persian Gulf Political Resident, as London's representative in Tehran (replacing Charles Marling) marked the intensification of forward British policy in Persia. Cox was instructed by London to augment long-term British influence in Persia (Olson, pp. 204-13).

FROM THE ANGLO IRANIAN AGREEMENT TO THE COUP D'ETAT

With the termination of the war in November 1918, Tehran looked to the US for assurances that Persian sovereignty would be honored during the peace talks in Paris, from which London excluded Persian delegates. The US, though echoing Tehran's concerns during the talks that got underway in January 1919, was not prepared to challenge Britain's hegemony in the region, given Washington's recognition of London's long-established interests in the region, the US-British war-time alliance, and the two countries' continued involvement in the Russian civil war. Moreover, the opposition of the US senate to American participation in the League of Nations (convening in January 1920), further curtailed Washington's ability to honor in any way President Wilson's wartime pledge of post-war independence to weaker independent nations such as Persia (Yeselson, pp. 144-51; Bonakdarian, 2000a, pp. 18-19).



Masterminded by Curzon, in 1919 London attempted to impose its absolute suzerainty over Persia. On 9 August 1919, an Anglo-Persian Agreement was negotiated between London and Woṭuq-al-Dawla. For their co-operation in facilitating this Agreement, the Persian premier and ministers of foreign affairs and finance, Firuz Mirzā Noṣrat-al-Dawla and Akbar Mirzā Ṣārem-al-Dawla, received a total sum of 131,000 Pounds Sterling. The Agreement, which evoked immediate condemnation from Persian nationalists and took the rest of the world by surprise, was tantamount to the establishment of a virtual British protectorate over Persia. In preparation for implementing the Agreement, even though it had not been officially ratified by the Majles in accordance with the Persian constitution, Britain dispatched a financial mission to Persia led by Armitage Smith, undertook preparatory plans for the construction of a railway, and extended the first installment of a 20-year loan of 2,000,000 Pounds Sterling to Tehran, secured by the collection of customs revenues of southern Persian ports. In October 1919, Curzon replaced Balfour as the British foreign secretary in the Conservative-dominated post-war coalition cabinet of Lloyd George, giving Curzon much greater leverage in molding London's Persian policy.

The 1919 Anglo-Persian Agreement was so audacious and unpopular that even France and the US condemned it and eventually many British politicians and even the conservative press, such as *The Times*, wondered whether anyone beside Curzon wanted the Agreement. Moreover, in June 1920 the embattled Woṭuq-al-Dawla tendered his resignation and was replaced by Ḥasan Khan Moṣir-al-Dawla, who refused to recognize the Agreement on grounds that it had not been ratified by the Majles. According to constitutional guidelines, the Agreement could not be binding without the prior approval of the Majles. In 1921, the fourth Majles would firmly refuse to sanction the Agreement, thwarting absolute British imperial rule in Persia (Katouzian, *passim*; Fatemi, pp. 10-120; Ghani, pp. 46-80; Bennett, pp. 123-28).

Another of Curzon's immediate objectives in Persia was the suppression of the Jangali insurgency in the Gilān province. In June 1918, the Jangalis had forced the retreat of British forces, led by Major-General Lio-nel Dunsterville, from areas under their control, through which the British forces hoped to reach the Russian Caucasus where the Russian war effort against the Ottomans had fizzled out in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution. The British also were using Gilān as a passage to Russian territory in their military campaign against the Bolsheviks. By July, a larger British force succeeded in obtaining a non-



aggression pact from the Jangalis. In late February 1919, the British North Persia Force (Norperforce) joined the Persian Cossack forces dispatched to Gilān by Woṭuq-al-Dawla's government for pacifying the Jangali's. Before the end of the next month, British forces, backed by air raids, had captured Rasht and forced the Jangalis to retreat from some of their positions. In reaction, the Jangalis welcomed Bolshevik assistance, given the Bolshevik desire to curb British operations against them. In May 1920, Soviet forces from Baku, in the Russian Caucasus, reached the Caspian port of Anzali, lending assistance to the Jangali forces and abetting in the formation of the first Soviet Socialist Republic in Persia in June (Ravāsāni, *passim*; Chaqueri, *passim*; Sabahi, pp. 33-137).

Rezā Khan's military coup in February 1921, with British diplomatic and military consent, was to inaugurate a new phase in Anglo-Persian relations, as well as finally subduing various insurgency movements throughout of the country.

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