

THE GENESIS OF AMERICAN-PERSIAN RELATIONS,  
1883-1904

by  
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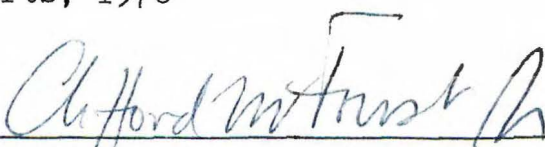
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## ABSTRACT

"The Genesis of American-Persian Relations, 1883-1904"

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This thesis discusses the causes which led to diplomatic representation on the part of the United States in Persia, the means by which such representation was established, and the first twenty years or so of its history. It covers the limitations of this relationship due to the American foreign policy of the time, that of non-involvement and non-interference in the domestic affairs of Persia, and the positive contribution made by American missionaries in furthering friendly relations between the two countries. The thesis shows how America's lack of interest in Persia was contrasted with the Persian drive to enlist United States support in strengthening its ability to resist economic and political pressure, mainly from Russia, and how the Department of State repeatedly turned aside all advances made by Persia through the United States minister in Teheran and offered no encouragement to American business to become established there. It deals with the attitude of Kurdish tribesmen toward Persian Christians, American missionaries, and the Persian central authority, and how their attitude influenced American diplomatic relations.

## FOREWORD

The immediate causes of the establishment of a U.S. mission in Teheran and the regularization of diplomatic relations between the United States and Persia<sup>1</sup> in 1883, and the history of that relationship during the next two decades were rooted in the role of the American missionaries in that country. The first of these missionaries arrived in Persia fifty-three years before the United States Government stationed diplomatic representatives there. The missionaries had to rely on the good offices of friendly foreign diplomats for protection and guidance. It was through these third parties, particularly the British, that the first contacts between the United States and Persia came about, the need for which arose from actual threats to the lives and safety of the missionaries. Even then, it was with reluctance that the United States Government established formal diplomatic relations.

This study will examine the manner in which, and the reasons for, the missionary role in Persia influenced American foreign policy. It will also evaluate the effectiveness of the United States in protecting its citizens after the diplomatic relationship existed.

It is difficult to understand the United States-Persian relationship without first considering Persian geographical position relative strategic factors. Rivalry between the newly

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<sup>1</sup>The name of the country of Persia was changed to the one used today--Iran--only in 1935.



emerging western industrial powers attempting to find markets for manufactured goods and to gain control over raw materials placed any weak nation or people of an undeveloped area in the world in a highly vulnerable position. Persia was one of these which was torn between internal domestic pressure and external demands by western nations. It was basically these factors that brought the Shah of Persia to believe that the United States might throw a protective cloak over Persia and prevent the nation from being absorbed or dominated by a foreign power--mainly Russia.

Nasir-ud-Din Shah encouraged American economic and military aid in his endeavor to strengthen his country's ability to resist Russian and British influence. In contrast, the United States government resisted all these enticements of the Shah and remained aloof from any involvement in Persian affairs. An examination of the different attitudes expressed by the various United States ministers to Persia in relation to the official view of their government will be undertaken.

This study also will illustrate the U.S. policy of non-intervention and non-interference in the internal affairs of a nation as expressed by President James Monroe in his message to Congress on December 2, 1823, which did not prevent the U.S. from opening diplomatic relations with Persia for the sole purpose of protecting a relatively small group of U.S. missionaries. Because of the lack of any direct interest by the U.S. in expanding trade or influence in Persia, the U.S. was in a weak position to exercise any influence on Persia--outside of moral or legalistic influence--in protecting U.S. missionaries'

lives and property. To a great extent the U.S. missionaries had to depend on diplomats from Great Britain in Persia for immediate protection in outlying areas of the country, even after the U.S. minister arrived in Teheran.

The problems and issues that developed between the United States and Persia between 1883 and 1900 formed the basis of the relationship between the two countries until World War II. Only after world events which began with World War II and the U.S. (and world) need for oil forced the United States to change its rather passive role toward Persia did it become a matter of national interest for the United States to pursue a policy of providing the economic, technical, and military support as the Shah and the U.S. minister to Persia had requested in the nineteenth century.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE FOUNDATION

#### American Missionaries in Persia before 1880

The image of the Middle East held by American people during the nineteenth century was as vague as that held by the leaders of that area with regard to the United States. The American people's ideas and impressions were acquired through Sunday school, the reading of the Arabian Nights, and, for a few, the study of school books on the ancient civilizations of Egypt and the Fertile Crescent. Ignorance of the United States by the people of the Middle East extended through all levels of society. Samuel Green Wheeler Benjamin, the first U.S. Minister to Persia (1883-1885),<sup>1</sup> reported that many Persian officials, including the Shah, had only the slightest impressions of the United States.<sup>2</sup>

In the light of this mutual lack of knowledge and awareness, the question arises: How did America, and particularly the Americans who became missionaries, select Persia for their activities? As a result of religious enthusiasm in England and the resultant founding of many missionary societies in the 1790's, a similar religious interest developed quickly in America, resulting in the establishment of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, which represented mainly

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<sup>1</sup>See Appendix I for list of U.S. Diplomatic Representatives to Iran, 1883-1902.

<sup>2</sup>S.G.W. Benjamin, Persia and the Persians (London, 1887), p. 433.

Congregational and Presbyterian denominations in America. Many missionaries, both British and American, soon thereafter appeared in the Middle East. A report by a British Chaplain, Robert Walsh, in the *Missionary Herald* in 1826 concerning the Nestorian Church in Persia resulted in the Board's sending two Americans, Reverend Eli Smith and Reverend H.G.G. Dwight from the Ottoman Empire to survey the possibility of dispatching missionaries to Persia.<sup>3</sup>

Smith and Dwight traveled to Syria, Asia Minor, Armenia, and Persia. They visited the northern part of Persia, staying in the city of Urmia (present-day Rezaieh), meeting the Nestorian bishops, and visiting many Nestorian villages. They were warmly received by these peoples. Rev. Mr. Smith observed, "I see that this field is white and ready for harvest. In all my journey I have seen no people as willing to accept the Gospel as the Assyrians of Persia. It is a good field for the work..."<sup>4</sup> As a result of the receipt of this positive report and those of other missionaries in the Middle East regarding the difficulties being experienced in working among the non-Christians, the Board decided to establish the Mission to the Nestorians, with its permanent station at Urmia in

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<sup>3</sup>Robin E. Waterfield, Christians in Persia: Assyrians, Armenians, Roman Catholics and Protestants (New York, 1973), p. 102. (Hereinafter referred to as Christians in Persia.)

<sup>4</sup>John Elder, History of the American Presbyterian Mission to Iran, 1834-1960 (Teheran, Iran, n.d.), p. 7. (Hereinafter referred to as Presbyterian Mission.)



north-western Persia. These efforts were to be directed at regeneration and revitalization of the native Christian Nestorians.

Who were the Nestorians? Where did they come from? How did they arrive in Persia? Christians came into Persia at a very early date. The Apostle Luke states in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles that Parthians, Medes, and Elamites were present in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps some of these people converted and returned to Persia to practice their new beliefs. Tradition has it that two of the Apostles, St. Thomas and St. Bartholomew, traveled to Parthis and as far east as India, establishing Christianity wherever they visited. Quintus Tertullian, one of the greatest of the early Christian writers in the west, said that Christians were in Persia before the Sassanians and that by 100 A.D., the Christian church in Persia was organized into a loosely federated episcopal see.<sup>6</sup>

In 431 A.D., the Christians living in the East led by Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople, broke with western Christians over the latter's acceptance of the Virgin Mary as the "Mother of God". Persian Christians adhered to the beliefs held by Nestorius; their church's golden age was from the fifth to the thirteenth centuries which was noted for its emphasis on education and its effective missionary spirit. It sent

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<sup>5</sup>Acts 2:9. King James Version.

<sup>6</sup>Waterfield, Christians in Persia, p. 16.

missionaries to Central Asia, China, and India.<sup>7</sup>

The early church suffered at the hands of a strong and hostile state religion and was persecuted by the Sassanian rulers. The Islamic invasion of Persia in the seventh century resulted in the Arabs recognizing the legal status of the church and granting it protection. Although the devastating thirteenth century Mongol invasion of Persia resulted in great destruction and massacre of Persians, both Moslem and Christian, the Nestorian Church survived as the Mongols were tolerant towards religion. After the Mongols converted to Islam and with the invasion of Persia in the fourteenth century by Tamerlane, the Nestorian church was reduced both in number and strength. It survived mainly in the Lake Van and Urmia regions along the Persian-Ottoman borders. Christianity became a small and insignificant movement.<sup>8</sup> The decline of Christianity in Persia in fact had begun prior to the Mongol invasion, partly because it had never identified itself fully with the Persian state or people. Further, the church insisted on using the Syriac language in its worship, its theology was complicated, and it relied heavily on monasticism and withdrawal from normal life.<sup>9</sup>

By the nineteenth century the remaining Nestorian community was located on the mountainous regions of northern Persia, bordering the Ottoman state. Nestorians were mostly poor and

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<sup>7</sup>Waterfield, Christians in Persia, pp. 38-46 and Elder, Presbyterian Mission, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup>Waterfield, Christians in Persia, pp. 52-54.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 47-54.

illiterate; of an estimated population of 125,000 in Persia, Ottoman state, and Mesopotamia, it was reported that only forty men and one woman who was the sister of a patriarch were able to read.<sup>10</sup> Economic conditions were depressed, and health and sanitary provisions primitive. In 1830, the Nestorians were recovering gradually from a serious cholera epidemic which had reduced their numbers by fifty per cent.<sup>11</sup>

The inability of the central government in Teheran to exercise its authority over this vast mountainous area allowed Kurdish leaders virtual autonomy. The Nestorians, as a religious minority, were kept by the Kurds in a state tantamount to serfdom.<sup>12</sup>

The first American missionaries who arrived in this area were welcomed by the religious leaders of the Nestorian Church. They were invited to speak at the Sunday services and at services held on special Saint days. The missionaries soon realized that their most urgent problems were meeting the literary and medical needs of the Nestorians. The Reverend Justin Perkins, who reached Tabriz in August 1834 and founded the Persian Mission to the Nestorians, devoted most of his time to the translation of the Bible and other books into

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<sup>10</sup>Elder, Presbyterian Mission, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup>Waterfield, Christians in Persia, p. 102.

<sup>12</sup>U.S., Congress, House, Protection of American Citizens in Persia. 47th Cong., 1st Sess. 1882. Executive Document, No. 151, March 30, 1882., p. 12. (Hereinafter referred to as Protection of American Citizens.)



modern Syriac.<sup>13</sup> The first printing press arrived in 1840 and shortly thereafter the first book was printed in modern Syriac. Soon after the arrival of Rev. Mr. Perkins, the first modern schools were established in Persia. The first school had just seven students on the first day, but by 1839-1840 the enrollment had reached fifty-five. A school for girls followed with a first-day enrollment of four Nestorian girls.<sup>14</sup>

The arrival of the American missionaries in the area where there existed a delicate balance between the different religious and ethnic groups had an initial adverse effect, not only did it cause tension between local Kurdish hordes and their Nestorian "vassals," but it also spurred competition among western missionaries working in the immediate area. The Americans confronted the proselytizing efforts of Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox clergy as well as missionaries sent from England, all of whom preceded the Americans.<sup>15</sup> It was said by an American missionary that "Mohammedans, Muscovites and Monks furnish their full quota of opposition."<sup>16</sup>

The Kurdish leaders became very suspicious and jealous of the attention given to the Nestorians by all of these

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<sup>13</sup>Justin Perkins, A Residence of Eight Years in Persia (New York, 1843), pp. 316-330.

<sup>14</sup>Elder, Presbyterian Mission, pp. 10-12.

<sup>15</sup>Waterfield, Christians in Persia, pp. 102-111.

