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**'Persia. Note on the memorandum by Sir M Durand on the situation in Persia -
HC 1274 of 1895 [L/PS/3/349].'**

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About this record

This note on the memorandum produced by Sir Henry Mortimer Durand, Minister Plenipotentiary to Tehran 1894-1900, was written by Sir William Lee-Warner and focuses on various issues relating to the current situation in Persia. These include:

- the issue of the Regie debt;
- concerns over the succession of the Vali Ahd to power following the death of the Shah;
- the delimitation of the Perso-Baluch frontier;
- Anglo-Russian relations and actions in Persia;
- Russian influence over the region and over the Vali Ahd;
- considerations over how English finances and personnel could be better managed in the region.

The document concludes with notes from 'E N' and 'G H'. The identities of these authors are unknown.

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Confidential.

1896.

Persia.

Note on the Memorandum by Sir M. Durand on the situation in Persia.—H. C., 1274 of 1895.

For reasons summarised in paragraph 29 of the Memorandum, Sir M. Durand proposes that the British Government should take over the Régie debt on proper security, and save, at "no cost" to ourselves, the Persian Government several thousands of pounds interest. His other recommendations are eight in number, viz.,—

- (a) the arrangement, in concert with Russia, of a scheme for the public recognition of the Vali Ahd as successor, on the Shah's death, to Persia "undiminished and unimpaired";
- (b) investiture, after a delay, of the Vali Ahd with the G.C.B.;
- (c) an allowance of 150*l.* a year to Dr. Adcock as surgeon to the Consul-General at Tabriz;
- (d) an addition of at least 200*l.* to the salary of the Consul-General at Tabriz;
- (e) a clear understanding that, if Russia advances in the north, we shall take measures to ensure our hold of the Persian ports, and perhaps territory, in the south;
- (f) the establishment of British officers in Seistan and in Shuster;
- (g) the delimitation of the Perso-Baluch frontier;
- (h) and, besides other minor measures, the reduction of our expenditure at Meshed and Resht, with a view to the establishment of more centres of observation at other points, chiefly in Russian territory.

2. Before these several measures are criticised in detail, it is necessary to state a few facts already known to Lord George Hamilton, but bearing directly upon the arguments which follow.

The Vali Ahd, Muzaffer-ed Din, born in 1853, governs Azerbaijan, where, in the words of Mr. Curzon, he is "immured." Russia has already agreed with us to recognise his succession on the death of the Shah. Russia has gone further, and in 1834, 1888, and

more lately in April 1893, has declared itself ready to observe the integrity and independence of Persia. But the unexpected often occurs, and the condition of Persia is worse in 1896 than it has ever been before. The avarice of the Shah has not abated, the depreciation of the currency has already produced riots, the Governorships are still sold, and the people are robbed. Literally the country groans. From long acquaintance it endures the present Shah, but it seems that the country would on a succession willingly sacrifice its independence for good rule. A revolution is a possible surprise in store for us.

In the next place, it seems that the indolence and weakness of the Vali Ahd have increased, and that his dependence on, and the favour he shows to, Russia are greater. A disputed succession is more probable than it was. The Zil-es-Sultan who rules at Isfahan has, in Mr. Curzon's opinion, ceased to be a formidable factor, but he is by others regarded as a probably active competitor for the throne. Kamran Mirza, the Naib-es-Sultaneh, Governor of Teheran and Commander-in-Chief, may also be a claimant and might seize the treasury on the death of the Shah. By the suffrages of the soldiers in Azerbaijan and by the aid of the Shah's body-guard, even without the active support of Russia, the Vali Ahd might peacefully succeed to his father, but the contingency of civil war arising out of a disputed succession, as well as that of a revolution arising out of long years of misrule, have to be borne in mind.

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The personal character of the Vali Ahd must also be considered. Our reports seem to show that he is absolutely dependent upon Russian influence, but at the same time his English doctor, Dr. Adcock, has some influence over him. He is moreover a weak man and of vacillating character. Were he to succeed, and were Russia not to advance troops or occupy Persian territory, he would, it is feared be only a puppet in the hands of Russia. His generosity or weakness have left him very poor.

