CHAPTER II

IRAN DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Consequent on the bombardment of Russia's Black Sea port, Theodosia, on 29 October 1914 by the German ship, Brunsen, nominally under Turkish flag, Russia declared war on Turkey and Iranian neutrality was proclaimed soon after on 1 November 1914. (1)

Turco-Russian hostilities soon broke out in Erzerum-Kars front and a British expeditionary force also landed in Iraq (then named the Vilayat of Mesopotamia) in November 1914. The conflagration spread to the Iranian districts bordering Turkish and Russian territories presumably because the presence of Russian troops in Iran posed a threat to the Turks. (2) The latter also had no compunction to violate the Iranian frontier, as the demarcation of frontier between Iran and Turkey just before the outbreak of war by a Mixed Boundary Commission was highly resented by Turkey. (3)

1 Rouhilah K. Ramazani, The Foreign Policy of Iran (1500-1941), (Virginia, 1966) p.116.


3 Christopher Sykes, WARSUSS, the German Lawrence, Longman, Green & Co. London, 1936, p.61. This Commission was dominated by Russia and Great Britain.
The German policy was subtle and logical. They did not want Iran to enter the war till German victory was in sight, but they had set their intelligence agents to work for rallying a force of Iranians to damage the British and Russian interests in Iran to the maximum extent by organising raids on the Imperial Bank treasuries and on the properties of Russian and British firms and individuals. (4) Furthermore, German intelligence agents successfully attempted entry into Afghanistan through Iran to persuade Amir Habibullah to join Germany and break his relations with the Government of India. Iran supplied oil for the British navy and India provided man-power and supplies to sustain British war effort. The Germans wanted to imperil both these sources and also keep maximum number of Russian troops locked up in Iran to minimise Russian pressure in Europe.

Accordingly, German intelligence machinery made a three pronged drive to envelop the entire British sphere. (5) A mission to Kabul was sent under Captain O.

4 Ibid., p.85, Sir Percy Sykes, p.442. He states that Germany tried to force Iran into the war on German side.

5 J. C. Hurewitz, Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East. A Documentary Record, vol. II (Princeton, New Jersey, 1956) p.11. The central zone, which had been declared neutral in accordance with the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 had been merged with the southern British zone in March 1915 vide Constantinople Convention, after minor adjustment in Russia's favour. Russia was given a free hand in the northern zone.
Niedermayer to wean Amir Habibullah away from his alliance with the British. The Amir was not moved by empty German promises; he wanted a military force to back him before he could take the plunge and invade India. (6) The activity of Niedermayer Mission resulted in the setting up of Anglo-Russian cordon along the Iremo-Afghan border in July 1915. Russia took up the guarding of frontier from Sarakhs to Birjand and from where the British took up the guard duty by manning the entire line up to Kuh-i-Malik-i-Siah in Baluchistan with Khorasan levies recruited from Hazaras and Sistan levies of the Baluchis. The second mission under Dr Zugmayer, a scholar of natural history, kept the pro-German flame alive in Kerman. He dared to sally forth rather timidly towards Baluchistan frontier once or twice. Its aim of organising raids into British Baluchistan could not be achieved although the Mission was popular in Kerman.

However, Wassmuss the formidable German agent in the south proceeded systematically and skillfully to win Iranian hearts by working on the accumulated Iranian hatred against Russians and Englishmen on account of atrocities committed by Russians in Iran with meek British acquiescence since the military intervention in 1909. He fomented rebellion among the Iranian tribes in

6 Sir Percy Sykes, n. 2, pp. 441, 449.
the south against the central government's policy of neutrality in the war and won over the Swedish officered Gendarmerie to the rebel cause. Tribal raids against the British Residency at Bushire were organised by him in April 1915. This necessitated reinforcement of the British Residency, which served as a convenient plea for Nassruss to rouse tribal passions to a high pitch and provoke another attack on the Residency in July 1915. The British were, this time, flushed with victory in Iraq and were encouraged by the Russian successes in Iranian Azerbaijan. They occupied Bushire on 8 August 1915, which further provoked tribal attacks and resulted in more bloodshed.

The whole of South Iran was now in revolt. At Isphahan, G. Graeme, the British Consul General, was attacked and wounded and an orderly as well as the Russian Vice Consul was killed. At Shiraz, the British consul, Sir Frederick O'Connor, and the entire British colony were taken prisoner and forced to march to Ahram under the custody of Zair Khidair Khan. This necessitated diversion of the British forces to South Iran, which resulted in reverses for the British forces in Iraq during November 1915. (7) Feelings ran so high against the British that pro-British Khansch tribe of Qarn-ul-Mulk

7 Christopher Sykes, n. 3, p. 126.
was unable to stem the anti-British tide. Arab tribes under Shaikh Khozal of Mohammerah and the Bakhtiar tribes on whom depended the security of oil pipeline also got out of hand and turned hostile. Bakhtiaris wanted to drive away Persian Cossack troops from Isphahan and Soulut-ed-Dowleh wanted to suborn South Persia Rifles to endanger the security of oilfields and Imperial Bank treasuries. As a result, oil pipeline was breached and oil supplies were disrupted. Out of seventeen branches of the Imperial Bank, seven were taken over by the rebels, who also destroyed telegraph offices and wires to disrupt the communication system of the British and the Iranian governments.

German efforts were handicapped by the repeated forays by Rauf Bey, the Turkish commander on Iraq border. The Iranians, who suffered at Turkish hands, turned against the Germans. In spite of these handicaps, German intelligence forged ahead with their activity. When the third Iranian Majlis opened on 4 January 1915, strong anti-British and anti-Russian sentiments were voiced by an overwhelming majority. The Iranian Prime Minister, Mostoufi-ul-Mamalik was, at heart, neutral, but he was assailed on all sides by anti-entente and pro-German propaganda. Iranian Democratic Party, which had a great influence on Iranian thinking, was anti-British to the
Mre. Hostoufi was forced to enter into negotiations with the Germans for a secret alliance, but the German Minister, Prince von Reuss, was prepared to guarantee Iranian independence and integrity for the present. In reply to the Iranian demand for a substantial loan and supply of arms and ammunition, he promised to ensure adequate supply from Turkey. The Iranians disliked and distrusted the Turks for what they had already done in Iran. The Turks were also hated for their Pan-Turanian propaganda and for their ambitions to bring Iran under the all-embracing Caliphate. (8) The negotiations for a secret Irano-German alliance therefore fell through, but the government agreed to shift its seat to Isphahan. Prince von Reuss set the pace by leaving Tehran on 16 November 1915 and the Majlis deputies dispersed four days later. They stayed temporarily at Qum waiting for the Shah to join. There, the Democratic Deputies formed a National Defence Committee and on 22 November 1915 the Moderates also joined them to form a solid block against Russia and Great Britain. The Germans promised to treat the Moderates also as their allies and give them protection, money and arms.

The British and Russian pressure, backed by intimidation, prevented the government and the Shah to follow

(8) Ebulhassan K. RezaZad, n. 1, p. 128.
and join the pro-German deputies at Qum. The National Defence Committee managed to collect some ill-equipped soldiers under Mirza Sulaiman Khan to fight the Russians. Russian threat to Qum now became real and the rebels, therefore, migrated to Kermanshah, a safe German haven, where they proclaimed the formation of a national government under Nizam-as-Sultaneh.

Anglo-Russian strategy wanted to ensure respect for Iranian neutrality and they could do so, if the British and Russian troops in Iran remained passive. The German strategy strained every nerve to provoke them to action against Iranian malcontents. That way, the Iranian tribes could be enthused to join in a holy war against the Anglo-Russian combination.

Russia and Great Britain succeeded in their bid to have a government of their choice at Tehran on 10 December 1915 under Farman Farma in place of Mostoufi-al-Nawalek. Farman Farma's first act was to dismiss the commanders of Iranian Gendarmerie, who had turned pro-German and influence South Iranian tribes to adopt a pro-British stance. In February 1916, Farman Farma was replaced by a trusted pro-British Prime Minister, Sipahsalar Azim, who agreed to accept Anglo-Russian control over all Iranian expenditure. (9) Owing to bankruptcy, generated

9 Ibid. p.132.
by the war, the Iranian government was dependent on Great Britain and Russia to run its finances.

This all-embracing control enabled Russia and Great Britain to obtain concessions in Iran on 9 March 1916, a Russian subject, A.I.Khoshtaria, was granted an exclusive oil and mining concession in Gilan, Mazandaran and Astrabad districts on similar terms as had already been granted to the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. (10) The British government wanted to have a concession for the exploitation of the mineral resources of Iran as a quid pro quo for any rail concession that Russia might obtain. (11)

Turkish victory at Kut al-Amara on 25 April 1916, which was the severest reverse for the British arms in Asia thus far, proved a turning point for Anglo-Russian fortunes in Iran. The Turkish forces under Ilham Pasha and Pro-German Iranian forces under Nizam-as-Sultaneh, Mohammad Taqi Khan and Mirza Sulaiman Khan made a united bid to dislodge the Russians during June and July 1916. The latter recovered ground in August 1916 with British support. This put an end to the political statement following the

10 The difference, however, was that Khoshtaria concession was tenable for seventy years and could be transferred to any other company. The concession was registered on 12 March 1916. A second concession was given to him on 21 January 1917 for minerals in Gilan, Mazandaran, Astrabad and Ardebil.

11 Pro. 10 I-135 (February 1919). The exploratory work on this exploitation was started in 1916.
resignation of Sipahsalar's cabinet and on 29 August 1916 a pro-British cabinet was formed under Vossuq-ed-Dowleh. From this time, a pro-entente policy was followed by most of the successive central cabinets of Iran. (12)

Anti-British feelings among the people and the tribes, however, continued. The British government, therefore, resorted to their familiar method of balancing the pro-British elements against the anti-British elements in areas, where their interests predominated. In South Iran, Bakhtiaris and Qashqais were counterbalanced by pro-British Khamseh tribe under Gavam-ul-Hulk and Arabs under Shaikh of Mohammereh. In East Iran, anti-British Baluchis were held in check by pro-British Hazaras. Only the Jangalis in Gilan remained defiant.

South Persia Rifles

Ever since the conclusion of the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, the Government of India had been in favour of an Iranian force in South Iran under British officers to counterbalance Persian Cossack Brigade under the Russian officers in North Iran. In accordance with this policy, Iranian Gendarmerie was formed in 1911 A.D. under Swedish officers with the eventual aim of replacing

12 Rouhollah K. Ramazani, n.1, p.134. The only exceptions were the cabinets of Mostoufi-al-Manalek and Samsam-as-Saltaneh from January to August 1918.
the Swedish officers with British officers. The aim of this policy actually was to prevent the Russian-officered force from dominating the whole of Iran. However, the experiment failed at the first crucial test in 1915 A.D. when the Swedish officered Gendarmerie defected to the pro-German faction in Shiraz and imprisoned the British colony and the British consul in Shiraz. This made it possible for German agents to gain a road to Afghanistan and Baluchistan.

The British and Russian governments, therefore, agreed that in order to keep the trade routes open to ensure flow of supplies to the Allied forces, a new Iranian force should be raised in South Iran with a strength of 11,000 under British officers to replace the Gendarmerie. As a quid pro quo for the Russians, it was agreed that the strength of Persian Cossack Brigade should be raised to the same level.

The maintenance and equipment of both the proposed British and the existing Russian forces was taken over by a joint Anglo-Russian commission and a joint subsidy of Tomans 200,000 (approximately £50,000) a month was guaranteed to the Iranian government for this purpose.