<sup>16</sup>John A. DeNovo, American Interests and Policies in the Middle East, 1900-1939 (Minneapolis, 1963), p. 11. (Hereinafter referred to as American Interests and Policies.)

western missionaries. They were concerned lest they lose their position and power in the region of their livelihood. Many missionaries encouraged their fellow Christians--the Nestorians--to resist Kurdish rule although with no possible chance for assistance from outside. Tension developed between the Nestorians and the Kurds, resulting in open hostility.<sup>17</sup> The basic cause was more economic and political than religious: in 1841 the Kurdish leader, Nasrullah Khan, attacked and destroyed the home of the Nestorian patriarch. Conflicts continued to increase during the early 1840's, culminating in 1846 in the revolt of the Nestorians in the Mosul area near the Ottoman border. It was estimated that 10,000 Nestorians were killed in their vain attempt to redress grievances. The result of this tragic experience was that some of them turned against the American missionaries. Peace between them and the Kurds was restored only after the arrival of the Ottoman army.<sup>18</sup>

During these early years, the American missionaries concentrated their efforts on improving the living conditions of the Nestorians. A report by the British Consul General at Tabriz to his government stated that no attempt was made to interfere with the religious practices of the Nestorians and the authority of the Nestorian bishops.<sup>19</sup> Converts were

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<sup>17</sup>Waterfield, Christians in Persia, p. 110.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 106-108.

<sup>19</sup>U.S., Congress, House, Protection of American Citizens, Enclosure 2 in No. 102.

encouraged to remain with the established Nestorian Church. The missionaries devoted themselves to establishing schools for both boys and girls, furnishing medical aid, and improving general health conditions.

Gradually the missionaries shifted their emphasis away from working with the Nestorian Church and its ecclesiastical hierarchy to working with the Nestorian people in separate congregations having their own clerical structure. Those missionaries arriving in the 1850's considered the old church lacking in vitality. The Nestorian community became divided between their old established church and the new "protestant" church.

By 1860, the American missionaries became eager to extend their activities to the conversion of those regarded as heathens and began searching for other people to proselytize. Gradually the mission extended its efforts beyond the Nestorians to other non-Moslem people in Persia, including Christian Armenians and Jewish Persians, which had the result of placing them immediately in opposition to Armenian and Jewish religious leaders. The main attraction that drew the Armenian and Jewish people to the Americans was the possibility of sending their children to the American mission schools and these schools grew slowly but fairly steadily because of this.

A major change in the American missionary thrust in Persia occurred on December 17, 1870, when the American Board of Foreign Missions split, and the Presbyterians withdrew



their support. The Board became a Congregational organization, concentrating its efforts in Ottoman regions and leaving the Persian mission field to the Presbyterians. The new Presbyterian missionaries broadened their field of activity among the people of Persia, Christian Nestorians and Armenians, Jews, and for the first time, Moslems. Their new goal was to proselytize all non-Protestant peoples.<sup>20</sup> Prior to 1870, American missionary work was concentrated mainly in the vicinity of the village of Urmia and among the Nestorians; after that year, new mission stations were established in Teheran, Tabriz (1873), and in Hamadan (1879). In each location, schools, clinics, and small hospitals were built.<sup>21</sup>

The official attitude of the Persian government during these early years was one of toleration of the American missionaries. It had little concern over their attempts to convert Armenians, Nestorians, and Jews to Protestantism; however, this attitude held only for non-Moslems.<sup>22</sup> The missionaries had encountered opposition from the established leadership of these various minorities. For example, in 1874, Armenian priests stirred up Moslem ecclesiastics against American

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<sup>20</sup>Elder, Presbyterian Mission, pp. 23-24.

<sup>21</sup>Waterfield, Christians in Persia, pp. 133-138.

<sup>22</sup>J.L. Potter, "Religious Liberty in Persia," 43 The Moslem World, III, 1 (Jan. 1913), 4.

missionary activity and a number of Moslems attending services were beaten.<sup>23</sup> It was claimed that the Russian government, worried over increased American and British influence, encouraged Armenian Church leaders to create opposition against the American missionaries.<sup>24</sup> At this time, although the missionaries experienced opposition from local Moslem religious leaders and municipal government officials under pressure from these religious leaders, no Persian official from Teheran, including the Shah, openly opposed the missionary activities as long as they were directed at the non-Moslem population of their country. In 1851, the Shah, Nasir-ud-Din, actually aided the missionaries' efforts by repealing an 1842 edict which prohibited their proselytizing among native Christian groups.<sup>25</sup> On occasion, American missionaries had to appeal to Persian authorities for protection against threats to their lives and property by Nestorian, Armenian, and Jewish leaders.<sup>26</sup> A greater threat to the safety of the American missionary, however, arose from the inability of the central government in Teheran to maintain law and order throughout the country, especially in the remote areas.

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<sup>23</sup>Robert E. Speer, "Growth of Religious Liberty in Persia," The Missionary Review of the World, XLV, 8 (Jan. 1948) 635.

<sup>24</sup>Benjamin, Persia and the Persians, p. 433.

<sup>25</sup>Abraham Yeselson, United States-Persian Diplomatic Relations, 1883-1921 (New Brunswick, 1956), p. 9. (Hereinafter referred to as Persian Diplomatic Relations.)

<sup>26</sup>Potter, "Religious Liberty in Persia," p. 42.

During these early years prior to the arrival of the first American Minister in 1883, Americans living in Persia requested and were granted protection by the British Consul General living in Tabriz. Upon the latter's withdrawal from Tabriz, the Russian Consul General gave assistance to the Americans until 1851 when once again the missionaries received British protection, which assistance continued until 1883.<sup>27</sup>

#### American Attitude toward Persia in the Nineteenth Century

In the mid-nineteenth century, the American foreign policy makers were chiefly concerned with the maintenance and advancement of U.S. interests in the Western Hemisphere and the Pacific Ocean, mainly to China and Japan. The Middle East was not considered of any political interest to the United States. For example, the United States was determined to cut a canal through Central America, but was relatively indifferent to the problems of the Turkish Straits or the Suez Canal.<sup>28</sup> It was, however, toward the end of the century after the United States became more industrialized and needed markets for both its raw materials and finished goods when the American policymakers gradually developed an interest in the Middle East.

In spite of this lack of interest in the Middle East, American authorities felt responsible for and insisted on

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<sup>27</sup>Waterfield, Christians in Persia, p. 103.

<sup>28</sup>Harry N. Howard, "The United States and the Problems of the Turkish Straits," The Middle East Journal, I, 1 (Jan. 1947), 59-62.



the right to protect U.S. citizens, wherever they were.<sup>29</sup> U.S. diplomatic relations with Persia began in the 1850's when, at Persia's instigation, efforts were made to negotiate a treaty between the two countries. The initial steps were taken by George P. Marsh, American Minister Resident at Constantinople (Istanbul), and the Persian government. A treaty was signed on October 9, 1851; however, this treaty never entered into force. Under pressure from Great Britain, Nasir-ud-Din Shah took no final action, thus causing the treaty to die.<sup>30</sup>

Great Britain considered Persia to be within its sphere of influence and looked with displeasure on any nation displaying an interest in Persia. In 1854, the Persian charge d'affaires in Constantinople contacted the United States Minister Resident, Carrol Spence, and indicated the Persian desire to reopen negotiations. Tension between Persia and Great Britain was increasing over Afghanistan, and in 1856, the situation erupted in warfare. Spence advised the American State Department that Persia was interested in purchasing American warships and obtaining the services of American naval personnel. He also expressed the belief that Russia was now encouraging the Persians to get the United States involved as

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<sup>29</sup>DeNovo, American Interests and Policies, p. 18.

<sup>30</sup>J.C. Hurewitz, Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East, Vol. I, 1535-1914: A Documentary Record (Princeton, 1956), pp. 158-159.

a counterbalance to British interests in the country.<sup>31</sup>

In Vienna, Persia again requested the American Minister there for naval assistance included in a draft of a treaty. In May and June 1857, the State Department sought the aid of Russia in the Persian-American negotiations. The American government believed that not only Great Britain would try to defeat the negotiations between the United States and Persia, but France would also. The American Minister in Constantinople continued to be the chief negotiator and was approached by the Persian charge d'affaires to seek American naval aid in the defense of Persia. During these negotiations, Spence outlined U.S. policy of non-intervention, but emphasized the benefits that could be realized from the competition of American traders in a market dominated by Great Britain.<sup>32</sup>

Russia eventually withdrew her support of the treaty. Subsequent to its defeat in the Anglo-Persian War (1856-1857), the Persian government saw no immediate advantage for American diplomatic interest in her affairs; thus, the Persian government's interest in obtaining the expansion of American diplomatic representation in Persia ebbed. Deeply involved in America's own domestic problem over slavery, U.S. officials showed little interest in becoming entangled in the political affairs of Persia. In his inaugural address, President James Buchanan outlined the position of American diplomacy as being

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<sup>31</sup>Yeselson, Persian Diplomatic Relations, pp. 20-21.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 21.



for "peace, commerce and friendship with all nations," and the avoidance of foreign entanglement and interference in domestic affairs of other states.<sup>33</sup> A Persian-American treaty, however, was approved in August 1857 during the administration of President Franklin Pierce and was forwarded to the United States Senate by President Buchanan. The Senators were advised that the treaty was beneficial to American trade and was urged to appropriate funds to establish a legation. The treaty was approved by Persia, ratified by the U.S. Senate on March 12, 1857, but the Senate failed to appropriate funds for establishing a legation in Persia.<sup>34</sup> Congressmen had had little interest in this remote area of the world as their attention was directed at the immediate problems of slavery and maintaining the Union. On a number of occasions Persian officials, both in London and St. Petersburg, expressed their desire to U.S. officials for establishing diplomatic relations with the United States.<sup>35</sup>

Some twelve to thirteen years later, there came an occasion for a change in the U.S. government policy toward Persia which resulted from threats to lives and property of American missionaries working there. This threat came from the invasion of Persia by Kurdish tribesmen from Ottoman territory. Seeds

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<sup>33</sup>James D. Richardson, ed. A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents (New York, 1897), p. 435, Vol. V. (Hereinafter referred to as Messages of the Presidents.)

<sup>34</sup>Hunter Miller, ed. Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America (Washington, 1942), pp. 429-488.

<sup>35</sup>Richardson, Messages of the Presidents, p. 435.

sown by the Russians among Kurdish chieftains within the Ottoman Empire during the Russo-Ottoman wars of 1829, 1853-1855, and 1876-1878, encouraging them to revolt against Ottoman rule, gradually developed into a movement for a Kurdish autonomous state. In 1880, Kurdish chieftain Obeydollah tried to unite the Kurdish tribes living in Ottoman territory and Persia under his rule.<sup>36</sup> Kurdish leaders claimed the grievous maltreatment by both Ottomans and Persian authorities forced them into striking their blow for the tribal freedom and autonomy.<sup>37</sup>

A Kurdish force moved into the plain of Urmia driving toward the major Persian city of Tabriz, a territory dotted with approximately 2,000 villages of which 120 or so were occupied by Nestorians. The Kurds, in addition to being invaders who considered the Persians to be enemies, were also Sunni, whereas the Persians were Shi'ites. A deep and lasting animosity already existed between these two Islamic elements; the Persian Shi'ite population, together with the Nestorians, Armenians, and Jews, suffered at the hands of the invading Kurds.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Hassan Arfa, The Kurds: An Historical Political Study (London, 1966), pp. 23-24.

<sup>37</sup>U.S., Congress, House. Protection of American Citizens, p. 12.

<sup>38</sup>Rufus R. Dawes, A History of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations with Persia (Marietta, Ohio, 1887), p. 16. Hereinafter referred to as History of Diplomatic Relations.)

At this time, there were fourteen American missionaries stationed in the Urmia sector. A member of the 47th Congress, Representative Rufus R. Dawes of Marietta, Ohio, had a sister who served as a missionary in Urmia along with her husband and family. After learning of the Kurdish invasion from reading newspaper reports of the events and realizing the threat to the Christian missionaries in the area, Mr. Dawes requested the Secretary of State, William M. Evarts, to appeal to the Persian government to protect the lives of the missionaries. The Secretary informed him that this would be impossible because the United States had no representative in Persia, but assured him that the American Minister in London would be instructed to request the good offices of Great Britain to protect American interests in Persia. The British government responded favorably to the U.S. request and instructions were sent by London to the British Consul General at Tabriz, William G. Abbott, to offer whatever assistance might be necessary for the safety of the missionaries in that area. At the time the Kurdish forces attacked Urmia the English Consul General, coincidentally, was a guest of the missionaries and was caught along with them within the Kurdish line. The missionaries' cottage was located on Mt. Seir, six miles outside the town near where the Kurdish forces had taken up position looking down over Urmia.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Dawes, History of Diplomatic Relations, pp. 1-8.



