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“Dear Anthony,” “Dear Leo:” Britain’s Quixotic Flirtation With Dynastic Change in Iran During World War II*

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In the midst of the Second World War, with the British unable to persuade Reza Shah Pahlavi, the ruler of Iran, to reduce the large number of Germans in his country—Germans they feared would sabotage vital oil installations or succeed in installing a pro-German, anti-British government in Tehran—Leo Amery, the secretary of state for India, penned a note to the foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, with an unusual proposal. Amery took as his starting point one of several cables from Sir Reader Bullard, the British envoy to Iran. Bullard had been stressing Reza Shah’s growing unpopularity and the serious damage that he thought Britain suffered because of its association, in the mind of Iranians, with the “universally detested” king. Referring

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*British Foreign Office (FO) documents cited Archives at Kew.
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to Reza Shah disparagingly as Reza Khan, the Shah's common name before he seized power and overthrew the ruling Qajar (Kajar) dynasty to become king in his own right, Amery wrote:

My dear Anthony:

I see from Bullard's telegram 202 that things are getting very shaky in Persia and that Reza Khan is universally detested. When considering our policy in that connection don't forget that the legitimate Shah, the younger brother of the late Shah, Prince Hassan Kajar, is in this country and could if necessary be flown out at any moment. He is still quite young (in the forties) and is a man who showed both courage and ability in the years in which he acted as Viceroy before being driven out...Prince Hassan might yet prove a trump card, and I know he would be willing to try his hand if we wished it.¹

Not surprisingly, this proposal for British involvement in the restoration of a little-regretted Iranian dynasty met with a lukewarm response from the foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, and his Middle East staff at the Foreign Office.² Yet this was not the end of the matter. Amery's quixotic proposal, initially dismissed, took on a life its own due principally to Amery's unflagging persistence but also to developments on the ground. Following the Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran in August, 1941 what began as a far-fetched idea for dynastic change was almost embraced as official British policy and came close to costing the Pahlavis the throne. This article recounts the birth, life, and death of this curious episode in Anglo-Iranian relations in the Second World War.

But first some background.

The Prince Hassan to whom Amery referred was the younger brother of Ahmad Shah, the last ruler of the Qajar dynasty. Ahmad Shah had acceded to the throne in 1909 when still a minor, coming of age only in 1915. He had proved a timid and ineffective ruler who seemed to prefer the watering holes of Europe to the political machinations of Tehran. By 1921, the Qajars had been thoroughly discredited. A powerful national movement had forced Ahmad Shah's grandfather to grant the country its first constitution in 1906. Ahmad Shah's father had been deposed in 1909 after he bombarded parliament and attempted to quash the new, hard-won constitution. Ahmad Shah himself had accepted a substantial monetary bribe from the

¹Amery to Eden, 16 May 1941, E 1872/933/34, in FO 371/27196.

²"Middle East staff" is used in this essay for members of what was officially known as the Eastern Department.

British government to support the unpopular and eventually abortive Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919 which, in the eyes of many Iranians, would have turned Iran into a British protectorate in all but name.

In February 1921, Reza Khan, then a military officer, along with a co-plotter, Seyyed Zia Tabataba'i, had staged a coup in the name of reform. Reza Khan initially left Ahmad Shah on the throne, but he rapidly consolidated power in his own hands and launched a program of sweeping change. He built up the army, subdued the restless tribes, reestablished central authority, and began to address the country's long-neglected problems. Within two years, Reza Khan was the virtual master of Iran; the shah had been reduced to a cipher. In November 1923, a thoroughly frightened Ahmad Shah agreed to appoint Reza Khan prime minister; he left immediately for Europe, never to return. In his absence, his younger brother and the crown prince, Hassan, took over his duties. In October 1925, parliament deposed the Qajars and in December a constituent assembly named Reza Khan shah and founder of a new dynasty, the Pahlavis. Prince Hassan was now unceremoniously escorted to the Iraqi border and also made his way to Europe. By 1941, he had been absent from the country for sixteen years. It was this prince, whom Amery insisted on describing as "the legitimate Shah," and this deposed dynasty that Amery proposed to bring back to power. His goal, of course, was to establish in Tehran a monarch sympathetic and pliant to Britain's war needs.