The task of raising the proposed British-officered force was entrusted to Brigadier Sir Percy Sykes in
January 1916 and he was given arms and equipment, three British officers, three Indian officers, twenty Indian non-commissioned officers, twenty-five Sowars (Indian cavalry) of Central India Horse. He reached Kerman in the middle of 1916 and the task of raising Kerman Brigade of the new force (South Persia Rifles) was given to Lt. Col. G.L. Farran. Sir Percy Sykes himself left Kerman for Shiraz on 23 July 1916 to raise Fars Brigade of this force. On reaching Shiraz, he took over 2,000 personnel of the Iranian Gendarmerie to serve as nucleus for the proposed South Persia Rifles. These men were taken over complete with rifles, ammunition, field guns and machine guns. The Gendarmerie at Kerman had already been taken over. The nucleus of this force was augmented by further enlistment. This proved to be a grave blunder later on because Gendarmerie personnel were at the root of indiscipline and mutiny.

The avowed aim of this force was to serve as a military police for South Iran, but it came to have, in course of time, quasi-military character and its Inspector General came to be known as General Officer Commanding. (13) Initially, the new force was placed under the operational control of the British Minister Tehran and the responsibility for supplies, administration

and expenditure was vested in the Government of India. Nominal control of the Iranian government was recognised on the analogy of the Persian Cossack Brigade. (14) Operational control of the force was, later on, transferred to the Commander-in-Chief in India. (15)

In the initial stages, Vossuq-ed-Dowleh, an old friend of the British, was the Iranian Prime Minister. On 21 March 1917, he recognised Sir Percy Sykes as the Commandant of the new force. (16) He did not, however, recognise Sir Percy as an officer in the service of the Iranian government; nor did he recognise the newly raised force as an Iranian force.

British efforts were, however, concentrated on making this force acceptable to the Iranian government. It was, accordingly, promised that the British officers of this force would, eventually, be replaced with neutral officers and the force would be merged with the uniform Iranian army to be formed after the war. This had swung the Iranian Democrats in British favour and the Iranian government also agreed in August 1917 to give full

14 I.O. London to Viceroy New Delhi, 3456, dated 19 March 1917, Pros 284-351 (Jan 1919).

15 I.O. London to Commander-in-Chief Simla, 59390, dated 1 June 1918, Pros 1-432 (Sep 1919).

16 Minister Tehran to Foreign New Delhi, 90-F dated 5 March 1918 and 129-F dated 3 April 1918 Pros 284-351 (Jan 1919) Sir Percy Sykes, vol. II, p. 476. His statement that South Persia Rifles was recognised by the Iranian government is not supported by evidence.
recognition to the force, provided British government gave an undertaking that their troops would be withdrawn from South Iran after the war. (17)

The Democrats of South Iran linked the recognition of South Persia Rifles with the withdrawal of British forces from Central Iran also. (18) The people generally favoured recognition to be given only on the complete withdrawal of all British forces from Iran. (19)

The reason given by the British Legation for repeatedly demanding recognition was that the force had been formed to keep order in South Iran, and lack of recognition had resulted in defections of Gendarmerie personnel from the South Persia Rifles. The Iranians, however, knew that this was a foreign force operating in a neutral country. Control over its administration, finances, equipment and operations was vested in British hands. Sir Percy Sykes refused to render reports of its activities to the Iranian government. It had been formed under an arrangement between Czarist Russia and Great Britain and on the collapse of Czarist regime in Russia in 1917, the

17 Minister Tehran to Foreign New Delhi, 88-F, dated 5 February 1918, Pros 1-254 (War 1919).


19 Minister Tehran to Foreign New Delhi, 117-F, dated 18 February 1918, Ibid.
raison d'être for this force had, consequently, disappeared.

When Ala-us-Sultaneh replaced Vossuq-ed-Dowleh as Iranian Prime Minister in June 1917, he refused to recognise this force. German intelligence service in Iran, somehow, came in possession of the correspondence on this subject between the British Legation and the Iranian government and its publication demoralised the Iranian personnel of this force. This put a new heart in the anti-British tribes in South Iran to fight the British forces in that area.

Had it been disbanded at that time, the British government would have been free from a grave military liability. However, disbandment was not resorted to for fear that the disbanded soldiery would prove a grave risk to the British position in Iran in conjunction with the Austrian and German prisoners of war released by the new Soviet regime. (20)

The original aims set forth for this force were:

(a) restoration of law and order, (b) increase of British prestige, trade and influence throughout the Middle East and (c) counterpoise Persian Cossack Division.

The first of these aims concerned the Iranian government.

20 Sir Percy Sykes Shiraz to C.G.S. Simla, 179-676 dated 6 June 1918, Procs.1-432 (Sep 1919).
but for that mandate should have been obtained from them by the British government.

If law and order had run riot in South Iran, the most the British government could do was to make its own arrangements to protect its vital interests, e.g. consulates, installations of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, Imperial Bank, communication lines etc. The Iranians could, then, have no grudge.

Sir Percy Sykes shelved the original scheme under which the main force was to be maintained at Abadeh and Shiraz and outposts would have been manned by the levies. He was keen to establish law and order by subduing the Iranian tribes. (21) In doing so, he found himself locked up in a grim struggle with the German intelligence organisation in South Iran. German agents were well entrenched in the south, thanks to the indefatigable efforts of German Consul, Wassmann, and Sir Percy Sykes found that his force was not only operating in alien country but also against a hostile people. (22) Sir Percy Sykes could do nothing to meet the situation with his demoralised force and Indian troops had to be called

21 Sir Percy Sykes Shiraz to Foreign Simla, 236, dated 18 June 1916, Pmss 284-351 (Jan 1919)

22 Christopher Sykes, n.3, p.196.
to take up the pacification programme. Thereafter South Persia Rifles remained essentially a civilian force assisting the regular troops.

Real trouble, however, could be attributed to Sir Percy Sykes, who was an officer of the Indian Political Service, and wanted political control over the area of his operations in Fars. To justify his demand, he made allegations against the British Consul Shiraz that he was keeping political information from Sir Percy.

He added that because of the close association between the British Consul and Farman Fama, the Iranian Governor-General of Fars, information on operations leaked out to the enemies of Great Britain and the casualties for his force were, consequently, heavy. (23) As an officer of the Indian Political Service, he looked upon Iranians, along with Indians, as a subject race and if political control were vested in him, he would have alienated the pro-British sympathies of Farman Fama and Qavam-ul-Mulk, the two bastions of British support in an alien and hostile land.

British Minister, Tehran looked upon this suggestion of Sir Percy Sykes as dangerous for British interests.

23 British Consul Shiraz to Foreign Simla, 65 dated 23 July 1918, FSO 14-432 (Sep 1919)
However, British Consul, Shiraz, was willing to hand over political control to Sir Percy, provided the Government of India agreed. (24) This encouraged Sir Percy Sykes to repeatedly ask for political control with the argument that he wanted to keep the information on the movement of his troops to himself and wanted to manipulate the situation to break the tribal combinations. (25) He refuted the argument of the Government of India that his force in Iran was maintained primarily to give aid to the civil power. (26) His reason was that the Iranian Governor General in Fars was an official of a foreign government, whereas he was in Iran to defend British interests. His allegation against Farman Farma was that the latter was hand in glove with the British enemies, e.g. Qashqais, Kazerunis etc. and it was on account of Farman Farma that supplies for South Persia Rifles were purchased at dearer rates, thereby causing excessive expenditure of £30,000 a month to the British government. (27) He took his stand on the principle that

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24 Sir Percy Sykes to Foreign Simla, 179-198G dated 31 July 1918, Ibid.

25 Sir Percy Sykes Shiraz to Foreign Simla, 179-198G dated 31 July 1918, Pros 264-351 (Jan 1919).


27 G.O.C. South Persia Rifles to C.G.S. Simla, 179-209G dated 6 August 1918, Ibid.
as the Field Commander in Fars, he was entitled to political control over his operational domain. (28)

The ineffectiveness of South Persia Rifles being in no doubt, the Government of India authorised issue of 350 rifles and 35,000 rounds of ammunition to Fars men so that his infantry could guard the roads. This placed the South Persia Rifles in a worse position. (29)

A proposal was, therefore, taken up by the British Legation that neutral officers, preferably from Sweden, should be employed to work out a modest scale for the maintenance of this force under them. This was tantamount to the revival of Gendarmes and proved abhorrent to the British government, who suggested that American officers should be engaged to reorganise this force. (30) The Iranian government, however, suggested that Swiss officers should be engaged, as officers from Switzerland were being considered for employment for the uniform force to be formed after the war. (31) British Legation Tehran was, simultaneously, working on another formula.

31 Minister Tehran to F.O. London, 746 dated 27 August 1918, Ibid.
for re-organising South Persia Rifles on an economic scale under British officers, but the Government of India suggested that Kerman and Fars Brigades should be handed over to the Governors General of Kerman and Fars. (32)

The Government of India were, actually, fed up with the controversy started by Sir Percy Sykes and were convinced that no reforms would cure this force and it was much better to dissolve it. (33) As an alternative, it was suggested that the Fars Brigade should be transferred to Farmān Farmā to enable him to effectively control Fars. It was also suggested that British financial support should be assured to him to keep him in a subservient position. (34)

The Shah, however, desired that the proposal to transfer this force to Farmān Farmā should not be pursued, as he was committed too much to the British cause. (35) Another hitch arose, because Farmān Farmā

32 Vicerey Simla to I.O.London, dated 16 August 1918, Ibid.

33 Vicerey Simla to I.O.London, dated 26 October 1918, Pros 1-248 (Nov 1918).

34 Note dated 27 October 1918 by Sir Denys Brag, Ibid.

agreed to keep British officers for instructional duties only, while they insisted on retaining the command. (36) British officers did not like to serve under the Iranian government and service conditions offered to them were not, therefore, acceptable to them. (37)

Sir Percy Sykes was aware of these proposals, but he kept up the controversy for obtaining political control as Commandant of South Persia Rifles. There was now no alternative but to recall Sir Percy Sykes to the United Kingdom for consultation and he, accordingly, handed over his charge to Colonel E. F. Orton on 15 December 1918. (38)

Disorders in South Iran

The discipline of South Persia Rifles being what it was, Dehbid and Abadeh garrisons revolted and deserted with their horses, arms and ammunition. Sir Percy Sykes had ordered the execution of recaptured deserters and this had exacerbated popular feelings against Great Britain. The situation necessitated the use of British and Indian troops to maintain order.

36 Britconsul Shiraz to Foreign, New Delhi, 139 dated 18 December 1918, Ibid.

37 Col. E. F. Orton’s note dated 14 December 1918, Ibid.

38 I.O. London to Viceroy New Delhi, dated 25 November 1918, dated 15 December 1918, Pwss. 167-175 (July 1919), Sir Percy Sykes Shiraz to C.G.S. New Delhi, 760-6, Ibid., dated 15 December 1918.
A confederacy of tribes was, thereupon, formed comprising of Qashqais, Kazerunis under Nasir Divan, Dashtis-

tanis and malcontents among the Arabs, to oppose British troops. Sfatal-ed-Dawleh was in over-all command of this

confederacy and he was encouraged by the Iranian government of Samsan-us-Sultaneh to declare hostilities on 23

May 1918. Cassmus was planning an attack on Bushire. (39)

The British troops muted the Qashqais at Deh Shaikh on

25 May 1918. The united tribes turned to besiege Shiraz

and they were encouraged by the Bakhtiaris and the

Iranian government at Tehran.

The popular upsurge against Great Britain unnerved

both Qaman-ul-Mulk and Farman Farma, because they feared

reprisals on account of their present pro-British activity.

The British government agreed to compensate Qaman for

proved losses, but for Farman Farma payment of 6,000 tomans

a month was guaranteed for the duration of war or for the

period he continued as Governor General of Fars and friend-

dy towards Great Britain. (40) It was also agreed that

compensation would be given to him for confiscation of

his estates by the Iranian government on account of his

services to the British cause.

The moment was now considered opportune for dealing


Pro's l-432(Sep 1919).