3. In the position of affairs described, three courses of policy may be considered :—

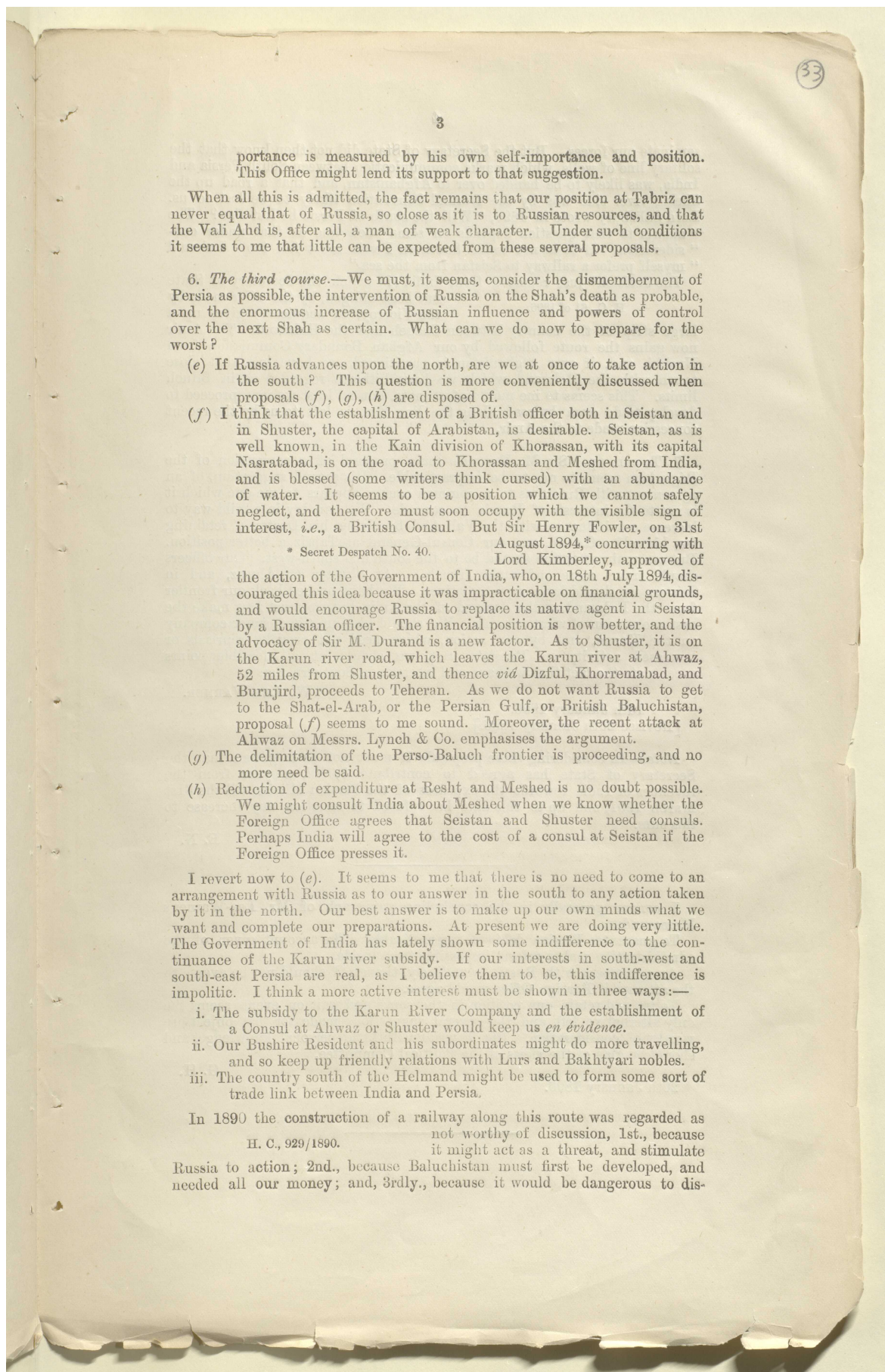
- i. To restore vigour and honesty to the administration and so escape the fear of revolution. It is generally admitted that nothing which we can do, or which Russia will let us do, can now effect that result. Nevertheless, Sir M. Durand's proposal to convert the Régie debt is a measure in that direction.
- ii. To increase our influence over the Vali Ahd. That, no doubt, is possible, and Sir M. Durand's proposals (a), (b), (c), and (d) are devised with that object.
- iii. To rely less upon reform or the acquisition of an influence over the Vali Ahd than upon our own independent action and preparations. If Persia is running upon the rocks of Russian intervention or Russian protectorate, we can strengthen our position in the south and be ready to intervene or protect that portion of Persia. The proposals (e), (f), (g), and (h) look that way, and other measures may be suggested.