As already noted, the response at the Foreign Office to Amery's suggestion was unenthusiastic. "Prince Hassan is not a good candidate," and only heavy bribery could generate a local demand for him, noted A. V. Coverley Price, one of the foreign office officials in London dealing with Iran. "The mere fact that he came from England would make him *persona non grata* in Iran, unless he brought a shower of gold with him." His colleague, C. W. Baxter added: "I fear that the Kajar ex-Valiahd [crown prince] is by no means a strong candidate." Horace Seymour, the assistant under-secretary of state for foreign affairs, who had served as minister in Iran in 1936-1939, was equally skeptical: a movement in Iran in favor of a Qajar restoration was unlikely, he noted. Moreover, British promotion of dynastic change in Iran could lead to Russian intervention.³ Eden took his time—two weeks—to reply to Amery. His note, incorporating the views of his staff, particularly Seymour's, was polite but dismissive:

³Minutes by Coverley Price, Baxter and Seymour, 16 May 1941, E 1872/933/34, in FO 371/27196. written on the cover folder of Amery to Eden,

My dear Leo:

The Qajar candidate might possibly be useful in the event of any movement in Persia for the return of the Qajar dynasty. I think, however, that such a movement is unlikely. It seems more probable that, when the Shah loses his grip, the Pahlevi dynasty will be succeeded by some general who is able to seize power. This is the normal thing in Persian history.

I would not be in favor of an attempt by us to promote a revolution in Persia, especially as this would very likely result in Russian intervention.”⁴

Amery, however, was not to be deterred; and this resulted in an exchange over several months of personal notes between “dear Anthony” and “dear Leo.” Amery continued to press his case for a Qajar restoration under Prince Hassan (or possibly under his younger son, Prince Hamid), and Eden and his Middle East staff at the Foreign Office continued politely to discourage what they regarded as an impractical idea. In pursuit of his cause, Amery in time tried to enlist the support of British diplomats, retired and active, who had served in Iran; he invoked an endorsement for his cause from the government of India; and he even pressed the idea on Prime Minister Churchill—all to little effect. Yet this was hardly the end of the matter. Events played into Amery’s hands; and what initially seemed improbable and impractical became, for a moment, a possibility, then almost a reality.

Operation Barbarossa, Hitler’s invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June, 1941 turned Russia and Britain into allies. Both countries were disturbed by the large German presence in Iran and now joined hands to pressure Reza Shah to send the Germans home. The allies also wished to employ the Iranian road network and particularly the recently-completed trans-Iranian railway to supply an embattled Russia with arms and other essential requirements. Unable to secure Reza Shah’s cooperation regarding the Germans and urgently in need of a supply route to the Soviet Union, Britain and the USSR began to coordinate pressure on the shah and, already by the last week of July, to plan for the use of military force if necessary. This provided Amery with an opening to revive the idea of a Qajar restoration.

On July 25, he noted in his diary: “Spoke again to Anthony about Prince Hassan: he has obviously done nothing and is not very alive to possibilities there.”⁵ In another note to “dear Anthony” on July 30, after weighing in on the advisability of military action, Amery once again proposed setting up Prince Hassan as king. “Please don’t

⁴Eden to Amery, 4 June 1941, FO 371/27196.

Diaries 1929-1945, ed. Leo Barnes and David

⁵Leo Amery, *The Empire at Bay: The Leo Amery*

Nicolson (London: Hutchinson, 1988), 698-99.

forget that we have a possible Pretender here in the legitimate Shah, Prince Hassan, if the present Shah should prove really recalcitrant...[Prince Hassan] could of course be flown out very quickly.” Amery wasn’t quite sure where Hassan lived, but he offered, discreetly, to find his address, “as we know him quite well personally.”⁶ He followed this letter up with a handwritten note to Eden, suggesting the FO consult British diplomats who had served in Iran and who knew Prince Hassan when he was crown prince: “I think the best way of finding out how far he is likely to be acceptable in Persia, if we have to hash with Reza [Shah], is to ask Havard...or Percy Loraine. All I can say is that he is a very nice fellow, intelligent and undoubtedly our way.”⁷