40 Minister Tehran to F.O. London, 107 dated 23 June 1918;

F.O. London to Viceroy Simla, dated 22 June 1918, Ibid.
with Qashqai tribe. A split had already been produced by propping up Sardar Ehtesham against Soulat-ed-Dowlah with British financial support. (41) On the urgings of Sir Percy Sykes, Farnaq Farna was persuaded to appoint Sardar Ehtesham as the Ilkhani and Ali Khan as the Ilbegi of the tribe on 19 June 1918. (42) The aim was to keep the loyalty of the Arabs to the British cause by dividing the Qashqais.

Soulat-ed-Dowlah made it known to both Qawam-ul-Mulk and Farnaq Farna that he had no aggressive designs and he was acting in full accord with the intentions of the Iranian government. He was opposed to British interference with the Fars tribes and undertook to control his tribes to ensure law and order in the Qashqai territory. This changed the attitude of Qawam-ul-Mulk. He openly sided with the British government, but affirmed loyalty to the Iranian government.

The Government of India strongly advocated approachement with Soulat-ed-Dowlah through the Iranian government, because a compromise was set to stabilise the situation and resort to force was likely to result in Anglo-Iranian rupture in addition to embittering Muslim opinion against the British. (43) Opposed to

41 Britconsul Shiraz to Foreign Simla, 45 dated 1 June 1918, Ibid.
42 Note dated 3 June 1918 by Sir Denys Bray, Pwos Sec(Sep 1919).
43 Note dated 4 June 1918 by Sir Hamilton Grant, Pwos 1-482(Sep 1919).
this was the view of the British Consul, Shiraz, who recommended that tribal attacks should be repulsed, because that was the only *via media* between *approach-*
ment with Soulat and a forward movement of British troops from Bushire towards Shiraz. (44) The Commander-
in-Chief in India differed from both these views and supported Sir Percy Sykes for an attack on Soulat-ed-
Dowleh to break the tribal combination.

In the situation prevailing in South Iran, Sir Percy Sykes could achieve nothing without troop rein-
forcements. He, however, clung to the hope that blood-
shed would put the Iranian government in a better frame of mind and facilitate the recognition of South Persia Rifles.

Soulat's forces suffered a defeat at Chinar Rahdar as a result of British action on 17 June 1918. The remnants of his forces were dispersed on 7 and 8 July 1918 and were finally defeated at Firuzabad in October 1918. Abadeh had been relieved on the night of 16 and 17 July 1918. Soulat fled towards the south and Nasir Diwan returned to Kamaraj.

The next task was to re-open Shiraz-Bushire road. Major General J. A. Douglas the Garrison Commander of Bushire had built Bushire-Farsajun railway line, 37 miles long, for movement of troops and supplies. He now

started operations to arrest the Khans of Borosjun, Ahram and Chahkutah and to subdue Daliki. (45) He issued a proclamation that these operations had been started by him to enforce the authority of the Iranian government. Soulat-ed-Dowlah's attacks in the region of Bunder Abbas also fizzled out, because his ranks had been decimated by the epidemic of cholera. (46) The truculent Kuhgelu tribe had been suppressed by a Behshiari force. Behshiariis now offered the services of 5,000 cavalry to bolster up the collapsing South Persia Rifles. (47)

The British government had no use for the Behshiari cavalry, because South Iran was now returning to normalcy and the operation of a Behshiari force would stir up turmoil again. (48) However, the local British authorities considered that a unified Behshiari force would stabilise the situation at Isphahan and protect the British oilfields. (49) With that end

45 Dy. R.P.G. Bushire to C.G.S. Simla, 922 dated 11 July 1918, Ibid.

46 Britconsul Bunder Abbas to Foreign Simla, 280 dated 13 July 1918, Ibid.

47 R.P.G. Beighdel to Foreign Simla, 592 dated 18 July 1918, Ibid.

48 The Behshiari force disturbed the balance among the tribes.

49 R.P.G. Beighdel to Foreign Simla, 6193 dated 27 July 1918, Pros 1-632 (Sep 1919).
in view, 600 rifles, 30,000 rounds of ammunition and two guns were given to Sardar Zafar, Baktiari Ilkhani, in addition to the subsidy of 8,000 to 10,000 tomans a month for Baktiari levies. (50)

Allied successes in Europe produced a salutary effect on the situation in South Iran. Roads were now safe and the civil government was stronger. Army posts were established on the roads and an advance base was set up at Khaneh Zini. (51) British trade now resumed its former activity.

Massmuss, however, continued his instigations to Soulat-ed-Dowleh. True to the prognostication of the Government of India, his rival, Sardar Ehtoshan, proved to be a man of straw and was deserted by his tribe. (52)

The Government of India, therefore, suggested that a policy of influencing the Khans through agreement should be followed instead of asking them to surrender. (53) It also proposed to support the Iranian governors. The military commander at Bushiro suggested that the central government should be strengthened and interference in the affairs of the Iranian tribes should be given up.

52 Britconsul Shiraz to Minister Tehran, 125 dated 3 November 1918, Ibid.
53 C.G.S. Simla to G.O.C. Bushiro, 81038-MO.1 dated 8 October, 1918, Ibid.
The Qashqai tribe held the key to the situation in South Iran. The confederacy of Soulat-ed-Dowlah had been broken up and he was in a pliant mood. (54) However, the British government still felt that he must be punished for his past anti-British acts, before an understanding with him was concluded.

**Impact of Soviet Revolution**

The Russian front had stretched from Europe across Caucasus and North-west Iran and southwards to touch the British right flank in Iraq to block German infiltration towards India. Abdication of the Czar on 2 March 1917 resulted in the collapse of this front. The provisional government of 2 March 1917, which had been ardently welcomed by the Iranians was followed by Soviet revolution on 7 November 1917. (55) Consequently, it became impossible to continue the old policy in Iran under which the British government had either come to terms with Russia on the principle of give and take or had fought it with diplomatic weapons.

After the flush of victory in Russia, revolutionary zeal received a serious setback in Europe and it soon became evident to the Soviet leaders that western imperialism could be brought down by engineering over-

54 British consul Shiraz to Minister Tehran, 11 dated 5 January 1919, Pms 1-187 (Dec 1919).

55 Rouhollah K. Rezaeei, n.1, p.146.
throw of imperialist domination in Asia. As a first step in that direction, the Soviet Union published secret imperialist treaties concluded during the war for the division of Asia and thereby exposed the diabolical nature of Western imperialism.

Soon after the Russo-German Armistice Agreement at Brest-Litovsk on 15 December 1917, Leon Trotsky sent two notes on 14 and 27 January 1918 to the Iranian Charge d'Affaires in Moscow declaring complete and irrevocable annulment of Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 on the ground that it was inconsistent with the freedom and independence of Iran. (56) At the same time, all other conventions, which militated against the freedom and independence of Iran were declared null and void. Promise was given for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Iran and punishment of all Russians found guilty of violent acts against Iran in the past. (57) An ominous hint was given that the Soviet Union could make efforts to drive the British and Turkish troops out of Iran.


Trotsky actually wanted a planned withdrawal of Russian and Turkish troops from Iran. Russian evacuation was completed by the end of 1918.
Karl Bravin reached Tehran on 12 January 1918 with a message of new Soviet policy towards Iran. The British government managed to cut him off from the Soviet government by post and telegraph and it was only in June 1918 that he could send a series of telegrams to his government in which he demanded that he should be invested with official recognition so that representatives of the previous Czarist regime could be turned out of Iran and replaced by new representatives owing allegiance to the Soviet regime. He asked for Soviet confirmation that independence and integrity of Iran would be respected and Iranian navy would be free to navigate in the Caspian Sea under its own flag. He also disclosed that the British government had plans to set up an independent South Iranian state under Faman Fama and an independent East Iranian state under Qavam-as-Sultaneh comprising of Khorasan, Sistan and Kainat.

This mission paved the way for further Irano-Soviet understanding. G.V. Chicherin sent a note on 26 June 1918 to the Iranian government in which a suggestion was made for the conclusion of an Irano-Soviet treaty on the principle of freedom and mutual respect. The Soviet Union renounced all rights of control over Iranian post and telegraph, land revenues and customs and surrendered all property, including Discount Bank ownsed previously by the
government of Czars as well as all concessions in Iran owned by the Russian subjects. To indemnify Iran for all losses suffered by it on account of the operation of Czarist forces, all Russian loans to Iran were declared null and void and a suggestion was made that Iran should seek similar indemnification from Great Britain. The new Soviet policy was diametrically opposed to the entire fabric of Anglo-Iranian relations and the British government was faced with the alternative of either modifying its own policy or of finding new ways and means to continue in the old way.

The new Soviet policy enabled the Iranian government to abrogate all treaties, agreements and concessions on 27 July 1918, which in the past had been extracted by Russia from a reluctant Iran. This was followed up by the transfer of jurisdiction over foreign subjects from the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Iranian Ministry of Justice on 1 August 1918. (58) Thus, by putting an end to extra-territorial jurisdiction in Iran the way was cleared for the repudiation of capitulatory privileges enjoyed in Iran by the foreign Powers. The Iranian press actually started demanding cancellation of concessions concerning the Imperial Bank and the Anglo-

58 Note dated 31 July 1918 from Doshen-us-Sultaneh, Iranian Foreign Minister to Sir Charles Marling, British Minister, Tehran, Pros 1-248 (Nov 1919).
Iranian Oil Company to liberate Iran completely from foreign thraldom. (59)

The Iranian cabinet of Samsam-us-Sultaneh had, in fact, prepared seven decrees; the first six for revoking all previous concessions granted to Great Britain and the seventh for declaring war against Great Britain. A decision for the dismissal of Farman Farma was also taken. Just at this juncture, British troops poured into Kasvin to occupy Caucasus following the failure of Soviet government at Baku; the Shah dismissed Samsam and appointed Vossuq-ed-Dowleh as the Prime Minister. The latter took immediate action to prevent publication of the decisions of his predecessor. However, the basis for Iran's future relations with foreign powers on the model of Iran's relations with Soviet Union and the Iranian right to take full advantage of its independent status and natural resources was now firmly established. (60)

**Dunsterville Mission**

A British Military Mission under Major General L.C. Dunsterville was sent to Baku from Baghdad in February 1918 through the Iranian territory to bolster up the

59 *Iran (Tehran)*, 2 August 1918.

60 Sir Davood Khan, Iranian Consul General in India to Sir Hamilton Grant, Foreign Secretary, Government of India, 1881, dated 12 August 1918, Pros 1-268 (Oct 1919).
resistance of the republics of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan against the southward march of Bolshevik revolution and to stem the Turco-German advance through North-West Iran towards Afghanistan and India. (61)

To ensure the success of this mission Qasr-i-Shirin-Enzeli line was occupied by the British forces and an adequate force was placed at the disposal of General Dunsterville. (62)

Dunsterville mission was required to operate from Enzeli, which was controlled by the Jangalis. They opposed this mission in conjunction with the Bolsheviks.

Dunsterville was forced to retire to Hamadan, where he established contacts with White Russian generals and persuaded them to delay their departure from Iran to enable British reinforcements to arrive and take over the defence of Tehran against Jangali and Turkish attacks. Dunsterville recommended payment for all supplies required by these White Russian generals. The main argument given by him for his recommendation was that British troops would cost more than what he had


62 1 regiment of cavalry, 1 battery of mountain artillery, 1 infantry brigade, 1 battery of LCI cars plus RAF planes based at Hamadan, Komanshah and Kasvin.
recommended for the Russian forces. (63)

It became difficult to find money for the upkeep of these Russian forces. Secondly, Russians owing allegiance to the Czar were bent upon maintaining Russian interests in North as earmarked in the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. Dunsterville naively thought that expenditure on these Russian forces could be offset against the Russian debts owed by Iran. Baratov suggested that Dunsterville should proclaim British protectorate over Russian Turkistan and undertook to check Turco-German advance towards Afghanistan if payment of £450,000 was made to him to meet initial expenses of the expedition. (64) Baratov argued that holding of Baku was the key to the Iranian situation; and the British government shared this view. (65) Bicharakov


65 W.O. London to G.O.C. Force D Baghdad, 61450, dated 2 June 1918. Ibid. Control of Krasnovodsk was transferred to G.O.C. Force D Baghdad. It had, so far, been held by the Government of India.
promised help on account of his hold on the White Russian fleet in the Caspian Sea.