4. *The first course.*—It seems admitted by Sir Mortimer, and in accordance with facts, that the reform of Persian administration from within is not to be expected. The evil is past cure. Yet any relief from pecuniary embarrassment must lighten the sinking ship of State, and the Régie debt could be converted, and Persia relieved. Nevertheless, the proposal seems to me opposed to our principles. To liquidate part of the debts of a spendthrift does not often improve his character or position. This country does not usually give guarantees for foreign debts. In any case, the security of Persia, if it is so near its end, must be very bad. I do not see how Sir Mortimer's proposal could possibly be justified in Parliament. I pass on to the next course.

5. *The second course.*—It is reasonably certain that the Vali Ahd will succeed to the throne, and it is possible that Persia may not then, or at once, be dismembered. Obviously, a British influence over the future ruler of Persia is worth something. I therefore discuss the proposals (a) to (d).

- (a) A plan of operations with Persia which would make it clear to the Vali Ahd and the Persians that England and Russia together ensured his peaceful succession would, no doubt, increase our influence. But as Russia knows full well that she has now a commanding influence throughout Persia, and an exclusive control over the North, I cannot see why she should sacrifice the result and gains of her persistent action for many years. She has previously declined to be drawn into a common undertaking, and I presume that she will persist in following her own independent line without a dual engagement.
- (b) No doubt a G.C.B. can be given whenever Lord Salisbury desires, but its effect will not, I fancy, be momentous.
- (c) The allowance proposed for Dr. Adcock, who is a *persona grata* to the Vali Ahd, is not likely to be needed for long, as the Shah is now close upon 65 years of age. The proposal is inexpensive and worthy of acceptance I think.
- (d) The addition to the salary of our Consul-General at Tabriz, the commercial emporium of Persia, and situated on its busy north-west frontier, will still leave the British representative ill-paid compared with the Consul-Generals of other nations. But it seems a move in the right direction in a country where a man's im-

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portance is measured by his own self-importance and position. This Office might lend its support to that suggestion.

When all this is admitted, the fact remains that our position at Tabriz can never equal that of Russia, so close as it is to Russian resources, and that the Vali Ahd is, after all, a man of weak character. Under such conditions it seems to me that little can be expected from these several proposals.

6. *The third course.*—We must, it seems, consider the dismemberment of Persia as possible, the intervention of Russia on the Shah's death as probable, and the enormous increase of Russian influence and powers of control over the next Shah as certain. What can we do now to prepare for the worst?

(e) If Russia advances upon the north, are we at once to take action in the south? This question is more conveniently discussed when proposals (f), (g), (h) are disposed of.

(f) I think that the establishment of a British officer both in Seistan and in Shuster, the capital of Arabistan, is desirable. Seistan, as is well known, in the Kain division of Khorassan, with its capital Nasratabad, is on the road to Khorassan and Meshed from India, and is blessed (some writers think cursed) with an abundance of water. It seems to be a position which we cannot safely neglect, and therefore must soon occupy with the visible sign of interest, *i.e.*, a British Consul. But Sir Henry Fowler, on 31st

* Secret Despatch No. 40.

August 1894,* concurring with Lord Kimberley, approved of

the action of the Government of India, who, on 18th July 1894, discouraged this idea because it was impracticable on financial grounds, and would encourage Russia to replace its native agent in Seistan by a Russian officer. The financial position is now better, and the advocacy of Sir M. Durand is a new factor. As to Shuster, it is on the Karun river road, which leaves the Karun river at Ahwaz, 52 miles from Shuster, and thence *via* Dizful, Khorremabad, and Burujird, proceeds to Teheran. As we do not want Russia to get to the Shat-el-Arab, or the Persian Gulf, or British Baluchistan, proposal (f) seems to me sound. Moreover, the recent attack at Ahwaz on Messrs. Lynch & Co. emphasises the argument.

