



INDO-EUROPEAN TELEGRAPH COMPANY

INDO-EUROPEAN TELEGRAPH COMPANY (IETC), a telegraph company that controlled telegraph wires between Tehran and the Russian border and onward through Russia and Germany to London. Unlike the Indo-European Telegraph Department (IETD; q.v.) operated by the British Indian government and the native Iranian system, the Indo-European Telegraph Company (IETC) was privately owned and operated by the Siemens Company.

On 11 January 1868, Naşer-al-Din Shah granted the Siemens brothers a concession to build and operate a telegraph from Tehran to the Russian frontier at Jolfā. The agreement stipulated that, after 25 years, the entire line would default to the Iranian government unless overridden by a subsequent agreement (Cable and Wireless Archives, *Articles of Association of the Indo-European*, pp. 90-96; Iranian Foreign Ministry Archives, 23/12/1284). In January 1891, the IETC extended their concession with Persia through 1925 (IO L/PWD/7/767; 98/21 IE). The Persian government had previously built a rudimentary telegraph connecting Tehran and Tabriz, but used the Siemens concession to upgrade the link at no cost to itself. Robert Murdoch Smith, director of the IETD Persian section, wrote in an 1868 letter, "The Tabreez line has been very bad of late of course, the Iranians will do nothing to it in anticipation of Siemens taking it over" (IO L/PWD/7/453; E-72). Contemporaries frequently confused the IETC and IETD, leading Frederic Goldsmid, IETD director from 1865-71, to pen a clarification letter to *The Times* of London



published 7 February 1870. The British government initially welcomed the IETC for the communications security an additional Indo-European telegraph route would provide. However, the IETC line fell under the protection of Russian authorities, even if most of its directors were English (Jamālzādeh, p. 180-83).

The IETC 480-mile double wire line opened in August 1869 for both Iranian and foreign traffic, although the IETC did not complete the route via Tiflis, Odessa, Warsaw, Thorn, Berlin, Emden, and Lowestoft to London until January 1870. The commencement of IETC operations shortened Indo-European communications from 12 days to just over six minutes (Mallock, p. 9). Increased traffic to Tehran via the IETC route spurred growth on the IETD system in the rest of Iran so as to accommodate traffic onward from Iran to India (IO L/PWD/7/453; E-7/2).

Beginning in 1912, the IETC sought to transform its Iranian operations into a wireless company (IO L/PWD/7/1631; 1/785), though this was interrupted by the outbreak of World War I, which cut off IETC service; it did not resume until August 1923 (Simpson, p. 393). In 1929, Imperial and International Communications, a predecessor to Cable and Wireless, acquired the IETC. In 1931, Imperial and International Communications ceased its operations in Iran, liquidating the landline the following year (CW [Cable and Wireless] 12/89/1).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archives. The main repository of the Indo-European Telegraph Company papers is in the Cable and Wireless Archives (CWA) in London, although there is some reference to the IETC included in the papers of The Indo-European Telegraph Department records at the India Office Collection at the British Library, L/PWD/7.

German works. Many German scholars have discussed Siemens' role in



constructing the IETC, for example: S. Von Weiher, *Die Entwicklung der englischen Siemens Werke und des Siemens Überseegegeschäfts in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Frieberg, 1959.

A. Kukan, “Erste Transkontinentale Telegraphenverbindung. Die ‘Indo-Europäische’-Linie (1870-1931),” in *Kultur und Technik* 3, 1876, pp. 196-291.

Idem, “Die Indo- Europäische Telegraphenlinie,” in *Archiv für Post und Telegraphie* 19, 1889, pp. 577-86, 614-23.

Karl Helfferich, *Goerg von Siemens, Ein Lebensbild aus Deutschlands großer Zeit*, Berlin, 1923.

Persian works. See the bibliography under INDO-EUROPEAN TELEGRAPH DEPARTMENT.

Other works. Hugh Barty-King briefly discussed the IETC in his Cable and Wireless company history, *Girdle Around the Earth. The Story of Cable and Wireless*, London, 1979.

Charles Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran, 1800-1914*, Chicago, 1971, pp. 152-54.

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