Dunsterville felt a great urge to go to Baku along with Bicharakov in pursuance of the original scheme of his Mission. (66) However, due to the rapidly changing military situation in Caucasus, the British government confined his activity to Khamin-Resht road directly under the General Officer Commanding, Force 'D', Baghdad. (67) The German forces were concentrated at Batum and a Turkish force was poised for an advance towards Baku. It was, therefore, risky for a British or White Russian force to move from Iran towards Baku without securing roads and communication lines. (68)

The Soviet regime, which had been established at Baku on 22 March 1918 was also overthrown on 27 July 1918. The new regime at Baku invited General Dunsterville, who arrived there on 13 August 1918 with 1,000 men and artillery. (69) A Turkish force, however, ousted him on


13 September 1918. Dunsterville arrived the same day at the Iranian port Enzeli (now Pahlevi) and concentrated his efforts on the security of Khanikin-Reash road to serve larger Allied interests of resisting communist propaganda and infiltration and safeguarding communications.

**Malleson Mission**

In addition to Dunsterville Mission, the government of India sent another military mission under Major General Sir Wilfrid Malleson in June 1918 to resist the Bolshevik revolution in Transcaspia. The Mission was based at Meshad and its immediate aim was to prevent Bolshevik control of Baku and Caspian Sea, especially Krasnovodsk port on the eastern bank of Caspian Sea. Additional aim was to prevent the Germans and Turks from using Transcaspian region for an advance on Afghanistan via Transcaspia. (70) A counter-revolutionary coup at Askabad

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70 Sir Percy Sykes, n.2, p.496.

*Journal of the Central Asiatic Society, (London, 1922), vol.IX, Part II, pp.96–106. Major General Sir Wilfrid Malleson delivered a lecture to The Central Asiatic Society on 24 January 1922 and stated that his aim was to prevent penetration of Germans and Turks via Baku and Krasnovodsk to Afghanistan to incite a religious war against the British in India. Turkish pressure towards Baku was stiffened by the German Corps headquarters at Tiflis and appearance of Turco-German forces at Afghan borders would have encountered Amir Habibullah to invade India.*
had driven the Bolsheviks to Tashkent and timely British intervention from Meshad prevented their return.

The Malleson Mission had a military character, but the officers detached from Dunster-mission to Krasnovodsk had both political and military functions. Dunsterforce constituted the first line of resistance against the Bolsheviks and Malleson Mission constituted the second line.

The war in Europe took a favourable turn for the Allies and Armistice with Turks soon followed on 30 October 1918. The situation favoured Malleson to render a dramatic assistance of 2,000,000 roubles to the representatives of Turkistan Union, who were required to block the harbour of Krasnovodsk, destroy railways in Turkistan and round up and confine German and Turkish prisoners of war at Semirechia. Last but not the least was the security of cotton stocks in the region, which were earmarked for export to Great Britain.

The British government placed all British officers employed east of Caspian under the control of General Malleson, who was to take his orders on operational matters from the War Office, London, through the British Commander-in-Chief in India. (71) Instructions on all

71 Subsequently, in January 1919, operational control was transferred to Lord Milne at Constantinople.
other matters were issued to Malleson by the Secretary of State for India, through the Army Department in India.

Germany was also making determined efforts to obtain Baku oil and cotton by overrunning Transcaspia after crossing Caspian Sea. If that had been allowed to succeed, serious threat to Afghanistan could have developed. (72) Bolsheviks did not want British intervention, as there was a general suspicion that the British government wanted to restore Czarist monarchy in Russia. General Malleson concluded agreements with the local authorities of Transcaspia and Russian Turkistan for resisting Turco-German military schemes in both these regions. (73) The British government undertook to defend Baku and Krasnovodsk against Germans, Turks and the Bolsheviks and to supply finances, guns, ammunition, rifles, aeroplanes, etc. to the Government of Transcaspia, which agreed to make available Caspian shipping, railways, telegraphs and cotton for British use. The British government was now openly at war with the Bolshevik

72 Malleson Meshed to C.G.S.Simla, MD-00043 and MD-00044 dated 19 July 1918, Pros 1-432 (Sep 1919).

73 Malleson Meshed to C.G.S.Simla, MD-00294 dated 22 August 1918, Pros.1-248 (Nov 1919).
government and Iran sided with Great Britain by recognising the new regime at Askabad.

The British policy continued to help the White Russians against the Soviet government, but it did not like handing over territory to direct White Russian control. (74) In view, however, of mass defections of Russian soldiers to join the Bolshevik forces, financial support to the White Russian Legation at Tehran was stopped. (75)

Although the Government of India desired that the new regime in Transcaspia should raise a force of their own to help the British and Indian troops operating in that region, but that was not now possible as all resistance to the Bolsheviks had collapsed. The Commander-in-Chief in India, therefore, recommended that the defence of Transcaspia should be taken over by British and Indian troops direct, on the plea that Bolshevik threat to Iran, Afghanistan and India was growing. (76)

74 British Legation Tehran to Foreign New Delhi, 189 dated 21 Oct 1918, C.G.Meshad to Foreign New Delhi, 259 dated 23 October 1918, Pros 1-432 (Sep 1919).

75 Malleson Meshad to C.G.S.Simla, MD-00756 and MD-00757 dated 17 October 1918 and MD-00790 dated 20 October 1918, Malleson Meshad to C.G.S.New Delhi, Pros 1-248 (Nov 1919).

76 Malleson Meshad to C.G.S.New Delhi, MD-00742 dated 16 October 1918, Ibid.
Thus, the original task allotted to General Malleson on 22 June 1918 for preventing Bolshevik incursions into North-East Iran had resulted in a confrontation between Great Britain and the Bolsheviks. (77) The Soviet government protested against the operation of British forces in Transcaspia on the pretext of maintaining order in that region. (78) They threatened that the subjects of the Allied governments would be arrested and held as hostages, if the British policy was not changed. The British government was not of firm mind on how to deal with the gathering Bolshevik power. (79)

Troops at the disposal of General Malleson were not in sufficient strength to implement the British policy for the reconstruction of Russia on non-Bolshevik lines. Malleson wanted to rally all anti-Bolshevik elements in Transcaspia to form a united government, but he could make no headway for lack of policy instructions from London. (80) The minimum he asked for was that the

77 Viceroy New Delhi to I.O.London, 14347, dated 23 October 1918, Ibid.

78 Moscow Wireless News, dated 10 October 1918.


80 C.G.S.New Delhi to Malleson Meshad, 90906-M.O.1, dated 12 November 1918, Ibid.
people in Transcaspia should be persuaded to allow a referendum under British auspices and abide by its results.

The operation of British forces under Malleson near the borders of Afghanistan had upset the Amir; especially the British occupation of Merv and Kushk. The British policy towards the Turks had inflamed Kozakm feelings everywhere. British occupation of area between Black Sea and Caspian Sea and from there to Afghan border was not possible. Nor did the British have resources in men and materials to effect these tasks. They, therefore, suggested that the prisoners of war belonging to the Central Powers in these regions should be expatriated to put an end to the prevailing turmoil.

General Malleson's forces were, therefore, withdrawn to Meshad to serve as a rallying point for all counter-revolutionary forces in Iran and Russia and to prevent the pursuit of British agents by the Bolsheviks near the Iranian frontier. (81) When Jrenburg fell to the Bolsheviks and Moscow-Tashkent railway line was established, a clash between the British and the Bolshevik forces appeared imminent and Iran looked up to Great Britain to

defend Iranian territory in that eventuality. (82)

From now onwards Bolshevik propaganda against Great Britain was stepped up from Askabad, Tashkent, Moscow, Kabul etc. and in the changed military situation Malleson force became redundant for the anti-Bolshevik policy of Great Britain. (83)

The Soviet Union was planning to send a representative to Iran to find out Iranian attitudes and General Malleson wanted to arrest him. (84) Fears were expressed in the British House of Commons that this would be a provocation and violation of the International Law, as Iran was an independent country. (85)

The Iranian government and the people held the view that the Bolsheviks had no quarrel with Iran and Iran had no army to cope with the Bolshevik attack, which might take place on account of provocations from British forces on Iranian territory. The main aim was that Iranian troops should not be sacrificed to serve British inte-

82 Malleson Meshad to C.G.S.Simla, MD-01839, dated 2 July 1919, Ibid.


84 Malleson Meshad to C.G.S.Simla, MD-02304, dated 24 September 1919, Ibid.

ests. (86) The British government now awoke to the danger of retaining Malleson force in Iran and they therefore saw wisdom in withdrawing the main force, leaving a strong consular guard at Meshad. (87)

The Iranian Prime Minister was thinking of sending an emissary to the Bolshevik leaders to make the Iranian position clear to them. The Soviet regime was now firmly in saddle and Iran wanted to stop Bolshevik propaganda in Iran and persuade them not to attack Iran. (88) Iranian anxiety to befriend the Bolsheviks deserved British sympathy; rather the Iranians felt a call to duty to establish an understanding with Soviet Union. (89) They felt picqued when the British government stood in the way of normalisation of Irano-Soviet relations, especially because the Allied powers, themselves, were entering into commercial relations with the Soviet

86 Tehran Situation Report for the period ending 25 February 1920, Pros. 534 (Sep 1920).


88 Minister Tehran to F.O.London, 179, dated 5 April 1920, Ibid.

Union. (90)

General Malleson also now felt that British detachments north of Meshad should be withdrawn for a concentration at Meshed. (91) The British government also agreed to delay complete withdrawal from East Iran. (92)

British Naval Presence in the Caspian Sea

To prevent the combined Soviet-German move to utilise Baku oil supplies for the German war machine, the British cabinet was keen to destroy the oil wells of Baku and to capture the Russian fleet in the Caspian Sea. (93) A small naval force of 4 merchantmen converted into battleships was created under Commodore D.T. Norris at Krasnovodsk. Centro-Caspian flotilla under General Bicherakov joined hands with him to gain possession of Baku dockyard on 17 November 1918. The combined flotilla defeated the Bolshevik navy off Alexandrovsk in May 1919 and the entire flotilla in Caspian was handed over to the White Russians in August 1919. The control of Caspian

90 Minister Tehran to F.O. London, 172, dated 3 April 1920, Ibid.

91 Malleson Meshad to C.G.S. Simla, MD-03747, dated 29 April 1920, Ibid.

92 I.O. London to Viceroy Simla, 1474, dated 26 April 1920, Ibid.

93 F.O. London to Minister Tehran, dated 2 June 1918, Pros 1-432 (Sep 1919).
Sea remained in British hands to support the British policy in Iran.