The Foreign Office remained unconvinced. Seymour pointed out that consulting Percy Loraine, a former minister to Tehran or Godfrey Havard, who had served as oriental secretary at the Tehran legation and was now consul general in Beirut, would be pointless, since Loraine had left Iran in 1926 and Havard in 1933. Seymour thought the opinion of the diplomats in Tehran would more relevant than that of people “who have no present acquaintance with a rapidly changing situation.”⁸ Bullard, the British minister in Tehran, was in due course consulted. His response was unhelpful to Amery’s cause: “There is no enthusiasm for the Qajar [dynasty] ... and it is doubtful that any member of the family would find much local support,” he cabled to London.⁹ Seymour seconded Bullard’s assessment: “It does not look as if we should do much good by sending anyone of this family to Persia as our candidate,” he wrote. If Reza Shah went, he noted, succession by his eldest son, Mohammad Reza, would avoid confusion and suit England for that reason.¹⁰

Amery, however, persisted. Bullard’s views may be useful on Qajar prospects in general, he wrote to Eden, but it was Loraine and particularly Havard who could speak to “Prince Hassan’s personality and power of handling his own people which of course Bullard couldn’t.” Again, he urged Havard be consulted.¹¹ The FO demurred. There was no point in consulting Havard, C. W. Baxter noted, “since, whatever reply we received, the fact remains that Prince Hassan’s chances of mounting the throne are practically nil.”¹²

⁶Amery to Eden, India Office, July 30, 1941, E 4276/933/34, FO 371/27196.

⁷Amery to Eden, 30 July 1941, E 4276/923/34, FO 371/27196.

⁸Minutes by Coverly Price, Baxter and Seymour, 16 May 1941, E 1872/933/34, in FO 371/27196.

⁹Bullard to Foreign Office, No. 520, Tehran, 10

August, 1941, FO 371/27197.

¹⁰Seymour’s minute on Bullard to Foreign Office, No. 520, 10 August 1941, FO 371/27197.

¹¹Amery to Eden, 14 August 1941, E 4406/933/34, FO 371/27197.

¹²Minute by Baxter on Amery to Eden, 14 August 1941, FO 371/27197.

Amery also seems to have tried to enlist the support of Harold Nicolson, the retired diplomat and distinguished author, who had served as counsellor in the Tehran legation in 1925-27 and was currently a member of Parliament and a governor of the BBC. It was perhaps at Amery's instigation that Prince Hassan called on Nicolson in early August to say that should Britain "adopt an attitude of hostility to Reza Shah and the Pahlevi dynasty...there is an alternative Shah, waiting for us and anxious to help". Nicolson, writing of this visit in a "dear Anthony" note to Eden, also referred to Hassan as "the legitimate King of Kings;" but Nicolson was more cautious than Amery in advocating Hassan's candidacy. The prince, he noted, made no concrete proposals and was a bit vague. Moreover, Nicolson observed, while Reza Shah's crown prince, Mohammad Reza, was married to the king of Egypt's sister, Prince Hassan's second son and the putative heir of the Qajar dynasty [Hamid], was a British subject and had served in a branch of British merchant navy, under the name of Mr. Drummond. "How it came about that the King of Kings was so careless about his dynastic progeny as to allow his Valiahd [crown prince] to become a member of the British Merchant Navy and to speak no language except English, passes my comprehension."¹³

Eden, replying in similar letters to both "My dear Leo" and "My dear Harold" on August 18, reiterated Bullard's view that there would be little support among Iranians for a Qajar prince and that the current crown prince would be the best candidate should Reza Shah vacate the throne. "This is also my personal view," Eden added in his note to Amery. "I can recall no example in Persian history of a 'hark back' to an earlier dynasty." To Nicolson, he said, regarding Prince Hassan, "I don't like the idea of saddling ourselves with a candidate who might collapse at the first opposition," although "we should keep our hands free till we see how things are likely to shape."¹⁴