(g) The delimitation of the Perso-Baluch frontier is proceeding, and no more need be said.

(h) Reduction of expenditure at Resht and Meshed is no doubt possible. We might consult India about Meshed when we know whether the Foreign Office agrees that Seistan and Shuster need consuls. Perhaps India will agree to the cost of a consul at Seistan if the Foreign Office presses it.

I revert now to (e). It seems to me that there is no need to come to an arrangement with Russia as to our answer in the south to any action taken by it in the north. Our best answer is to make up our own minds what we want and complete our preparations. At present we are doing very little. The Government of India has lately shown some indifference to the continuance of the Karun river subsidy. If our interests in south-west and south-east Persia are real, as I believe them to be, this indifference is impolitic. I think a more active interest must be shown in three ways:—

- i. The subsidy to the Karun River Company and the establishment of a Consul at Ahwaz or Shuster would keep us *en évidence*.
- ii. Our Bushire Resident and his subordinates might do more travelling, and so keep up friendly relations with Lurs and Bakhtyari nobles.
- iii. The country south of the Helmand might be used to form some sort of trade link between India and Persia.

In 1890 the construction of a railway along this route was regarded as

H. C., 929/1890.

not worthy of discussion, 1st., because it might act as a threat, and stimulate

Russia to action; 2nd., because Baluchistan must first be developed, and needed all our money; and, 3rdly., because it would be dangerous to dis-

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seminate our forces. But the Secretary of State did not then know that the solitary line of wells, which marks communication between South Persia and India, was likely to be handed over to Afghanistan, and that a road up the Shelag river side was by the Durand Convention likely to be lost to us. Lord Salisbury wrote in 1890, "Will the south of Persia be lost also? The answer to that question depends on some such line as that under consideration. If it is not made Southern Persia must fall too. I should myself prefer a railway to Seistan from the sea."

The decision* just reported from India (in which the Secretary of State has been obliged, by the offer made by the Viceroy, to acquiesce) gives up a large strip of the country between Chagch and the Helmand. The Amir now gains the route followed by our Afghan Boundary Commission from Nushki, and, if ever Afghanistan is partitioned, we have lost that close touch with the Helmand, which we have hitherto regarded as in Biluch limits. This seems to me most unfortunate, but at least we may proceed to develop trade even by road along the line that is left to us by the recent concession made to the Amir.

H. C., 61 of 1896.

7. To sum up. Sir M. Durand's main proposal of a conversion of the Régie loan seems to me to be impracticable. His second suggestion, of an agreement with Russia as to a common course, appears to me one which it is not to the interests of Russia to concede. We can try in a mild way to increase our influence with the Vali Ahd by giving his Doctor a retaining fee, himself a G.C.B., and our Consul-General at Tabriz a better position. But our main attention should be to the south and south-west. Our officers should travel more and make friends. At Shuster or Ahwaz, and in Seistan, we should have representatives. We have pushed back our frontier from the Helmand at the demand of the Amir, but we must now make the best use we can of what remains. We should keep up the steamer company on the Karun, and by our action, which need not provoke reprisals or increased activity on Russia's part, we should at all feasible points accentuate the fact that we have real interests in Southern Persia.

W. LEE-WARNER.

13th January 1896.

[Revised 25th January 1896.]

Note.—In considering these proposals it must not be forgotten that the Secretary of State has agreed to contribute 7,000*l.* a year from the revenues of India towards the expenses of the Persian Mission till the 31st March 1901, and up to this date has refused to sanction any increase to this sum.

E. N.

I concur generally in the concluding paragraph of Mr. Lee-Warner's Memorandum.

To guarantee Persian debts is impracticable. The account given of the administration makes reform impossible from inside.

An agreement with Russia is unlikely, though I should not be averse to the attempt if Foreign Office would agree.

To try and retain our position in the south and wait on events seems the only alternative left, and the several suggestions made for that object are worthy of consideration. But I write with little personal knowledge, and should be glad of the views of the Political Committee.

G. H.

20th January 1896.