The Russian Volunteer fleet at Enzeli served as a target for Bolshevik attack on Iran. What was more, Enzeli had no accommodation, no fuel and no repair facilities to enable naval operations to be conducted from that base. This navy was, therefore, taken over by the British controller. (94)

British Policy

The British policy in Iran during the First World War is an instructive illustration of the inherent contradictions of imperialism. Until the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, British policy was a continuation of Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. In 1915, Russia and Great Britain had mutually agreed that Russia should have a free hand in the northern sphere as earmarked in the Convention of 1907 in return for the merger of the neutral zone in the centre with the southern British sphere. (95) The Bolshevik Revolution, however, upset the Anglo-Russian applecart and on the morrow of the


Revolution, the newly established Soviet regime promised the right to self-determination to the Iranians. It also decided to withdraw the Russian Military Mission from Iran. (96)

In the changed situation, the Iranian Democrats wanted to come to a settlement of all differences with Great Britain. (97) The Government of India commended this course and the British Minister also suggested that British officers of the South Persia Rifles should be replaced by neutral officers and the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 should be scrapped to placate the Iranian Democrats. (98) The situation in South Iran was deteriorating and the South Persia Rifles needed the support of British or Indian troops and Aircraft to eliminate the influence of German Consul, Wassmus. (99) The military operations contemplated by the British authorities in South Iran were likely to jeopardise

96 Ibid, p.27

97 Sir Percy Cox, R.P.G.Baghdad to Foreign New Delhi, 6585, dated 2 January 1918, Pros 101-135 (Feb 1919).

98 Minister Tehran to F.O.London, 8-F, dated 5 January 1918, Ibid.

British negotiations with the Iranian Democrats. (100)

The British Minister had been assured that if he
would support Mostoufi-ul-Hamalek, the latter would form
a pro-British Cabinet. (101) Had British assurances
been given on Iranian neutrality, formation of a uniform
Iranian force and settlement of South Persia Rifles,
the Iranian Government would have been willing to eliminate
German influences. It was, however, idle to expect
Mostoufi-ul-Hamalek to form a pro-British Cabinet. He
was a weak and pliable politician and could not resist
different influences at play in Tehran. There was frequent
talk of a coup d'etat by either the Germanophils, or
the Anglophils or the Iranian Revolutionaries. (102)
German and Turkish Ministers were working for a rupture
of relations between Great Britain and Iran and it had
become important for the British Minister to win over
the Iranian Democrats. (103) A monthly payment of Tomans
200,000 was made to the Iranian Cabinet and assurances
were also given on Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907,

100 Minister Tehran to Foreign New Delhi, 6, dated
7 January 1918, Ibid.

101 Minister Tehran to Foreign New Delhi, 147, dated
8 January 1918, Ibid.

102 Minister Tehran to Foreign New Delhi, 41-F, dated
16 January 1918, Ibid.

103 Minister Tehran to Foreign New Delhi, 179, dated
19 January 1918, Ibid.
the future of South Persia Rifles, revision of customs tariff and Iranian participation in the Peace Conference. The changed situation in Iran necessitated enunciation of the British policy.

Lord Curzon, a self-styled expert on Iran and number two in the British Cabinet, accordingly made a declaration of policy on 21 January 1918. (104) The two main irritants in the Anglo-Iranian relations were the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 and the South Persia Rifles. With regard to South Persia Rifles, he stated that it had been formed by the re-enlistment of Iranian Gendarmerie, which had been disbanded in 1915. He used this as an argument to show that it was an Iranian Force and did not form part of the British or the Indian Army of occupation. Its future would be discussed with a friendly Iranian Cabinet after the war. On the Anglo-Russian Convention, he repeated the familiar cliches that it did not impair the territorial integrity of Iran or its political independence. It was based on a self-denying ordinance between Great Britain and Russia and its abrogation would have to be negotiated with a duly constituted government of Russia after the war. The British Government desired that Iran

104 Civil and Military Gazette (Lahore), dated 26 January 1918.
should be neutral during war and independent subsequently. Iranian sentiment would have to be satisfied and safety of roads would have to be provided to protect the legitimate interests of trade.

To assuage Iranian opinion further, the British government proposed to utilise French moral influence by making a joint Anglo-French declaration to guarantee the integrity of Iran and to promise indemnification of all losses suffered by Iran due to military operations during the war. It was also proposed to advance money to Iran for the formation of a uniform Force under British and French officers, to organise trade routes from south to north for transporting supplies and to organise Iranian finances effectively with French loans. Loans were also to be proposed without special security for the day to day functioning of the Iranian Government. The proposed Anglo-French declaration was supposed to supplement and not to supplant the earlier British policies in Iran.

The British Minister did not agree with the proposal for a joint Anglo-French declaration as the Germanophil party, which was still strong in Iran, could have easily convinced the Iranian people that Franco
was being used as Britain's cat's paw. (105) It would have been different if France on its own had made a declaration for the independence and integrity of Iran. Iran had never asked for indemnification of war-time losses and French control over Iranian finances affecting military establishments would prove intolerable to Great Britain. France had never, in the past, co-operated with British policies in Iran. (106)

British policy was formulated and announced without regard to the sentiments of the Iranian people. The times were, however, changing and use of old methods could not produce the desired results. Russian troops were now withdrawing and the Iranians naturally desired that British troops should similarly be withdrawn and control over the South Persia Rifles should be transferred to the Iranian government. The Iranians also demanded that the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 should be abrogated and all the effects of Russian ultimatum of 1911 should be eliminated. Iran also wanted a seat at the Peace Conference, revision of the customs tariff and payment of surplus customs revenues and the

105 Minister Tehran to Foreign New Delhi, 10-F, dated 5 January 1918, Pros 101-135 (Feb 1919).

106 It was reported that French Red Cross officers in Urumia were raising a force of their own.
outstanding moratorium instalments unconditionally.

(107) The Iranian stand in respect of this desiderata was not rigid and uncompromising. British troops could withdraw after the war. Meanwhile, Iran was prepared to recognise the South Persia Rifles. The Iranians were much concerned about the British Cordons on the frontier. Levies which manned the Cordon in the East could form part of South Persia Rifles but on the Irano-Turkish frontier, the Persian Cossacks could man the Cordon provided it was ensured that no desertions would take place. This arrangement could keep a facade of Iranian neutrality.

The British Government were prepared to agree to the withdrawal of their troops from Central Iran if South Persia Rifles would be recognised and British officers accepted as replacement for the Russian officers serving with the Persian Cossack Division. (108) The British Government could not trust the Russians who could desert any time. Actually, Persian Cossacks had failed to restore order in Isfahan and they could hardly be trusted to maintain communications on Kermanshah-Enzeli road if the change of command was not effected.

107 Minister Tehran to Foreign New Delhi, 80-P, dated 3 February 1918, Pros 101-135 (Feb 1919).

The British Government suggested that Lieut. Col. C.B. Stokes who had been detached from the British Command in Iraq to the British Legation, Tehran for political work should be appointed the new Commandant and the remaining officers could be taken from Dunsterville's Force en route to Caucasus. No withdrawal of British troops from Bushire, Bandar Abbas, Jask, Chabahar and Eastern Cordon was contemplated. The British Government thought that the proposed arrangement would placate the Iranian Nationalists. The Government of India accepted the policy of troops withdrawal with the proviso that telegraph and consular guards should stay at their posts and the East Persia Cordon could also be made over to the Iranians when adequate Iranian Force would be available. The programme for the withdrawal of troops was required to be phased in consultation with the Commandant South Persia Rifles. (109)

The British Minister in Tehran advocated a swift and thorough action for taking over the road up to Enzeli or at least up to Kazvin. (110) British policy was to be backed by force and for that adequate troops should be maintained to frighten the Jangalis in Gilan. He was

109 Viceroy Simla to I.O. London, 146-S, dated 12 February 1918, Pros 101-135 (Feb 1919)

110 Minister Tehran to Foreign New Delhi, 99-F, dated 12 February 1918 and 400 dated 14 February 1918, Ibid.
positive that replacement of Russian officers by British officers would not be accepted by the Iranian Government without a show of force. The road to Caucasus was to be guarded exclusively by the British troops. An additional reason for induction of British troops into Iran was that Persian Cossacks would take a year to be considered reliable after assumption of the command by the British officers. (111)

The Government of India did not support that policy of force backed by adequate British troops. (112) The arguments given by it were that Germany, as the avowed liberator of Iran, did not pose any military threat to Iran. In any case, no Turkish or German troops were present in Iran to justify induction of British troops. On the contrary, presence of British troops in Iran would give an argument to the Germans and Turks to invade Iran to oust the British troops. The Germans would not move against Iran so long as British policy was liberal and a pro-British Cabinet was in power. Previous German missions had failed and they could hardly afford

111 Lieut. Col. Rowlandson Hamadan to D.M.I., H.O. London, 82, dated 10 February 1918, Ibid.

to repeat their failures. Now that Russia was out, the entire brunt of a policy of force would have to be borne by the British Government. There were also strong political grounds against the proposed policy of force. Use of force in Iran without any serious provocation was likely to alienate Moslem opinion all over the world.

In Afghanistan, British policies were likely to be misinterpreted. No real government in Iran was possible in the face of the British army of occupation. Apart from all other considerations, transport problems for the British army occupying Iran would be insurmountable. The immediate danger was of anti-British agents or brigands who could be dealt with by the Persian Cossacks under Russian or British officers.

The British Minister was perturbed by the happenings in the Persian Cossack Division and by the inroads of Soulat-ed-Dowleh against Qawam-ul-Hulk. He strongly recommended holding of Kermanshah-Kazvin road by force. (113) He opposed the policy suggested by the Government of India on the ground that Germany proclaimed itself as a liberator of Iran because it could not spare troops.

(113) Minister Tehran to Foreign New Delhi, 112-F, dated 17 February 1918, Ibid.
He was certain that Persian Cossacks would be unable to cope with the German agents. (114) The reason was that no Iranian Cabinet could dare to order Persian Cossacks to deal with German agents and the Commandant would not take any action without cabinet authority. The Iranians had no mind to appoint British officers to command the Persian Cossacks. Use of South Persia Rifles would result in a serious outcry. He remarked sarcastically that if considerations for Afghanistan were taken into account, British Cordons would have to be abandoned. He felt that force would be necessary to keep the communications clear. The Iranian feelings were completely ignored by the British authorities and in a fit of desperation, the Iranian Government published the substance of correspondence on the recognition of South Persia Rifles. (115) It became publicly known that the Iranian Government had demanded the withdrawal of British forces. This was a strong weapon in the hands of the extremists to force the Iranian Government not to resile from this position. The Iranian Government was now ready to prevent the passage of British troops to Caucasia through its territory. The British Minister

114 Minister Tehran to Foreign New Delhi, 117-F, dated 18 February 1918, Ibid.

115 Minister Tehran to Foreign New Delhi, 125-F, dated 20 February 1918, Ibid.
thought that show of force was necessary to curb the Iranian extremists. The Jangalis hoped to get ammunition and money from neutral sources to fight the British Forces.

The stand taken by the Government of India was fully supported by the General Officer Commanding Force 'D' Baghdad. (116) It was clear that the induction of British forces when no German or Turkish troops were present in Iran would result in disorders in Isphahan, Tehran, Shiraz and Bushire hinterland. Dunsterville Mission had failed due to the resistance of the Bolsheviks and Red Guards and there was now no excuse to guard communications across Iran to Caucasus. Turco-German agents could threaten Afghanistan only through Russian Turkistan, as owing to British Cordons their entry from Iran had been prevented. The British Minister admitted the truth of Government of India's views but he suggested that support to the Jangalis by the Turks and the Bolsheviks as well as infiltrations to Tehran would have to be prevented by force. (117) The British Government was also convinced that on moral and material


117 Minister Tehran to Foreign New Delhi, 138-F, dated 23 February 1918, Ibid.
grounds, military occupation of North Iran was out of the question. (118) The reinforcements required would be large and could not be made available by withdrawals from other fronts. Military occupation of Iran by the British Forces would also confirm Iranian suspicions of British intentions. The Revolutionary Committee formed by the Jangalis demanded evacuation of Iran by all white races. Immunity of Iran from the activity of anti-British agents could be secured by keeping a Western Cordon on the lines of the Eastern Cordon and by guarding Hamadan-Enzeli Road. If the Bolsheviks were provoked by British actions they might use armed Iranians to destroy oil pipelines in South Iran. (119) This warning was meant to curb General Dunsterville's activities, as military intervention in Caucasus was sure to be resisted by the Bolsheviks. The British Minister also kept on urging that British reply to the Iranian demand for the withdrawal of existing forces from Iran should be given. (120) He suggested that acquiescence in the Iranian demand for withdrawal would

118 F.O.London to Minister Tehran, 104, dated 21 February 1918, Ibid.

119 W.O.London to C-in-C New Delhi, 52793, dated 22 February 1918, Ibid.

120 Minister Tehran to F.O.London, 139-F, dated 23 February 1918, Ibid.
put new heart into the Iranian extremists who insisted on the withdrawal of consular and oilfield guards and of Eastern Cordon as well. The Iranian Moderates who supported the British policy would be driven into the wilderness and the Iranian Cabinet might also collapse without British military support. The Indian and the British Governments both considered Afghanistan as a vulnerable point but the British Minister considered Iran also a vulnerable point, which should likewise be defended.