A disappointed Amery noted in his diary, "the FO at present favouring [Reza Shah's] son...and refusing to consider my friend Prince Hassan";¹⁵ however, he would not let the matter drop. Failing to secure from Reza Shah the expulsion of the Germans and in need of Iran's through routes, Britain and Russia invaded Iran on August 25 and occupied the country, although they initially refrained from entering the capital. That same morning, or the next day, Amery followed up with a telephone call to the Foreign Office and, unable to speak to Eden, spoke instead to Seymour. Add-

¹³Nicolson to Eden, 8 August, 1941, E 4586/3691/G; Eden to Nicolson, 18 August 1941 E 4594/933/34, FO 371/27197. E 4594/3691/G, FO 371/27197.

¹⁴Eden to Amery, 18 August 1941, E ¹⁵Amery, *Diaries*, 711.

ing a new twist to his advocacy, Amery was now also promoting Prince Hassan's younger son, Hamid, as a candidate for the throne, possibly as an early successor to his father.¹⁶ Hamid was the young man who, as Nicolson had noted, was raised in England, spoke no Persian, and had served in the British merchant navy under the name of David Drummond.

Seymour reported on this telephone conversation with Amery in a note to Eden's private secretary, Oliver Harvey. Amery, he wrote, had met Hamid and was urging that Eden or someone else at the FO meet with him as well. "Mr. Amery had been very much impressed with the young man who was he thought an excellent type and extremely English in outlook and appearance." Seymour added: "I do not quite see what I am to say to this young man if I see him, nor do I think a typically English outlook and appearance is at all a good asset for a claimant to the throne of the King of Kings."¹⁷ Eden's reaction to Amery's new overture was at once bemused and impatient; yet, as usual, he wished to keep his options open. On Seymour's memo, he penned a note to his staff: "I found L. Amery pouring all this stuff into P. M.'s ear when I arrived at [the prime minister's residence at] No. 10 Downing. I rebuked him! But we may as well have this young man in mind but not see him until we decide that we want to unseat the Shah."¹⁸

Amery's push for dynastic change in Iran did receive support from one major participant in these exchanges--the Government of India. Both before and after the Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran, India had argued for a policy towards Iran more forceful than the gradualist and nuanced approach favored by the Foreign Office. An impatient India government at one stage even accused the Foreign Office of "appeasement" towards the Iranian government. India, for example, argued early for using economic pressure to secure the expulsion of the Germans—a policy the Foreign Office concluded would not be effective, at least not quickly enough and if not backed up by the threat of force. India was also an early proponent for demanding from the Iranians the use of the Iranian road network and the trans-Iranian railway to supply the USSR, a

¹⁶The suggestion that, after a short stint as shah, Prince Hassan might be succeeded by his younger son is discussed in more detail later in this paper.

¹⁷Seymour to Private Secretary, 26 August, 1941, E5316/3326/34, FO 371/27210. Amery had met with Prince Hamid that morning and noted in his diary: "Then young Hamid Kadjjar whom I had not seen for some time and who has developed into a most attractive virile young man. He earnestly

urged the point that it must surely be to our interests after the war to have a Persian ruling family thoroughly English in its outlook... Personally, I would back the Kadjar, in spite of the incompetence of the two previous rulers, but Anthony seems very sticky." See Amery, *Diaries*, 711.

¹⁸Eden's comments are written on the margins of Seymour's note. See Seymour to Private Secretary, 26 August, 1941, E5316/3326/34, FO 371/27210.

demand Eden thought it wiser to raise only after the German issue had been addressed. When the invasion took place, the government of India joined the chiefs of staff in calling for extensive demands on the Iranian government including the control of communications lines, ports and airports and occupation of large parts of the country.¹⁹

The government of India was much impressed by Bullard's frequent assertions that Britain suffered standing and sympathy among Iranians because of its association with Reza Shah. Against this background, it embraced Amery's idea of unseating Reza Shah and the Pahlavi dynasty and restoring the Qajars.

