APPENDIX - B.

For Dept. Secret E. Progs., Nov. 1901, No. 61 (Encl. 1.)

Minute by His Excellency the Viceroy on Russian Ambitions in Eastern Persia.

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It may be safely assumed that the great activity now being showed by the Russian Government and by Russian Agents in the direction of Khorasan, Seistan, Sarhad, and Eastern Persia in general, arises, partly from alarm at the success that is attending the Indian Trade-route to Seistan and the marked revival of British interest in that part of the Indian frontier; still more from a desire, while Great Britain is otherwise engaged, to accelerate that solution of the Central Asian question to which, ever since the apocryphal will of Peter the Great, Russian ambitions have been fondly turned, viz., the absorption of Persia, the connection of Russian territories by railway with the Indian Ocean, and the acquisition of a fortified naval base in the Persian Gulf. I propose to examine how far the realisation of these ambitions would be injurious to British interests; a conclusion upon which point is a necessary preliminary to the decision how far they should either be tacitly acquiesced in or openly opposed.

2. The argument that Russia can safely be
permitted to secure a maritime outlet for herself in the Persian Gulf, and that it is desirable that Great Britain should assist, or at least not withstand, her in that consummation rests upon a fundamental confusion of ideas. Those who employ it fail altogether to discriminate between commercial pleas and political ambitions. It may be urged that, whereas Russian manufacturers, in their attempt to gain access to Eastern markets, are at present compelled to make the long and circuitous journey by the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal, and the Red Sea, before they can reach the Indian Ocean, it would be an advantage could they be transported by rail-roads either from the Caucasus, or from the Caspian, to the Persian Gulf; although the apparent value of such a gain would probably be a good deal discounted in practice by the comparatively limited trade of Russia (which, however, may admit of a considerable development in the future), still more by the superior cost of land carriage over sea carriage. In so far as these are the ambitions of Russia, it is not probable that any one would seriously resist their satisfaction. They can be accomplished—provided the money be forthcoming—by amicable arrangements with Persia and with Great Britain. I am not myself a believer in the paying capacities of a trans-Persian line for many years to come. The country itself is poor, and cannot furnish either the capital
or the traffic. Were the line, however, an open line, it might conceivably attract the Russian trade from one end, and the Indian trade from the other, which would enable it to subsist. It is also conceivable that capitalists might be willing to come forward and construct it - though were I a capitalist I should not be found among their number - and arrangements might be made by which, while the line remained Persian property, the construction and maintenance of the northern portion might be entrusted to Russia, and those of the southern portion to Great Britain, a joint guarantee of the three Governments being applied to the whole. This railway might terminate on the Gulf in a Persian Port, open to the commerce of all nations, but subject to the Import and Export dues prescribed by the Persian tariff. I should myself regard such a venture as premature and as speculative in the highest degree; but I do not see anything in it that need necessarily arouse political jealousy or international complications.

3. This however, though the sentimental advocates of handing over Persia to Russian influence do not as a rule see it, is not in the least what Russia wants. What she desires is a railway built exclusively by Russian capital, managed and officered entirely by Russian agents, constructed not for commercial but for political and strategical objects, and terminating in
a Russian, as distinct from a Persian, port that would presently be converted not merely into a coaling station but into a fortified naval base on the Indian Ocean. Such of the advocates to whom I have alluded as at all realise this conception defend it upon the following grounds:-

4. It is said that ports do not give sea-power and that a Russian port in the Persian Gulf would in no wise add to her strength, because she has no fleet adequate to defend it. This might be true as long as Russia consented to remain solely or mainly a land-power. But the answer is clear that Russia has no fleet (or little to speak of) only because she has few ports; and that as soon as her maritime outlets are secured and fortified, the fleet will follow with no delay and in proportionate strength. If we project our gaze for only a short distance into the future, and contemplate the time when Russia will have secured the free passage of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, when she will have obtained a naval station somewhere in the Red Sea, when a coaling station will have been conceded to her in Siamese waters, when her position in Manchuria has been firmly established, and when its maritime outlets at Talienwan and Port Arthur, if not in a Korean harbour or island as well, have been fully developed (none of these being far-fetched or extravagant hypotheses) - still more if a
can any one doubt that the fleet would promptly be forthcoming, or that Russia would emerge as one of the great naval powers of the future?

