The Bakhtiari Star: Tribe, power and politics in the last years of Qajar Iran

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INTRODUCTION

In January of 1921, a fiery debate raged in the halls of the British Legation in Tehran. Their former rival and ally – the Russian Empire – had fallen to revolution, and now it seemed that the north of Iran would follow this same path. The British officials feared that the revolutionaries might try to take the Iranian capital, but feared even more the possibility that they might succeed.[1] In the preceding decade, the Qajar Empire had become a shell of its former self, and the Shah was in no state to defend his country. If Iran should fall to a socialist revolution, the all-important British oil production in the south of the country – not to mention all of their other investments – could slip out of their grasp. However, a controversial solution had come across the minister's desk: The khans of the Bakhtiari Tribe had rallied their troops in the Zagros Mountains, and were ready to march on the capital, as they had also done a decade before. But if the Legation could not settle on a clear stance, and the Bakhtiari could not be certain of British support, the khans would not dare to act. In that moment, British hands seemed to hold the power to determine the future of Iran.[2]

In 1909, during the Constitutional Revolution, the Bakhtiari had led a revolutionary force to Tehran to depose the Shah and reestablish a constitutional monarchy. Now, the ruling khans of the Bakhtiari stood as resolute opponents of this new revolution, terrified as they were of the "faintly disguised Bolshevism" spreading within their own ranks.[3] The khans asked for an endorsement of their plan, promising to do their utmost to protect the British interests which had become so intertwined with their own.[4] Over the preceding three decades, the British and the ruling khans of the Bakhtiari had developed a very close, albeit turbulent, relationship. Oil, trade, and political power had made the Bakhtiari elite very wealthy, but had also fanned the flames of their internal rivalries. The British minister implicitly supported the idea of a Bakhtiari-led state[5], but others within the legation insisted that it would be "fatal to pin our hopes on the Khans", and advocated for patience and a hesitant attitude.[6]

In the end, Tehran did not fall, and the khans did not march. Together with the defeat of the *Jangal* movement, 1921 would – instead of a Bakhtiari state – see the coup d'état of Reza

[1] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari 4."
[2] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari 34."
[3] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Note on Bakhtiari Policy."
[4] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari 18."
[5] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari 4."
[6] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari 47."

Khan, laying the foundation for the Pahlavi dynasty and Iran's subsequent trajectory throughout much of the twentieth century. However, even if the ideas of the khans never came to fruition, it does merit the question of how the Bakhtiari came to hold such a powerful position in the country in the first place, and if their attempted seizure of political control was ever a serious possibility. This thesis attempts to answer these and other questions through providing a thorough description of the ways in which the Bakhtiari participated in the politics of late Qajar Iran. In addition, I argue that the ways in which the Bakhtiari elite managed to become so politically involved was significantly affected by how the Bakhtiari were organized socially and economically, and I will discuss how this organization in turn shaped and was shaped by the development of close relations between the Bakhtiari ruling class and the British empire.

SUMMARY OF THE ARGUMENT

The Bakhtiari are a traditionally nomadic people, mostly living in and around the Zagros mountains in the south-west of Iran. When discussing their involvement in Qajar politics, the existing literature focuses mostly on their involvement in and prior to the Constitutional Revolution.[7] In 1906, in response to a year of protests, Mozaffar ad-Din Shah had signed the first Iranian constitution into law, before passing away only shortly thereafter. He was succeeded by his son, Mohammad Ali Shah, who strongly opposed the constitutional movement. Less than two years into his reign, the new Shah abolished the constitution and forcefully closed down the only recently created *Majles* (parliament), provoking a response among the supporters of the constitutional movement. Among those supporters were some of the most prominent Bakhtiari khans, and they took their men and joined up with other revolutionaries to march on Tehran. The revolutionaries deposed Mohammad 'Ali Shah in favor of his teenage son, Ahmad Shah, and parliament and the constitution were restored. The Bakhtiari, as defenders of the revolution, were subsequently propelled to the top of Iranian politics. When the revolution came to an end only two years later, the office of the Prime Minister was held by one of the most important Bakhtiari khans, and multiple provinces were in the hands of Bakhtiari governors.[8]

[7] Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran*; Khazeni, "The Bakhtiyari Tribes in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution"; Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*.

[8] Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History*, 315–85.

However, Bakhtiari power did not come to an end when the revolution did, and many remained in Tehran after 1911, staying closely involved within national politics. Throughout the often-chaotic decade that followed the revolution, the Bakhtiari – despite weakening with the years – remained a force to be reckoned with. It was only afterwards, in the years after Reza Khan's 1921 coup d'état, that Bakhtiari power began diminishing significantly, in part due to the anti-tribal policies introduced in the Pahlavi era.[9] The existing literature rarely discusses the post-revolutionary period in detail, skipping straight from the Constitutional Revolution to the beginning of the Pahlavi dynasty, despite the importance of this period in determining how Iran would develop throughout the rest of the twentieth century. The 1910s were a decade of turmoil for Iran, where the deficiencies of the contemporary state were laid bare. The days of Qajar rule were numbered, but the direction in which Iran should move was far from clear. Besides the authoritarian modernization which would eventually win out under Reza Khan, the democratic nationalism of the Constitutional Revolution had not yet left the political arena. Similarly, the Jangali movement in Gilan offered another option for Iran's future in their syncretism of socialist and Islamic ideals, and – as the introduction above shows – there was perhaps a chance that the Bakhtiari khans would have set up what would in effect have been a British puppet state. Thus, this thesis aims to help fill this 1910s-shaped gap in Bakhtiari literature by discussing not only the Constitutional Revolution and the buildup towards it, but also its aftermath and the ways in which Bakhtiari power continued up to 1921.

Secondly, as mentioned, this thesis will argue that the Bakhtiari socio-economic organization affected in what way and to what extent the Bakhtiari involved themselves with the politics of the capital. To this end, I will build upon the theory of David Sneath's *Headless State*, which presents nomadic societies not as primarily egalitarian and kinship-based, as has traditionally been the case, but instead as fundamentally aristocratic.[10] Through this lens, it is possible to focus on the internal hierarchies of the Qajar-era Bakhtiari while still acknowledging the decentralized and distributed nature of nomadic power structures. Like other nomadic groups, the Bakhtiari could live relatively independent of central power, especially when compared to urban groups, and as such had a very different relationship with the Shah and his administration.[11] Even so, they were not fully out of Tehran's reach, and conflicts with the

[9] Cronin, "Riza Shah and the Disintegration of Bakhtiyari Power in Iran, 1921-1934."
[10] Sneath, *The Headless State Aristocratic Orders, Kinship Society, & Misrepresentations of Nomadic Inner Asia*.
[11] Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran*, 3–15.

Qajar government were not unheard of. The Bakhtiari were governed by the *ilkhan*, the *khan* (chief) of the *il* (tribe), who was appointed by the Shah from among the Bakhtiari khans. However, the decentralized organization of the Bakhtiari meant that it was difficult for the ilkhan to fully control the other khans, and internal struggles for power were an ever-present factor in Bakhtiari politics.[12] The relevant internal divisions changed with the times, but the lack of unity remained constant. This made it possible for the Bakhtiari to fight on both the constitutionalist and the royalist sides during the revolution, or for some of them to ally themselves with Germany and the Central Powers whilst others retained their close ties with the British and the Allies during WWI.[13]

This distributed power was not unique to the Bakhtiari, however, but rather a factor within all nomadic societies in Iran. I will thus further argue that a combination of this distributed nomadic hierarchy with British involvement made the Bakhtiari especially well-suited to the political climate of late Qajar Iran. Not only could the khans count on a measure of British support in times of crisis, but their dealings had made their most powerful khans very wealthy and less dependent on traditional sources of revenue. As a result, the social gap between the ruling khans and the rank-and-file widened. These wealthy khans started becoming more and more urbanized and began losing touch with their nomadic subjects. Initially, when the old loyalties were still strong, this was mostly to the benefit of the khans, who could rely on Bakhtiari military prowess whilst still remaining connected to the politics of urban Tehran. Throughout the 1910s, however, rebellious sentiment among the rank-and-file became a pressing issue. The title of this thesis refers an example of such sentiment: a pamphlet distributed by less powerful khans and the rank-and-file in 1921, which contemporary British intelligence describe as "faintly disguised Bolshevism"[14], called *Setāre-ye Bakhtiār* [The Bakhtiari Star]. The strong military potential of the Bakhtiari rank-and-file and their resistance to top-down interference, the very factors that had at one point made them one of the most powerful groups in the country, were now the cause of their problems. As a result, by the time of Reza Khan's coup d'état, the Bakhtiari were not the force they had once been, and they had lost their chance at power to a new regime that would only see them further weakened. To summarize, I argue that both the rise and the fall of the Bakhtiari can be explained through the changes – in part caused by British involvement – to their social and

[12] Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 62–82.
[13] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Isfahan News #4"; The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Letter 12 March 1915."
[14] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Note on Bakhtiari Policy."

economic organization. By investigating both what occurred and how, this thesis aims to further our understanding of a turbulent but influential time, wherein the path Iran would eventually take was only one among many possibilities.

OUTLINE

This thesis is divided into six chapters. First, this introduction continues with a discussion of the research methods and methodologies I have employed during this project. In addition, the extant literature on the Bakhtiari will be discussed in order to give an indication of how this thesis fits into our current knowledge. At the end of this introduction, I will give an overview of the theoretical assumptions on which I base my argumentation: a justification for the materialist view that the economic realities shape social outcomes and a summary of David Sneath's argument that nomadic societies should be seen as aristocratic, hierarchical, and decentralized. The rest of the thesis discusses the history of the Bakhtiari in roughly chronological order. The second chapter, *The Bakhtiari in the Nineteenth Century*, is almost entirely based on secondary sources and is meant to sketch out the proper historical context to the developments I will discuss in the following chapters. The other chapters, based mostly on my original research, start in 1897 with *The British & The Bakhtiari Road*, wherein I discuss the development of Bakhtiari-British relations. After this, I will give the context of the Constitutional Revolution and early Bakhtiari involvement in the chapter titled *The Road to Revolution*, continuing with the years of 1909-1911 in *The Triumph of Tehran*. The post-revolutionary period, covering the years between the end of the constitutional revolution and the year of Reza Khan's coup d'etát, will be discussed in the second-to-last chapter, *The Last Years of the Qajars*, before ending the thesis with my concluding remarks.

THE RESEARCH

The original research presented in this thesis is based, for the most part, on archival research in the United Kingdom. Based on the literature, I suspected that both the British National Archives and the British Library in London housed records relevant to my research question, and to that end I visited the UK in fall 2023. As I had never done archival research, I wanted to familiarize myself with the process and did so in the Dutch National Archives in the months leading up to my departure. Here, in lieu of any categorization around the Bakhtiari specifically, I used the available records from the Dutch consulates in Tehran and Ahwaz in the period 1900-1914. At the same time, I was trying to translate sections of a contemporary Persian-language work on Bakhtiari society and history – the *Tarikh-e Bakhtiari* [History of

the Bakhtiari] – commissioned by Sardar As'ad, a prominent Bakhtiari Khan. Because I knew beforehand that my reliance on European archives was inherently limiting, I hoped that using this work could bring a semblance of balance to my selection of sources. However, the combination of the book being handwritten and my lacking Persian made this a very difficult task. Later on, I acquired a digitized version of one of the chapters, which made translating significantly easier, although I still only managed to translate a small portion. The scarcity of relevant information in the Dutch archives and my inability to properly use Persian-language source material means that I had to rely almost entirely on the archives in London. However, during my stay, the British Library was closed due to a cyberattack, and so all the UK records used in this thesis were found in the British National Archives.

In the British National Archives, to get an initial overview, I relied on records from 1897-1921 that used the keyword “Bakhtiari”. Once the types of records most useful to this project were identified – those to and from the embassy or consulates in Iran – a more systematic approach was taken. I went through these records for every year from 1906 (the year the constitutional revolution truly began) to 1921 (the year of Reza Khan’s coup d’état). Before 1916, records were categorized by origin and destination, and with these I focused on correspondence between the British Legation in Tehran and the Foreign Office in London, as well as correspondence between the British Consulate in Isfahan and the Legation in Tehran. From 1916 onwards, the records were sorted by topic, with all correspondence regarding the Bakhtiari gathered under the “Bakhtiari” topic. In addition, I also combed through the records marked "Isfahan" and "Political Situation". Isfahan's location next to Bakhtiari territory - as well as the importance of the city to the Bakhtiari - motivated my choice to focus on Isfahan more than on other cities and provinces, and these records proved very useful in offering a perspective on Bakhtiari rule at the local level.