In late August, following the Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran, Amery was pleased to send to Eden a copy of a cable from the viceroy in India, Lord Linlithgow who, "not on any instigation of mine," Amery wrote, endorsed the Hassan candidacy. Linlithgow in fact echoed Amery's views and, as Eden was later to remark, showed little appreciation of the realities on the ground in Iran. Linlithgow wrote:

"Question whether we should continue to deal with the Shah is issue of fundamental importance.... We suggest question of restoration of Qajar dynasty might have possibilities.... Mohammad Hassan was Prince Regent in Tehran [prior to] accession of Reza Shah and though absent from Persia for some 16 years had some reputation for dignity and statesmanship. Restoration of the old regime might succeed in some degree in rallying natives and hereditary leaders of the country."²⁰

In a "dear Anthony" cover letter enclosing the Linlithgow cable, Amery added further words of support for Prince Hassan's claim and the Qajars in general: "Remember they are not merely a family, but a large tribe, numbering I believe hundreds of thousands...presumably they would support a restoration." As to Prince Hassan: "I know him as a charming, courteous gentleman...and generally pretty shrewd. As to his sons, they are quite remarkable specimens of fine, virile Englishmen (in all except complexion)."²¹

¹⁹See, for example, references to India's accusation of appeasement and references to its call for economic pressure, access to Iran's railways, and use of force in Secretary of State to the Government of India, Draft, July 26, 1941, FO 371/27196.

²⁰Government of India to the Secretary of State for India, 29 August 1941, enclosed in Amery to Eden, 29 August 1941, E 5261/3326/34, FO 371/27209. The government of India contin-

ued to advocate the removal of Reza Shah. On September 4, Linlithgow cabled London: "We must have a Persian administration in being and a friendly population behind them. We can only secure this by eliminating the Shah or by rendering him impotent." Government of India to Secretary of State for India, No. 4766, 4 September 1941, E 5393/3326/34, FO 371/27211.

²¹Amery to Eden, 29 August 1941, FO 371/27209.

At the Foreign Office, H. A. Caccia, Eden's assistant private secretary, noted that Reza Shah had destroyed the power of the tribes, rendering them unimportant, and wryly added: "the fact that the young Qajars are 'fine, virile young Englishmen' surely puts them out of the running for the Persian throne? It would make them thoroughly suspect to the Russians as well as to the Persians." In a handwritten note in the red ink he often used, Eden also was dismissive of India's views although he did not entirely close the door on the Qajar option. "The pressure grows," he wrote. "Tho[ugh] India is notoriously wrong on all matters Persian, we may consider it desirable to give this further thought. We may not be able to buttress the Shah, and then what?"²²

To recap, then: up to and even after the Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran Amery's advocacy for a Qajar restoration had met with a decidedly cool reception at the Foreign Office and at the legation in Tehran. Both thought there was little support in Iran for Prince Hassan or for a return of the Qajars. Hassan personally aroused little enthusiasm; and while Amery thought it an asset that Hassan's sons were "two hefty, vigorous boys...thoroughly English in their outlook,"²³ Eden's staff considered the 'Englishness' of Hassan's sons a decided disadvantage for claimants to the Iranian throne.

Eden it is true, as was his wont, left his options open; but he offered no encouragement to Amery in his several "dear Leo" notes, nor to Nicolson. His minutes, addressed to his own staff, suggest exasperation with Amery's importunities and his attempt to win Churchill over to his cause. Eden's remark that the government of India tended to be "notoriously wrong on all things Persian" was not misplaced. Both India and Amery seemed to imagine an Iran of decades earlier. India, for example, looked improbably to "natives and hereditary leaders" to rally to the Qajars, and Amery seemed under the illusion that the Qajars were still a large tribe of tens of thousands, when in reality the Qajars no longer functioned as a tribe. Numerous members of the former royal family remained; but Qajar tribal solidarity had long dissipated.

Yet, on September 11, two weeks into the Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran, Eden agreed to meet with Prince Hassan and his son Hamid over lunch at Amery's house and, afterwards, to entertain the possibility of putting the Qajars back on the throne. He cabled Bullard:

²²Eden's comments are written in his own hand on Amery's letter. See, as above, Amery to Eden, 29 August 1941, E 5261/3326/34, FO 371/27209.