5. Secondly, it is contended that a Russian port and trade in the Indian Ocean would be absolutely at the mercy of the British fleet. This of course depends in the main upon the strength of our naval resources in Eastern waters as compared with those which Russia would maintain. The balance is at present entirely in one direction. That it would long remain so is open to grave doubt. But this plea rests upon a further double misconception which in spite, or perhaps in consequence, of its extraordinary popularity it is necessary to expose. It postulates that the naval base, once secured, would be left unfortified and open to attack. The precedent of Port Arthur does not encourage this amiable illusion. Just, as, by the expenditure of millions of roubles, that naval station has, in a surprisingly short time, been rendered practically invulnerable to maritime attack (the same might be said at an earlier stage of Batum and Vladivostok), so would a naval base in the Persian Gulf be similarly treated.

6. Next, the argument under examination entirely ignores what will happen in the long years
of peace, and assumes only what may happen on the rare occasion of war. It is easy to say that were Russia to acquire a Gulf port, and to create a mercantile navy and a fighting fleet, all three would be at our mercy, should war be declared. But supposing there were no war, what then? In ten years of peace, there would most unquestionably have been built up a position by land and sea which would be immune from any attack that we might direct against it; and we should no more direct our energies against Russia in the Persian Gulf, than, if war were declared tomorrow, we should try to bombard Cronstadt or to effect a landing at Vladivostok.

7. Thirdly, the familiar plea is urged that if only we were to come to terms with Russia about Persia — by which is meant the complete surrender to Russian aims — there would be an end to Anglo-Russian rivalry in Asia, and that the two nations might sit down together to work out the reclamation of the East. I regret to confess that this plea appears to me equally untenable. The plan has been too often tried and found wanting. It used to be said that, if Russia were allowed her way at Constantinople, she would cease to be a menace to Great Britain in Central Asia. Will any one now contend that if Constantinople were given to her tomorrow, she would tear up her Kushk Railway, or surrender her ambitions as regards Harat
and Kashgar? Only a few years ago the same plea was urged in China—"Let Russia but have a port in ice-free waters, and we shall hear no more of Russian rivalry at Peking". I doubt if any one who has passed through the recent Chinese war will now endorse that theory. The cession of Port Arthur to Russia was the infallible prelude to the absorption of Manchuria; and it renders absolutely inevitable the ultimate Russian control over the northern provinces and the capital.

3. As a student of Russian aspirations and methods for fifteen years, I assert with confidence what I do not think that any one of her own statesmen would deny—that her ultimate ambition is the dominion of Asia. She conceives herself to be fitted for it by temperament, by history, and by tradition. It is a proud and a not ignoble aim, and is well worthy of the supreme moral and material efforts of a vigorous nation. But it is not to be satisfied by piecemeal concessions, neither is it capable of being gratified save at our expense. Acquiescence in the aims of Russia at Tehran and Meshed will not save Sāistan. Acquiescence in Sāistan will not turn her eyes from the Gulf. Acquiescence in the Gulf will not prevent intrigue and trouble in Baluchistān. Acquiescence at Herat and in Afghan
Turkistan will not secure Kabul. Acquiescence in the Pamirs will not save Kashgar. Acquiescence at Kashgar will not divert Russian eyes from Tibet. Each morsel but whets the appetite for more, and inflames the passion for a pan-Asiatic dominion. If Russia is entitled to these ambitions, still more is Great Britain entitled, nay compelled, to defend that which she has won, and to resist the minor encroachments which are only a part of the larger plan. Like many other students of the Asian problem, I have often pondered, at each stage from Korea to the Bosphorus, whether we could not, by a friendly agreement with Russia, arrive at such a demarcation of our respective interests as would enable us to eschew rivalry and to cultivate an amicable co-operation, if not an actual alliance, in the future. At each stage I have found that in such an agreement the giving would be all on our side and the receiving on the other. The satisfaction of Russian interests could not be attained except by an intolerable sacrifice of our own. Simultaneously my inclinations towards such an understanding have not been encouraged by a study of the manner in which similar efforts have been met or have been observed in the past. The better and the safer policy seems to be for Great Britain at each point upon the long line of contact to frame her policy and to declare it. The West Ridgeway Convention and the public statement of
Lord Dufferin that its infraction would be followed by war, has for sixteen years saved the Zulfi kar-Bosaga section of the frontier. Persia will not be saved except by some similar declaration.