Consul Abbott reported to Foreign Secretary Earl Granville that the Union Jack floated side by side with the Stars and Stripes over the missionary buildings and a sign on the outside identified "the residence of the British Consul and the American Missionaries."<sup>40</sup> A copy of his report was forwarded to the American Secretary of State, which stated that the missionaries opened their compound to approximately three hundred Persians and Nestorians. He denied the story that the missionaries sided with the Kurds against the Persians: "...the U.S. have every reason to be proud of men who, at all times conspicuous for their practical piety, displayed at Urmia , amidst famine, pestilence and war, a coolness and pluck which will never be forgotten by those who were present..."<sup>41</sup>

The Kurds failed to capture Urmia and the Persian army succeeded in driving the remnant away from the environs. The Kurds had treated the missionaries with respect; but this did not make matters easier, because the missionaries were placed in a very difficult position, that of not wanting to favor either side in the struggle.<sup>42</sup>

The British Minister to Teheran, in accordance with instructions received from London, interceded on behalf of the American missionaries by requesting the Shah's government

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<sup>40</sup>U.S., Congress, House, Protection of American Citizens, p. 17.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

to take extra measures for the protection of the missions in Urmia. Upon instructions from the Shah, the Persian Minister of War, Sepah Salar, who was given the responsibility for defeating the Kurds, assured the missionaries of his protection and added that the Shah's government appreciated the integrity and sincerity of the missionaries' past actions in Persia. The U.S. State Department expressed the appreciation of President Chester A. Arthur to the British government for the promptness and good will displayed by the British officials in responding to the U.S. request for assistance.<sup>43</sup>

Even after the fighting subsided, the British Mission to Persia continued to play a protective role over the U.S. missionaries there. The British government was formally requested by the U.S. State Department to continue to protect the missionaries in March of 1882. In May of the year before, the British government transmitted copies of new regulations to the State Department issued by the Persian government forbidding prosecution of converts from Judaism to Christianity, and one on prohibiting the teaching of religion in the missionary schools.<sup>44</sup> It had always been the policy of the Persian government to grant religious freedom to non-Moslems, but to strictly prevent any attempt to teach Christianity to Moslems.

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<sup>43</sup>U.S., Congress, House, Protection of American Citizens, p. 18.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., pp. 21-24.

### Establishment of Diplomatic Relations

In 1882, the relationship between the missionaries and the Persian government began to become tense over the desires of the missionaries to proselytize among Persians. The Persian government would not tolerate any attempt by the missionaries to teach Christian religious beliefs to the Moslems, either at the school, or at the church. Strict orders were issued by the Persian government and Moslems were threatened with arrest and punishment if found attending such services. The missionaries were not inclined to abide by the orders and thereby imperiled their own position in the country and even their lives.<sup>45</sup> The need for official protection from the U.S. government became more acute under these circumstances. The British government kept the American State Department informed of the events in Persia and the U.S. government counselled the friends of the missionaries to refrain from any extreme actions in Persia which would place the British representatives in a difficult position in any of their attempts to protect the missionaries. The need to establish U.S. diplomatic relations with Persia in order to protect the lives and interests of U.S. citizens, mainly those of the missionaries, became evident during this period.<sup>46</sup>

A resolution of inquiry was passed by the House of Representatives on February 13, 1882, to President Arthur

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<sup>45</sup>U.S., Congress, House. Protection of American Citizens, p. 24.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 24-25.



through the Secretary of State, regarding the protection of American citizens in Persia. The Secretary of State reported to the House that since America had no diplomatic relations with Persia, it could not directly protect American citizens in that country, but he did state that he would contact the British government for assistance. The British quickly and affirmatively responded to this request.

While the U.S. State Department was requesting British protection for its missionaries in Persia, the U.S. Representative, Rufus R. Dawes, maneuvered with his friends in the House to take the initiative of opening official relations with Persia. In the pursuit of his objective, Mr. Dawes introduced a joint resolution (H.R. No. 195) in the 47th Congress authorizing the Secretary of State to establish diplomatic relations with Persia. This resolution was passed to the Committee on Foreign Affairs where opposition developed. This opposition centered around the lack of action by the Committee on a prior item (the imprisonment of Irish-Americans in British jails and granting relief for those in Ireland).<sup>47</sup> On July 15, 1882, Charles G. Williams, Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, introduced House Resolution 6743 for the establishment of diplomatic relations with Persia. As a result of this House Resolution, the Secretary of State recommended to the President that it would be advantageous to American interests, both personal and commercial, to develop

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<sup>47</sup>Dawes, History of Diplomatic Relations, pp. 39-40.

more intimate relations with Persia.<sup>48</sup> It took the Committee three months to report back to the House recommending a bill for the establishment of diplomatic relations with Persia.<sup>49</sup> Because of the press of business and House rules, the bill had little chance of passing in that Congressional session. It was possible for bills to be taken up out of order and voted upon in the final six days of the session, depending upon the interests of the committee. Williams, a special friend of Dawes, with the strong support of John A. Kasson, who as a Minister to Austria had recommended the establishment of relations with Persia a number of years before, accomplished this near impossible task.<sup>50</sup>

In the discussion that followed in the House in support of the bill, Kasson emphasized the possibility of trade with Persia, especially in American cotton and petroleum.<sup>51</sup> He pointed out that cotton grown in the U.S. was being shipped first to Great Britain, thence to Persia. He added that all great trading nations of Europe had emissaries in Persia and the United States, a nation of traders, should be represented also. The members of the committee discussed the importance of Persia's geographical position and the role of the American

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<sup>48</sup>Dawes, History of Diplomatic Relations, p. 27.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., pp. 42-43 and U.S., Congress, House, Commercial Relations with Persia. House Report No. 1648 (Washington, 1888), p. 4.

<sup>51</sup>Dawes, History of Diplomatic Relations, p. 44.



missionary within Persia. This country had more missionaries in Persia than any other nation; therefore, we should not have to depend upon the British for this protection.<sup>52</sup>

Strong support for the bill came from Mr. Andrew G. Curtin, former governor of Pennsylvania and ex-minister to Russia, now a member of Congress. "He was one of the most dignified and finished orators in Congress."<sup>53</sup> Thus, Dawes had strong support from a few influential members of the House, two former ministers to Austria (Kasson and Godlove S. Orth of Indiana), a former minister to Russia (Curtin), and Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Williams. Dawes indicated that he had little or no support outside of Congress, the public having little or no knowledge of Persia and having exerted no pressure on its representatives to have relations established with Persia.<sup>54</sup> "The only favorable symptom describable was a general disposition in Congress to talk loud and long in favor of American citizens in foreign lands."<sup>55</sup>

With the passage of the bill in the House, only two days were left for Senate action. The same influential men of the House who had pushed the bill in their chamber, appealed to William Windom, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, to call a quorum on August 4, 1882, for consideration of the bill. The Committee adopted a favorable report,

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<sup>52</sup>Dawes, History of Diplomatic Relations, p. 46.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>54</sup>Yeselson, Persian Diplomatic Relations, p. 25.

<sup>55</sup>Dawes, History of Diplomatic Relations, p. 27.

passed it to the Senate and after ten minutes of consideration, the bill was passed by unanimous consent, becoming law when signed by President Arthur three days later. Dawes immediately requested the Secretary of State, Frederick T. Frelinghuysen, to telegraph the news to the Persian government officially, which was done on the same day through the American and Persian ambassadors in London. Congress had authorized the sending of a charge d'affaires and consul general to Teheran. The American ambassador also notified the British.

Congress adjourned on August 8 before action was taken by the Secretary of State on selecting the first minister to Persia. After conferring with Dr. Ireneus Prime of New York, the Secretary of State selected Rev. Henry Jessup, D.D., former missionary to Syria. He turned the appointment down.<sup>55</sup>

Secretary of State Frelinghuysen's next act was to send a list of possible choices to Mr. Dawes and requested him to confer with Messrs. Rice and Curtin in making a recommendation. Included in this list was the name of Samuel G.W. Benjamin, a man who had lived in the Near East for over twenty years, knew Greek, Turkish, and French, and had published a book entitled The Turk and the Greek in 1867. This was the man whose name was recommended to the President by the Secretary of State, after his selection by Dawes and his conferees. President Chester A. Arthur accepted the recommendation and

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<sup>55</sup>Dawes, History of Diplomatic Relations, pp. 53-54.

appointed Benjamin to become the new Minister Resident to Persia on January 29, 1883. On February 14, he was informed of his appointment by the Secretary of State; however, the title of his position was changed to that of Charge d'Affaires and Consul General of the United States to Persia prior to his departure. This increased rank carried no equivalent increase in basic salary, which was \$5,000, plus \$3,000 for expenses.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Dumas Malone, et. al., eds., The Dictionary of American Biography, II (New York, 1928), p. 198.

## CHAPTER II

### THE FIRST DIPLOMATIC MISSION TO PERSIA, 1883

The selection of Mr. S.G.W. Benjamin as the first diplomatic representative of the United States to Persia was a remarkable choice for America to send to a land where minimum involvement was anticipated. Benjamin was born in Argos, Greece on February 13, 1837, the son of an American missionary father, and spent his first eighteen years in Athens, Smyrna, and Constantinople. His personal characteristics were not ideal for diplomatic service as he was not accustomed to a routine and lacked self-discipline. He was energetic, quick, versatile, romantic, and conceited, and had a volatile temperament.<sup>1</sup> He was a writer of both books and magazine articles, his subjects being mainly art and travel. As an author, he was conscientious in assembling his material, but careless in its composition.<sup>2</sup> He was also a mariner and painter of marine subjects; his paintings were aimed at boldness and force rather than refinement.<sup>3</sup> They sold at prices ranging from \$60 to \$600. As a mariner, he made forty-five voyages across the Atlantic Ocean and was noted for his ability to withstand the roughest weather without becoming seasick, which he attributed to his

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<sup>1</sup>G.N. Curzon, Persia and the Persian Question, I (New York, 1892), p. 23 and Malone, The Dictionary of American Biography, p. 189.

<sup>2</sup>Malone, The Dictionary of American Biography, p. 189.

<sup>3</sup>Curzon, Persia and the Persian Question, p. 23.

use of whiskey and tobacco, and the avoidance of drinking water.<sup>4</sup>

Benjamin departed New York on April 4, 1883 for Teheran via Bordeaux, Marseille, Constantinople, and from there by land to the Ottoman port cities of Trabzon and Batumi (a city now held by Russia) on the Black Sea. Travel between the last two cities was by steamer. From Batumi he continued to the port city of Poti from which he continued by rail to Tiflis (Tbilisi) and finally to Baku on the Caspian Sea. There he smelled the peculiar odor that was ever-present in the air and determined it to be the petroleum that saturated the earth in the area.<sup>5</sup> He departed Baku via steamer and arrived at a small Persian port of Enzeli, present-day Bandar Pahlavi, from which the Shah despatched his steam-yacht to take Benjamin on board with his family.<sup>6</sup>

Upon his arrival at Enzeli, he was met by officials of the Shah who made arrangements for the final portion of the trip to the capital of Persia, Teheran. His party of some fifty people proceeded slowly to Teheran, the journey hindered by the slow progress of the Russian Minister who preceded him with ninety-six horses loaded with baggage. No two foreign envoys could enter Teheran on the same day, according to

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<sup>4</sup>John W. Leonard, ed. Who's Who in America, 1914-1915 (Chicago, 1916), p. 171.

<sup>5</sup>Benjamin, Persia and the Persians, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup>Despatch from U.S. Minister to Persia, 1883-1906. U.S. State Dept. Microfilm Roll No. 1, I Microcopy No. 223. 1903, Dip. Ser. No. 10 dated Jan. 13, 1883.