The Government of India again sounded a note of moderation by repeating its earlier argument that renewed British guarantee for the integrity would rally Iranian Moderates to the British cause and also preserve Iran’s benevolent neutrality. (121) British troops were available in Iraq to defend British interests in Iran without violating Iranian neutrality. It was also suggested that pledges for the evacuation of British troops should be given on the lines already indicated, viz., retention of oilfield and consular guards and the Eastern Cordon. In view of the rupture of Anglo-Russian

121 Viceroy Simla to I.O.London, 201, dated 26 February 1918, Ibid.
relations, the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 should be abrogated; the Soviet Government had already denounced it. Iran could also be admitted to the Peace Conference if other non-belligerents were admitted. The customs tariff should be revised and payments for subsidy and moratorium instalments should also be made. When these concessions were made, Iran could be asked to allow the retention of South Persia Rifles during war after which a uniform military force would be formed under neutral officers. The Iranians could also be asked to intercept Turco-German agents with the help of British armoured cars and personnel. If an agreement on the above lines failed, Great Britain could have some justification for military occupation of Iran.

The Iranian extremists and the Jangalis made most of the Bolshevik repudiation of foreign debts and confiscation of foreign property. They had faith in German victory and were organising forces against British interests. The Turks and the Bolsheviks were near at hand to give them help. A demonstration was being organised in Tehran to prevent the Shah from appointing a Moderate Democrat to succeed Mostoufi-ul-Mamalek who had resigned as Iranian Prime Minister. The pro-British faction was trying to force the Shah to appoint Vossuq-ed-Dowleh as the Iranian Prime Minister.
Vossuq suggested that Shah's subsidy should be stopped to make him agree to his appointment. He was the only top Iranian politician wholly wedded to the British cause. The Iranian Democrats condemned British efforts for the enrolment of Georgians and Armenians, arrest of Sulaiman Mirza, repair of Kerind-Kermanshah road and the telegraph line in Iran. East Persia Cordon and Bunder Abbas-Miriz-Kerman line were already opposed. The climate for conciliation was not favourable and the British Minister recommended a show of force and occupation of Kermanshah, Hamadan and Kazvin on the evacuation of Russian forces.

The immediate British aims in Iran were not clear. It had vaguely been stated that sufficient forces should be sent to North-West Iran to stabilise the situation in Tehran to prevent the ingress of anti-British agents and to keep the Caucasus Road open. Adequate forces for this purpose were not available and experience of South Persia Rifles showed that the value of Levics was doubtful. The British Minister was emphatic that Baku must be taken by the British forces to keep Iran immune from anti-British influences. (122) However, the force and the volume of public opinion in Iran was strongly

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122 Minister Tehran to Viceroy Simla, 473, dated 29 May 1918, Pros. 1-432 (Sep 1919).
against Great Britain. Therefore, South Persia Rifles
would have to be transferred to Iran and expedition
against Baku would have to be abandoned. However the
British Minister was doing exactly the opposite of what
was required to propitiate Iranian opinion. He had
recommended capture of Baku and wanted to give a free
hand to Sir Percy Sykes to deal with the disturbed situ-
atation in Iran. (123) General Dunsterville was keen to
complete his original mission at Baku and the General
Officer Commanding Force 'D' supported his proposal.
(124) However, the situation in Caucasus had changed
and the British Government did not want General Dunster-
ville to move to Baku. (125) On the contrary, it opposed
the advance of Russian Generals beyond Enzeli. It was
stipulated that General Dunsterville should guard the
security of Khanikin-Resht Road and eventually control
the Caspian Sea.

It was decided by the Eastern Committee of the
British Cabinet that Kermanshah-Hamadan-Kazvin line
should be held by adequate number of troops and Kazvin-
Caspian line should be safeguarded. It was also stipu-

123 Minister Tehran to C.G.S.Simla, dated 23 May 1918,
Ibid.

124 G.O.C. Force 'D' Baghdad to Brimlat Tehran, X-9041,
dated 25 May 1918.

125 W.O. London to G.O.C. Force 'D' Baghdad, 59064, dated
27 May 1918, Ibid.
lated that the Russian Fleet in the Caspian Sea should be secured and oil wells of Baku should be destroyed. As an additional aim at Baku, it was stated that the local government there should be assisted against the Turks. (126) It was estimated that one Infantry Brigade, one Mountain Battery, one Cavalry Regiment, eight Armoured Cars and four Aircraft would be adequate for the above mentioned aim. (127) Two more Brigades would be necessary if occupation of Tehran was required. Thus, for the whole of North Iran, one Infantry Division and one Artillery Brigade would be required.

The British Minister, Sir Charles Marling, kept the embers of Anglo-Iranian discord alive. (128) He claimed compensation for the murder and injury of British officers and personnel and for the destruction and robbery of British property. The Iranian reply was a long tirade against the violation of Iranian neutrality by the Armed Forces of the belligerent Powers. The Iranian Government demanded compensation for injury to the

126 F.O.London to Minister Tehran, dated 2 June 1918, /Ibid. Pros, Secret, War Nos 1-432 (Sep 1919).

127 G.O.C. Force 'D' Baghdad to H.O.London, X-9104, dated 27 May 1918, /Ibid. The estimate was based on the figures given by General Dunsterville.

Iranian subjects and property. They gave concrete cases to support their claim. The operations of South Persia Rifles against Qashqai and other tribes left behind a trail of blood and had resulted in widespread misery and resentment. The British Forces constructed a telephone line from Shiraz to Miriz, carried mails, parcels, passengers and merchandise on Sistan and Khorasan roads without authority. This resulted in loss to Iranian revenues. In March 1918, British, French and American officers were raising armed forces of Syrian Christians in Azerbaijan. In May 1918, British Forces carried out military operations against Sinjabi tribe in Kermanshah. A forest in Surkheh Dizeh in Quran district of Kermanshah province was cut down by the British Forces. Trade in Iran was disrupted due to disturbed conditions created by British military actions. In North-West Iran, British military authorities had imposed censorship, which resulted in moral and material losses to the Iranians. The Iranian Government could also add that the British Legation at Tehran was paying subsidies to the Shah, Farman Farma, Zil-es-Sultan, Bakhtiari Khans, Qawam-ul-Mulk, Sardar Zafar and the Persian Cossack Division. (129)

129 Zil-es-Sultan died on 3 July 1918 and his subsidy was consequently stopped.
Relief measures were organised at Shiraz, Hamadan, Meshed and Tehran with political motives and secret services were organised without authority from the Iranian Government. These measures produced anti-British feelings among all Iranians and Indians resident in Tehran.

The British Government paid scant regard to the wishes and sentiments of the Iranian people. It wanted a comprehensive military plan to occupy as much territory between India and Turkey as was possible so that Turkish influence could be eliminated. It wanted forces to be raised for that purpose. (130) It was proposed that as soon as the port of Enzali was captured and British command over Caspian established, White Russian General, Bicharakov, would be dispensed with. Payments for the maintenance of White Russian Forces in Iran were no longer possible from the depleted reserves of Iranian currency held by the British Legation, Tehran. Simultaneously, a bold stroke in South Iran was urged and for that British reinforcements were being rushed. (131)

Mis-handling of the political situation at Tehran by Sir Charles Marling, the British Minister; indeed

130 W.O. London to G.O.C. Force 'D' Baghdad, 59161, dated 29 May 1918, Pros 1-432 (Sep 1919).

131 Britconsul Shiraz to Foreign Simla, 46, dated 3 June 1918, Ibid.
provoked hostility of the Iranian Government and this, in turn, resulted in uprising against Great Britain in South Iran. The South Persia Rifles was ineffective and Sir Percy Sykes suggested that Fars Brigade should be disbanded; the loyalty of Kerman Brigade of the Force had not yet been affected. Desertions from Fars Brigade of South Persia Rifles had encouraged Soulat-ed-Dowleh to declare open hostility to Great Britain. The loyalty of the Force was possible, if the Iranian Government had recognised it. (132) That could be achieved by the improvement of Anglo-Iranian relations.

The Commander-in-Chief of India wanted operations in Bushire hinterland and advance towards Daliki accompanied with advance from Shiraz towards Bushire to bring Soulat-ed-Dowleh between two fires. (133) The British Minister supported military action against Soulat as he was the spearhead of the anti-British forces in South Iran. (134) German successes in France had emboldened Soulat and his followers.

132 Sir Percy Sykes Bushire to C.G.S.Simla, 179-55G, dated 31 May 1918, Ibid.

133 C-in-C Simla to W.O.London, 43369, dated 3 June 1918, Ibid.

134 Sir Percy Sykes Shiraz to C.G.S.Simla, 179-61G, dated 3 June 1918, Ibid.
The Government of India tried to prevent the proposed military plans from being put into operation. (135) It feared alienation of Bakhtiar and other tribes as well as Afghanistan and Indian Moslems. The Germans had carefully prepared the ground for putting Great Britain in this position. The Government of India suggested a realistic plan of strengthening the British garrisons on the Gulf coast as well as in East Iran and North-Western Iran to create a climate for negotiations with the Iranian Government and Soulat-ed-Dowleh from a position of strength. Withdrawal of British Forces from Central and Southern Iran was also proposed to calm ruffled Iranian feelings.

These pleadings of the Government of India were ignored and military action in Central Iran was not stopped. (136) As a result, the Bakhtiar Khans turned hostile and were determined to drive away the Persian Cossack troops. The situation, thus created, was dangerous for the safety of the oilfields. The British Intelligence reported that Turco-German forces would start operations from their bases at Tiflis through Askabad towards


Afghanistan. Turkish aim clearly was to holster up Afghanistan and persuade it to invade India. (137) If that happened, the Baluchis were likely to cut Sistan communications, Bujmurd and Kuchan Khans, Jangalis and Turcumanis would prevent the British Forces in North-East Iran from intercepting Turkish advance through Transcaspia.

The British War Office wanted destruction of Baku oilfields and the capture of the Caspian Fleet. (138) Military operations in Baku were approved by the British Government as offensive in Central Asia would help military intervention via Vladivostock. (139) Irregulars were also recruited to deal with Turco-German agents. The British Intelligence in Khorasan was geared up with the co-operation of the Iranian Governor General who was given subsidy for this purpose. (140) In Tehran, British efforts were continued to induct Vossuq-ed-Dowlah as

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137 Britmilat Meshed to C.G.S.Simla, MD-87, dated 29 May 1918, Ibid.