9. I now proceed to examine the effect that would be produced upon India, were Russia permitted to gratify her ambitions by constructing a Russian railway through Persia, and acquiring a Russian port in the Persian Gulf.

10. It is not open to doubt that these enterprises, and the power for pressure and control which they would give, would be followed at no distant interval by the destruction of the Persian monarchy as an independent kingdom, and its incorporation, on much the same footing as Bokhara or Khiva, in the dominions of the Czar. The north of Persia is already within the grasp of Russia, and can be absorbed or annexed by her whenever she desires. A railway from the north to the south would be the link by which the same process would be extended southwards until it reached the ocean. The lateral connections, eastwards and westwards, might for a while be delayed. Sooner or later they would follow. A Shah might be left upon the throne, just as there is a Khan at Khiva and an Amir at Bokhara. We also have our Asiatic Princes in India, and we know that they are not incompatible with a
European dominion.

11. But it may be said, why not let Persia be swallowed up, as the Central Asian Khanates have successively been? What is Persia to Great Britain or to India? A sufficient answer might probably be found in the history of the past 100 years. It is inconceivable that a succession of Indian Governments and of British statesmen for a century can all have been so blind as to have expended the efforts of a ceaseless diplomacy and millions of money upon an object which, after all, was of little value or concern. Even, however, if we brush aside this consensus of authority, and if we assume that Great Britain may in the past have placed her money on the wrong horse in Asia as well as in Europe, let us see what there is in the present situation to help us to an independent reply.

12. The subject is two-fold, commercial and political. By the efforts of our traders during the past century we have built up a commerce (in the main from India) with the ports of the Persian Gulf and with the cities of Southern and Central and even of Northern Persia, which possesses an annual value of several millions sterling. It is not too much to say that we have created this market, and that in the southern zone we still monopolise it. The political
absorption of Persia by Russia means the certain proscription and the ultimate extinction of this trade - at least in every article in which Russia can compete with India or Great Britain. Where now is the Indian or the British trade with Tiflis, Bokhara, and Samarkand? Persia would follow suit; and a system of carefully differentiated tariffs would, in a short time, deprive India of one of her best and most lucrative markets.

13. These considerations are sufficiently serious. The political ones are more so. The Russian railway to Kushk (where the materials are stored for the 70 miles prolongation to Herat) already places that fortress within the grasp of Russia, should she at any time care to run the risk of a casus belli with Great Britain. But the Russian railway about to be constructed to Meshed if prolonged, as is the intention, to Seistan, and ultimately to the Gulf, will dispense Russia from the necessity of crossing the Afghan frontier on the Herat side. From Persian territory she will menace the entire western flank of Afghanistan. She will command the Herat-Kandahar road and will render insecure any future British occupation of Kandahar. Lower down, in the unsettled tracts of Baluchistan and Makran, which we have at present only imperfectly brought under our control,
there would be limitless scope for frontier disturbance and local intrigue. We should be compelled, at the cost of a great expenditure of money and of a serious addition to our responsibilities, to invest our authority over those regions with a more concrete character, and to maintain posts and garrisons to guard what would then have become a vulnerable, though it is now a negligible section of the Indian border.