Persian protocol, and it was, therefore, necessary for Benjamin to remain one day's journey behind the Russian minister. His slow and tedious trip was interrupted by a messenger from the Shah urging his speedy arrival at the capital because the Shah was departing the city on June 11 for the summer. His arrival after the Shah's departure would have meant that he would have had to postpone entering the capital until the Shah's return in October. Benjamin left his wife and daughter, and hurried by horseback to Teheran, a trip of 220 miles.<sup>7</sup>

Wishing to show good will toward the first United States envoy, the Shah sent a carriage to meet Benjamin at Qazvin, which permitted him to ride the last eighty miles to Teheran on a fine road. He arrived outside Teheran on the ninth of June, sixty-five days after sailing from New York. The Russian Minister was received by the Shah on June 10 and Benjamin the next day at the Shah's pavilion near the gates of the city. The Shah extended to the American full civilian and military honors, and had him escorted to his quarters in Teheran by a regiment of cavalry.<sup>8</sup>

During the audience, the Shah remained standing and talked with Benjamin in French. His manner was easy, and he expressed his opinion that both countries could benefit by maintaining diplomatic relations. He was interested in learning if the United States intended to maintain a permanent legation or

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<sup>7</sup>Despatch from U.S. Ministers, Dip. Ser. No. 10 dated Jan. 13, 1883 and Ali Pasha Saleh, Cultural Ties between Iran and the United States (Teheran, 1976), p. 249.

<sup>8</sup>Benjamin, Persia and the Persians, p. 42.

only a temporary one. When the U.S. Minister replied that the legation would be permanent, the Shah responded that he hoped that it would be so. Benjamin was impressed by the Shah's appearance and mannerisms which made him appear younger than his age of fifty-six.<sup>9</sup>

Benjamin's immediate problem was a physical one--that of locating quarters and personnel--servants and staff for the legation within Teheran. Temporary lodging in the city was provided him through the efforts of the American missionaries. He was forced to remain in the city through the extreme heat of that first summer although it was the custom of legations to move to the cooler foothills each summer for work. His early despatches to the State Department were devoted to explanations of his attempts to purchase a carriage, horse, and harness; hire a driver; locate a suitable house; and order stationery, printed forms, and ordinary appliances for business, staying within the meager budget allowed by the State Department. He was forced to augment his allowance from his personal funds in order to obtain some of the bare essentials for living in the country. The furnishings for his office came to \$360, of which he paid \$125 from his own pocket.<sup>11</sup> The first American flag was made by missionary ladies with the

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<sup>9</sup>Despatch from U.S. Minister, Dip. Ser. No. 10 dated Jan. 13, 1883 and Benjamin, Persia and the Persians, pp. 190-193.

<sup>10</sup>Saleh, Cultural Ties between Iran, p. 249.

<sup>11</sup>Despatch from U.S. Minister, Dip. Ser. No. 14 dated June 18, 1883.

help of Benjamin's wife and daughter. When completed, it was probably the first American flag ever raised in the city of Teheran. The flagstaff proved expensive, over \$200.

Benjamin was confronted shortly with many of the issues and influences that were to dominate and develop into the fundamental basis of the relationship between America and Persia prior to World War II. He quickly became aware of the Russian influence and designs for dominating Persia, and Persia's efforts to enlist American support for resisting the pressures of the great powers, Russia and Great Britain,<sup>12</sup> and he soon became involved in protecting U.S. missionary roles in the country.<sup>13</sup> This latter facet of the U.S.-Persian relationship would absorb much of the U.S. representatives' time until the early twentieth century.

The third matter that interested Benjamin, which he reported to the Department and which recurred in numerous reports by subsequent representatives of the U.S. in Persia, was the possibility of establishing and increasing commercial relations between the two nations. Secretary of State Frelinghuysen had never informed Benjamin that the primary reason for sending him to Persia was the protection of U.S. missionaries. Trade was not encouraged by the State Department, nor was the idea received enthusiastically by the U.S.

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<sup>12</sup>Despatch from U.S. Minister, Dip. Ser. No. 23 dated July 19, 1883.

<sup>13</sup>Despatch from U.S. Minister, Dip. Ser. No. 20 dated July 5, 1883.



commercial interests.<sup>14</sup> President Arthur, in his fourth annual message to Congress in December of 1884, emphasized that "countries of the American continent and the adjacent islands are for the United States the natural nests of supply and demands,"<sup>15</sup> which seemed to preclude extended involvement in Persia.

As early as July 1883, Benjamin reported to the State Department the feasibility of developing commercial relations between the two countries. He cited items produced in the U.S. which would be of interest to Persia: firearms, furniture, cloth, clocks, tobacco, cotton, woolen goods, shoes, and paper, in return for which Persia could export silks, dried fruits, artistic bric-a-brac, rugs, and textiles. Benjamin reported additionally that valuable commercial concessions might be arranged for U.S. companies for exploitation of Persia's rich coal, lead, copper, and petroleum reserves.

Meanwhile, John A. Kasson, former American Minister to Austria and now member of Congress, noted in a communication to the Secretary of State dated July 12, 1878, that the estimated annual external trade of Persia amounted to \$18-20,000,000, of which approximately \$12,000,000 were imports and \$7,000,000 exports. Cotton goods and yarns formed a large part of the imports. Kasson mentioned firearms and other specialties of

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<sup>14</sup>U.S. Congress, House, Commercial Relations with Persia, Report No. 1648, 47th Congress, 1st Sess., 1882, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup>James D. Richardson, ed., Messages of Presidents, p. 4838.

the U. S. could possibly be considered for trade.<sup>16</sup>

The subject of developing such relations was again discussed in the Minister's second audience with the Shah. This and other topics discussed in the audience was duly reported in the capital of Teheran and created much interest among the diplomatic corps there, especially among the Russians and British. Nasir-ud-Din Shah urged the U.S. to increase commerce with his country and questioned the minister on the possibility of the Shah visiting the U.S. and the conditions of the voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. He was searching desperately for trade, investments, and, possibly, support of a third power to balance the economic, political, and military pressures of--mainly--Russia. The Shah believed that the U.S. could act as a balance against further Russian expansion. There seemed very little to fear from the U.S. in the form of economic domination, and there was much to gain from introducing new investment capital and an alternative to trading with Russia and England.<sup>17</sup>

On the whole, Benjamin supported the missionaries' role in Persia and defended their rights most vigorously with the Persian government. In return, the U.S. missionaries respected and praised actions taken by him. At the same time, Benjamin chastised the missionaries for their attempts to proselytize

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<sup>16</sup>U.S., Cong., House, Commercial Relations with Persia, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup>Yeselson, Persian Diplomatic Relations, p. 18.

Moslems and defended the Persians who opposed their attempts to convert Moslems.<sup>18</sup> Some missionaries in Persia believed that if they could not convert Moslems, there was no point to their being there.<sup>19</sup> In a letter to a missionary in Tabriz, Benjamin cautioned against any efforts of such conversions, because the converted Moslem would possibly be killed by the people under the guidance of their religious leaders. This could create a problem which could result in the loss of life among the foreign colony in the country.<sup>20</sup>

By 1884, the American missionary colony consisted of twenty-four American missionaries and their families at Urmia, Teheran, Hamadan, and Tabriz, all in the northern part of Persia. These missionaries were assisted by 230 native teachers, mostly Nestorians. They had established twenty-five churches of 1,726 communicants and 4,578 persons attending services; 208 pupils lived in missionary boarding schools, and 2,452 attended day school. One of the major emphases of the missionaries was the translation of the Bible into the local dialect commonly used by the Nestorians and printing of books for their schools' use. In support of these activities, the missionaries printed 1,680,890 pages of educational and religious material in 1884.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Benjamin, Persia and the Persians, pp. 360-362.

<sup>19</sup>Despatch from U.S. Minister, Dip. Ser. No. 81 dated Aug. 15, 1884.

<sup>20</sup>Despatch from U.S. Minister, Dip. Ser. No. 81 dated Aug. 15, 1884.

<sup>21</sup>Yeselson, Persian Diplomatic Relations, p. 11.

the acquisitions of the Americans--property, schools, houses, and land--were considerable. The Treaty of Turkomanchai (1828) granted Russia the right to protect property in Persia by the most favored nation clause. This clause was included in the U.S. trade treaty; therefore, the purchase of property was permitted although it resulted in growing suspicion by the Moslems.<sup>22</sup>

The problems that developed between the missionaries and the Persian authorities were largely unavoidable for Persian law did not recognize the right of Moslems to desert their religion and forbade them to receive Christian training or to attend church services. The missionaries contended that this did not prohibit preaching; they were not bound by Persian law.

Benjamin strove to understand both positions. He wrote that "It is not difficult to imagine what would be the feeling of a Protestant, or a Roman Catholic, or a Hebrew father in the United States, who should see a priest of a faith he detests exerting every effort, however honestly, to lead his child from the faith of its fathers."<sup>23</sup> At the same time, Benjamin defended American citizens to the Persian Minister of Foreign Affairs by saying:

American citizens are not law-breakers, rest assured of that, I am responsible that they do not invite Mussulmen to their services, but surely you would not require them to be so

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<sup>22</sup>Benjamin, Persia and the Persians, p. 361.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 362.



rude as to exclude visitors from their houses, or attendance from their services, for in the latter case, at least, they might sometimes make the mistake of excluding native Christians whom you allow to gather, for the garb and appearance of each are often similar. But if you do not want your people to attend these services, prevent them in advance yourselves.<sup>24</sup>

Although the Persian government got assurance from the U.S. Minister that American missionaries would not deliberately proselytize Moslems, Benjamin warned the missionaries to expect to encounter growing opposition, both secret and open from local government and religious leaders. The type of harrassment experienced by one American missionary from local officials and mullahs was outlined in a letter written by missionaries in the city of Hamadan to Mr. Benjamin in February, 1884, in which they cited the unjustifiable arrest, ill-treatment, and fining of their Persian servants.<sup>25</sup> As a result of this letter, Benjamin protested to the Minister of Foreign Affairs that the Hamadan authorities had ignored the rights of American citizens and held American property, contrary to the Treaty of Turkomanchai. The Minister immediately issued orders for the return of the American property and cessation of further harrassment of U.S. citizens. Opposition from local authorities toward the missionaries temporarily ceased. Benjamin cited the action of the Persian government as an

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<sup>24</sup> Despatch from U.S. Minister, Dip. Ser. No. 81 dated August 15, 1884.

<sup>25</sup> Despatch from U.S. Minister, Dip. Ser. No. 57 dated Feb. 15, 1884, Encl. 2/57 written by James W. Hawkes dated Feb. 1, 1884.

indication of their sincere desire to maintain friendship between the two countries and their intention to protect foreign citizens residing in their territory.<sup>26</sup>

The Russian and French Ministers in Persia were concerned over both the Protestant and Catholic missionaries' overzealous attitude regarding proselytizing non-Christians. These Ministers enjoined the missionaries to act with great restraint especially during the holy month of Ramadan. Benjamin observed that the "Persians are excitable people likely to allow their impulses to carry them to violence sufficiently regrettable at times. They are quarrelsome and when their fanaticism is aroused, may prove dangerous...."<sup>27</sup>

In the performance of his primary responsibility of protecting American missionaries, compounded by a growing obsession with Russian designs on Persia, Benjamin was led into a confrontation with the Russian Minister in Teheran. The immediate cause was the receipt of a letter from Rev. Benjamin Labaree, earlier identified as having had a role in the original decision to open the Embassy, stating that the Russian authorities within Persia were encouraging Armenian Orthodox, as well as the Persian, authorities to protest the proselytizing activities by the missionaries. Benjamin viewed these protests as calculated to restrict American

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<sup>26</sup>Despatch from U.S. Minister, Dip. Ser. No. 274 dated August 19, 1884.

<sup>28</sup>Despatch from U.S. Minister, Dip. Ser. No. 81 dated August 15, 1884.

influence in Persia,<sup>28</sup> and he added that every move by Americans in Persia was "watched with a jealous eye by Russia."<sup>29</sup> As a result of receiving reports from the missionaries regarding the Russians inducing the Moslems to protest the American presence, he despatched a note in English to the Russian Minister in Teheran protesting these actions. The Russians returned it declaring that they could not understand English; French was the language normally used in notes of this kind sent to non-English legations in Teheran.<sup>30</sup> The standing policy of the Secretary of State, and the State Department as a whole, did not support any aggressive action of its ministers abroad. Frelinghuysen's policy was "the traditional one of opportunistic drifting and negativism--of not going out to look for trouble but settling troubles when they arose."<sup>31</sup> The Department rebuked Benjamin for his actions and instructed him henceforth to send directly to the Persian government his protests regarding the treatment of Americans in Persia and not to the Russian legation; a French translation should accompany any notes sent to the Russians.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Despatch from U.S. Minister, Dip. Ser. No. 103 dated March 23, 1884 and Benjamin, Persia and the Persians, p. 433.

