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At the beginning of the 20th century, the central government of Persia was in an enfeebled state. After the beginning of the Constitutional Revolution in 1906 and subsequent unrest, only a shadow remained of Persia's military and police forces. This power vacuum led to disturbances in the provinces. Security for the populace was non-existent, and bandits roamed the highways.

The struggle for control over Persia between Great Britain and Russia, which the British press called "the Great Game," had ended in a draw. The way out of this stalemate was an agreement reached in 1907, whereby Persia was divided into Russian and British spheres of interest, while the two countries promised to respect the integrity and independence of Persia (see ANGLO-RUSSIAN CONVENTION OF 1907).

In October 1910, increasing unrest in southern and southwestern Persia led the British government to demand that the Persian central government restore order in these regions, or else the British themselves would take care of the problem. The Persian government, which did not wish to see British troops on its soil, decided to create a highway gendarmerie with the aid of European instructors. There was a group of politicians in the Persian leadership who had

been strongly influenced by a positive image of Europe. By granting the Europeans the responsibility and the task of reorganizing a number of the country's administrative institutions, they hoped to both avoid further interference by the great powers in the internal affairs of the realm, and clear the path for the modernization of their nation.

However, the Persian leadership was not allowed to freely entrust this task to just any Europeans; the instructors were to be chosen from neutral nations, which is why neither the Germans nor the French could be hired. The Italians were approached first, and when they declined the offer, the invitation went to the Swedish government. Sweden accepted the assignment despite the fact that the country lacked its own gendarmerie. Sweden was seen as a neutral country with modern, well-trained officers who had the necessary competence for completing the task. The proof of this could be found in the efforts of the Swedish lieutenant Wilhelm Unander, whose organization of security forces in the turbulent Balkans of 1903-1906 had earned the Swedish officers great international respect (Gyllenhaal and Westberg, p. 22).

In August 1911, Swedish General Harald Hjalmarsson set out for Persia, accompanied by officers Oscar Skjöldebrand and Carl Petersén. In total, thirty-eight Swedish military men would travel to Persia; the majority of whom were officers, though several non-commissioned officers and technicians were also included. Along with a number of officers' wives, the Swedish colony in Persia came to consist of some sixty individuals. The officers signed contracts and swore an oath of allegiance to the reigning monarch, Aḥmad Shah, but without having to change citizenship. This meant that legally they were not subject to Persian law.

The task of the gendarmerie was to make the country's highways safe for civilians and trade caravans. Furthermore, the gendarmerie was to guard the roads around the capital city of Tehran and watch over rebellious nomadic tribes. The gendarmerie would be modeled after a modern army in order to fill the military vacuum in the country.

Shortly after his arrival, General Hjalmarsson established the Central Bureau of the Gendarmerie, with seven sections, each responsible for a different task. The gendarmerie was divided into regiments, two of which were posted in Tehran and one each in Shiraz, Kerman, Qazvin, Isfahan, and Borujerd. In October 1911, an officers' school was opened, followed in February of 1912 by a gendarme school, designed to train the troops. Due to unrest in southern

Persia, another school for non-commissioned officers and gendarmes was opened in Shiraz in April 1912.

Training at the gendarme school generally lasted six months and was conducted according to regulations following the Swedish model. After completing their education, the gendarmes served for six months patrolling the highways, after which the best of them were selected for a further six-months' training at the school for the non-commissioned. After another six months of active duty, the cream of the non-commissioned trainees was selected for a one-year officer's course. After taking the officer's exam, the successful graduates were promoted to the rank of sub-lieutenant. By 1914, the gendarmerie comprised of approximately 200 officers and 7,000 soldiers and had 3,000 horses at its disposal (Arne, pp. 126-27).

Despite grave difficulties, the Swedes succeeded in accomplishing their task exceedingly well. They created a very effective police corps that was capable of being used in more difficult circumstances and tougher situations than simply policing the roads. Many Swedish officers were decorated by the Persian government after successful missions.

In the autumn of 1912, five Swedish policemen were invited to Persia in order to reorganize Tehran's police corps. The group was led by superintendent and reserve lieutenant Gunnar Westdahl, who embarked for Tehran in January 1913 and stayed until 1924. Westdahl and his colleagues (detective constables Sven Bergdahl, N. P. Sjöberg, P. L. Bjurling, A. E. Eriksson, and prison director E. Ståhlberg) carried out a thorough reorganization of the ineffective Tehran police force, whose men sorely lacked the necessary training. Westdahl introduced a new organization, new detective training, a new police force of some 1,000 men and set up a wage reform which would counteract the widespread corruption and bribery within the corps (Bergdahl, pp. 29-60).