²³Amery to Eden, 16 May 1941, E 1872/933/34, in FO 371/27196. Amery himself also noted that the two young men were "almost too English for Persian purposes," but this didn't seem to give him any pause.

“Prince Hassan Qajar, the heir of the Qajar dynasty is in London and I have met with him and his son privately. He makes a fair impression. The son is an excellent type, but is Europeanized and does not speak Persian.

Prince Hassan would be prepared to go to Persia if there was a movement for replacing the Qajar dynasty on the throne. He would take his son with him...I do not (repeat not) wish you to discuss this possibility either with Persians or with your Soviet colleague at present but I should like your own views as to possibilities.”²⁴

Prince Hamid’s recollections of this meeting, recorded in a lengthy interview he gave some four decades later, are understandably fuzzy on some of the details, but remain nevertheless instructive. They confirm that the discussion that day touched on the possible return of Hassan to Iran and his installation as shah; and they also help us understand why Eden was eager to learn from Hassan whether, if he was returned to Iran, he would take Hamid back with him. There had been several meetings between his father and various British officials, Hamid recalled, and added:

One day, after lunch in London with Sir Anthony Eden and various other members of the British cabinet, my father and I, walking through Green Park, honestly thought that the next day we would be asked to return to Tehran...

I think the intention was to take back my father, but with a limited stay, as he was too colored by the older elements of the dynasty. And to try that approach first... before putting in a younger man of the newer generation...the impression I got was [that] it would be me.²⁵

Hamid and his father clearly read more than warranted into this meeting. Eden at this point had not yet made up his mind; he was still exploring his options. But the possibility of a Qajar restoration was now on the table, as was the idea that Hamid might replace his father on the throne after an interval. That evening, Amery noted in his diary that “the lunch went off very well, Anthony evidently liked young Hamid and had a really good talk afterwards with his father... Bullard is now being sounded as to the possibility of a Qajar restoration being spontaneously mooted from the Persian side.”²⁶ Eden’s deputy private secretary, Caccia, noted on Septem-

²⁴Eden to Bullard, No. 682, 11 September 1941, E 5588/3326/34, FO 371/27214.

²⁵Habib Ladjevardi (ed.), *Memoirs of Prince Hamid Kadjar* (Cambridge, MA: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University, 1966), 44

and 46-47. These ‘memoirs’ are in the form of a direct transcription of an interview conducted by the editor with Hamid Qajar, and this may explain the sometimes awkward wording in the text.

²⁶Amery, *Diaries*, 714.

ber 13: “Yesterday Sir R. Bullard was given authority to discuss question of succession – ‘including possibility of Prince Hassan.’”²⁷

This dramatic turn-around at the Foreign Office—from the initial dismissal of Amery’s proposal as far-fetched and impractical to its near embrace—requires explanation. Bullard had continued to hammer home his view of Reza Shah’s unpopularity; the harm association with him did to Britain’s standing with the Iranian people; and the desirability of unseating him. Once the Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran took place, Bullard also concluded that Reza Shah was obstructing Allied objectives in Iran, confirming his belief that Reza Shah must go. By the first week of September, he had won over the Foreign Office to his view, and Eden began to look for ways to bring about Reza Shah’s flight or abdication. The Allies in fact secured Reza Shah’s abdication when they finally sent their troops to occupy the capital on September 16—a step they had until then avoided. It was in this context—in the anticipation of and planning for the post-Reza Shah period—that Eden met with the Prince Hassan and his son, Hamid, and cabled Bullard for his views regarding a Qajar restoration.