<sup>29</sup>Despatch from U.S. Minister, Dip. Ser. No. 102 dated Mar. 19, 1883.

<sup>30</sup>Despatch from U.S. Minister, Dip. Ser. No. 52 dated Jan. 19, 1883.

<sup>31</sup>P.M. Brown, "Frederick T. Frelinghuysen," in Secretaries of State. Samuel F. Bemis, ed. VIII, (Boston, 1928), 3-6.

<sup>32</sup>Instructions from State Department to U.S. Minister dated May 17 and May 31, 1884.

Benjamin's precipitousness resulted in a second incident involving a foreign legation in Teheran. When the new German Minister, Herr von Braunschweig, took up residence in the Persian capital, he failed to call on Benjamin's wife on her day to receive official visitors. He immediately despatched a sharply-worded note to the German Legation stating, "Permit me to hope that an explanation without delay and (as far as possible) reparation on the part of those representing the German Empire at Teheran will prevent the conclusion that there is any definite intention of wanting respect towards the United States Government."<sup>33</sup> The German reply was swift in coming and pointed; the German Minister was "of the opinion that neither his official position nor his personal dignity allow him to accept such insulting expression."<sup>34</sup>

The State Department felt that Benjamin overreacted and created an international incident over a relatively minor affair. In support of his position, the foreign community in Teheran, being small, and the Persian characteristic of insisting, incidentally, on correct ceremony and protocol, all knew of the German Minister's slight of the U.S. Minister's wife. Benjamin reassured the State Department that he realized that von Braunschweig was just recently promoted from a simple consul to minister and was perhaps overcome with his new

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<sup>33</sup> Despatch from U.S. Minister, Dip. Ser. No. 95 dated Dec. 30, 1884, Encl. 1/95 written by Benjamin to German Consulate, dated Dec. 22, 1884.

<sup>34</sup> Despatch from U.S. Minister, Dip. Ser. No. 95 dated Dec. 30, 1884.



elevated position and persuaded that a Minister Resident, such as Benjamin, was beneath his dignity. For this reason, Benjamin should have minimized the slight affront to his offices and to the U.S. He did not believe that it was the German government's policy to offend the American government, nor did he feel that Count Bismarck would condone the conduct of his minister in Teheran.<sup>35</sup> All attempts made by the Austrian and British ministers to reconcile the two parties proved unsuccessful. The British ambassador was very supportive of Benjamin's action and acted as his advisor during this period. All conciliatory advances made by Benjamin were refused by the German minister; the British minister finally advised Benjamin not to make any further concession or attempt a reconciliation. It was noted that even the Austrian minister's attitude was one of sympathy for Benjamin's position, a feeling held by other members of the diplomatic corps in Teheran.<sup>36</sup>

The U.S. State Department's attitude was unsympathetic toward its representative in Teheran, however, and the Department did not hesitate to display its irritation with him for allowing a minor incident to develop into an exchange of notes between the two governments. They also rebuked him for the sharpness of his note to the German minister. It is very likely that this incident eventually led to his replacement when the new American President, Grover Cleveland, took

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<sup>35</sup> Benjamin, Persia and the Persians, p. 435.

<sup>36</sup> Despatch from U.S. Minister, Dip. Ser. No. 95 dated Dec. 30, 1884.

office in March of 1885.

The strained relations between the German and American ministers eventually eased as is shown in the following incident. On an occasion when Benjamin's wife was on a drive in the country in March shortly before his departure in 1885, her carriage met with a mishap. Fortunately the German minister passed by on the road, and for the first time, acknowledged Benjamin's wife. He offered her his carriage for her return to the city. An exchange of notes between the two legations ended with the establishment of harmony between the ministers. Benjamin did not attribute the sudden change in these relations to the fact that he was scheduled to depart soon, because he had kept his plans a secret within the American Legation until shortly before his actual departure date.<sup>37</sup>

Despite the displeasure of the State Department with Benjamin on several occasions, attributable to his impulsive and somewhat undiplomatic actions, he did receive occasional compliments from his superiors. The Minister was given credit by the Department, as well as by American missionaries, for the manner in which he protected them in Persia. As the result of his efforts and advice, the department agreed to establish consulates in Tabriz and Bushahr. Tabriz was the center of much missionary activity. Prior to the establishment of a U.S. consulate in that city, the French and British Consulates looked after American interests; they had assumed

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<sup>37</sup>Despatch from U.S. Minister, Dip. Ser. No. 109 dated April 10, 1885.

this responsibility even while Benjamin was in Teheran.<sup>38</sup> Tabriz and Bushahr were both ports of entry for foreign goods. Trade from the United States, Europe, and Russia was channeled through Tabriz, while cargo arriving by sea was shipped through the southern port of Bushahr.

Benjamin's other principle achievement was the establishment of friendly relations with the Shah and his ministers. The Persians seemed to like him, and he encouraged the Shah to open a legation in Washington.<sup>39</sup> The prospect of receiving a representative from Persia in Washington was not welcomed with enthusiasm back home, and it was delayed for four years.

The recall of Benjamin occurred when the Democratic Party took office in March 1885 although he actually left Teheran on May 13. After his departure, the responsibility of protecting American interests in the country was assumed again by the British ambassador. Benjamin was not immediately succeeded by the new American minister. He later insisted that it was a disgrace for the U.S. government to "abandon the permanent and growing colony of its citizens in Persia to the protection of the legation of another power, even though friendly."<sup>40</sup> The difficulty that developed between Benjamin and the State Department really evolved from their differing views of the

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<sup>38</sup>Despatch from U.S. Minister, Dip. Ser. No. 99 dated Jan. 17, 1885.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., Dip. Ser. No. 99 dated Jan. 17, 1885.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., Dip. Ser. No. 58 dated Feb. 21, 1883.



role of the U.S. minister in Persia. He felt that he was the representative of a great power desiring to open full diplomatic and economic relations and to expand the power, prestige, and commerce of the U.S. with Persia; the President and the Department of State rather were persuaded that the U.S. representative should play only a limited role there, mainly, that of protecting missionaries and otherwise keeping a low profile, avoiding problems and not involving the U.S. government in the affairs of other nations. This difference in approach resulted in disappointment on both sides.<sup>41</sup>

It is interesting to note Benjamin's observations in 1885 on the causes for Persian difficulty in emerging as a modern nation. The first cause he mentioned is religion. A state religion had restricted the development of the country, and he emphasized the seriousness of having the government and its laws subject to the dictates of the clergy. The second cause of weakness within Persia was the pervasive corruption of those in power. The third cause was the continuous rivalry between England and Russia and the constant threat of actual interference by Russia in the internal affairs of Persia.<sup>42</sup> In modern times, the United States has replaced England, but the struggle between East and West over the destiny of Persia continues.

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<sup>41</sup>Benjamin, Persia and the Persians, p. 433 and Letter to Department dated January 12, 1887.

<sup>42</sup>Benjamin, Persia and the Persians, pp. 473-475.



### CHAPTER III

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELATIONS, 1885-1903

The post of American Minister in Teheran remained vacant after Benjamin's departure on May 19, 1885, until April 2 of the next year when Frederick Hampden Winston took over the responsibility. The United States continued to maintain its position of protecting American interests in Persia, but was determined not to become embroiled in the internal affairs of Persia, nor in the political intrigues between the western powers over influence in the country.

The American position of non-involvement in Persia was emphasized by President Grover Cleveland, head of the first Democratic administration since the Civil War, in his inaugural address on March 4, 1885. "It is the policy of neutrality, rejecting any share in foreign broils and ambitions upon other continents and repelling their intrusion here. It is the policy of Monroe and of Washington and Jefferson--'Peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliance with none.'"<sup>1</sup> Both the President and his Secretary of State were determined to remain aloof from becoming involved in strengthening Persia's ability to remain free of economic or political domination by her neighbor, Russia, or other industrial nations of Europe.

A new minister for Persia was eventually selected by Secretary of State Thomas F. Bayard in January 1886. He

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<sup>1</sup>Richardson, Messages of Presidents, p. 4886.

designated Winston, who was born in Sand Hill, Liberty County, Georgia, and was practicing law in Chicago at the time of his appointment.<sup>2</sup> The lack of urgency exhibited by the U.S. State Department in its slow replacement of the American minister in Persia is an indication of the degree of importance placed by the U.S. on its relations not only in Persia, but in the entire Middle East during the late nineteenth century.

Mr. Winston left the United States on January 16, 1886, and after the usual annoyances encountered in travelling in that part of the world--luggage being misplaced, wettings in the driving rain, snowdrifts up to six feet deep, and burning sun which blistered his face--he finally reached Teheran on April 2. In his audience with the Shah, the ruler indicated his continued interest in visiting the United States by his detailed questions concerning the voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. He also showed his interest in seeing Niagara Falls.<sup>3</sup>

Winston's stay in Persia was a rather abbreviated one; he tendered his resignation two months after arriving in Persia.<sup>4</sup> He saw no reason for America to maintain a legation there because there was insufficient commerce between the two countries to warrant the expense of running a legation. "There is no American trade worth mentioning and no prospect

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<sup>2</sup>Leonard, Who's Who in America, 1899-1900 (Chicago, 1916), p. 807.

<sup>3</sup>Despatch from U.S. Minister, Role 2, August 17, 1885-June 30, 1887, Dip. Ser. No. 8 dated April 5, 1886.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., Dip. Ser. No. 17 dated May 10, 1886.

for any....The insecurity of property, the inefficiency of authority, the constantly increasing depreciation of currency and a multitude of other reasons make it inadvisable in my judgment to try to extend American trade in the country."<sup>5</sup>

Winston also believed that a threat to American missionaries working in Persia did not exist so long as they did not attempt to convert Moslems to Christianity. There were only twenty American missionaries in Persia in 1886. Winston observed that the Persian people's attitude toward American missionaries was one of toleration.<sup>6</sup> His strong feeling concerning the lack of trade opportunities in Persia was held in spite of an interview that he had with the Shah who expressed his interest in trade potential that could develop between the two nations. The Shah cited one of his pet projects--he proposed that American technological and financial resources should be used to construct a railroad line between the Persian seaport on the Persian Gulf and the city of Teheran. This would connect the southern portion of Persia with the northern part of the country. The project had been opposed by both Great Britain and Russia for their own reasons, and Persia had been reluctant to grant construction rights to any other European country for they would assuredly demand a high

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<sup>5</sup>Despatch from U.S. Minister, Dip. Ser. No. 17 dated May 10, 1886 and Yeselson, Persian Diplomatic Relations, p. 32.

<sup>6</sup>Despatch from U.S. Minister, Dip. Ser. No. 14 dated April 10, 1886.

price for their investment.<sup>7</sup>

Soon after setting foot on Persian soil, Winston became disillusioned with the Persians. He reported to the State Department in one of his despatches that the presents and gifts which he had to pay to various Persians while travelling from the Caspian seaport to Teheran included gifts to the Governor, interpreter, commander of the Shah's yacht, engineer of the roads, postmaster, Precinct Chief of Police, guards, villagers, and servants. His expenses for these gifts amounted to \$527.70. He observed that the poor pay all the taxes and the noblemen, nothing. Public offices were sold to the highest bidder. Manufacturing was at a low ebb. Further, he reported, Russia was already in a strong position, politically, and economically, within the country.<sup>8</sup>

It was Winston's conclusion that nothing justified maintaining a U.S. mission in Teheran. It was for this reason, and his personal business back in the United States, that he submitted his resignation to the Department of State, effective June 30, 1886. In his letter of resignation, he stated that

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<sup>7</sup>Despatch from U.S. Minister, Dip. Ser. No. 15 dated April 25, 1886. This railline was finally constructed in 1930, financed from funds derived from taxes on tea and sugar and through the use of American and German engineering firms and a Scandinavian construction concern. The line, known as the Trans Iranian Railway, was completed in 1938, in time for use by the Allies in shipping critically-needed supplies to Russia during World War II, as described in The Modernization of Iran, Amin Banani (Stanford: University of California, 1961), p. 134.