The fact that almost all of my work is based on documents found within British archives seriously affects my work, and I do not want to sugarcoat that. Though these records also included (translated) correspondence with and between Bakhtiari khans, the vast, vast majority of the texts that I use were written by British officers for an audience of other British officers. The use of these documents will inevitably affect my thesis, but I have tried to alleviate some of the bias inherent in my source selection by reading these texts “against the grain”. By constantly remaining wary of how the authors and intended audience alike were affected by the dominant colonial and imperialist worldview of the British Empire, as well as how their observations were shaped by British interests, I intend to use these records to the

fullest extent, while also being cognizant to not mindlessly and unintentionally reproduce the worldview of the early-twentieth century colonial elite. It is worth noting, however, that "reading against the grain" is a technique more-often employed in situations where there *is* no alternative source material. In situations where the only possible perspective to build on is a colonial one, reading against the grain becomes a necessary evil to uncover the history of the unheard.[15]

The issue here is that, while the technique works, there is still a large amount of information from other perspectives that I leave unused – mostly for practical reasons. In the case where I would be able to find and actually read more Iranian and Bakhtiari documents, the additional perspectives would make the job of writing a plausible history much more doable. In addition, my own positionality also acts as a constraint. As someone who was brought up in a west-European society, in a Euro-American family, there is a large cultural gap between myself and the Bakhtiari whose history I try to uncover. Although there is also a gap between me and the British colonial administration in both time and political views, this is just as true for the Bakhtiari. A lot has changed in the past 100 years, but the British and I still have a shared cultural foundation. Trying to read "against the grain" is inherently limited by my own imagination and insight, which are both affected by the perspectives to which I have been exposed throughout my life. Trying to be cognizant of this fact, as well as incorporating secondary literature which does utilize a wider range of perspectives (and including whatever Persian-language primary source material is available to me) can mitigate this to an extent. However, as it is, this thesis is shaped by the limitations of my source material and by my own perspective. Despite this, I still believe that this thesis can be a valuable addition to how Bakhtiari history is understood, but I also believe that is worth underlining that the story as I present it is in no way complete, and a more rigorous version of this argument would test its assumptions by incorporating a multitude of different perspectives.

THEORY

To explain the question "what shape did Bakhtiari involvement in early 20th-century Iranian politics take, and to what extent can this be explained through the interconnected developments of British involvement on the one hand, and social or economic changes among the Bakhtiari on the other?" it first needs to be established that the ways in which actors move

[15] Sowry, "Silence, Accessibility, and Reading Against the Grain: Examining Voices of the Marginalized in the India Office Records."

through a political environment is shaped by their material interests and the class structure of the society in which they live. To do so, I build upon the framework of Marxian history – which posits that different classes are incentivized to take particular political actions by acting in accordance with their material interests[16] – without adhering fully to all of its prescriptions. This choice is based on my position that material factors are one of the most important pieces of the puzzle in analyzing history, but without believing that they are the only piece. They are necessary in the analysis, but not sufficient by themselves. It would be a mistake to completely ignore the importance of religion and cultural practices, but for the purposes of this thesis I will refrain from analyzing these in-depth, and instead focus on how the actions of both the powerful and the common were shaped by the systems in which they moved, and their material interests therein.

Classical Marxist theory is mostly concerned with class relations within industrial capitalist societies and their European-style feudal predecessors, which in light of the Bakhtiari's un-capitalist modes of production and social organization needs further justification. Previous generations of historians have already done away with some of the specific predictions and analyses of early Marxist scholarship, whilst still retaining the core elements of the theory contained within. The theory of historical materialism concerns itself with how different classes with differing relations to economic production are naturally in a state of conflict because of their opposing interests, and that this conflict drives transformations in society through the dialectic.[17] Doubts about the universality implied by this theory – as well as problems of Orientalism and class-essentialism – have led some scholars to revise and refine Marxist history-writing to be less reliant on outdated and Eurocentric analyses; such as the ideas of oriental despotism and set historical "stages" of human history.[18] However, I am of the opinion that such attempts[19] oftentimes still cling too tightly to the traditional pillars of Marxist thought. Historians should not try to force a square peg down a round hole, and if the evidence is not there – which it is not in the case of discrete historical paths applicable to all societies[20] - we should not try to uphold the theory. Despite my objections, I am still of the opinion that the cornerstone of Marxian thought remains a valuable tool in historical analysis.

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[16] Haldon, "Theories of Practice: Marxist History-Writing and Complexity."
[17] Bernet, Raphael, and Zachariah, *What's Left of Marxism - Historiography and the Possibilities of Thinking with Marxian Themes and Concepts*, 122–24.
[18] Bernet, Raphael, and Zachariah, 130–35.
[19] Diakonoff and Hosking, *Paths Hist.*
[20] Sneath, *The Headless State Aristocratic Orders, Kinship Society, & Misrepresentations of Nomadic Inner Asia*, 6.

Stripped of the superfluous elements of its own historiographical tradition, Marxist historical materialism becomes a philosophy of political economy that can be summarized as such: Economic production and political class cannot be seen as separate from one another, and the difference in how these classes relate to the economy can become the impetus for conflict and political action. For the analysis in this thesis, I rely on nothing more than this core idea as far as Marxist thought is concerned, and so do not feel the need to work "within" the tradition of Marxist history. In this way, I am able to build upon the work of Marxist historians who have done a lot of work to support this assertion, without relying on any of the further theoretical baggage.

LITERATURE

At the time of writing, the most comprehensive English-language work on the Bakhtiari in the Qajar period is Arash Khazeni's 2009 monograph *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran*.[21] It's primarily a work of social and political history, trying to tell the story of the Bakhtiari from the margins, focusing on their relations with the Qajar state in addition to their internal political conflicts. It is based on an earlier dissertation[22], and – before the release of the monograph – Khazeni also published other papers on the Bakhtiari, such as The Bakhtiyari Tribes in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (2005).[23] Outside of Khazeni's work, in English, there is the work of Gene Garthwaite from the 1980's, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari Tribe of Iran*.[24] Aside from the texts I just mentioned, there is more scholarly discussion in Persian, though a thorough investigation of Iranian scholarship on the Bakhtiari remains out of reach due to my insufficient language skills. Still, there are two articles of interest to this project, both related to the Bakhtiari position during the Constitutional Revolution: Mansur Amani's "Investigation of the special position of the Bakhtiari tribe in the Constitutional Revolution"[25] and Mohammad Reza Alam's "The political failure of the Bakhtiari in the Qajar period and the loss of their position after the Triumph of Tehran".[26] These are both interesting articles, and give unique perspectives on

[21] Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran*.
[22] Khazeni, "Opening the Land: Tribes, State, and Ethnicity in Qajar Iran, 1800–1911."
[23] Khazeni, "The Bakhtiyari Tribes in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution."
[24] Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*.
[25] Amani, "بررسی جایگاه خاص ایل بختیاری در انقلاب مشروطه."
[26] Alam, "ناکامی سیاسی بختیاریها در دوره قاجار واز دست دادن جایگاه خود پس از فتح تهران."

events that Khazeni doesn't mention. However, compared to a monograph, they are both still limited in scope.

Though not a work on Bakhtiari history in particular, this thesis also builds upon David Sneath's *The Headless State: Aristocratic Orders, Kinship Society, and Misrepresentations of Nomadic Inner Asia*.[27] There are competing historical and anthropological models that sketch very different pictures of how nomadic societies such as the Bakhtiari operated, and Sneath's work presents a picture of nomadic society that differs considerably from how the Bakhtiari have been presented in the literature. Throughout the twentieth century, much of the scholarship on nomadic societies rested on theories that assumed that "tribal" societies were a form of organization which preceded, and would naturally evolve into, a centralized state society. According to these theories, tribal societies were seen as egalitarian and organized along kinship lines, whilst state societies were impersonal and class-based. This school of thought has its origins in the nineteenth century, where scholars of all kinds espoused various versions of this idea, including people such as Marx and Durkheim. In Durkheim's version, tribal societies were clan-based, self-organized by segment: People would organize themselves into households, which would in turn organize into lineages, and those into clans or other larger groups. Durkheim's theory would later be refined, but the idea of segments of lineage remained, which gave it the name "segmentary-lineage theory". These early anthropological models, first developed by liberal and socialist social reformers as part of their critiques of contemporary society, quickly spread and were incorporated by imperialist powers throughout Europe and America.[28] Sneath states that "the notion that without the state people organize themselves into descent groups and that these tend to be nonhierarchical became deeply ingrained in the Western social sciences"[29], and this was also the case with scholarship on the Bakhtiari in the twentieth century.

The problems with the segmentary-lineage model are manifold, and Sneath goes into much more detail than I will here, but there are a few main issues which I feel are worth mentioning. First and most important, the evidence we have does not line up with this theory. Proponents of the segmentary-lineage model would claim that, as the dominant mode of organization prior to the development of the state, societies organized through repetitive series

[27] Sneath, *The Headless State Aristocratic Orders, Kinship Society, & Misrepresentations of Nomadic Inner Asia*.
[28] Sneath, 38–42.
[29] Sneath, 41–42.

of descent groups would be widespread. Instead, there don't appear to be *any* societies who are organized in the particular ways the model would suggest.[30] What's more, one of the core ideas – that the clan precedes the development of the state – seems to be backwards. In many cases, clans only seemed to become societally important after the rise of an aristocratic order, being an institution reserved for the elite alone. Rather than the kinship-based clan preceding the state, it seems to be a product of it.[31] Secondly, the segmentary-lineage model is also unequally applied to historical societies, and often in a very Eurocentric manner. According to its own definitions of the state, wherein rulers with supreme authority appoint regional representatives for the collection of tax or tribute, most European states prior to the modern era – where local aristocratic families could often be more powerful than the crown – would more fairly be described as "tribal chiefdoms". Instead of describing medieval England as such, however, proponents of the segmentary-lineage model carve out exceptions for post-antiquity Europe and only seem to want to apply this terminology to societies outside of the West.[32]

Sneath's book, however, is not concerned with all societies commonly called tribes, but specifically with the pastoralist and nomadic societies of Asia. Segmentary lineage theory assumes that nomadic societies – like all "tribes" – are always egalitarian, as long as they do not have frequent interactions with less-egalitarian state societies. When the anthropologists adhering to this theory would fail to find the egalitarianism they expected to find among modern pastoralists, they would often make the claim that, at one point, these groups *did* adhere to their notions of what a "tribe" should look like, but that interactions with the modern state had transformed them to be more state-like and thus that this purer form could be found in the historical record. A claim for which there is little evidence.[33]

The alternative analytical frame proposed by Sneath can be summarized as such: Rather than being an impediment to the presence of hierarchy, mobile pastoralism functions as its own political economy, which can lend itself to the development of many different types of societies, both the egalitarian and the stratified. In many cases, the historical record suggests that nomadic societies were large-scale and complex systems that were decidedly hierarchical. The specifics of this pastoral political economy vary from case to case, but in general, "owing

[30] Sneath, 48.
[31] Sneath, 41.
[32] Sneath, 48–49.
[33] Sneath, 53–55.

to economies of scale, the benefits of specialization, and the reduction of herd losses, large concentrations of herd wealth seem to have been more secure and productive than small holdings".[34] This economy based on mobile pastoralism, while clearly different from sedentary agricultural societies in many ways, "allows just as many possibilities for the accumulation of wealth and the construction of large-scale systems as agricultural techniques do".[35] Unlike what Segmentary-Lineage theory or Marxist thought (where agricultural property is the cornerstone of feudal aristocracy) predict, this allowed for the development of an aristocratic order with institutionalized relations of status, inheritance, and political office. One wherein descent is not the building block of the society, but a tool to justify power and property. Thus, nomadic societies could be complex, hierarchical, and truly statelike. However, they were not states built on bureaucratic institutions, but rather ones dominated by a decentralized and semi-independent aristocracy which nevertheless saw themselves as part of the same polity: the titular "Headless State".[36] Although they have different underlying political economies to agricultural aristocratic states, nomadic societies should not be exoticized by trying to force them into an outdated and incorrect analytical framework. Instead, they should be analyzed in a way that underlines the aristocratic and hierarchical nature of their societies – similar to those sedentary polities simplistically described as "feudal" – while remaining cognizant of the tendency towards decentralization that their underlying political economy incentivizes.