The crown prince, Mohammad Reza, was the constitutional successor to the throne. However, Bullard had inadvertently created the impression at the Foreign Office that the crown prince would for various reasons be unsuitable for the succession. He reported to London the Russian ambassador’s unfavorable impression of the crown prince’s abilities. He erroneously attributed to Mohammad Reza Pahlavi pro-German sympathies and a role in obstructing Allied objectives in Iran.²⁸ On all these points, Bullard later scrambled to correct himself, but not before the damage was done. When the Anglo-Soviet entry into Tehran precipitated Reza Shah’s hasty abdication, Eden cabled Bullard that the crown prince was unacceptable as shah and asked for, and himself proposed, alternatives:

As regards succession, it seems to us that the Crown Prince must be ruled out on account of his well-known pro-German sympathies and we cannot regard Shah’s abdication in favor of his son as anything but a ruse to prolong anti-Allied policy... As we see it, possible alternative would be one of the younger Pahlevis or a Qajar restoration. Prince Hassan strikes me as tractable and intelligent but not as a strong personality, while his son Hamid is an excellent type, but speaks no Persian.²⁹

²⁷Inked note by H. A. Caccia, September 13, E5586/3326/34, FO 371/27214.

²⁸For Bullard’s unfavorable assessment of the crown prince, see for example Bullard to For-

eign Office, No. 742, 15 September 1941, FO 371/27216.

²⁹Foreign Office to Bullard, No. 720, 16 September 1941, FO 371/27216.

Ironically, it was Bullard, instrumental in persuading the Foreign Office to force Reza Shah from the throne, who now helped preserve the crown for the Pahlavis. Bullard thought highly of the man the shah had appointed as prime minister immediately following the Anglo-Soviet invasion. Mohammad Ali Foroughi was a respected elder statesman and scholar; and Bullard felt that both Foroughi and his foreign minister, Ali Soheili, were sincere in their desire to cooperate with the Allies and to begin a program of reform. The two men had shared with Bullard, in language both direct and indirect, their impatience with Reza Shah, their conviction that the shah remained an obstacle to change, and their wish to see him go. Soheili had told Bullard that, in the right circumstances, Reza Shah could be persuaded to abdicate.³⁰ Foroughi himself seems to have concluded that the intensity of British hostility to Reza Shah made it impossible for him to remain on the throne.³¹ Judging by Bullard's dispatches, these two men appear to have played a key role in convincing Bullard that the sensible policy would be to allow the succession of Mohammad Reza to go forward unimpeded.

Bullard laid out the arguments for acquiescing in the crown prince's succession in a quick cable to the Foreign Office on September 15, when he thought Reza Shah's abdication imminent and a decision by Britain on the succession urgent.³² He followed up with a lengthier, more detailed cable two days later.³³ His first cable proved sufficient to persuade Eden to reverse his decision, (Bullard's second cable crossed the one from Eden to him), but the full case made by Bullard is worth reviewing. It provides some insight into the influence of Foroughi (and Soheili) on Bullard's thinking; and it helps show why Amery's 'Qajar project' was from the beginning misconceived. Bullard argued that succession by the crown prince would have the benefit of legitimacy, conforming to the course of action laid down in the constitution. It would be the least disturbing to a country already disrupted by the Allied invasion. By insisting on another choice, Britain would make itself responsible for the new ruler's actions and involve itself in "a mass of conflicting interests and intrigues." There was no demand for a Qajar ruler; the prime minister opposed a return of the dynasty; and even though the British could force the country to accept a Qajar (Bullard, here, seems to have been referring to Prince Hamid), "I should have

³⁰Bullard to Foreign Office, No. 742, 15 September 1941, FO 371/27216.

³¹This according to Foroughi's son, Mahmud Foroughi. See Habib Ladjevardi (ed.), *Memoirs of Mahmoud Foroughi* (Cambridge, MA: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University, 2003), 50.

³²Bullard to Foreign Office, No. 746, 15 September, 1941, FO 371/27217.

³³Bullard to Foreign Office, No. 767, 17 September 1941, E 5754/3326/34, FO 371/27217. The summary that follows is taken from both cables; the quotations all come from the Bullard's No. 767 of 17 September.

thought his ignorance of Persia a serious bar and his English education a source of embarrassment sooner or later both with the Persians and Russians.” Besides, there were “hundreds of Qajars in the country...waiting hungrily...for return of the days when the country was bled not by one leech but by hundreds.” The crown prince would be a constitutional monarch with few powers and would prove tractable due to his youth and inexperience and the lesson he learned from the fate of his father; and prime minister Foroughi thought well of his abilities, goodwill and readiness to begin reforms. There was, also, Bullard noted, the danger that, despite their protestations to the contrary, the Soviets would have preferred violent change. Locking in the succession would avoid that possibility.