<sup>8</sup>Despatch from U.S. Minister, Dip. Ser. No. 14 dated April 20, 1886.



he was refusing to accept compensation for services which he could not accomplish.<sup>9</sup>

After Winston's departure from Teheran on June 10, the American charge d'affaires, A. Keim, a Persian national, took charge of the American interests in Persia. Charges against him made by the Persian government to the State Department, however, forced them to relieve him of his responsibilities and, once again, the U.S. had to turn to the British charge d'affaires for the oversight of American interests.<sup>10</sup>

E. Spencer Pratt of Alabama accepted the appointment to the post of Minister Resident and Consul General in Teheran on August 13, 1886. He assumed his duties in Teheran on November 22. The Shah asked for a photograph of the U.S. President and Mrs. Cleveland, having previously asked Winston without receiving it.<sup>11</sup>

Pratt's assessment of Persia was in stark contrast to that of Winston. Pratt was full of praise for the country and recognized the economic, political, and investment possibilities for American capitalists there. Throughout his few years' stay in Persia, he constantly endeavored to foster Persian-American relations and increasing trade and investment possibilities. All his efforts to influence the opinion of

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<sup>9</sup>Despatch from U.S. Minister, Dip. Ser. No. 17 dated May 10, 1886.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., Dip. Ser. No. 35 dated Aug. 12, 1886.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., Dip. Ser. No. 8 dated Nov. 25, 1886.

the State Department were rebuffed by his superiors.<sup>12</sup>

The Shah continued his effort to enlist American support in the development of his country. A private interview with Pratt emphasized Persian natural resources and concessions, and his desire to obtain both American capital and technical knowledge to develop his country. The Shah had been impressed with American integrity as displayed by American missionaries, doctors, and teachers. He was also aware that America had no imperialistic designs on his country and Persia might use America to counterbalance both the economic and political pressure from England and Russia.<sup>13</sup>

In another interview with the Shah, Pratt reported the Shah's comments regarding Persia's vast mineral resources and the fertility of its soil which required only an improved irrigation system. "The field is opened to American capital and industry, which have but to come here and reap its fruits."<sup>14</sup> The Shah promised extraordinary concessions to American capitalists if they would assist in industrial or agricultural projects. He also expressed his desires that the United States government raise the level of its representation in Teheran to the highest grade of its diplomatic service.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Yeselson, Persian Diplomatic Relations, p. 33.

<sup>13</sup>Peter Avery, Modern Iran (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1967), p. 145.

<sup>14</sup>Despatch from U.S. Minister, Dip. Ser. No. 9 dated Nov. 29, 1886.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

Secretary of State Bayard's only action after receipt of this despatch was to forward it to the Chairman of the Committees on Foreign Relations for the Senate and on Foreign Affairs for the House of Representatives for their information.

During 1887, the Shah gave permission for the erection of a hospital in Teheran under the direction of Dr. W.W. Torrence, missionary-physician of the American Presbyterian Board. The land for the hospital was donated by the Prime Minister in payment of medical services performed by Dr. Torrence on the Prime Minister and construction money was received from an American woman as well as from the Presbyterian Board. Pratt wanted the Department to bring this event to the attention of the American public for purposes of gaining further assistance for the American missionaries in Persia. The Department furnished this information to the press, accordingly.

Pratt spoke very highly of the work of the American missionaries in elevating and educating native Christian elements as well as their medical work and "also by the beneficial moral effort of their example upon the community generally."<sup>16</sup> He used many techniques to interest his superiors in Washington and the business community in becoming more involved in the economic aspects of Persia. Indeed he was admonished by the State Department for acting as an agent for the Gatling Gun Company and again two months later, the Department warned him that he should not act as salesman or agent for any

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<sup>16</sup>Despatch from U.S. Minister, Roll #3, July 3, 1887 to May 31, 1881, Dip. Ser. No. 114 dated Sept. 20, 1887.



American citizens involved in commercial ventures overseas. Both the Shah and various of his ministers continued to discuss the feasibility of obtaining American capital, American technicians, mining engineers and geologists, and American business to assist the country in furthering its development. All of these requests were forwarded by Pratt to the State Department. Secretary Bayard patiently advised Pratt of the many difficulties surrounding investments in Persia, that investments could more profitably be made closer to home, and that the policy of the United States was one of non-intervention.

The one and only common venture that materialized during Pratt's stay in Persia was made by Francis H. Clerque of Bangor, Maine, who sought concessions to build a railroad and develop an industrial empire. A sixty-year concession was obtained by Clerque, with the active help of Pratt, which granted him general electric rights. Because of a shortage of funds, the Company never implemented the concession and the project eventually died.<sup>18</sup>

Another scheme of Pratt's to get America interested in Persia was a proposal for the establishment of an Oriental institute to make Americans more aware of the Middle East. He also suggested that the United States invite the Shah to visit during the Shah's tour of Europe. All suggestions were rejected.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Yeselson, Persian Diplomatic Relations, p. 35.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 35 and 37.



Pratt's major achievement during his five years in Persia was the completion of negotiations for having a Persian representative in Washington. The Shah decided to send a career diplomat, Haji Hosein Kuli Khan Mo'tamed-ol-Vezareh, and assigned him as Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary to Washington.<sup>20</sup> In spite of Pratt's request to the Department that it give the Persian an elaborate welcoming ceremony, the State Department arrangements were of a modest nature.<sup>21</sup> The Persian minister arrived in Washington on October 5, 1888. He had the opportunity during his first meeting with President Cleveland to present the Persian government's plea for American aid to save Persia from British and Russian domination.<sup>22</sup> This transported the question of whether or not to help Persia from distant Teheran to Pennsylvania Avenue.

With regard to the primary reason for Pratt's assignment in Persia, the protection of American life and property, the missionaries' life there had settled down to the usual harassment and threats. The threat continued to be felt by Nestorian Christians in western Persia. The Kurds from Ottoman areas were still the threat. On August 28, 1888, Pratt notified the State Department that the Kurds living in the Ottoman

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<sup>20</sup>Foreign Relations of the United States, 1887. Diplomatic Papers (Washington, 1888), No. 254 dated July 8, 1888.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., No. 252 dated Jan. 23, 1888 and No. 144 dated Oct. 4, 1888.

<sup>22</sup>Yeselson, Persian Diplomatic Relations, p. 39.

Empire were planning to enter Persia and attack the Christians.<sup>23</sup> On a more prosaic level, local Tabriz officials planted obstacles in the path of American missionaries attempting to purchase land to construct a new school. Also, Pratt reported in June 1887 that the American citizens were robbed and assaulted in an area of Persia contiguous to the Ottoman border.<sup>24</sup> In spite of their need for protection and these niggling annoyances and threats, the lives of missionaries were rather routine during this period. President Benjamin Harrison expressed the satisfaction of the U.S. government over the "generous treatment" accorded them in Persia.<sup>25</sup>

The one serious instance that marred the relationship between the Persians and American missionaries was the fatal stabbing of the wife of Rev. J.N. Wright who lived in the district of Salmas in western Persia. Mrs. Wright was a native Persian Nestorian, having been married to Rev. Wright for at least five years.<sup>26</sup> She had been attacked and stabbed by an Armenian who was eventually arrested in Ottoman territory and returned to prison in Persia.<sup>27</sup> Pratt requested the assistance

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<sup>23</sup>Foreign Relations, No. 347 dated April 17, 1889, p. 644.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid. and No. 365 dated June 18, 1889, pp. 645-646.

<sup>25</sup>Richardson, Messages of Presidents, p. 783.

<sup>26</sup>Foreign Relations, No. 456 dated May 24, 1890, pp. 658-659.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., No. 457, dated May 16, 1890, p. 660.

of the British consul general at Tabriz, Col. C.E. Stewart, through the British minister in Teheran to represent the U.S. officially in this case. This is evidence that, in spite of the American representative in Teheran, the United States Government still had to depend on friendly relations with Great Britain for the protection of its citizens in at least some of the outlying areas of the country. The fatal assault on Mrs. Wright had no religious overtones, but was a domestic affair between the Wrights and the Armenian, a teacher in the school operated by the missionaries. After the usual vacillation of local officials, Mrs. Wright's assassin was brought to trial in Tabriz. The minutes of the trial were forwarded to Teheran for review by the Prime Minister where it was decided that execution was not warranted. The attacker received a sentence of life imprisonment from which he ultimately escaped. The Acting Secretary of State, William F. Wharton, informed Pratt that the U.S. Government would not insist on the death penalty, even though Persian justice would not be adequate punishment for the murder.<sup>28</sup> The United States also did not pursue the matter because Mrs. Wright was a Persian by birth and the U.S. lacked a means of exerting any effective force on Persia.<sup>29</sup>

On July 15, 1891, a new American minister, Truxton Beale, arrived in Teheran to replace Pratt. It was a great shock to Pratt when he was notified by the State Department that he

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<sup>28</sup>Foreign Relations, No. 233, dated Sept. 19, 1891, p. 691.

<sup>29</sup>Yeselson, Persian Diplomatic Relations, p. 42.



was being replaced. "The reluctant minister was practically evicted."<sup>30</sup> During his stopover in Athens, Beale received a telegram from Pratt on June 21 requesting him to remain in Athens until a further communication was sent. Beale replied the next day that he was sailing immediately for Constantinople. Again on June 28, Beale received a note from Pratt saying he should go by way of Tabriz and thence to Teheran because of unhealthy conditions on the Caspian coast. Once again, the next day, Pratt advised Beale to delay his entrance into Persia as a consequence of the absence of the Shah from Teheran for forty days. Beale returned Pratt's message with the notation that he had no fear of fever, and he was travelling via Baku and Rescht intending to reach Teheran on July 14.<sup>31</sup>

When in Teheran, Beale was notified informally that Pratt had secured an appointment as commissioner general in charge of the Persian exhibit at the World's Columbian Exhibition which was to be held in Chicago in 1893--a position without pay or diplomatic responsibility. Beale graciously supported this appointment in his despatch to Washington: "Pratt's extensive connections make it difficult to find a better qualified person to carry out such an assignment."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Yeselson, *Persian Diplomatic Relations*, p. 43.

<sup>31</sup>Despatch from U.S. Minister, Roll #5, Jan. 2, 1890 to Dec. 5, 1892, Dip. Ser. No. 525 dated July 25, 1891 and Yeselson, *Persian Diplomatic Relations*, p. 43.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., Dip. Ser. No. 8 dated July 23, 1891.



Yet another shift in the general attitude of the American minister took place with Beale. Benjamin had been most enthusiastic about Persia, Winston's disillusionment caused him to leave in two months, Pratt waxed enthusiastic about the economic potential of Persia, and now at the outset, Beale showed little enthusiasm or interest in encouraging capital investments.<sup>33</sup> Despite the fluctuation of attitudes of the various American ministers in Persia, that of the State Department remained one of non-involvement and negative reaction to even the slightest hint of becoming connected to the economic or political affairs of the Persians.

Although Beale's tour in Persia was relatively short, he achieved, through negotiation with the Shah, an agreement that the Persian government would permit American missionaries to hold real estate. He persuaded the Shah to promulgate a law permitting them to hold property in their own right, instead of according to the previous practice of their listing the property in the name of a Persian subject. Beale succeeded in winning this concession by emphasizing the "good character, hospital and educational work done by the missionaries."<sup>34</sup> In addition, he instituted the practice of obtaining the seal of the Grand Vizier on each deed of property purchased by Americans, guaranteeing the rights of the missionaries to hold

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<sup>33</sup>Yeselson, Persian Diplomatic Relations, p. 41.

<sup>34</sup>Foreign Relations, No. 26 dated Dec. 5, 1891, p. 355.

the property.<sup>35</sup> The inability of the missionaries to have property in their own names had been a source of dissatisfaction between the Persians and the missionaries; the missionaries were grateful for Beale's significant achievement.

Two major events occurred in Persia during this period. The first was the major protest and open resistance to the Shah over the granting of a tobacco monopoly to the British Imperial Tobacco Corporation. The Persian people, led by the religious leaders, organized a mass movement declaring that the tobacco was unclean, since it was now being processed by Christians, and they forbade smoking until the Shah cancelled the monopoly. The mullah claimed the growth or sale of tobacco in Persia by foreigners was against the Koran and Islam. Tobacco was universally used in the country at this time and practically a necessity for Persians; however, the protest was so successful that no Persian dared to smoke in public. The Shah was forced to cancel the concession and the alliance between mullah, reformers, and discontented population won an important victory.<sup>36</sup>

Beale was impressed with the power of the mullah. He explained in a despatch to the Department that "A mullah is simply a priest and not a member of any organization like the Church of England,...but by common consent a body of them

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<sup>35</sup>Foreign Relations, No. 26 dated Dec. 5, 1891, p. 355.