Even if Sneath focuses mostly on Mongolian and Turkic nomads of Inner Asia, he does not assume his analytical framework to only be applicable to those societies. In fact, when he discusses how segmentary-lineage theory is applied to the nomads of Iran, he uses the Bakhtiari specifically as his counterexample. He calls into question the description in Garhtwaite's *Khans and Shahs* of the Bakhtiari as a "segmentary pyramid" organized from the bottom-up with the khans as "nonexploitative 'first-among-equal' tribal spokemen".[37] To support his claims, he compares Garthwaite description with that of Digard's *Techniques des Nomades Baxtyari d'Iran* (which Garthwaite himself had used as his basis for the modern anthropological perspective):

[34] Sneath, 17.
[35] Sneath, 17.
[36] Sneath, 181–204.
[37] Sneath, 57.

> "Garthwaite hardly mentions the distinction between nobles and commoners, the class division that Digard felt was of such central importance, but on closer examination it seemed that the organization of commoners into groups under named heads is more likely to have been an administrative act than the result of some indigenous kinship structure. And instead of chiefs acting as representatives of their kinsmen, it seems that local nobles held a range of state-defined aristocratic titles and official prerogatives from as long ago as the eighteenth century, if not before. The continuities and connections between 'the state' and the Bakhtiari nobles are much more striking than the evidence of a distinctive "tribal" society confronting it."[38]

Khazeni, in his book *Tribes and Empire*, mentions this same discrepancy between Digard's and Garthwaite's respective works, but unlike Sneath, he does not state which interpretation he leans towards himself.[39] Instead, he avoids discussions of how the Bakhtiari were organized in favor of describing tribe-state interactions and focusing on "actual narratives of the social and cultural history of tribes".[40] Because little has been written on the Bakhtiari in the past decades outside of *Tribes and Empire*, Garthwaite's version of the Bakhtiari still stands as one of the most recent analyses of the social organization of the historical Bakhtiari. A regrettable fact, since this description is built upon a faulty colonial model. Thus, because Khazeni's work holds a comparatively neutral stance towards anthropological models, I was left with many questions of how the Bakhtiari actually functioned internally.

However, this is not to say that both works are without merit. The opposite, in fact. *Khans and Shahs* is very comprehensive, and discusses all periods of Bakhtiari history for which we have textual evidence, starting in the eighteenth century and continuing all the way until what for Garthwaite was the present day. The combination of Garthwaite's historical and anthropological insights – when reevaluated through the lens of Sneath's framework – is still of great value. A lot of my own descriptions of Bakhtiari society are based on combining primary sources with a reevaluation of Garthwaite's work. Similarly, Khazeni's *Tribes and Empire* serves as a key secondary source, and in many ways this thesis has been inspired and influenced by Khazeni, and the questions that were left after reading his book became the starting point of this project. His neutral approach gives his work a more descriptive character, which can be read in many different ways depending on whatever the audience's

[38] Sneath, 59.
[39] Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran*, 7.
[40] Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran*, 7.

theoretical starting point is, and thus is able to serve as a great stepping stone for this thesis' analysis. His dedication to writing "the history of nineteenth-century Iran 'from the edge'" makes the Bakhtiari, and not the Qajar state or European powers, the main characters of his story. To this end, he uses a combination of British and Iranian archival sources, Qajar chronicles, and a variety of other primary sources (such as the aforementioned *Tarikh-e Bakhtiari*). Although Garthwaite does not give as detailed a description as Khazeni's for his source selection, he does mention that he had access to personal collections of documents and photographs of Bakhtiari families, and from the bibliography we can gather that he used a combination of British archival and Persian non-archival source material. My own selection of primary source material prevents me from pursuing the ideal of writing "from the edge" to the same extent as Khazeni does, but that is also why both his and Garthwaite's books serve as such valuable secondary sources for this thesis.

Besides using Sneath's framework to reinterpret Bakhtiari history, this thesis also differs from the literature by zooming in on the politics of the last decades of the Qajar dynasty (1897-1921 in particular). *Tribes and Empire* covers all of the Qajar period, but does not focus as much on internal organization or individual political ambitions. It also ends with the constitutional revolution, where the buildup is given more attention than how it fell apart, and the period from 1911 onwards is not discussed at all. Garthwaite does discuss the post-revolutionary period, but because all of Bakhtiari history from the eighteenth century onwards is covered in just one chapter, important events are not discussed in full detail (which is more than reasonable given the comprehensive scope of the work). This, however, is where my own project is able to give more insights and provide a more in-depth look into these last two-and-a-half decades of the Qajar era. Thus, this thesis expands on the existing literature by discussing Bakhtiari involvement in the post-revolutionary period, while also reinterpreting the history presented before through a more accurate model of nomadic social organization.

To wrap up this section, I feel that it is worth mentioning that, although Sneath's theory provides a good alternative to how nomadic "tribal" societies can be analyzed, the terminology employed is still very important. The history of how scholarship in the west has discussed those who were considered to be part of tribes still affects how words such as "tribe" and "tribal" are used. When used uncritically, the simplifications of the colonial model – whether dismissive or romanticizing – are often unintentionally implicit in the text. These words should not be applied without thought, and it is always worth it to consider if alternative terminology would not be more applicable. In this thesis, however, I will at times

still use the word “tribe” to refer to the Bakhtiari, as this is the most reasonable translation of the term i*l* by which they are known in Persian. When I do so, I refer specifically to the political construction of the Bakhtiari as a semi-autonomous state-within-a-state. In the case of *khan*, which is sometimes translated into English as “chief”, I will opt to use the local terminology as this title has to some extent been adopted into English. With all this in mind, the internal workings of the Bakhtiari tribe and how these shaped the material interests of both the Khans and their subjects can now be discussed; thereby shining light on what shaped Bakhtiari involvement in late Qajar politics.

THE BAKHTIARI IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The *Tārikh-e Bakhtiāri* – written in the early twentieth century by the commission of one of the most prominent Bakhtiari Khans – claims that Bakhtiari history stretches all the way back to the Achaemenid era, where they supposedly helped defend Iran against the invasion of Alexander the Great.[41] Later scholarship would cast doubt upon this idea, as documentary evidence for a group by this name only goes back as far as the fourteenth century, and any references remain sparse until the eighteenth century.[42] What we do know is that, throughout this period, the fundamental social structure of the Bakhtiari remained, at its core, nomadic.[43] Building off of Marxian theory and the work of David Sneath, the political and social structure of the Bakhtiari can be analyzed through the lens of their primarily pastoral-nomadic economy. The aim of this chapter, then, is to describe Bakhtiari society throughout the nineteenth century, and how the particulars of their society were affected by their nomadic way of life. In addition, Bakhtiari society would undergo significant changes during this century, as they were unified under their first *ilkhan*, but the core issues of decentralization and conflict brought by their economic and political system remained. By the end of this century, the Bakhtiari had become a force to be reckoned with, but had not yet reached the heights that they would reach during the early twentieth century. However, the ways in which the Bakhtiari were organized socially and politically would make possible their later ascendancy within Iranian politics. Investigating the economic and political structures of the Bakhtiari will provide later chapters with the essential context to explain their victories, as well as their failures.

NINETEENTH-CENTURY NOMADS

Whatever their origins, there is no question that a distinct Bakhtiari identity had crystallized by the nineteenth century, and one inexorably tied to their nomadic lifestyle. The mobility that pastoralism provided makes discussing the precise boundaries of their homeland somewhat vague, as Bakhtiari influence could often still be felt in provinces and districts that the Qajar government did not consider part of the Bakhtiari province. However, to make the attempt, the Bakhtiari country proper bordered the provinces of Arabestan, Fars and Lorestan, as well

[41] Sardar As'ad, *Tarikh-e Bakhtiari*, 3–6.

as the district of Chahar Mahal[44], which was often under Bakhtiari control even if not officially considered part of the Bakhtiari territory.[45] Thus, their territory during the Qajar era approximately matches the modern-day province of Chahar Mahal and Bakhtiari, but extends a bit further into Khuzestan, where towns such as Malamir (also known as Izeh) were considered part of the Bakhtiari lowlands.[46] Their influence spread beyond these official borders though, and they often meddled in the affairs of cities such as Isfahan to the north-east or Ramhormoz to the south-west.[47] Bakhtiari territory was further divided into two parts: the *yeylāq* (the high country or summer pastures) and the *qeshlāq* (the low country or winter pastures), which were also referred to as *sardsir* and *garmsir* (the cold and the hot country) respectively. The high country, as the name might suggest, consisted of the more mountainous regions to the east, whilst the low country – centered on Malamir – was located to the west.[48] This internal division was paramount to the Bakhtiari way of life, as it hints at the core of Bakhtiari nomadism: the seasonal migrations.

The practice of seasonally moving herds of animals to areas with differing geography and climate has been described as transhumance[49], but is more accurately called "yaylag pastoralism", as the entire community moves along with the herd, not just a select few.[50] The migrations were necessary for the survival of the Bakhtiari herds, as the animals could not graze in the scorching summers of the *garmsir* or the snowy winters in the *sardsir*. Their herds consisted of many animals, but most important were horses for riding, and sheep and goats for dairy, wool, hair, and meat for their own subsistence. The other animals they kept, such as donkeys, mules, or oxen, were used as draft animals or as items to trade or sell at urban markets. This local trade provided the Bakhtiari with most other goods they wanted, such as tea, sugar and grains, but only for those that did not grow any themselves.[51] Despite relying predominantly on animal husbandry, agriculture was not unheard of among the Bakhtiari, as they had long been supplementing their pastoralism with small amounts of

[44] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Notes on the Bakhtiari Tribes and Their Chiefs by Lieutenant Ranking," 158–59.
[45] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari," WO 106/5960, 1944, 19–21.
[46] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Notes on the Bakhtiari Tribes and Their Chiefs by Lieutenant Ranking," 159.
[47] Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran*, chap. 2.
[48] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Notes on the Bakhtiari Tribes and Their Chiefs by Lieutenant Ranking," 167–68.
[49] Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 50.
[50] Khazanov, 23; Potts, *Nomadism in Iran : From Antiquity to the Modern Era*, 4.
[51] Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 23.

seasonal agriculture. Every autumn, when they left their mountainous summer pastures, the Bakhtiari would plant crops that would survive under the snows, which would be waiting for them when they returned the next spring. Then, when they reached their lowland winter pastures, they would plant more crops. These would only be ready to harvest during the summer, so a small group of people would stay in the *garmsir* to harvest and store the crops while the rest of the tribe returned to the mountains.[52]

By the nineteenth century, agriculture had slowly become a noticeably more important part of Bakhtiari life, and permanent agricultural settlements had sprung up in both the *garmsir* and the *sardsir*. The inhabitants of these villages took on a much more sedentary lifestyle, although they were still just as tied into the Bakhtiari political structure as their more nomadic counterparts.[53] The Chahar Lang, one of the two main subdivisions of the Bakhtiari, took especially well to sedentary life. They had taken over many of the arable lowlands along the Karun River in the early nineteenth century, including the network of dams and canals around Malamir. There, around 1000 families had taken to village life, where they farmed rice, opium, and black "Baruni" wheat.[54] On the other hand, the other main subdivision – the Haft Lang – remained predominantly nomadic well into the nineteenth century.[55] In the end, it would be the Haft Lang who would unify the Bakhtiari, but before that point this internal division was a key part of Bakhtiari politics, and the differences in their economic lives affected how they played the political game.