138 W.O.London to G.O.C.Force 'D' Baghdad, 59391, dated 1 June 1918, Ibid.


140 Minister Tehran to Foreign Simla, 99, dated 7 June 1918, Ibid.
the Iranian Prime Minister.

It was obvious that the British authorities had no clear view of the situation. So long as the Turco-German forces were victorious on the battlefield, the position of a pro-British Prime Minister would be untenable. (141) The combined intrigues of Hassamuss and Soulat-ed-Dowleh were undermining the morale of South Persia Rifles and the Interior Minister, Mukhbir-es-Sultaneh, instigated the tribes to rise against Great Britain. (142) The Turks were poised for an attack of Iranian Azerbaijan. (143) In view of the gloomy picture in the face of Turco-German combination, the British authorities suggested that talks should be held with the Bolsheviks with a view to arriving at a compromise with them. (144) In Iran, the German agents egged the Iranian Democrats on to take up anti-British attitude openly. Actually, the military authorities in South Iran had too

141 Minister Tehran to Viceroy Simla, 544, dated 14 June 1918, Ibid.

142 Sir Percy Sykes Shiraz to C.G.S.Simla, 179-856, dated 9 June 1918, Ibid.


144 Britmilat Meshed to C.G.S.Simla, MD-110, dated 9 June 1918, Ibid.
much political power and they used it for oppressive measures without regard to Iranian sentiments. Sir Percy Sykes failed to understand that a facade of Iranian authority had to be maintained for the success of British policy in South Iran.

The Iranians nursed the grievance that the independence and neutrality of their country had been violated right from 1915. When the Russian troops withdrew in 1918, their place was taken by the British troops. Thereafter, aggression and intervention continued in violation of solemn British pledges. South Persia Rifles functioned as a foreign force but Iran was repeatedly asked to recognise it. What was more, Great Britain wanted to dictate the nationality of the officers for South Persian Rifles and for the Iranian Army as if the terms of the Russian ultimatum of 1911 A.D. were still applicable. This infringed the independent status of Iran. British military authorities arrested Sulaiman Mirza and his party on Iranian soil and transported them to Baghdad. Similarly, the arrest of the opponents of the British cause in South Iran was arranged. In spite of Vossuq's popularity, his appointment as the Iranian Prime Minister was opposed due to his pro-British sympathies. The British Minister bewailed that economy in the use of British
troops jeopardised British position in Iran. (145)

So long as this state of affairs continued, military pressure could hardly persuade the Shah to appoint a pro-British cabinet. The situation could be alleviated by improving relations with the politically articulate Iranian Chiefs and leaders. Instead of recruiting forces, British authorities could have made payments to the Iranian Chiefs for intercepting anti-British agents. The situation created by the British actions was such that the pro-British Chiefs demanded British military support and compensation for losses suffered by them for serving the British cause. If Vossuq-ed-Dowleh came to power, he would need British monetary and military help to rally support to his position. However, British reinforcements could not be sent to Iran owing to transport problems and to more urgent requirements on other fronts.

In this situation, the Government of India again suggested that opportunity should be taken to make a friendly gesture to induct Vossuq-ed-Dowleh to power. (146)

The German offensive in Europe had been halted, the

145 Minister Tehran to Viceroy Simla, 585 dated 19 June 1918, Ibid.
146 Viceroy Simla to I.O.London, 633-S dated 6 June 1918 and 709-S dated 26 June 1918, Ibid.
Italians had scored a victory over the Austrians and Turks had occupied part of Iranian Azerbaijan. All this had combined to create hostile feelings against the Central Powers. A pro-British Iranian Cabinet could stabilise the situation. The time was opportune for securing the submission of the Khans of Borasjun, Tangistan and Chakhuta.

It appeared that the policy statement made by Lord Curzon on 21 January 1918 still held good. Now that the improved situation demanded change of policy, the British Government agreed only to the withdrawal of British officers serving in South Persia Rifles through mutual consent, provided Colonel Stokes was appointed as the Chief of Staff to the Iranian Commandant. The Force would continue to be financed by the British Government and would be treated as the first unit of the uniform Iranian Army to be formed after the war. In return for this insignificant concession, the Iranians were required to give loyal co-operation in South Iran, secure friendly attitude of Qashqais and hand over Wassmuss and other anti-British agents to the British Army. Installation of Vossuq-ed-Dowleh as the Iranian Prime Minister was considered a guarantee for an Iranian policy of active co-operation and assistance.
Great Britain actually wanted to bind Iran in an alliance with the Anglo-French Powers so that British Cordons in East and North-West Iran could be retained. British Forces would then recover Azerbaijan and Tabriz from the Turks. The general uprising in South Iran had spread to Central Iran and the Government of India repeatedly asked for a genuine reconciliation with the Iranian Government as military action proved abortive. (147) General Dunsterville believed in the reports of the White Russian General, Baratoff, that Turkistan would declare in favour of Anglo-French Allies and would ask for the establishment of a British protectorate over it. Dunsterville had committed all his troops for the achievement of this aim and could spare none for Iran, where violence and anti-British demonstrations continued. The British Government wanted a compromise solution provided it did not involve submission to violence.

If a military solution was to be attempted through the operations of the Indian Army and Force 'D' in the demarcated spheres of operational control envisaged by the British government, political control would also

147 Viceroy Simla to I.O.London, 736-S dated 1 July 1918, Ibid.
be necessary side by side with the operational control. (148) This was not possible without a voice in the direction of policy at Tehran. An explicit understanding with the Iranians would be necessary to achieve the ends of British policy. (149) With regard to the ventures of British generals in Transcaspia, Turkistan etc., the Government of India took the stand that in view of the chaotic conditions prevailing there and the length and the difficulty of communications from India, effective military action was not possible.

The British Government was not deterred by the counsels of the Government of India. It wanted maximum effort to achieve the objectives in Caspian, North-West Iran and Baku. It was contemplated that British control in Caspian should be permanent but in Baku only temporary. (150) A show of force at Kazvin was required to back British Minister's policy to induct a pro-British Cabinet at Tehran. However, troops to back the British

148 The demarcation line for the Indian Army covered South and East Iran, Transcaspia, Turkistan, Meshed and Kashgar Missions. The jurisdiction of Force 'D' covered North-West Iran, Bakhtiari territory, oilfields, Dizful and Shushtar.

149 Viceroy Simla to I.O.London, 739-S dated 1 July 1918, Pros 1-432 (Sep 1919).

150 W.O.London to G.O.C. Force 'D' Baghdad, 61196 dated 28 June 1918, Ibid.
policy were not available in sufficient strength and Levies were unreliable. Russians had departed and Turks occupied Tabriz and Western Azerbaijan, fighting had spread to Abadeh in Central Iran, Bakhtiari tribe was dis-affected and trade had been paralysed. The Persian Cossack Division was strongly anti-British and if the British Legation would threaten stoppage of subsidies for this Force, latent Anglophobia of Russians all over North Iran was sure to burst into the open. (151) In this situation, the Shah was unable to appoint a pro-British Prime Minister. (152)

The British were pursuing a policy in Iran which could not be sustained by force. Hence failure at Tehran and inability to fulfil military commitments elsewhere produced an unfavourable atmosphere for Great Britain in the Middle East. (153) A better course would have been to secure the friendship of the countries forming the gla. of India. Reconciliation with Iran was the cornerstone of such a policy. British failure to face this reality resulted in widespread disorders

151 Minister Tehran to Viceroy Simla, 593 dated 2 July 1918, Pros 1-432 (Sep 1919).

152 Minister Tehran to Viceroy Simla, 610 dated 7 July 1918, Ibid.

from the Gulf coast to the Caspian coast. These disturbances resulted in unsettled conditions in India because Turco-German agents gained an effective line of communication beyond the reach of the British Forces. Their main aim always had been to create disturbed conditions in India. Subsequent to the Armistice, disturbed India would serve as a valuable asset against Great Britain at the Peace Conference. (154) The British Government and the British military authorities had no clear perspective of the situation. British Forces in Iraq could ill afford to spare the transport and supplies needed for Iran without jeopardising their own operational efficiency. The only redeeming factor for Great Britain in this sordid situation was the clash of German and Turkish views on the strategy towards India and Afghanistan. (155) Moreover, Germany and Turkey could not spare sufficient forces for operations against Afghanistan and India.

The British Government recalled Sir Charles Marling, the British Minister at Tehran, and appointed Sir Percy

154 C-in-C Simla to W.O.London, 52238 dated 5 July 1918, Ibid.

Cox in his place as Charge d’Affaires and Special Commissioner. (156) About the same time, Vossuq-ed-Dowlekh was installed as the Iranian Prime Minister. (157) The situation in Iran, however, remained extremely unfavourable to Great Britain. Iran’s main grievance was the functioning of South Persia Rifles in an unauthorised manner under a Commandant appointed unconstitutionally by Great Britain. It undertook large scale operations of a military character against the Iranian nationals. The Iranians also felt that British occupation of parts of North and Central Iran was mainly responsible for the Turkish attack on Iranian Azerbaijan and occupation of Tabriz. The Iranians argued that if British troops withdrew, Turks would also follow suit. Iran actually had asked Turkey to withdraw from the Iranian territory.

The military situation had, however, turned favourable to Great Britain. Failure of German offensive in Europe coincided with Lord Allenby’s spectacular victories over Turks in Palestine. Consequently, British


forces in Iran were strengthened. The British Government now felt able to stipulate terms for the future of South Persia Rifles and for the formation of a uniform Iranian Force after the war. (158) Sir Percy Cox now saw little difficulty in bringing Iran into an alliance with Great Britain at least as a sleeping partner, provided British Forces on the Enzoli line were strengthened further to cope with Turco-German combination. The moral effect of an Anglo-Iranian Alliance was likely to be excellent in India and Afghanistan and British control on the telegraph lines would also improve. (159) Sir Percy Cox did not want the strength of Bakhtiar tribe to increase in the post-war period. He wanted the British influence to be increased to curb the power of the Bakhtiaris.

The war was drawing to a close and it was too late to draft Iran as a British Ally. Iran was keen to have a seat at the Peace Conference so that its independence could be guaranteed internationally and damages for its war-time losses could be compensated by allotting to it a portion of Turkish territory. The Iranian people demanded that the concessions of

158 Minister Tehran to Viceroy New Delhi, 856 dated 1 October 1918, Pros 1-248 (Nov 1919).

159 Minister Tehran to Viceroy New Delhi, 857 dated 1 October 1918, Ibid.
the Imperial Bank and of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company should also similarly be cancelled. (160) Further action by the Iranian Government to revoke British concessions and to declare war against Great Britain was forestalled by the entry of British troops into Iran in large numbers. British military intervention forced the Shah to appoint Vossuq-ed-Dowleh Iranian Prime Minister. Operations in South Iran were continued in full swing. The Government of Transcaspia was supported against the Bolsheviks. As the Russian troops now refused to fight the Bolsheviks, who might enter Khorasan after subjugating Turkistan, the British authorities started financing and arming regular Iranian troops in Khorasan to deal with Bolshevik encroachments. The deterioration in Irano-Turkish relations was utilised by Great Britain to produce a moral affect in favour of the British Allies among Moslems. British subsidies were continued in Iran to retain a voice in the reconstruction plans in the post-war period. The expenditure required in South Iran and for Persian Cossack Division was high, but it was continued. Iranian parties of

160 Iran (Tehran) 2 August 1918.
different hues, Anglophil, GermanophiJ and Turcophil, now looked up to Great Britain to make a gesture to win the Iranian hearts. (161)

Sir Percy Cox suggested that USA should be introduced into Iranian politics as it would revert to its neutral role on the termination of the war. Therefore, American officers should be preferred to Swiss officers for the uniform Iranian force to be formed after the war. (162) The US President had already sent a fact-finding mission to Iran under Professor William Jackson. Sir Percy Cox welcomed American interest in the Iranian affairs as introduction of an English speaking nation in Iran was preferable to any other nation. The American Mission, however, appeared to be concerned chiefly with helping Iran at the forthcoming Peace Conference. Sir Percy Cox recommended that if USA refused to come, Belgians could be preferred. Belgium was a small country and would have no ambitions vis a vis Great Britain. In the past, Belgian officers had been the cause of trouble for Great Britain, but for the future Great

161 Minister Tehran to Viceroy New Delhi, 886 dated 15 October 1918, Pros 1-248 (Nov 1919).

162 Minister Tehran to F.O.London, 985 dated 20 November 1918, Ibid.
Britain could ensure selection of right type of Belgian officers for service in Iran. Sir Percy Cox, however, desired that the British Government should announce a benevolent British policy so that Iran could be asked to indicate its desiderata for the Peace Conference.