Bullard’s arguments proved persuasive. Eden cabled Bullard on September 17 that “in view of the difficulty of finding any other solution,” the crown prince was acceptable, but only on trial and “subject to good behaviour,” and on condition he instituted reforms and remained a constitutional monarch with little power.³⁴

That Eden and the Foreign Office were so quick to reverse themselves on the acceptability of the crown prince is not difficult to explain. In addition to the arguments advanced by Bullard, Hassan had made a passable but not a strong impression during lunch with Eden and his aides; Hamid’s lack of familiarity with Iran or Persian were serious obstacles to a Qajar restoration.³⁵ The Iranians themselves effectively pre-empted the British by quickly swearing in Mohammad Reza as shah on September 17, the day after Reza Shah’s abdication. Although Bullard, in urging London to give the new king a chance, wrote that “we could always get rid of him quickly if he proved unsuitable,”³⁶ such a move obviously became more difficult once the crown prince took his oath of office before parliament and was seated on the throne.

Besides, a perusal of the record suggests that in the weeks immediately preceding and following the Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran, considerable uncertainty prevailed at the Foreign Office as to what set of circumstances might cause Reza Shah’s departure or what might ensue if he abdicated or was forced from the throne. Bullard

³⁴Eden to Bullard, No. 729, 17 September 1941, FO 371/27217.

³⁵A second lunch that Nicolson arranged at his home so that that Seymour could meet with and assess Prince Hassan did not go as well. “I fear my luncheon is not a success,” Nicolson noted in his diary. Prince Hassan was “very charming but inconsequent,” eager to leave London, before the air raids began; and when asked whether his

younger son, Hamid spoke Persian, he replied (the conversation was in French): “Pas un mot, pas un seul mot.” (‘Not a word, not a single word.’) Nicolson diary, cited in Denis Wright, *The Persians among the English*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 1985), 214.

³⁶Bullard to Foreign Office, No. 767, 17 September 1941, FO 371/27217.

and his influential press attaché, Ann Lambton, did not rule out a popular movement to oust the Shah (which never materialized). Some thought the shah might be murdered (another highly unlikely scenario). Coverley Price foresaw chaos on the shah's departure and the emergence of a German puppet. Seymour believed some general might seize control (though no such attempt occurred) or that the British might need to back up "some local leader who seems to have a following and a chance." I. T. M. Pink, another FO official dealing with Iran, thought that if Reza Shah went, "it was essential to make a clean sweep of the whole 'Pahlevi' brood." Eden and others thought Reza Shah might be succeeded by a British-backed regency under a prominent Iranian statesman.³⁷

While too much need not be made of such speculation, it reflects the uncertainty prevailing at the Foreign Office regarding the best course of action should Reza Shah go. This left men at the FO open to suggestions and persuasion—from Amery, from Bullard, from others—regarding the post-Reza Shah period. This can help explain why, despite much initial skepticism, Eden finally gave serious consideration to, then quickly abandoned, Amery's campaign for a Qajar restoration; and why, in the end, the decisive argument for retaining the Pahlavis on the throne was made not in London but in Tehran.

³⁷The sources for this sampling of the diverse views of Foreign Office officials cited here are as follows: Popular movement to oust the Shah: Bullard to Eden, No. 64, 1 May 1941, FO 371/27150 and the enclosed Lambton memo; Chaos: Coverley Price's minute on Amery to Eden, 16 May 1941, FO 371/27196; Military officer or local leader taking power: Seymour's

minute on Amery to Eden, 30 July 1941, FO 371/27196; Sweeping away whole Pahlavi brood: I. T. M. Pink's minute on Bullard to Foreign Office, No., 702, 12 September 1941, FO 371/27213; Possibility of a regency: minute by Pink on Bullard to Foreign Office, No. 627, 30 August 1942, FO 371/27208 and Eden to Bullard, No. 637, 6 September 1941, FO 371/27211.