DIVISIONS OF CLASS AND CLAN

Originally, the Chahar and the Haft Lang – whose names translate into Four Legs and Seven Legs respectively – had been divided during the Safavid-era, based on the differing rates of taxation at the time. Khazeni states: "The wealthier tribes of the Haft Lang, who lived on the northern banks of the Karun River, were taxed at a rate of one-and-three-quarter mules, or seven legs; the Chahar Lang, who lived on the southern banks of the Karun, were taxed at the rate of one mule, or four legs."[56] These were not unified groups, however. The Chahar and Haft Lang were subdivided into *babs* (subtribes), which were then even further subdivided

[52] Khazeni, "Opening the Land: Tribes, State, and Ethnicity in Qajar Iran, 1800–1911," 58.
[53] Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 23–24.
[54] Khazeni, "Opening the Land: Tribes, State, and Ethnicity in Qajar Iran, 1800–1911," 59–60; The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Notes on the Bakhtiari Tribes and Their Chiefs by Lieutenant Ranking," 169.
[55] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Notes on the Bakhtiari Tribes and Their Chiefs by Lieutenant Ranking," 5.
[56] Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran*, 21.

into individual *tayafas* (clans) of a few hundred to a few thousand families each.[57] There were dozens of these clans, and in 1836 the total population of the Bakhtiari was placed at 28,000 families, estimated to be around 140,000 individuals.[58] We know that at that point the *babs* each had their own khans, who Garthwaite describes as such:

> "The primary role of the khans at the bab level was to mitigate competition between tribes for land and conflict with sedentary society, which probably constituted the major factors for strife; in addition, migration, with its potential for the exacerbation of intergroup rivalries, may have increased the likelihood of internal discord. All this, added to the pressures generated by disputes with other tribes, the defense of territory, the necessity for exchange with sedentary society, and the demands of the larger community (especially the Iranian government), seems to have necessitated the existence of khans or like leaders as mediators. These leaders and their people usually had 'common' ancestors. Such leaders always possessed the characteristics of wisdom, courage, and generosity necessary for their chiefly function, which may have included coordination of the migration; assignment of pastures; appointment of headmen and agents; mediation of intertribal disputes; leadership for raids, defense, and battle; and issuance of levies, taxes, and fines."[59]

In this, we can easily recognize the language of Garthwaite's assumptions of a fundamentally egalitarian Bakhtiari organized around common descent, wherein leadership is granted to individuals by the community for the common good. However, if we drop this assumption and merely consider the functions described by Garthwaite in this passage – military leadership, pronouncing legal judgements, appointing administrators, and levying taxes on the populace – it becomes clear that these khans acted in much the same way as any other aristocratic ruler at the time. A British travelogue describes a khan holding court, listening to complaints of his tribe, and administering justice by saying that he "was all-powerful, and exercised the right of life and death over his people".[60] To trust a travelogue at face-value would be a mistake, but there is nothing to hint at the supposed egalitarian nature of Garthwaite's khans to be read between the lines. From among these khans, one was appointed

[57] Khazeni, 34; The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Notes on the Bakhtiari Tribes and Their Chiefs by Lieutenant Ranking," 14.
[58] Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 65.
[59] Garthwaite, 37.
[60] Henry Layard, *Early Adventures in Persia, Susania, and Babylonia*, 371.

by the central government to act as the highest authority among either its own group (Chahar or Haft Lang), though later on the office of *ilkhan* was created to be responsible for the Bakhtiari as a whole. These state-appointed intermediaries were responsible to the central government for the Bakhtiari and their taxes. Because of their autonomy and mobility during the Qajar period, the level of taxation levied on the Bakhtiari was relatively minor when compared to the taxes of their sedentary neighbors. Taxes were supposed to be paid on the basis of the number of animals held, but these were easily evaded merely by hiding sections of the herd in the mountains. Even the more sedentary Chahar Lang did not pay all that they were taxed, as they would resist most attempts at tax collection unless forced to, which could often be more trouble than it was worth for the Qajar state.[61]

In lieu of large amounts of taxes or labor for public works, the Bakhtiari were instead recruited into the Qajar army in large numbers, where they played an especially important role as cavalry. A British report from the early nineteenth century states that, in 1815, the Qajar army recruited one *sowar* (horseman) for every ten households, and one foot soldier for every five.[62] Using the numbers that Garthwaite provides of five individuals for every family, this would mean that 3 out of every 50 Bakhtiari were part of the Qajar military, or around 6% of their entire population. It is possible that these numbers have been exaggerated, or that Garhtwaite's estimates err on the low side, but they do match with similar rates of militarization described in later sources. For example, in 1911, the Zarasvand clan of the Duraki *bab* consisted of around 1000 families, or 5000 people using Garhtwaites numbers. Of these 5000 people, they were able to arm and field 1500 as well-armed sowars and footmen, or 30% of the entire Zarasvand clan.[63] This was not an outlier. Even poorer clans such as the Gandali (also of the Duraki *bab*) could supply more than a quarter of their population as fighting men, even if only half of these would be armed with rifles.[64] Even if we are conservative with our estimates and halve these numbers to only 15%, this is still an incredibly high number of people dedicated to warfare, matching numbers reached by the mass conscription of the First World War.[65] It is clear that a vast majority of all able-bodied men of the Bakhtiari could be called on to fight, which was actually not out of the usual for

[61] Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 65.
[62] Morier, "Some Account of the I'liyats, or Wandering Tribes of Persia, Obtained in the Years 1814 and 1815."
[63] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Notes on the Bakhtiari Tribes and Their Chiefs by Lieutenant Ranking," 16.
[64] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), 17.
[65] Library of Congress, "Mobilized Strength and Casualty Losses | World War I Rotogravures, 1914-1919."

nomadic societies[66], but it did mean that Bakhtiari society was much more concerned with military matters than their sedentary neighbors. In times where the state was weak, Bakhtiari brigandage became a significant issue, as it was for example in 1813, where a khan of the Bakhtiyarvand *bab* raided all the way north to Tehran.[67] Khans also often extorted and raided villages in Arabestan, sometimes claiming these lands for themselves as well.[68] Finally, they also often fought amongst themselves for pasture rights and other similar matters, but also for their khans' ambitions to political power. These conflicts ranged from full battles, to raids on property, to theft of livestock.[69] The profit and plunder of these raids and battles would be distributed amongst all the fighting men, which was their right for risking their own lives and property.[70] The men of the Bakhtiari thus had two ways of making a living: managing and tending to their herds, or warfare. However, of these two, warfare and plunder were the easier path. For the khans, having such a large and willing source of manpower at their command made warfare similarly attractive, and conflict became an ever-present fact of Bakhtiari society throughout the entire nineteenth century. For ambitious khans, the ultimate goal became the unification of all Bakhtiari clans under their banner. The Haft Lang khan Hossein Qoli Khan Ilkhani of the Duraki *bab* – who decades after his death would still be referred to respectfully as "the late Ilkhani"[71] – would be the first to succeed, but he was not the first to make the attempt.[72] By seeing where the ilkhan would succeed, and where his predecessors failed, the nature of power in Bakhtiari politics can be made clear.

THE CHAHAR LANG AND MOHAMMAD TAQI KHAN

Throughout much of the eighteenth century, the Duraki *bab* of the future ilkhan had enjoyed the position of being the most powerful branch among both the Haft Lang, as well as the Bakhtiari as a whole. However, during the first decades of the Qajar dynasty, the Duraki seemed to have lost their position among the Haft Lang in favor of the Bakhtiyarvand, and the Haft Lang as a whole were losing power to their ascendant rivals among the Chahar Lang.[73] Their recent partial transition into sedentary life gave the Chahar Lang control over the

[66] Kradin and Barfield, *Nomadic Pathways in Social Evolution*, 75.
[67] Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 64.
[68] Garthwaite, 87.
[69] Garthwaite, 100.
[70] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Note on Bakhtiari Policy," FO 248-1324, 5.
[71] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari," WO 106/5960, 21.
[72] Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 17.
[73] Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran*, 48–50; Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 62–63.

villages and the accompanying agricultural wealth, which had made them considerably richer than their Haft Lang counterparts.[74] In addition, they also managed to (at least initially) maintain an amicable relationship with the Qajar court. Zainab Khanum, the sister of the most important Chahar Lang Khan, 'Ali Khan, was one of the wives of Fath-'Ali Shah Qajar.[75] Although this should not be seen as evidence of any close cooperation or interest in Bakhtiari affairs, given that the Shah had 160 wives over the course of his life, it still suggests that the Chahar Lang had not yet run afoul of the Qajar court.[76] However, this was not to last. 'Ali Khan got into conflict with his brothers, and the Qajars – employing a divide and rule strategy – decided to support his brother Hasan Khan instead. The Shah managed to capture 'Ali Khan and blinded him, and his sons would be forced to grow up in hiding. One of these sons, Mohammad Taqi Khan, managed to regain control of his *bab* by killing his uncle when he was only 18 years old. Mohammad Taqi Khan went on to use this base of power with his own people to expand his rule over much of the Bakhtiari through marriage, alliance, and the wealth of his agricultural holdings. Once again, this aroused suspicions in the Qajar court. In reaction to this threat, the new Shah, Mohammad Shah Qajar, took interest in Bakhtiari affairs once again, looking for ways to keep this rising khan compliant.[77]

Despite not having the support of the government, and thus not functioning as the official intermediary between the tribe and the state, Mohammad Taqi Khan was still deemed the supreme authority of all Bakhtiari by most clans. This included not only the Chahar Lang, but also some among the Haft Lang, including Hossein Qoli's *bab*, the Duraki. He had not managed to unify all the Bakhtiari, but for the moment, there was peace.[78] Austen Henry Layard – a British traveler stayed with the Chahar Lang during the winter of 1840-1841 – heaps praise on the great Chahar Lang Khan. After meeting him in Malamir, Layard even goes as far as to say that Mohammad Taqi Khan was such a wise, just, and charismatic leader, that he would be able to win his independence from the Qajar state and their demands of taxation and tribute if he would be able to fully cement his rule over the Bakhtiari.[79] Even if we call into question Layard's characterization as the flowery language of a travelogue, we do know that the threat of Bakhtiari power was taken very seriously by the Qajars. That autumn,

[74] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari," WO 106/5960, 19–21.
[75] Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 62.
[76] Eskandari-Qajar, "Temporary and Permanent Marriages at the Court of Fath `Ali Shah Qajar."
[77] Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 67.
[78] Henry Layard, *Early Adventures in Persia, Susania, and Babylonia*, 349.
[79] Henry Layard, 450–54.

the khan had been forced to send his own brother as a hostage to Tehran for assurances of loyalty.[80] The Bakhtiari owed the government a substantial sum of taxes that Mohammad could and would not pay, and they hoped that this threat to his brother might force the khan to acquiesce in time.[81] When payment still did not arrive, the governor of Isfahan advanced on Malamir with his troops, and Mohammad Taqi Khan was forced to turn over his eldest son as a hostage after a month of negotiations. At the same time, the governor of Shiraz had made sure that the tribes that had formerly accepted Mohammad Taqi's authority withdrew their support. Threatening to kill his son, and without any support from his allies, Mohammad Taqi Khan was forced to accept his arrest and imprisonment in Tehran, where he died in 1851.[82]

THE GREAT ILKHAN

The capture of the last great khan of the Chahar Lang in 1841 caused a power vacuum among the Bakhtiari, where other groups saw and took their chance at power. The first to make the attempt was Ja'far Quli Khan of the Bakhtiyarvand, but he quickly lost favor with the government and was replaced by Kalb 'Ali of the Duraki, the uncle of the future ilkhan, Hossein Qoli Khan.[83] Hossein's father – also named Ja'far Qoli Khan – had been the previous head of the Duraki *bab*, but was killed in battle with his Bakhtiyarivand namesake in 1836.[84] Leadership of the Duraki had then passed on to Ja'far's brother, Kalb 'Ali, who became the guardian of young Hossein and his three brothers. By 1841, Hossein had joined the service of the governor of Isfahan, and assisted him in Mohammad Taqi Khan's capture, thereby winning the confidence of the local government officials. Afterwards, conflict arose between Hossein and his uncle over his father's inheritance, and the Haft Lang khans started fighting each other; some supporting Kalb 'Ali, while others rallied behind Hossein and his brothers. Hossein won, and his uncle was killed in battle in 1846, whereafter he became the undisputed head of the Duraki and the Haft Lang.[85] Because he held the trust of key government officials, Hossein was then able to spread his influence over the Bakhtiari for the next three-and-a-half decades unimpeded by the machinations of the Qajar state. So long as the government had trust that Hossein remained loyal, and that he would collect taxes in their name, they saw no issue with his expanding power over the Bakhtiari. It was not out of the ordinary for other