14. The Minute which I wrote on 4th September 1869, and sent home to the India Office with the Government of India's despatch of 21st September 1869, sufficiently indicated the extreme strategical importance to India of Seistan. The success that has attended the efforts which we have since made to develop the trade route from India to that part of Persia - the value of the trade having risen in two years from 7½ to 15 lakhs - has tended to increase both our interest and our influence in that portion of the Shah's dominions, and has encouraged us to project the early construction of a railway from Quetta to Meshki, i.e., over the first 90 miles of the route. A Russian railway through Seistan to the Gulf - followed as it must be by the political absorption of Seistan - would not merely kill this promising enterprise, and close the one remaining overland trade-route (that to Yarkand and Kashgar is already nearly dead) that still remains
open to Indian commerce, but it would have the 
following further and even more serious consequences. 
It would place Russia in control of a district 
ethnographically connected with Baluchistan, would 
profoundly affect our prestige both with Afghan and 
Baluch, and would greatly enhance the difficulties 
that we already experience in managing the cognate 
tribes on the India side of the border. If Great 
Britain is ever called upon to advance to Kandahar, 
as she will probably one day be compelled to, an 
intolerable state of friction would arise between the 
Powers that would then control the upper and the 
lower waters of the Helmand. Moreover, while Seistan, 
if it ever fall under British influence, could, owing 
to the protecting floods upon the north, be easily 
defended against Russian attack from the direction 
of Meshed, our present frontier (should Seistan pass 
into the hands of Russia), being entirely exposed, 
would enjoy no similar immunity. I might easily 
enlarge at greater length upon the strategic importance to India of Seistan. But as I believe it to be 
now generally recognized both here and in England, it 
will be sufficient to say that a Russian railway 
through Eastern Persia to the Persian Gulf means 
neither more nor less than the final loss to Great 
Britain of Seistan, and that the recent declarations 
of the British Government as to our interests in that
quarter forbid me to believe that they would acquiesce in any such calamity. For my own part, if Persia were to hypothecate to Russia the revenues of Seistan (a move which has recently been under contemplation, but which I should regard as not less insulting to ourselves than would be to Russia the hypothecation of the revenues of Meshed to Great Britain), or to cede to Russia a commanding political position on that section of the border, I should not hesitate to advise that the Persian Government be compelled to cancel the arrangement. Such a peril can, however, be more opportunely averted by a plain declaration of our views and intentions in advance, than by threats or military movements afterwards.

15. Should a Russian naval port be constructed in the Gulf, and should a Russian fleet (most likely in connection with the French) be called into existence in the Indian Ocean, it is impossible, either for the protection of our trade, or for the safety of our own shares, that we could remain content with the existing strength of the East India squadron. We should have to place the ports on the eastern coasts of India in a state of more finished defence than is at present the case. Our military and naval responsibilities would be more than doubled in that direction.

16. The question would next arise how far
Russia would find it compatible with her newly acquired political ascendency, that the main lines of telegraphic communication between Great Britain and India should run through Persian territory or beneath the waters of the Persian Gulf. Even if she were ready to leave them intact, should we be prepared to acquiesce in the control, at a time of emergency, of these lines by a foreign and probably a hostile power?

17. It has been argued that, if Russia cannot in prudence be allowed a port at the south-eastern end of the Persian Gulf, owing to its close proximity to India shores, and its patent challenge to Indian interests, we need entertain no such scruples about a port nearer to the upper end. As I have previously argued, a commercial port, as the terminus of a commercial railway, may be rendered equally innocuous anywhere in the Gulf. But if it is to be a political port, and the terminus of a political railway, then it is equally objectionable where it be placed, and the mere geographical distance of a few hundred miles, or one or two days steam, makes no difference in the situation. Political control over Southern Persia can equally be disseminated from lines terminating at Mohammerah, Bushire, Bandar Abbas, or Chahbar. Whichever be the naval base, the ships that lie there can equally menace
Indian commerce, Indian shipping, and Indian interests. Moreover, while at the near end of the Gulf, a Russian railway to the sea would have the drawbacks already mentioned of invading the British sphere of interest in Sistan and Persian Baluchistan, of destroying British influence in those regions, and of directly menacing the British-protected territories of the Khan of Kalat - a Russian railway to the upper end, e.g., to Mohammerah on the Karun, would similarly traverse a region (that inhabited by the Lur and Bakhtiari tribes) in which British influence has hitherto remained uncontested, and where British enterprise has established an adventurous and successful foot-hold, and would terminate in a port which is owned by an Arab Sheikh whose family has been uniformly friendly to the British power, and which commands the main channel of the Shat-al-Arab or combined estuary of the Tigris and Euphrates. To concede such a position to Russia would place the approach to Baghdad within her power, and would extinguish the influence of Great Britain in Turkish Arabia.