The British Government stipulated that permanent British influence should be maintained in Iran owing to its geographical position as a country bordering India. For the implementation of this policy, a competent and friendly government in Iran should be supported by the British Legation. (163) Vossuq-ed-Dowleh was suitable but not indispensable for the promotion of this policy. With regard to foreign officers for the uniform Iranian Force, the British Government kept an open mind. To enable permanent improvement of relations to be put into effect, Great Britain would respect the independence of Iran and work for the abrogation of Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. On the vital question of Iranian participation in the Peace Conference, no assurance was given. However, the British government gave an assurance that the interests of Iran would be

protected if Iranian desiderata was made known to them.

It was evident that the British government wanted to take full advantage of the Allied victory in Europe and determine the lines on which post-war reconstruction in Iran was to take place with British help. Therefore, the appointment of foreign officers for the South Persia Rifles was deferred. (164) Safety of Bushire-Shiras road and of the telegraph line was necessary for British trade and the British government reserved the right to take unilateral action if this commercial line was imperilled. As regards the Peace Conference, the Iranian government took the British government at its word and started preparing the Iranian desiderata for presentation either directly or through the good offices of Great Britain. (165) Actually, the Iranians had an exaggerated expectation of what they could get from the Peace Conference. The British government could advise the Iranians on this score and be helpful. If their expectations were thwarted, Great Britain would incur permanent displeasure of the Iranian people.

164 Minister Tehran to Viceroy New Delhi, 921 dated 29 October 1918, Ibid.

165 Minister Tehran to Viceroy New Delhi, 927 dated 31 October 1918, Ibid.
In this hour of British victory when the British government could dominate Iranian affairs, the Government of India recommended the technique of friendliness and of winning Iranian confidence. (166) The lessons of the past showed that British position in the beginning of the war suffered owing to the resentment produced by British association with Russian excesses in Iran. Instead of repeating the time-worn cliches ad nauseam on Iranian independence and the Anglo-Russian Convention, the British government was required to give a practical earnest of British policy to win Iranian hearts. To begin with, the South Persia Rifles should be given up as it had proved undesirable, useless, untrustworthy and expensive. Secondly, the Indian troops should be withdrawn immediately. Furthermore, the old policy of dictating the appointments of Iranian Governors also generated irritations and should have been given up. The British government should give an assurance of co-operation and give up domination. Wise words these; but who in the British Foreign Office was going to listen to them? Lord Curzon dominated the

166 Viceroy New Delhi to I.O.London, 2246-S dated 1 November 1918, Ibid.
show and a chorus of die-hard Tories in and outside the British Cabinet fully supported him.

British Forces were now to be withdrawn from Iran. The British Legation desired that before actual withdrawal, Iranian Forces in Azerbaijan and North-West Iran should be armed and equipped by the British government to enable them to defend Iran from possible Russian or Turkish attacks. It also recommended that the introduction of foreign officers for the Iranian Army should be deferred till after the Peace Conference. (167) The British Legation also proposed that the nationality of the Financial Adviser to be appointed to put the Iranian finances in order should be carefully determined. (168) The British government, however, considered it undesirable that Financial Adviser of any other nationality should be appointed for Iran as Britain provided the finances to run the country. (169)

The Government of India still worked for a sane policy in Iran. The situation had changed and it was impossible for any one nation to have an exclusive

167 Minister Tehran to Viceroy New Delhi, 936 dated 3 November 1918, Ibid.

168 Minister Tehran to Viceroy New Delhi, 937 dated 3 November 1918, Ibid.

169 F.O. London to Minister Tehran, 597 dated 19 November 1918, Ibid.
right to exploit Iran. If Great Britain desired to set Iran's house in order, it could do so as an agent of and on behalf of the League of Nations. (170) The age-old tendency of Great Britain had been to justify all aggrandisements as part of a civilising mission for the good of the people coming under the British sway. (171) This was now a meaningless dream as international relations would now be channelised through the League of Nations in full glare of publicity. If Iran learned to co-exist with Bolshevik Russia and regenerated Turkey, it would have no fear of any aggression from outside. If, on the contrary, military presence of Great Britain continued in Iran, Bolshevik suspicions would be strengthened that Iran could still be used as a jumping off ground for military intervention in Russia. As for the Iranians, South Persia Rifles was considered a test of British sincerity. The idea of foreign officers for this force was, therefore, obsolete in the changed situation. British interests could be served by transferring it to the Iranian control and by continuing to finance it. The truth about the Iranian keenness for a seat at the Peace Conference was that they had

170 Note dated 21 October 1918 by Sir Denys Bray, Ibid.
171 Statesman (Calcutta) 13 August 1899.
genuine fears about the political and territorial future of their country. A change of British policy could, therefore, allay these fears. Great Britain was not required to fabricate a set-up for Iran. All that was necessary was to give British help and allow the Iranians to have their way.

Extremism flourished in Iran during the war owing to helplessness and frustrations born out of the miseries caused by the actions of belligerent forces. It needed to be channelised into a fruitful course for post-war reconstruction. A policy of highhandedness in Iran would be resented throughout the Moslem world. As a corollary to this Iranian policy, Great Britain must also declare its policy towards Bolshevism so that Irano-Soviet frontier could settle down to normalcy. Apart from the British troops in Iran, presence of British troops on Russian territory had serious disturbing influence in Afghanistan.

However, British statesmanship could not rise to the demands of the new situation in Iran. The British Legation was aware that in spite of favourable climate created by the Allied victory in Europe and the pro-British cabinet of Vossuq-ed-Dowlah, Iran was reluctant to have a British Financial Adviser and British officers
for the uniform Iranian Force. (172) However, Sir Percy Cox would not leave Iran alone as he feared that the situation would go from bad to worse. He read in the view of the pro-British faction, a popular opinion in favour of British involvement in the affairs of Iran. (173) No one in Iran, not even the British proteges, envisaged a future under British tutelage. Sir Percy Cox, therefore, wanted an inter-Allied, or better an international, mandate for Great Britain to carry out reforms for a period of years with a guarantee for the integrity and independence of the country. That was possible only if the international community could be convinced that Iran was incapable of either self-government or resistance to absorption by Bolshevism. That would hardly create a climate for Great Britain to function in Iran. The real intention of Great Britain was to stay put and block the way of other nations to have interest in Iran. That was contrary to the principle of self-determination which dominated the Peace Conference. Secondly, could war-weary Britain do all that it wanted to do in Iran? Gone

172 Minister Tehran to Viceroy New Delhi, 969 dated 14 November 1918, Pros 1-248 (Nov 1919).

173 Minister Tehran to F.O. London, 970 dated 14 November 1918, Ibid.
were the days when Englishmen thought that they had a divine mission to turn every country they visited into an orderly British possession run on British lines. (174) Naturally, the Iranians considered that representation at the Peace Conference was vital for their future. (175)

The bold demands of the Iranian government for the Peace Conference showed that it was certain to win full sympathy at the Conference table. The political, economic and financial independence demanded by Iran took the British government by surprise. (176) Iran demanded that signatories to the Peace Treaty should ensure that Iran's independence and integrity would not, in future, be prejudiced. It desired that all treaties and conventions which limited its independence and integrity should be treated as null and void. It demanded complete economic liberty, annulment of capitulations, new customs tariff and new commercial treaties with all countries to put an end to the slavery of the past. Great Britain was required to extend full support to the Iranian demand for compensation on

174 Note dated 17 November 1918 by Sir Denys Bray, Ibid.
175 Minister Tehran to F.O. London, 981 dated 18 November 1918, Ibid.
176 Minister Tehran to F.O. London, dated 26 November 1918, Ibid.
account of damages caused by the belligerents. British support was also demanded for re-adjustment of Iran's frontiers and full Iranian sovereignty in the Caspian Sea. The British reaction to the Iranian demands was that it had already done what it could to help Iran.

(177) Pledges had been given for the independence and integrity of the country as well as for the abrogation of Anglo-Russian Convention. The British government agreed to support Iran's participation at the Peace Conference.

It was apparent that Iran wanted to emerge from a limited sovereignty of the past to a status of full sovereignty. Great Britain had many commercial, irrigation, navigation, banking, oil, transport and rail concessions in Iran. It also enjoyed certain prescriptive rights in the Persian Gulf, e.g. lighting, buoying, policing etc. The Agreement of 1911, following the Russian ultimatum, debarred Iran from borrowing money from the open markets of the world, from giving railway concessions to foreigners and from employing foreigners without the consent of Great Britain and Russia. Iran was also forced to recognise Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. Undor

177 F.O.London to Minister Tehran, 967 dated 23 November 1913. Ibid.
various Orders-in-Council, British and Indian laws were administered in Iran. Great Britain had sympathy with Iranian ambitions, but would it wipe out all its rights and privileges to suit Iran's convenience? What was more, would Great Britain help Iran to regain its full independence and sovereignty?

**Conclusion**

The history of Iran during war is the sad story of a weak nation being trampled underfoot by its powerful neighbours, who used Iran as a battlefield in total disregard of the aspirations and feelings of the people and the government of the country. British interests predominated in South Iran, where German intrigues managed to put up a confrontation between British troops and armed Iranians. The British troops were at a disadvantage owing to lack of popular support. The British Army Commander, Brigadier Sir Percy Sykes, contributed no less to the confusion. He wanted absolute political control in his operational domain and as the British Consul, Lt.Col.H.Gough, and the Iranian Governor General of Fars, Farman Farna, both worked jointly, he bitterly complained against them and blamed them for the setbacks suffered by the British Forces under his command. A similar confrontation developed between the
British Military Commander in East Iran, Major General Sir Wilfrid Maléson and the British Consul General in Khorasan, Lt. Col. W.G. Grey, when the threat of Bolshevik encroachments into Iran became a reality subsequent to the establishment of Soviet control in Russian Turkistan.

The induction of British troops into North Iran was justified for the protection of political and commercial interest of Russians and of foreigners. The reason given was that if Russia was eliminated, the Germans would step in. The argument was fallacious for two reasons. First, the German factor was only marginal in this region. Secondly, Iranians knew that new Russia which was born out of the Revolution would be liberal and democratic and would have no aggressive ambitions in Iran. British protection of Czarist Russian interests, therefore, embittered Iranian feelings. The Iranians lost faith in Great Britain because it staunchly supported Russia's aggressive policy after the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. British policy in Iran demanded that the Russian Legation should be replaced by the emissaries of the now Soviet Government but the over-all British policy against Soviet Union stood in the way.

Last but not the least was Iran's outlook for the future. Iran wanted representation at the Peace Conference...
because it wanted reconstruction of the nationalities and principalities east and west of Caspian to be so devised that the possibility of domination should be obviated. However, the publication of secret treaties showed that the British government was committed to an altogether different course. Sir Percy Cox recommended an international mandate exclusively for Great Britain to work out Iran's salvation. (178) This was not likely to work as it involved an extended military dominance and enormous expenditure which Great Britain could not afford to spare. British responsibility in terms of military and financial obligations in Asia had already increased. It could ill afford to add Iran to its responsibilities. The Government of India, therefore, advocated a liberal policy of assistance to enable Iran to stand on its feet by its own efforts.

Sir Percy Cox and his patron, Lord Curzon, viewed the situation from a different angle. They feared that Bolshevism would find a fertile soil in Iran where poverty and misery were indescribable. They also felt that if USA or any other country came in, the old

rivalry would again be revived. The exclusive British control was, therefore, considered a sound policy for Iran.