[80] Henry Layard, 318–20.
[81] Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 66–70.
[82] Garthwaite, 70–71.
[83] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari," WO 106/5960, 20.
[84] Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 74.
[85] Garthwaite, 74–75.

nomadic groups in the country to have their own ilkhan appointed by the state, who would be the sole representative of the entire tribe. In Hossein's case, he was first given the title of *nazim* (organizer) in 1862, and in 1867 he was named as the first ilkhan of the Bakhtiari.[86]

Hossein Qoli Khan succeeded where Mohammad Taqi Khan failed in large part due to government support, but he was also more successful at drawing support from the various Bakhtiari *babs* through clever politicking and alliances.[87] Throughout his life he had a total of eight wives, and by arranging marriages for his six sons and twelve daughters he was further able to form connections between his family with almost all the key players among the Bakhtiari. Creating bonds of kinship – as is common in aristocratic societies – thus seemed more of a means to cement alliances between two groups of elites, rather than a way through which the khan could be connected with his own people. Of the marriages the ilkhan arranged for his daughters, three were with men of the Ahmad Khosrowi clan of the Duraki, which is notable since they were few in number (only 150 families) and were already closely connected to the ilkhan's own clan.[88] However, the strengthening of the ties between the two *tayafah* would soon develop into the important military *bastagan* (relatives, sing. *bastah*) system – which would persist into the final years of the Qajar dynasty. Through secondary marriages between Hossein's family and the Ahmad Khosrowi, the second would enter the service of the ruling khans as permanent retainers. As a result, the men of the Ahmad Khosrowi became known as the best fighters in the Bakhtiari, although there were also occasionally similar deals with other clans as well. The *bastah* grew very wealthy of the gifts and payments that the ruling khans gave them for their service, and became less and less reliant on their own property.[89] These forces of professional fighters – financially dependent on the khans – would soon become a vital and much sought-after resource for any khan looking to advance his own power. However, they were incredibly expensive, and their payment would become a pressing issue as Bakhtiari khans felt the need to find more and more sources of revenue to secure their own powerbase.[90]

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[86] Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran*, 60–62.
[87] Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 74.
[88] Garthwaite, 76.
[89] Garthwaite, 80–81; The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Notes on the Bakhtiari Tribes and Their Chiefs by Lieutenant Ranking," 15.
[90] Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 81; The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Note on Bakhtiari Policy," 6.

Another significant advantage of the ilkhan was the lack of conflict with his brothers. From all we know, they seemed to work well together and none attempted to usurp Hossein's power during his lifetime. It was one of these brothers, Riza Qoli Khan, who managed to force the Chahar Lang into submission. The Chahar Lang now only held a marginal position in Bakhtiari politics, and this seemed to have only accelerated their transition to sedentary life.[91] Though the khans already had their winter headquarters in Malamir, the ilkhan also built a fortress on the banks of a lake in the fertile Chigakhor valley for their summer headquarters. During their stay there, Hossein Qoli Khan Ilkhani and his family would stay in the fortress, but all the lesser khans and the rank-and-file would stay in tents outside. Furthermore, this valley was part of the official territory of the Zarasvand *bab*, but the ruling khans saw no issue making it their headquarters.[92] Both of these factors suggest that Hossein had managed to place all the other khans fully under the authority of him and his family. At the end of his 35-year reign, there was little that could threaten their power from any of the other clans.

Despite all his successes, Hossein Qoli Khan Ilkhani did not die peacefully. During the 1870s, he had become involved in a conflict between two Qajar princes: The Zill al-Sultan, who had become the governor of Isfahan, and Farhad Mirza, who was governor of Fars. These two princes fought over the rights to tax certain territories, and used nomadic tribes as their weapons therein. While Farhad Mirza used his influence over the Qashqai, the Zill al-Sultan was aided by the Bakhtiari ilkhan, who sent letters to the governor of Fars threatening to send 5000 horsemen against him. This display finally shone a spotlight on how powerful the Bakhtiari had become in the preceding decades, and Naser al-Din Shah Qajar began to take the military threat posed by the Bakhtiari very seriously, which no longer seemed to outweigh the decades of cooperation with the imperial government.[93] The Zill al-Sultan, fearful of Bakhtiari power and fearful of losing influence at his father's court, acted against the ilkhan. In 1882, during a routine payment of taxes in Isfahan, Hossein Qoli Khan Ilkhani was entertained by the prince in the governor's mansion and, during this stay, his host arranged to have the ilkhan murdered. After 36 years of leadership, Hossein Qoli Khan Ilkhani was either strangled or poisoned on what were purportedly the Shah's orders.[94] At the same time, the Zill

[91] Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 75.
[92] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Notes on the Bakhtiari Tribes and Their Chiefs by Lieutenant Ranking," 167–68.
[93] Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran*, 66–67; Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 96.
[94] Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 92; The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari," WO 106/5960, 20.

al-Sultan had also managed to imprison the ilkhan's eldest son, Esfandiar Khan. In one day, the Qajar state had removed this growing threat to their own rule, or at least believed they did, but after 35 years of unquestioned rule by the late Ilkhani, the Bakhtiari could and would not return to the independent *babs* of before.

THE RULING FAMILIES

After the death of Hossein Qoli Khan Ilkhani, the ilkhanship passed over his sons (even those not imprisoned) and was inherited by one of his brothers, Imam Qoli Khan, instead. Another brother, Reza Qoli Khan, was made second-in-command, or *ilbaig*. Imam Qoli Khan made the pilgrimage to Mecca not long after obtaining his title, and became subsequently known as the Hajji Ilkhani.[95] He ruled unopposed for 7 years, but shifts within the Qajar court made sure it did not last. In 1888 the Zill al-Sultan lost favor at court, and the Shah decreed the Hajji Ilkhani deposed in favor of Reza Qoli Khan. At the same time, he released the eldest son of the late Ilkhani, Esfandiar Khan, and appointing him ilbaig. However, the Hajji Ilkhani resisted, and Esfandiar had to defeat his uncle in battle. With the aid of the Qajar army, he succeeded, and he was rewarded with the title of *Samsam-es-Saltaneh* (Sword of the State).[96]

The political situation of the late nineteenth-century Bakhtiari had been chaotic ever since the late Ilkhani's death, and factions had arisen around the sons of Hossein Qoli Khan Ilkhani's sons (who would become known as the Ilkhani family), and the Hajji Ilkhani and his children (the Hajji Ilkhani family). The number of *bastagan* had only increased, and the size of the two families had created a situation where power was anything but secure. [97] It only took two years for the Hajji Ilkhani to retake the ilkhanship, but Esfandiar was still allowed to remain in power as ilbaig (Reza Qoli was given the governorship of Chahar Mahal in lieu of a position of leadership among the Bakhtiari). A tenuous peace was reached when the Hajji Ilkhani passed away and Esfandiar became Ilkhan. He appointed the eldest son of his predecessor as ilbaig, and set the precedent that never should the two offices be held by one family. If the ilkhan was an Ilkhani, the ilbaig was to be a Hajji Ilkhani, and vice versa.[98] But even if this compromise prevented one family becoming dominant over the other, it was by no means an end to the struggles for power. After decades of unification, the Bakhtiari still

[95] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari," WO 106/5960, 21; Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 96–97.
[96] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari," WO 106/5960, 21–22.
[97] Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 97.
[98] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari," 20–22.

consisted of various powerful khans with their own troops engaged in a constant struggle for power. Only now they were no longer of different tribes, but different factions within the same clan.

The ways in which Bakhtiari society was shaped strongly incentivized the khans to pursue their ambitions with violent means, especially when the state was too weak to put their thumb on the scale. The mobility provided by a predominantly pastoral subsistence allowed the majority of able-bodied men to take up arms, and the rank-and-file was incentivized to do so because the sharing of plunder assured them wealth that they could never obtain through the mere keeping of their own herds. In addition, their mobility also made it difficult for the leadership to fully subdue their most powerful rivals. In times of conflict, any rivals could take their herds, hide in the countryside, and fight in skirmishes and raids. Instead, any who aimed to hold onto leadership were forced to placate their most powerful rivals, which had no guarantees of success. However, with the shift from power resting in the hands of various clans and their khans towards the monopolization of power by only two families, the role of the rank-and-file also changed. The shift to the *bastagan* system meant that the great khans no longer relied primarily on soldiers of their own *tayafah* or *bab*, which would have been impossible since all of them were still part of the same clan. Having access to their own core of skilled, loyal, and well-equipped fighters that could be used be used for their political ambitions meant that this structure of independent power-holders remained more-or-less in place, albeit in a different manner. However, the big change of the *bastagan* system was the increasing pressure it put on the khans to obtain the financial means necessary to pay these men.

Thus, the economic system of the Bakhtiari created a political system that, transformed through unification, would incentivize their actions in the decades to come. Power attracts rivals, and if the khans wanted to maintain theirs, they were forced into both a literal and a metaphorical arms race to hoard more and more wealth and power for themselves. Their herds alone could no longer provide them with enough funds, and so the khans were incentivized to look outside of their lands. Thus, when the British came with offers that would provide the khans with funds they needed, they found it difficult to refuse. The structure of their society – the decentralization and militarization provided by nomadism, as well as the financial requirements of the *bastagan* system and the relative stability provided by their newfound centralization – made possible the rise and fall of Bakhtiari power in the last decades of the Qajar era.

THE BRITISH & THE BAKHTIARI ROAD

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Bakhtiari stood as a rising power within the country. Their unification under the late Hossein Qoli Khan Ilkhani had given them a stability they had not seen before, and with it came the strength to resist any interventions of the Qajar court. However, the Bakhtiari focus was pointed inwards, and they had few ambitions beyond their own lands. The khans remained concerned with the offices of ilkhan and ilbaig, which required at least a modicum of cooperation with Tehran, but aside from this, they took little interest in Iran's national politics. For the moment, this served the Iranian government well enough, as the theoretical threat posed by the Bakhtiari would not become an actuality as long as they kept to themselves. For the British, this tenuous peace between court and khan provided an opportunity for business, and they began to deal with the Bakhtiari khans directly, without relying on the Qajars to serve as an intermediary.[99] This eventually evolved into a close, albeit tumultuous, relationship between the ruling khans of the Bakhtiari and the British Empire. The aim of this chapter is to explain how the previously described changes in Bakhtiari society gave both sides the reasons and ability to develop this relationship. In addition, the ways in which Bakhtiari society began to be affected by their entanglement will be described, as this would come to have big effects on internal Bakhtiari politics, as well as their future ambitions on the national scene.