<sup>36</sup>Nikki R. Keddi, Religion and Rebellion in Iran: The Tobacco Protest of 1891-1892 (London, 1966), pp. 1-29.

came together, carried on negotiations and correspondence with the Shah, made demands and concessions and concluded an understanding with him."<sup>37</sup> He felt that the protective organization of the mullahs must have been the work of the Russians by "provoking anti-foreign demonstrations in order to impede the development of Persia by Western enterprise."<sup>38</sup>

Beale's sudden decision to resign and depart from Persia was hastened by a cholera epidemic in the winter of 1892. Again, the post in Teheran was left vacant, after only one year. The attitude of the State Department regarding the vacancy and the country of Persia was again made unambiguously clear in a letter from Secretary John W. Foster appointing Watson R. Sperry to the position. "We are now without any representative in Teheran, and while the necessities of the Government are not very great, there might be some inconvenience to American residents in that country in having the post remain vacant a great while."<sup>39</sup>

Sperry served in Teheran only eight months, but during that short period, he became involved in problems of harassment of American missionaries in the major Persian city of Tabriz. These missionaries were forced again to turn to the local British official for protection and the British Government was not eager to play too active a role since they did

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<sup>37</sup>Foreign Relations, No. 30 dated June 11, 1891, p. 357.

<sup>38</sup>Yeselson, Persian Diplomatic Relations, p. 43.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 46.



not want to give the Russians any pretext to exploit Persia's religious fanaticism. It was Sperry's action that resulted in the appointment of a consul to Tabriz whose main purpose would be to protect the missionaries.

A recent closing of a school and church in Tabriz provoked the State Department to request Sperry to press a claim for the losses suffered.<sup>40</sup> He realized the weakness of the American presence and its inability to protect the missionaries; therefore, he suggested that the State Department should show the Persian government the extent of its seriousness by demonstrating visibly the power of the United States, perhaps by sending a warship to the Persian Gulf. Of course, the State Department decided against such a display and did not prosecute the claim.<sup>41</sup>

Sperry's successor, Alexander McDonald, received his appointment on September 3, 1883 and held it for four years. He was enthusiastic about Persia, much in the manner of Pratt; however, McDonald's tour was marked by increasing unrest and lawlessness in the country. The Shah's power was weakened as the result of his backing down during the Tobacco Protest, and McDonald's role of protecting American citizens and property became increasingly important. In an attempt to have a thief

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<sup>40</sup>Despatch from U.S. Minister, Roll # 6, July 28, 1892 to August 29, 1894, Dip. Ser. No. 50 dated May 29, 1893.

<sup>41</sup>Foreign Relations, No. 13 dated Jan. 25, 1893.



punished for having robbed an American missionary, McDonald remarked, "The administration of justice in Persia is most peculiar--'how to do it' seeming to be their aim. By a system of delays, annoyances, and pecuniary demands parties accused and accusing are subjected to such vexations as to yield in hopeless despair of having justice done them. It is this state of things that I am seeking to overcome in this case in point...."<sup>42</sup>

The inability or unwillingness of the central government to enforce the laws of the land in even the major cities of Persia during these years created increasing difficulties for Christian, Persian, and American missionaries. The exalted position of the mullah in the society and the weakness of the Shah enabled the mullah to defy local government authority at will.<sup>43</sup> A request by Rev. James W. Hawkes to McDonald to intervene in his behalf with the government in Teheran for permission to open a school in Kermanshah, which was previously refused by the governor of the province, was forwarded to the Shah. The Christian community there consisted of about six to eight families, almost all of whom were Catholic, while the Jewish families numbered about four hundred. It was from these groups of families that Mr. Hawkes planned to draw his

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<sup>42</sup>Despatch from U.S. Minister, Dip. Ser. No. 6 dated June 21, 1893 and No. 7 dated Oct. 19, 1893.

<sup>43</sup>Yeselson, Persian Diplomatic Relations, p. 45.

pupils.<sup>44</sup> The Shah rejected the request, citing the distance of Kermanshah from the capital, the turbulent and fanatical character of the people and the tribes in the neighborhood, and pressure from religious leaders. The safety and welfare of the property and individuals as well as the state were the factors that forced the Shah to decide on the inadvisability of opening the school at that time. These matters were reported to the State Department by the minister.<sup>45</sup>

Mr. Hawkes was a missionary in Hamadan while he was trying to start a school in Kermanshah. He reported that the local akhund, mullah Abdullah, a local ecclesiastical leader, was behind the renewal of persecution of Jews in Hamadan and was instrumental in stirring up resistance against establishing the school in Kermanshah. He was described by John Tyler, Vice Consul General in charge of the U.S. legation in Teheran as a "violent bigot and fanatic and this phase of his character, in the eyes of the common people, throws a halo of sanctity around his person."<sup>46</sup>

Popular unrest occurred throughout Persia, all of which was symbolic of the degree of decay that existed in the country and the failure of the central authority "to cope effectively

<sup>44</sup>p. 499. Foreign Relations, No. 133 dated Jan. 28, 1894, Encl. 1,

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., No. 108 dated June 18, 1894, p. 491.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., No. 113 dated July 12, 1894, p. 493.

with any demonstration against its authority."<sup>47</sup> These conditions were reported to the U.S. State Department, but Secretary of State W.Q. Gresham could not comprehend the reason Persia was unable to provide "due protection".<sup>48</sup>

The main center of cancer for the American minister was in northwestern Persia and the area bordering the Ottomans, where nomadic Kurds were massacring Christians there in the vicinity of Lake Van. American missionaries first carried the knowledge of the disorders to Persia. McDonald reported to Secretary of State Richard Olney of the fears existing around the mission stations in Tabriz, Khoi, Urmia, and Salmas--all in Azerbaijan Province--concerning incursions from across the border or native outbreaks. They were also nervous over hearing local mullah saying that they must naturally side with the Ottomans.<sup>49</sup> The success of the Kurds in massacring and plundering Christians had excited some Moslems in Persia, who joined the plundering; the bazaars in the region of Tabriz were filled with plunder. The American minister tried to enlist the other western nations in action in case of riots in Teheran but to no avail. Missionaries requested an armed guard to assist Armenians, Nestorians,

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<sup>47</sup>Foreign Relations, No. 51 dated Mar. 29, 1894, p. 488.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., Enclosure 1 in No. 122 dated Apr. 24, 1894, p. 498.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., No. 218 dated Dec. 14, 1895, p. 466.

and Jews trapped in Van to migrate to Persia. Both the Persian government and the U.S. Minister refused to take any action as it would constitute armed invasion of another country.<sup>50</sup> The Secretary of State concurred in this,<sup>51</sup> and the Department continued to urge the Persian government to insure adequate protection of Christian lives. The government earnestly endeavored to extend protection to all people living in Persia; however, its police force was deficient and corrupt.

Disturbances again broke out in Hamadan between the Moslems and the sizeable (3,000) Jewish population living in the city. Jews had lived there from biblical times and many had gained positions of wealth which excited the envy of their neighbors. Differences between the civil officials and mullah led to a breakdown of authority which resulted in disorder and other excesses against the Jews. Several American missionaries working in Hamadan at this time requested the U.S. Minister to intercede with the Persian government for the safety of the Jews.<sup>52</sup> The action by the government finally brought peace and an orderly state of affairs to the city. These disorders and threats to the lives of non-Moslem groups continued to be the main concern of American diplomacy in a

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<sup>50</sup>Foreign Relations, No. 224 dated Jan. 22, 1896, p. 469.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., No. 139 dated Mar. 3, 1896, p. 470.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., No. 260 dated Oct. 7, 1896, p. 482.



country wherein the U.S. had little political, strategic, or commercial involvement.<sup>53</sup>

The internal disorder and weakness of the central government eventually led to the assassination of the Shah. On May 1, 1896, the Shah was visiting a shrine for devotion when a man disguised as a woman shot him in the heart.<sup>54</sup> The new Shah, Muzaffar-ed-Din Shah, was proclaimed Shah on the same day. According to a report to the State Department, he employed as his personal physician, Dr. George W. Holmes, a member of the American Presbyterian Mission in Hamadan.<sup>55</sup>

The new Shah issued a decree in January 1897 banning the importation of all books, both religious and secular. McDonald protested to the Minister of Foreign Affairs that this ruling was unjust to foreigners residing in Persia and contrary to the spirit of the times.<sup>56</sup> The Minister of Foreign Affairs replied that the restriction was only on sacred and religious books brought in for the purpose of free distribution to Persians for the propagation of an alien religion, and it had been issued to placate the populace which was being urged on

<sup>53</sup>Yeselson, Persian Diplomatic Relations, p. 49.

<sup>54</sup>Foreign Relations, "Assassination of the Shah," Telegram from McDonald to Olney dated May 1, 1896, p. 488.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., No. 241 dated May 4, 1896, p. 488.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., No. 178 dated Jan. 25, 1897, p. 427.

by the mullahs.<sup>57</sup> Like many other Persian laws during this era, McDonald noted that this one was not strictly enforced.<sup>58</sup>

McDonald was replaced after the new Republican administration of President William McKinley had assumed office. McKinley continued the Cleveland policy of non-intervention and no entanglement, although he insisted on protection of the national honor and the lawful rights of U.S. citizens throughout the world.<sup>59</sup> McDonald's successor, Arthur S. Hardy, was appointed to the post on July 12, 1897. He was a novelist, former editor of Cosmopolitan Magazine, and a mathematician, and was assuming his first diplomatic assignment. Hardy's chief concern in Teheran was the same as McDonald's--protection of the missionaries under disturbed conditions and a breakdown of effective law and order in the country.

Rev. Mehran Bagdasarian, a naturalized American citizen and a missionary for the Disciples of Christ, was arrested by Persian authorities and accused of protecting and helping Armenian revolutionists. In arresting him, the Persians violated the rights of an American citizen, and Hardy and Consul General Tyler protested to the Persian government, although they felt little sympathy toward Bagdasarian. They considered

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<sup>57</sup>Foreign Relations, Enclosure 2 in No. 282 dated Feb. 20, 1897, p. 429.

<sup>58</sup>Yeselson, Persian Diplomatic Relations, p. 50.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

him to be a man who had sought American naturalization in order to gain protection of the flag but thereafter one who evaded the duties of citizenship.<sup>60</sup>

Although Hardy attempted to secure a policy statement from the State Department regarding action to be taken by the U.S. Minister in Persia in protecting these "pseudo-citizens" as well as native-born Americans, the Department could deny protection to any person returning to Persia after naturalization.<sup>61</sup> Hardy became very disturbed over his inability to defend "bona fide" American citizens when mistreated. He noted that both Britain and Russia could resort to economic pressure to enforce their demands; whereas he could use only an argument and moral suasion.<sup>62</sup> The protest and action was, in the case of Bagdasarian, sufficient for the Persian government to release him and even force the governor of Azerbaijan to pay an indemnity of two hundred tomans to the Armenian.<sup>63</sup> Secretary of State John Hay agreed with Hardy's feeling on naturalized American citizens living abroad and the latter was authorized to refuse protection if, upon investigation, he was satisfied that the privilege of naturalization was being abused.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Foreign Relations, No. 38 dated Aug. 8, 1898, p. 525.

<sup>61</sup>Yeselson, Persian Diplomatic Relations, p. 52.

<sup>62</sup>Foreign Relations, No. 45 dated Dec. 21, 1898, p. 528.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., No. 38, dated Feb. 2, 1899, p. 529.



Hardy also developed strong feelings over Russia's role in northern Persia. A Russian mission of the Orthodox Church was operating in the north among the Armenians and Nestorians and was gradually displacing the Presbyterian and Roman Catholic missionaries in that area. When asked by American missionaries for guidance, Hardy replied that as a consequence of the proximity of Russia and the feebleness of the Persian government, it would be unwise to protest on the general ground that the Persian government was not in a position vigorously to maintain religious liberty.<sup>65</sup>

Hardy was replaced by Herbert W. Bowen on May 3, 1899. A career diplomat and the then publisher of a newspaper, The Independent,<sup>66</sup> he switched the legation outlook from one of defeatist pessimism to positive hopefulness. Some of his predecessors had backed down from efforts to stimulate American trade with Persia, to persuade the American government to move to greater involvement, and to curb Russian influence in Persia. Bowen took the offensive in all of these areas. He adopted the idea expressed by President McKinley in his second inaugural address, "In this age of keen rivalry among nations for mastery in commerce, the doctrine of evolution and the rule of survival of the fittest must be as inexorable in these

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<sup>65</sup>Yeselson, Persian Diplomatic Relations, p. 53.