The success of the Swedes won international attention. In 1913, *The Times* somewhat exaggeratedly reported that the gendarmerie had made Persia safe and sound and that the efforts of the Swedes were of significance to the development of the entire country. This irritated the Russian Cossack brigade who saw the Swedes' success as a threat to their own influence over northern Persia (*The Times*, 27 December 1913).

With the outbreak of the First World War, Great Britain and Russia began viewing the Swedish presence in Persia with skepticism. The Swedes were

considered friendly towards Germany, and it was feared that they might switch employers and join the Central Powers. Under British-Russian pressure, the Swedish officers were recalled home at the beginning of 1915. In February 1915, General Hjalmarsson and most of his officers left Persia. Sixteen officers and four of the non-commissioned remained behind and contracted themselves to the German army (Ineichen, p. 147).

Some of these officers became involved in plans for a coup against the Russian Cossacks in November 1915. The idea was to provoke a conflict that would force the Shah to declare war on Russia and Great Britain. The plan became known, and the Russians were able to prepare themselves in advance. Nevertheless, the Shah was influenced in the hoped-for direction, but he was prevented by British and Russian diplomats from leaving Tehran and establishing a new government friendly to the Germans. On the other hand, the chief of the gendarmerie, Edwall, did everything he could to convince the Shah to leave the city. This led to his own dismissal and replacement by another Swedish officer (Ineichen, P. 147).

There were also a dozen Swedish officers in the German-Ottoman expeditionary force which arrived in Persia in November 1915, including former gendarmerie officers Martin Ekström and Gunnar Källström. The latter brought his entire regiment over to the German side. They claimed that they were merely taking the side of popular opinion in Persia and following the wishes of the majority of the public, although there were reports that it was money and the prospect of a fine career in the German army that had enticed these officers (Nyström, p. 259).

In April 1916, what was left of the gendarmerie was renamed "*amniya*," adopting the name of the patrol force that had existed in the 19th century before falling into decline. The British South Persian Rifles (q.v.; SPR) assumed the earlier role of the gendarmerie (Ineichen, p. 169).

Several Swedish officers lost their lives while serving in Persia. The fiercest battles were waged in the western and southern regions of the country around the cities of Shiraz and Kāzerun, as well as Solṭānābād and Borujerd. Among the deceased were Count Erik Lewenhaupt, non-commissioned officer Karl Oscar Karlson, Major Oscar Ohlson, and Lieutenant Philip Hierta.

The Swedish officers were attracted to Persia by the promise of prestige and financial gain; they received much higher wages than in Sweden, lived in great

luxury, and could rapidly rise through the ranks during their foreign service. This tour of duty was also seen as an adventure during a time before the First World War when all of Europe was in the throes of hero worship and nationalistic romanticism. For its part, the Swedish government hoped that its involvement in Persia would open a new market to Swedish industry, a wish that was fulfilled during the interwar period.

The officers' own perception of their tasks is best found in the collections preserved in the Swedish war archives, which consist of descriptions of the officers' missions in the Swedish press, newspaper interviews with returning officers, articles and letters to the editor written by officers and their wives, lecture notes, diaries, letters and the books which some officers wrote upon returning home.

A rather dominant perception found in these sources is that the officers saw their task as a civilizing mission, an effort on behalf of modern civilization. The relationship between the Swedish officers and the Persians is perceived and described in terms of an encounter between a modern Europe and an uncivilized Persia, whose foremost traits were chaotic and unorganized conditions and primitive natives.

The sources also show that the Swedes availed themselves of harsh and drastic methods. The gendarmerie came to resemble the Swedish army more than anything else. Many individuals were summarily sentenced to death by hanging or firing squad after a court martial. Similar to the behavior of Russian or British imperial soldiers in foreign countries, the Swedes too could act ruthlessly and many innocent victims lost their lives when the Swedish-led patrols attacked their targets (Nyström, p. 88). This was justified by claiming that a civilizing mission had to engage in disciplining the Persians, and use draconian measures in some instances. The population was to be chastised in order to establish law and order. Unrest along the highways and in the countryside was to be put down with ruthless force.

Another prominent idea among a number of the officers was that the principle of opposites dominated all aspects of life, from the domain of thought and morals to the practical management of day-to-day life. The Swedish and Persian cultures are portrayed as irreconcilable entities. Under these conditions, Swedish culture is described as an exemplar of modern European civilization while the Persian character is portrayed in derogatory and contemptuous terms: they are depicted as if they comprised a homogeneous

collective entity without the slightest personal deviation. These characteristic features, founded on individual observations, were considered appropriate for describing the entire population without exception. A number of texts are filled with indiscriminatingly scornful comments on the Persians, with a sharp line demarcating the civilized Swedish culture from the “barbaric” culture of the Persians (Svenska Dagbladet, 15 March 1914).

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