THE LYNCH BROTHERS

Back in the 1840s, the travel writer and archaeologist Austen Henry Layard proposed a plan to build roads through Bakhtiari territory, aiming to gain access to the natural resources and other commodities of the Bakhtiari country.[100] With the arrest of Mohammad Taqi Khan not even a year later, Layard's plan never amounted to anything, and the idea of building a road through Bakhtiari land would fade into the background for the next half-century. It took until 1888 for the British to reevaluate the idea, which was when Nadir Shah opened up the Karun River (which flows through Bakhtiari territory) to international trade. Henry Lynch and his brother, who ran the Tigris and Euphrates Steam Navigation Company of Baghdad (also referred to as just the Lynch Brothers company) began to take advantage of this new route to

[99] Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran*, 122–24.
[100] Henry Layard, *Early Adventures in Persia, Susania, and Babylonia*, 458–59.

try and push further into Iran's interior.[101] In contrast to Layard, the Lynch brothers did not want to exploit the resources of the Bakhtiari mountains, and instead aimed to open up trade with the city of Isfahan, thereby giving them access to the markets and industry of northern Iran. The river could only take them so far, however, and the rest of the route would have to go overland, through Bakhtiari territory.[102] Henry Lynch was invited by the Haft Lang khans to visit their territory for negotiations only a year after the river had been opened. At the same time, the British colonial government in India began taking interest in the Bakhtiari, sending missions to survey the territory in 1890 and 1891.[103] However, despite all this, it took until 1897 for the first plans on the future "Bakhtiari Road" to be set into motion. The brothers Lynch were not willing to start such a project until they were sure that their investments were safe. The British administration, seeing potential in this project, interceded on their behalf, obtaining a concession from the Qajar government for the Lynch Brothers company to construct a road through the mountains.[104]

Both the Qajar government and the Bakhtiari khans were wary, however. The continuing spread of British influence was not something the Qajars were very happy with, and the Bakhtiari desired to preserve their own autonomy and independence. To make this project possible, both groups would not accept management and control of the road to lay in foreign hands. The British, for their part, did not want to give this power to the Qajar government. So, as a compromise, the eventual concession placed much of the power in the hands of the Bakhtiari khans. Charles Hardinge, a secretary at the British Legation in Tehran, writes: "It was decided that it would be better that all mention should be omitted from the concession of the proposed construction of the road by Messrs Lynch, a clause being inserted securing the right of the Bakhtiari Chiefs to call in the aid of the capitalists who may lend them money on terms to be agreed upon between the Chiefs and the Capitalists."[105] During the subsequent negotiations, it was finally agreed upon by all parties that the Bakhtiari Khans would be the only ones allowed to guard, patrol, perform basic repairs, and handle the collection of tolls on this new road.[106] At first blush, it seemed that the main beneficiaries of this project would not

[101] Cole, "Precarious Empires: A Social and Environmental History of Steam Navigation on the Tigris"; Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran*, 90–91.
[102] Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran*, 91.
[103] Khazeni, 91–93.
[104] Khazeni, 101–3.
[105] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Charles Hardinge's May Letter to the Prime Minister, the Marquess of Salisbury." FO 60/631
[106] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Charles Hardinge's Letter to the Lynch Brothers." FO 60/631

be Iran or Britain, but the Bakhtiari khans. In addition to having almost full control of the road's management, the khans would be able to keep most of the revenues of the road themselves. After they would have paid back their debts from the Lynch Brothers' initial investment, only 6% of the company's ongoing expenses would have to be covered by the khans, and all remaining profits would be theirs to keep.[107] Even the Lynch Brothers company was not exempt from the tolls to be levied by the Bakhtiari, and would merely be "entitled to enjoy the most favourable terms accorded to any other party".[108]

The two brothers were initially hesitant to give that much power and responsibility to the Bakhtiari, and they feared that the road might be unsafe or fall into disrepair. During the negotiations, they often asked the British Legation (who acted as an intermediary between the Lynch Company and the Bakhtiari) to dial back their proposed plans, which the British Legation almost always politely declined. For example, Henry Lynch wanted to have joint oversight of the toll collection between them and the Bakhtiari, but Charles Hardinge – the legation's minister – informed Lynch that he did not see the necessity of such an arrangement. Similarly, Lynch wanted to have additional oversight by the Persian Government to ensure security along the new road, but Hardinge flat-out refused.[109] In the end, the Lynch Brothers company was much more interested in what the road could do, which new markets it would give them access to, and the potential of profit in that. So, if this deal worked out well enough (and their investments were paid back), they were willing to begrudgingly accept Bakhtiari control.[110]

The British Legation managed to negotiate a deal that was, in the end, much more favorable to the Bakhtiari khans than to their own countrymen. However, their arguments for refusing Lynch Brothers' requests reveals how this all fit into the long-term British strategy for Iran. The short-term profits for British subjects, though not unimportant, were put aside in favor of a deal that would ensure the empire's long-term interests were advanced. Charles Hardinge writes:

> "As regards the second point, viz: the nature of the security, I cannot agree with you at all that the guarantee of the Persian Government would improve either the security or the prospects of the undertaking, in fact I think it would have quite the opposite effect.

[107] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Memorandum of Agreement."
[108] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Amendments." FO 60/631
[109] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Charles Hardinge's Letter to the Lynch Brothers." FO 60/631
[110] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Memorandum of Agreement."

> Now the present situation of the case is this: The Persian Government have given a concession to the Bakhtiaris to make the road with foreign capital. Supposing the road is built with English money, and the Persian Government finding this road a success, try to interfere with its administration with a view of acquiring a share of the profits, the Legation would then have the right to come forward and to say to the Persian Government 'Hands off'"[111]

At the same time, the British – still looking to protect their subjects – managed to convince the Shah to act as a guarantor to the Lynch Brothers, should the Bakhtiari khans not manage to fully pay back their loan. In a letter from Hardinge to the British Prime Minister, we can see their strategy of framing the project as a "concession to the Bakhtiaris" rather than to themselves in action:

> "His Highness informed me that the Shah had agreed to accept responsibility for the payments to be made to Messrs Lynch, but he suggested that other parties besides the Bakhtiari chiefs should hold an interest in the concession. This proposal I said I could not listen to for a moment since the Bakhtiari Chiefs would not admit any Persian or foreign influence into the administration of the road … After some further discussion His Highness decided that the question should be settled in accordance with my wishes."[112]

By recusing themselves of any right to administer the road – only providing the capital – the British Legation managed to convince the Qajar government to keep their "hands off" as well. In practice, this meant that the British could use their developing relationship with the Bakhtiari to expand their influence further and further into Iran without any fears of interference from Tehran. They were able to use the Bakhtiari as a shield of plausible deniability, thereby benefiting both themselves, the Lynch Brothers company (who enjoyed risk-free investment due to the government's guarantee), and the Bakhtiari khans; all to the detriment of the Qajars.

[111] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Charles Hardinge's Letter to the Lynch Brothers." FO 60/631
[112] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Charles Hardinge's December Letter to the Prime Minister, the Marquess of Salisbury." FO 60/631

THE ROAD IN PRACTICE

Starting with the construction of the Bakhtiari Road, the ruling khans became a key part of the British imperialist strategy in western and north-western Iran; a relationship where, over the years, the khans were able to derive a significant amount of financial gain. By 1900, two bridges had been completed, but the road was not yet ready for trade caravans. Even without the presence of trade, the Bakhtiari Khans already managed to obtain an annual revenue of £1500 (approximately £230.000 in 2024, adjusted for inflation[113]) from charging tolls on the traffic of their own subjects.[114] That is not to say that it all went without any issues, however. Not long after the road had become fully operational, disputes between Lynch Brothers and the khans began. In 1906, the road had already fallen into such disrepair that trade caravans did not dare send their heavily-laden pack animals across. Since, as per their agreement, the Bakhtiari khans held all responsibility for basic repairs, Lynch Brothers (which had rebranded itself to The Persian Transport Company) accused the khans of breaking these promises and asked the British Legation to once again intercede on their behalf.[115] In the same year, reports had come in that the Bakhtiari road guards were extorting passengers along the route, and the company asked the British Legation to ensure that the khans "maintain discipline and pay them proper wages in order to put an end to the disgraceful blackmailing of passengers".[116]

The British Legation, on their end, was skeptical of the Lynch brothers' claims. They suspected that the poor state of the road was to blame on the Persian Transport Company's poor initial construction, rather than on a failure on the Bakhtiari end, and internal letters reveal that they made a point of not appearing biased in favor of the company. Regarding the cases of blackmail, the British aimed to only keep it "within moderate bounds". Their plan was to merely verify and report any cases to khans so that "sheer weariness might stimulate them to do what they can", rather than the direct pressure that Lynch had asked for.[117] These responses show that British officials at the time were very careful to maintain a good relationship with the Bakhtiari. Their strategy in Iran required them to remain friendly with the khans so that they could be used to further British interests under a veil of plausible

[113] Allen, "Inflation: The Value of the Pound 1750-2002"; Office for National Statistics, "Consumer Price Inflation, Historical Estimates and Recent Trends, UK - Office for National Statistics."
[114] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Lynch Brothers' Letter to the Foreign Office." FO 60/631
[115] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "February Letter from the Persian Transport Company to the Foreign Office."
[116] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "November Letter from the Persian Transport Company to the Foreign Office."
[117] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Captain D.L.R. Lorimer's Letter to Major P.Z. Cox."

deniability. It is worth noting that up until the signing of the 1907 Anglo-Russian convention – where the British and Russian empires divided Iran into their respective spheres of influence – the two empires were still involved in the so-called "Great Game", which saw both powers jockeying for power in Iran and Central Asia.[118] This heavily incentivized the British to focus on expanding their long-term influence over any short-term concerns. In this light, British involvement in Bakhtiari territory can be interpreted as part of this larger battle for influence – with the Bakhtiari and Qajar government only serving as pieces on the playing field – and where any minor cases of blackmail or lost profits were deemed acceptable sacrifices. Thus, for the British, the Bakhtiari road and its potential profits were only a means to an end, not an end in themselves. However, British involvement in Bakhtiari affairs did not end with the building of this road.

BLACK GOLD

In 1901, four years after granting the Lynch brothers a concession, the Qajar government granted another concession to the company of another British businessman: William Knox D'Arcy. Petroleum, long considered one of Iran's least useful natural resources, was starting to turn into a tremendously valuable commodity with the invention of the automobile and the airplane, and the transition of the world's navies to oil-based fuels. D'Arcy himself would never set foot in Iran, but his company obtained a concession to extract and export the country's oil, tax-free. A decision that would lay the groundwork for half a century of APOC (Anglo-Persian Oil Company, later BP) dominance of Iran's oil industry.[119] After a few years of trying and failing to find a suitable spot to begin large-scale oil production, the company decided to drill for oil in the *garmsir* of the Bakhtiari, where the presence of oil deposits had already been established. The problem with this was that the Bakhtiari, autonomous as they were, were not bound by the D'Arcy Concession to actually open up their land to them, and so a new agreement had to be reached.

In 1905, negotiations started with the most important of the Bakhtiari Khans.[120] Esfandiar Khan had died two years prior, and he had passed his honorific titles onto his younger brothers, Najaf Qoli Khan and 'Ali Qoli Khan, who became known in almost all official

[118] Dean, *Mapping the Great Game : Explorers, Spies & Maps in Nineteenth-Century Asia*, 269–70.
[119] "The D'Arcy Oil Concession."
[120] Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran*, 120–21.

correspondence as Samsam-es-Saltaneh and Sardar As'ad respectively.[121] Najaf Qoli Khan, the Samsam-es-Saltaneh, was ilkhan of the Bakhtiari during these negotiations, but it was his younger brother Sardar As'ad who served as the spokesman for the khans. He was hesitant to give away the rights to these lands to foreign businessmen, and demanded that the Bakhtiari be made equal partners, with a cut of the profits of at least 20%. After a lot of negotiations this was whittled down to only 5%, but D'Arcy still thought this too much. Finally, the ilkhan and ilbaig agreed on only a 3% cut of the profits, in addition to an annual subsidy of £3000 and a number of shares in the subsidiary "Bakhtiari Oil Company" and "First Exploitation Company".[122] Sardar As'ad, though protesting loudly to his fellow khans, was eventually convinced to sign the agreement as well. The fact that the British would make such a deal with the Bakhtiari without consulting the Qajar government first managed to draw to ire of the court, as it was a further sign of the waning power of Tehran over the Bakhtiari, but there was little they were able to do. Both the weakness of the Qajar state and the independence of the Bakhtiari had only increased since 1897, and the British no longer felt they had to pay lip service to Qajar sovereignty. The agreement was made, and the objections of the government were ignored by both sides.[123]

The Bakhtiari Agreement copied much of the wording of the D'Arcy concession, where pastoral land was considered uncultivated and unprotected, and could be claimed free-of-cost by the D'Arcy Oil Syndicate. [124] In effect, the ruling khans had made a deal wherein they gave away significant portions of the pastoral lands of their subjects for their own financial gain. As explained in the previous chapter, the nineteenth-century predecessors of the khans often fought amongst themselves for grazing rights or the rights to demand tribute of certain villages. Rather than land being held in common by the entire tribe, it appeared to ultimately be the property of the khans, who had the right to do with it what they wished. Normally, this still served their subjects, as grazing rights secured the strength, wealth, and loyalty of their own tribe, whose population in turn determined the military strength of the khan. However, this changed with the centralization of power in the ruling khans and the increasing financial requirements of the *bastagan* system. Now, the traditional authority of the khans was being used in dealings that benefited them and only them, with little of the benefits passing down to