18. The international aspect of the acquisition by Russia of a port at either end of the Persian Gulf cannot be ignored. Such an incident could not possibly stand alone. Under instructions from the Home Government, we have recently submitted to them plans for counter-action in such a contingency, involving the
seizure of certain Persian islands or harbours, in self-protection and retaliation, by ourselves. But neither would the action be confined to Russia and Great Britain. France and Germany would unquestionably appear and the Persian Gulf - for 100 years, so far as political predominance is concerned, a British lake would become a second Gulf of Pechili, to be quarrelled over and parcelled out by the greed of rival Powers. This is no fanciful picture of the imagination. It is an indisputable deduction from the circumstances of the case.

19. Finally, let me contemplate the effect that would be produced by the concession of a Persian railway and a Persian port to Russia upon the general problem of Indian defence. A glance at the map will show that India would then be surrounded in a ring fence by Russia and her ally. Following this line from West to East I have already shown the position at which Russia aims as threatening the entire western borders of Baluchistan and Afghanistan from the Persian Gulf to Herat. Herat itself could be taken by the Russians in less than three weeks. From Herat to the Oxus the Afghan frontier is at the mercy of the Russian forces. The course of the Oxus from Charjul to the Pamirs is now under their control. They can cross it
at any point at any time without our knowledge and without the possibility of interruption. We are obliged even now to keep a close watch upon the northern passes of the Hindu Kush. East of the Pamirs, the Russians have already taken up a position in the Taghdumbak Pamir, which will presently make their frontier adjacent to our own on the Mustagh Range. The fall of Kashgar and Chineast Turkistan is absolutely certain and cannot very much longer be delayed. Tibet will still intervene between Russian territory and our own on the north; but already rumours of a Russian protectorate have been heard, and a mission from Lhasa has been received by the Tsar. On the extreme east of British territory in Burma, we encounter the rival ambitions and expanding influence of France, whose aspirations do not fall short of the complete absorption of the kingdom of Siam. It is far from improbable that within twenty, perhaps within twelve, years from the present time, the metaphor previously employed will have been justified, and the Indian Empire, along the complete length of its land frontiers, will be coterminous with the territories, and confronted with the ambitions, of Powers whose interests are on the whole inimical to its own. In such a case - and it is no idle dream of fancy, as the future will show - we shall not be able to move, to strike, to advance, in
any part of the world where French or Russian interests are involved, because of the menace that will stand perpetually at our Indian doors. Of the strain upon Indian finances, I do not at present speak; but it would be altogether in excess of our means. In this ring fence there are at present three gaps; the still independent kingdom of Siam on the east, the portion of whose territories lying nearest to the Indian frontier has been guaranteed by a Convention between Great Britain and France; on the north the upland wilds of Tibet, as yet impervious to alien intrusion; and on the west the dominions of the Shah. These are the sole remaining buffers that separate the Asiatic possessions of Great Britain from her European Rivals. It rests with British statesmanship to retain all three intact. But it will sacrifice the most important of their number if it knowingly concedes to Russia that gratification of her ambition in Eastern Persia, the consequences of which to the British Empire it has been the object of this Minute to expose.

October 28th, 1901.

Curzon.