<sup>66</sup>Malone, Dictionary of American Biography, II, pp. 505-506.



operations as they are positive in the results they bring about."<sup>67</sup> The State Department could not dispute these ideas of Bowen for they coincided with the Open Door Policy being pursued by the U.S. in China; however, such a precipitous change from previous policy and the distinct possibility of the U.S. becoming involved in Persia as it was now deeply interested elsewhere in the world resulted in a negative response from Washington. Bowen was urged not to provoke Russia by any action that might be considered unfriendly by that country.<sup>68</sup> Through the application of the principles of the Open Door Policy, Bowen had hoped to contain the expansionist ideas and influence of Russia within Persia.<sup>69</sup> He forced the State Department to consider the application of the China policy to Persia, but they backed off and disavowed his thrust.

Bowen then tried to interest Britain and Germany in efforts to keep at least the southern part of Persia free from the Russian influence. He was concerned that Britain, once dominant in Persia, was interested now only in keeping a purely commercial relation there.<sup>70</sup> His efforts and enthusiasm to secure the support of these European powers proved as futile

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<sup>67</sup>Richardson, Messages of Presidents, X, p. 143.

<sup>68</sup>Yeselson, Persian Diplomatic Relations, p. 55.

<sup>69</sup>Thomas A. Bryson, American Diplomatic Relations with the Middle East, 1784-1975 (Metuchen, N.J., 1977), p. 42.

<sup>70</sup>George Lenczowski, Russia and the West in Iran, 1918-1948 (Ithaca, 1949), p. 4.

as his importunings of his own State Department, and, in 1901, he was replaced by Lloyd C. Griscom who reverted to the more traditional attitude of the U.S. toward Persia.

At the turn of the century, the U.S.-Persian diplomatic relationship remained substantially unchanged from what it had been since its inauguration over fifteen years earlier. American ministers who had advocated more aggressive policies both in political and economic spheres were ignored or instructed to tone down their enthusiasm. Nonetheless these early years established the basis for the relationship between the two countries which survived until 1940. Both nations were on the verge of extensive and dynamic experiences, the U.S. becoming a world power with worldwide interests and Persia sliding down the road of chaos and revolution preparatory to entering a new phase of revival and reconstruction in the twentieth century.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CLIMAX--THE LABAREE MURDER

On March 8, 1904, Reverend Benjamin W. Labaree, an American missionary living in Urmia, was murdered by Kurdish tribesmen and religious fanatics in northern Persia.<sup>1</sup> This event was, "in a sense, the culmination of the first twenty years of diplomatic relations between the two countries."<sup>2</sup> It brought into focus some basic elements in United States-Persian relations: the degree of influence of a special-interest group--the missionaries--in shaping American foreign policy, and the weakness of the Shah's government in maintaining peace and security within Persia.

The murderer of Labaree was one Mir Ghaffar, a sayyid (a lineal descendant of Mohammad). Richmond Pearson, the American minister to Persia at the time, realized the significance of this fact and the difficulty that would surround the arrest and punishment of Ghaffar and his accomplices by the Persian government. The Shah decided that because of his ancestral background, Mir Ghaffar would not be executed, as was hoped for by the missionaries, but that he would receive a sentence of life imprisonment with the stipulation that no further action be taken so long as the Kurds in Urmia maintained good behavior. The Persian government suggested a

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<sup>1</sup>Foreign Relations, No. 44 dated April 18, 1906, pp. 658-659.

<sup>2</sup>Yeselson, Persian Diplomatic Relations, p. 82.

payment to Labaree's widow of "Thirty thousand dollars cash gold."<sup>3</sup> She agreed to these arrangements and Pearson considered the Persian government's decision a practical application of the laws of common sense, which would guarantee security of rather than cause additional danger to Christians in that area.<sup>4</sup> On January 11, 1905, the United States Department of State informed Pearson that the Labaree murder case was closed;<sup>5</sup> even though the missionaries did not agree and had no intention of dismissing the matter so casually. The Department was delighted with this favorable turn of events which had once again avoided an untenable position for the United States in a part of the world where the country's national interest was minimal.

In contrast to the decision of the State Department, the missionaries were greatly disturbed and protested against the terms of the settlement, in spite of the Persian government having met all conditions set forth by the American government. The American "missionaries complain and assert that the British Government renders them more assistance than does their own;..."<sup>6</sup> was the description of the missionaries' attitude

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<sup>3</sup>Foreign Relations, No. 80 dated Sep. 21, 1904 encl. Telegram dated Dec. 28, 1904, p. 676.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., No. 113 dated April 20, 1905, p. 728.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., Telegram dated Jan. 11, 1905, p. 727.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., No. 121, dated Oct. 7, 1905, p. 733.



as expressed by Pearson in his despatch to the State Department. They insisted that all Kurds involved in the Labaree murder should be tried and punished by death, and it was their intransigence which ballooned the incident to international proportions. Some of the accomplices of Mir Ghaffar had escaped across the Ottoman border. In order that the Persian government comply with the request of the United States State Department that they be punished according to their guilt, the Persian government had to mount an expeditionary force to cross the Ottoman border and capture them. This insistence by the missionaries for the Persian government to act and not to evade its responsibility made Pearson suggest to the State Department that an American squadron be despatched to the Persian Gulf as a show of force in support of American demands. The Department was reluctant to take this action, and did not consider it a suitable response to the dilemma that the missionaries had gotten the United States into both domestically where she was nudged by the Foreign Mission Board in New York City as well as in Persia. The new American Consul of Tabriz, William F. Doty was requested by the missionaries to accompany the Persian forces into the Ottoman land in their pursuit of the Kurds. Border fighting broke out and resulted in an invasion of Persia by the Ottomans, which reportedly threatened the safety of some fourteen missionaries living in the area. Both the British and American ministers to the Ottoman Empire were asked by the United States State Department to intervene with the Ottomans to insure the lives and safety of missionaries in the area.

Ottoman forces occupied border areas of Persia, but as it turned out they did not threaten the safety of the missionaries, nor did they even come into their area.

Report from Consul General Tyler in Teheran, however, advised that the Persian government had used the excuse of the Labaree murder to redress a number of grievances against the Ottomans. The United States government rejected the Persian claim that the United States was to blame for Persia's defeat at the hands of the Ottomans. Ottoman troops, the Persians charged, had invaded their land, killed Persians, Armenians, and other Christians, and captured \$100,000 worth of Persian equipment; the United States should repay Persia for the losses. The State Department flatly refused any responsibility for the invasion of Ottoman lands until the day they received a cable from Consul Doty boasting that he had encouraged the Persians to act against the Kurds and even to follow Persian forces into Ottoman territory. His only regret was that the Ottomans interfered.<sup>6</sup> He was reprimanded subsequently by the Department for taking action contrary to the best interests and one which might have embarrassed the United States government.

The United States finally disentangled itself from the controversial incident by informing its minister that the United States had relinquished its demand for immediate punishment of the accessories to the murder and the assurance of a trial of those who had escaped the country were they ever to return. With the death of the murderer from natural causes

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<sup>6</sup>Yeselson, Persian Diplomatic Relations, pp. 77-78.

while in prison and the Persian payment to Mrs. Labaree, the United States government considered that the maximum justice possible under Persian law had been achieved.

This event in the diplomatic history of the two nations emphasized three important factors in relationships between the two countries during the late nineteenth century. Perhaps most important is the manner by which the physical presence of the missionaries living in Persia influenced United States foreign policy. The second is the determination of the United States government to remain aloof from involvement in the internal affairs of other nations. The third is the position and character of Persia itself--geographically, politically, and culturally.

The missionaries' influence on the United States government made both a positive and a negative contribution to the United States foreign policy. The negative effect was the shoving of a reluctant nation into the affairs of another country when that nation, the United States, had no overt interest in the other--either commercially, or politically, or strategically. They demanded special treatment from the United States government and used British influence when the American power was insufficient to meet their needs. They could be considered pampered and respectful only of the laws of God, which they sometimes interpreted in a manner most advantageous to their position. On the positive side, the missionaries forced their reluctant country to implicate herself in an area that was important to the world. Through their schools, hospitals, and

personal integrity, they established a foundation of trust, respect, and admiration between the U.S. and Persia that extends to the present day. There remain hospitals whose origins come from the missionaries and avenues are named to honor the memory of those missionaries whom the Persian people had loved and admired.<sup>7</sup>

The second factor was that the outlook of the Monroe Doctrine still survived in the late nineteenth century. Neither the people of the United States nor their government displayed any great interest in Persia, and it was only the power and influence of the friends of the missionaries that maneuvered Congress into opening formal diplomatic relations with one of the oldest nations in the world. Once that was accomplished, the United States government maintained only a passive interest there. It neither had the will, interest, nor physical power necessary to enforce its interests in that distant part of the world. It is this fact that made American missionaries look toward British diplomatic officials in Persia, on numerous occasions, for protection and guidance. American ministers to Persia who became impressed with the peculiarities of the Persian situation, her vast economic potential and strategic importance, and the threat of the growth of Russian influence were either ignored or reprimanded by the Department of State for overzealousness and were reminded of the basis of United States foreign policy--that of non-intervention and

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<sup>7</sup>One of the main avenues in Teheran today is named Jordan, after the American missionary who founded Alborz College.



non-involvement in the affairs of Persia. Although the government sent ministers to Persia to protect United States citizens living there--mainly the missionaries--the ministers were unable to furnish that protection. Many of the missionaries vividly emphasized this fundamental fact.

The third factor--the expectation of Persian authorities that the United States could somehow provide protective assistance against Russian pressures--requires a detailed study of Perso-Russian relations for thorough understanding. It can be said that in the Persian's view this third factor was genuine. They were unwilling to enlist the aid of other European nations, but saw the United States as a country of great strength and having no vested designs of acquiring power within Persia. The Persians wooed Americans in a manner similar to that of the suitor wooing his lady. All of Persia's advances were rejected by the United States. The Department of State displayed no interest in fostering trade with or investments in Persia. The United States ministers who became enthusiastic over the potential wealth of Persia were ignored and reminded rather peremptorily by the Department of the United States' determined lack of interest in Persia. United States business interests virtually ignored Persia during this period.

After the Labaree murder, world events and commercial interests began to force America to adopt new policies and attitudes toward Persia. Missionary influence over American policy gradually gave way to commercial and economic interests

in molding the American position in the twentieth century. As a powerful industrial nation it forced her to recognize finally the importance of Persia both economically and strategically. The lasting effects of the missionaries' good works of the nineteenth century formed the basis for a solid and lasting friendship and goodwill between the United States and Persia.

## APPENDIX I

UNITED STATES DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATIVES  
IN IRAN\*

## Charge d'Affaires and Consuls General

S.G.W. Benjamin, New York, January 29, 1883.

## Ministers Resident and Consuls General

S.G.W. Benjamin, New York, February 17, 1883.  
Frederick H. Winston, Illinois, October 18, 1885.  
E. Spencer Pratt, Alabama, August 3, 1886.  
Truxton Beale, California, February 17, 1891.  
Watson R. Sperry, Delaware, July 17, 1892.  
Alexander McDonald, Virginia, September 8, 1893.  
Arthur S. Hardy, New Hampshire, July 12, 1897.  
Herbert W. Bowen, New York, May 3, 1899.

## Envoys Extraordinary and Ministers Plenipotentiary

Herbert W. Bowen, New York, May 1, 1901.  
Lloyd C. Griscom, Pennsylvania, June 17, 1901.  
Richmond Pearson, North Carolina, December 17, 1902.

\*Excerpted from Annex I of Cultural Ties between Iran and the United States by Ali Pasha Saleh (Teheran: Sherkat-e-Chapkhaneh Bisto panj-e-Shahrivar, 1976), p. 271. Dates refer to dates of appointment.

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