[121] Garthwaite, "ESFANDĪĀR KHAN BAḴTĪĀRĪ."
[122] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Annual Report 1910"; Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran*, 120–23.
[123] Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran*, 122–24.
[124] Khazeni, 123.

the Bakhtiari majority. Even though the cut of the profits that the khans would receive from the oil drilling seemed tiny, the ruling khans only had to share these profits amongst themselves. The shares were first equally divided between the two ruling families, and then between the eldest sons of these families, meaning each person received approximately an individual share of 0.25% of the entire profits.[125] It would take a while for these profits to accrue, however, as oil would only pass through the pipes after 1912[126], but in the end this deal would still prove tremendously lucrative.[127] Similarly, the Bakhtiari Road was a project wherein the khans accrued most of the direct financial benefits. These also did not pass on to the rank-and-file, whose low pay relegated them to the extortion of merchants. Despite the issues with the construction, by 1907 trade along the road had increased considerably, and the revenues accrued by the ruling khans had grown to more than £3000 a year (the Lynch Brothers company, during the same period, only saw losses).[128] Supplementing their traditional incomes as rulers with these British projects, the khans of the two ruling families grew very wealthy, and the gap between them and their own subjects grew larger and larger. This became especially noticeable once oil revenues started rolling in, as Khazeni notes: "While the khans profited immensely from oil revenues, they were delegitimized in the eyes of their tribal subjects, who came to view the chieftaincy as politically and economically co-opted by the British."[129]

The geography of the Bakhtiari made the British turn their eye to their lands in the first place, for both traffic and resource extraction. The autonomy of the Bakhtiari, made possible by the tremendous military potential and the mobility that their nomadic society provided them, made them useful to the British as a shield against Qajar meddling and a pawn in their "Great Game". But it was the prior centralization of the Bakhtiari which had allowed them to make these deals at all. If the various subtribes had been as disorganized as they had been during the 1840s, under Mohammad Taqi Khan, then there would have been no assurances to the British that the deals they made would actually go into effect. Even with this centralization, the Bakhtiari and their independent ways were seen as troublesome and unreliable by the British, but in the end the deals were still made and more-or-less adhered to.[130] The ruling khans'

[125] Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 131.
[126] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Annual Report 1910." FO 248/1015
[127] Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran*, 123.
[128] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Revenues Paid to the Chiefs." FO 248/895
[129] Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran*, 123.
[130] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Charles Hardinge March Letter to the Prime Minsiter, the Marquess of Salisbury." FO 60/631

profits from their dealings with the British – which they were strongly incentivized to seek out because of the increasing payments required in the *bastagan* system – also caused them to become tied to British interests. At the same time, however, the British were now incentivized to help maintain stability among the Bakhtiari and the dominant position of the ruling khans. The British were most definitely in the more powerful position, but for the few elites who made up the ruling khans, the deals were mutually beneficial. On the other hand, the common Bakhtiari – as well as the rest of Iran – saw very little upside to this development. By strengthening the khans, British meddling exacerbated the already-growing hierarchical tendencies within Bakhtiari society, and placed the Bakhtiari into a position where they were becoming both a powerful force within Iran, as well as a tool to serve Britain's imperialist ambitions. However, even if they were financially tied to the British, the Bakhtiari khans were still people with their own agency, and their ideas of what to do with this newfound power and wealth did not always fit into British plans quite so easily.

THE ROAD TO REVOLUTION

The Constitutional Revolution was not the type of historical event where one would expect to see the involvement of a group like the Bakhtiari, especially not on the side of the revolutionaries. It was a movement led by the merchants of the urban middle-class, the *Bazaaris,* in an alliance with sections of the Shi'a clergy[131], whilst the nomadic tribes – like other rural landowners – overwhelmingly supported the absolutism of the Shah.[132] The Bakhtiari had become a powerful military and economic force within the country, but their power could just as easily have been used to uphold the system under which they had been allowed to thrive, as indeed it was for the first few years of the revolution. Although the revolution would begin in 1905, the Bakhtiari only committed themselves fully to the revolutionary side in 1909. This chapter aims to provide the context of the revolution, explaining why the Bakhtiari at first blush would seem an odd fit. However, by taking into account the particularities of Bakhtiari society as it stood – most notably their increasing contact with Europe, their newfound reliance on money instead of land and property, and their ever-present internal struggle for power – the fact of their involvement can be shown to be a natural consequence of their earlier history.

THE GREAT GAME

The Qajar state was weak. In the face of the ever-increasing European encroachment, the Shah no longer showed the strength necessary to protect the country. Failed wars against European powers had made it clear that Iran was no longer in a position to competently resist the imperialist powers of Russia and Great Britain.[133] However, it managed to hold onto its independence precisely because these two empires were locked into a careful balance that neither dared to upset.[134] Zia-Ebrahimi writes:

> "Iran's geostrategic position brought about political interference in its affairs. Iran became a de facto buffer state in the strategic rivalry between Britain and Russia in Central Asia, later called the "Great Game" by British diplomats. Both empires considered their presence in Iran to be vital to their imperial interests—Russia,

[131] Amanat, 316.
[132] Amanat, 143.
[133] Zia-Ebrahimi, *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism: Race and the Politics of Dislocation*, 120–23.
[134] Zia-Ebrahimi, 17–20.

> regarding the Caucasus and Central Asia, and Britain, concerning access to the Subcontinent. However, neither could make a definite move to turn Iran into a colonial possession without incurring the risk of an all-out military confrontation. Thanks to this fragile balance, the Qajars managed to maintain some nominal sovereignty, but it came with foreign presence and interference."[135]

Such foreign interference forced the Qajar Shahs to give away concessions to the imperialist powers, which only further harmed their credibility. Naser al-Din Shah Qajar, in order to pay for his first tour of Europe, signed the 1872 Reuters Concession, which gave the British subject (and founder of the Reuters news agency), Baron Paul Julius Reuter, a total monopoly on the construction of railways, canals, and irrigation works; exclusive rights to all the mines, forests, and uncultivated lands; and the right of first refusal for all future banks, mills, factories, and workshops.[136] "The most complete and extraordinary surrender of the entire industrial resources of a kingdom into foreign hands that has probably ever been dreamed of, much less accomplished" as the Viceroy of India, George Curzon, put it.[137] Fearful of British influence, the Russian Empire and the Shi'ite clergy both pressured the Shah to repeal the concession. However, the subsequent settlement only brought the government further into financial trouble, causing them to spiral and to give the British Imperial Bank of Persia a monopoly on all issuing of banknotes in return for a bailout.[138] In 1891, the Shah also signed the infamous Tobacco Concession, which was once again repealed by clerical influence, this time causing mass protests and widespread boycotts.[139] This backdrop of humiliation by European powers – combined with a simultaneous admiration for those institutions which were perceived to be the source of their strength – gave rise to a movement which was not only constitutionalist, but nationalist.[140]

CONSTITUTIONALISM & NATIONALISM

The revolution began in the final weeks of 1905. People protesting the government's mistreatment of sugar merchants listened to the words of a popular preacher, and when he was forcefully expelled from the mosque, many of the pro-constitutionalist 'ulama left the city in

[135] Zia-Ebrahimi, 20.
[136] Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History*, 283–85; Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, 480–81.
[137] Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, 480.
[138] Zia-Ebrahimi, *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism: Race and the Politics of Dislocation*, 21; Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History*, 303.
[139] Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History*, 305–9.
[140] Zia-Ebrahimi, *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism: Race and the Politics of Dislocation*, 125–26.

protest.[141] Naser al-Din Shah had been assassinated in 1896, and the early reign of his successor, Mozaffar al-Din Shah Qajar, was marred by financial difficulties. The price controls he had implemented were considered draconian by the protesters, and they joined the clergy in leaving the city.[142] Over the next months, protests and the accompanying government clampdown continued, but no mention was yet made of a constitution or parliament. That changed in July of 1906, when a group of Tehrani merchants took sanctuary (*bast*) with the British Legation, growing to a size of fourteen thousand people. There, the merchants – especially those who had a western education – took the lead, and started publicly proclaiming the benefits of a constitution. By telegraph, they spread these messages to other cities, and soon the movement had become a national affair. A month later, the Shah signed a decree for the establishment of a national assembly, the *Majles*. When it opened a few months later, its members quickly began to work to establish a constitution, which was signed by the Shah on his deathbed on December 30th, 1906. A few days later, Mozaffar al-Din Shah Qajar passed away. His son would inherit the throne, becoming known as Mohammad 'Ali Shah Qajar.[143]

The late Shah's successor was much less amenable to the idea of a constitution, and immediately began to work against his father's deathbed decree. What's more, the constitutionalist cause could no longer count on implicit British support. Only a year after giving *bast*, the two powers signed the Anglo-Russian convention which put an end to their "Great Game"[144], and divided Iran into a Russian zone of influence in the north and a British zone of influence in the south.[145] With the two powers now suddenly allied, Britain's relatively friendly position to the nationalists instantly disappeared. Their deal had given the Russian Empire carte blanche to occupy the northern provinces and force its wishes on the central government.[146] Despite these setbacks, the constitutional movement pressed onwards, and, in the fall of 1907, they signed into law a supplement to the constitution that guaranteed basic liberties.[147] However, the Shah gathered around himself an anti-constitutionalist front,

[141] Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History*, 315–16.
[142] Amanat, 315, 331–33.
[143] Amanat, 333–36.
[144] Amanat, 337–38.
[145] Wilson, "Creative Accounting: The Place of Loans to Persia in the Commencement of the Negotiation of the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907."
[146] Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History*, 344.
[147] Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History*, 337–38.

appointing a new prime minister, aided by both the conservative clergy and the nomadic tribes of Iran.[148]

Hostilities between the two camps only increased the following year. A failed assassination attempt, open calls for the removal of the Shah in the press, and the ambitions to the throne of other Qajar princes – such as the pro-British Zill al-Sultan – had made Mohammad ‘Ali Shah fear for the security of his position. The commander of the Russian-backed Cossack Brigade convinced the Shah to act, and to destroy the Majles. In June, the Cossack forces surrounded and bombarded the Majles building and the revolutionaries guarding it. Afterwards, the Shah’s troops engaged in a brutal campaign of intimidation, executing journalists and noted revolutionaries, and pillaging and raping the neighborhoods surrounding the Majles. Mohammad ‘Ali’s coup d’etat had succeeded, and Qajar absolutism was restored, at least for now.[149]

SARDAR AS’AD

After giving his description of the first protest of the revolution, Abbas Amanat writes:

> “The previously described episode highlights most, if not all, of the elements that would shape the revolution: merchants and artisans resentful of an inefficient and intrusive state; the lower- and middle-ranking mullahs of various shades calling on the mojtaheds to come out in support of the people; the Qajar state’s desperate reactions to demands for popular participation and eventually for a constitution; and finally, the urban population in large numbers. To these groups were added in due course the Western-educated elite, who joined the indigenous radical elements and helped shape the parliament (Majles) and frame the modern constitution.”[150]

The ones who, according to Amanat, led the revolutionary movement were the “merchants and artisans” and the “lower- and middle-ranking mullahs”. The middle classes, aided by a Western-educated elite. Only later would the urban population come out en masse to join these middle-class trailblazers in their ambitions, but even then, they were still urban. Outside of Tehran, important cities with more modern, western-derived industrial economies became the hotbeds of revolutionary activity. Tabriz – the city which Amanat calls the “true center of

[148] Amanat, 143.
[149] Amanat, 348–50.
[150] Amanat, 316.

radical activism"[151] – was one of the first cities in Iran where European businesses and European-derived technologies took hold and had been the largest city in the country before Tehran became the Qajar capital.[152] This then raises the question of how, in a movement so characterized by the urban middle-class, the Bakhtiari managed to become so strongly involved. Cities and towns in Bakhtiari territory were tiny, and the extent of their industry lay in the still-not-yet-operational oil pipelines, managed by the British. Although they engaged in trade, their people could not really be compared to the middle-class merchants of the Tehrani bazaars. However, there was one person among the Bakhtiari who seemed to be a true believer in the constitutional and nationalist causes, or at least strongly aware of the intellectual climate enveloping the cities of Iran: Sardar As'ad.

Sardar As'ad was one of the sons of Hossein Qoli Khan Ilkhani and thus a part of the Ilkhani family of ruling khans. All the sons of the late Ilkhani still alive during the revolution were known in contemporary records by their titles alone, which I will also do for the sake of clarity. The four surviving sons were, from oldest to youngest: Najaf Qoli Khan (Samsam-es-Saltaneh), 'Ali Qoli Khan (Sardar As'ad), Hajji Khosrow Khan (Sardar Zafar), and Yussuf Khan (Amir-e Mujahid).[153] Sardar As'ad had taken over the position of ilkhan from his older brother during early 1906, but according to a British officer "as an Ilkhani he was not a success".[154] Samsam-es-Saltaneh had discredited his brother's rule by organizing raids on the road to Isfahan[155], and regained his position as ilkhan only a few months after his removal, which he was able to mostly retain (excepting a short break in 1908) until the end of the constitutional revolution.[156] Though this might seem like the beginning of a dangerous power struggle, from all we know the two brothers worked well together, both before and after this point. Samsam-es-Saltaneh took on leadership of the Bakhtiari, while Sardar As'ad handled plans, politics, and diplomacy; which could be seen in Sardar's handling of the oil negotiations during Samsam's ilkhanship[157], as described in the previous chapter. After negotiations with the oil syndicate were more-or-less finished, Sardar As'ad took a trip to

[151] Amanat, 334.
[152] James D. Clark, "TABRIZ v. The City in the 19th Century."
[153] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Notes on the Bakhtiari Tribes and Their Chiefs by Lieutenant Ranking," 97–98.
[154] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), 111.
[155] Khazeni, "Opening the Land: Tribes, State, and Ethnicity in Qajar Iran, 1800–1911," 164.
[156] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Notes on the Bakhtiari Tribes and Their Chiefs by Lieutenant Ranking," 108.
[157] Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran*, 120–21.

Europe in 1908/1909 to seek medical treatment for his failing eyesight. Once there, he met up with prominent nationalists and anti-Qajar activists living in exile. Unlike some of the younger generation of Iranians who were at the forefront of the revolution, Sardar As'ad had not received a European education, but he did have a reputation for being well-read, and was able to enjoy many conversations with them about their worldview.[158]

His conversations with these nationalist emigrants proved to have quite an impact. Around this time Sardar As'ad would commission and help write the *Tarikh-e Bakhtiari* (History of the Bakthiari), which would be finished in 1911.[159] This book attempted to tell the entire history of the Bakhtiari, relying on the knowledge of the khans as well as European travelogues.[160] In it, there appear strong signs of the nascent nationalist ideology that was coming to the forefront with the Constitutional Revolution. It builds on European-derived works of history to tie the Bakhtiari to the ancient Persian empires[161], similar to other examples of "archaistic frenzy" among nationalist intellectuals trying to find a new Iranian identity in the pre-Islamic past.[162] Similarly, the book states that the language of the Bakhtiari is closer to the ancient Persian languages – and less influenced by Arabic – than modern Persian[163], once again underlining their status as "pure" Iranians. It also takes care to make the Bakhtiari appear pious, however. By stating that the Bakhtiari had been Shi'ites since before the national conversion of the Safavids[164], they underline both their religiosity as well as their Iranian-ness. The fact that he had this book commissioned, combined with the presentation of Bakhtiari history found within, shows that Sardar As'ad, if not a true believer, was at least keenly aware of the intellectual developments of his time. Wealth, European involvement, and stronger ties with urban Iran had put the Bakhtiari in a different position to their nomadic peers, and one of their khans was now in a position to see the potential of the revolution, without which the Bakhtiari would never have become involved with the revolution.

[158] Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 114.
[159] Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran*, 189–90.
[160] Sardar As'ad, *Tarikh-e Bakhtiari*, 65–101.
[161] Sardar As'ad, 3–6.
[162] Zia-Ebrahimi, *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism: Race and the Politics of Dislocation*, chap. 3.
[163] Sardar As'ad, *Tarikh-e Bakhtiari*, 23.
[164] Sardar As'ad, 8–10.

COURT OR CONSTITUTION

A tenuous peace had followed Mohammad 'Ali Shah's brutal campaign of intimidation, and it was only Tabriz that was still in active rebellion. Most nomadic tribes had already sided with the royalists and it was another Bakhtiari khan – Amir Mufakhkham of the Hajji Ilkhani – that was appointed head of the royal guard and sent with his Bakhtiari cavalry to put down the revolt in Tabriz. He was joined by two other Hajji Ilkhani khans, his brothers Sardar Jang and Sardar Ashja', as well as an Ilkhani khan, Sardar Zafar.[165] However, Sardar As'ad – while he was still in in Europe – managed to convince his older brother, Samsam-es-Saltaneh, to join the fight on the side of the constitutionalists.[166] So, when the Shah's call to arms came, Samsam-es-Saltaneh refused, although he did not yet openly side with the revolutionaries. He and his brother, Sardar Zafar, quarreled openly about this decision. The Shah once again relieved Samsam-es-Saltaneh of his ilkhanship, and appointed Sardar Zafar as ilkhan instead. Samsam-es-Saltaneh no longer had any love for the Shah, and needed to prove his power if he ever wanted to take back his position of leadership. Thus, in December of 1908, Samsam-es-Saltaneh openly declared for the nationalist cause and marched on Isfahan.[167] By January 3rd, fighting and chaos swept across the streets of Isfahan and the governor, the Zill al-Sultan, decided to take his troops and flee to Tehran.[168] Samsam-es-Saltaneh and the rest of his troops arrived not long after, and took control of the city. The rank-and-file looted the city, which had always been their right. However, either Samsam-es-Saltaneh or his brother were cognizant of how such practices could be perceived, and a large number of the stolen items were recovered and returned. The khan then assured everyone that he was only there to ensure that the Shah reestablishes the constitutional regime. He also refused to declare himself governor of Isfahan, at least initially, even though many in the area assumed that had been his goal.[169] During all this, Samsam-es-Saltaneh was still in close communication with Sardar As'ad. A local report by the British consulate states that "a laconic telegram from Hajji Ali Kuli Khan in Paris informs Samsam-ul-Sultaneh that instruction will be sent to him".[170]

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[165] Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran*, 164–65.
[166] Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 114.
[167] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Notes on the Bakhtiari Tribes and Their Chiefs by Lieutenant Ranking," 104.
[168] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Telegraphic Conversation between Mr. Grahama and Sir G. Barclay.", FO 248/965
[169] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Isfahan News #3.", FO 248/965
[170] The National Archives of the UK (TNA). "Isfahan News #3.", FO 248/965

Samsam's actions were thus still being coordinated by his younger brother, and his refusal of the governorship was most likely all part of Sardar As'ad's political strategy.

When the Shah heard about Samsam-es-Saltaneh's act of blatant rebellion, he sent the other Bakhtiari troops to deal with their rebellious family member. Sardar Zafar, the new ilkhan, led the attack and marched towards the south-west from Tehran. The two brothers communicated by telegram, but Samsam-es-Saltaneh "refused to entertain any idea of surrender".[171] Communication between the two sides continued over the following week, as the royalist forces were waiting on a reinforcement of artillery in Qom, but at the end of the week the loyalist khans proved to be not so loyal after all. An understanding was reached between the two sides and – instead of continuing to march on Isfahan – they would recognize Samsam-es-Saltaneh as ilkhan again[172], continue to stay in Qom and bar the road to any royalist troops that might be dispatched by the Shah from Tehran to Isfahan.[173] With a few telegrams, the fortunes of the royalist side had changed. Tabriz was still in open rebellion, and now the troops they had sent to recapture Isfahan had turned on them instead.

The initial offensive on Isfahan might have been stimulated – as Khazeni suggests – by requests from the revolutionary society (*anjoman*) that requested the Bakhtiaris help, or it might have been Bakhtiari grievances against its governor, the Zill al-Sultan, who had murdered their beloved Ilkhan thirty years prior.[174] The British consulate at the time suspects that Samsam-es-Saltaneh had personal problems with the Isfahani clergy and wanted to assert himself over them, and that his decision to rebel against the government was based on a desire to reduce the taxes on his land.[175] These factors certainly may have helped to sway him and the other khans, but a much more likely explanation can be found in whatever understanding the ruling khans managed to reach amongst themselves.

A Secret Agreement

In April, not long after Sardar As'ad had returned to Iran, an agreement was signed between the two ruling families, and considering the contents it is very likely that this was the

[171] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Isfahan News #4." FO 248/965
[172] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Notes on the Bakhtiari Tribes and Their Chiefs by Lieutenant Ranking," 104.
[173] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Isfahan News #5." FO 248/965
[174] Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran*, 166.
[175] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Telegraphic Conversation between Mr. Grahama and Sir G. Barclay." FO 248/965

understanding reached during Sardar Zafar's march on Isfahan. The British legation managed to obtain a copy of this agreement, and their translation begins as follows:

> "This Agreement is made between the Samsam us Saltana, Sardar uz Zaffar and Salar Heshmet, on the one hand and the Sardar Muhtesham and Salar Ashraf on the other with a view to promoting the National Movement, strengthening the Constitutional Cause and promoting good feeling between the above mentioned families in accordance with the undermentioned conditions."[176]

Almost all the conditions and clauses of this agreement are about equally dividing up the potential spoils of their participation in the revolution between all the khans signatory to the agreement. Clause two deals with titles and distinctions, clause three with the revenues from the Bakhtiari territory and Chahar Mahal, clause five with weapons, etc. and all of them specify that these should be equally divided between the two families. There are, however, a few clauses that merit special attention:

> "Clause 7. If any one, whoever it may be, great or small shall rebel against authority or turn "Yaghi", the Sardar Assad and Salar Ashraf shall go into the matter and inflict punishment, further all the other (Chiefs) shall accept their decision and have no right to in any way shield the offender.
>
> Clause 8. If the Constitutional Government is established & the members of the Hussain Kulli Khan family obtain any Government posts, further if the said new Government shall wish to remove the Sardar Muhtasham and the Salar Ashraf from the administration of the Bakhtiaris and the Chahar Mahal and should wish to give the said administration to the members of one family, having dispossessed the other, those in office shall not accept, except on the condition that the said administration is equally divided.
>
> Clause 9. If the Samsam us Saltana and the Sardar uz Zaffar, as in years past, try to oppress or behave in a manner hostile to the Sardar Muhtasham and the Salar Ashraf, I Haji Ali Kulli Khan and family swear that we will not allow it, and as long as we are alive will assist the Sardar Muhtasham and the Salar Ashraf."[177]

[176] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Agreement between the Family of Hussein Kulli Khan & the Family of Imam Kulli Khan."
[177] The National Archives of the UK (TNA).

Sardar As'ad is one of the ruling khans not mentioned in the preamble quoted above, but he is mentioned as part of clause 7 and clause 9. In addition, he acts as witness to the agreement, writing in first person. Seeing as this agreement had to wait to be signed until Sardar As'ad returned to Iran, I posit that it was his doing that made this agreement possible. He excluded himself from the signatories that stand to benefit from the agreement (as he is not mentioned in the preamble quoted above), and positioned himself as a neutral party and a peacemaker, swearing to act against his own brothers, if necessary, in clause 9. At the same time, clause 8 specifies only "members of the Hussain Kulli Khan family" as having the potential to obtain government posts in a future constitutional regime, implying that the Hajji Ilkhanis were not part of any national political ambitions. Sardar As'ad himself would, as part of this family, be able to fulfil his ambitions in national politics, whilst the family of his rivals would remain in and around the Bakhtiari territory. As peacemaker, he united the Bakhtiari for the constitutional cause. However, at the same time, he still managed to advance the position of himself and his family, because true power lay with these government positions, not with command of the Bakhtiari territory.

> "Clause 4. Whatever taxes and income the Samsam us Saltana may have obtained from Ispahan shall, after the deduction of necessary expenses and daily allowance of sowars and after these expenses are agreed upon as being correct by the members of both families, be equally divided between the two families."[178]

The final clause specifies the revenues obtained during Samsam-es-Saltaneh's tenure as unofficial governor of Isfahan. He would remain in Isfahan for the rest of the year, but would leave early in 1910.[179] In this one year he is said to have made 500,000 tomans as acting governor, as well as from claiming the properties of the fleeing Zill al-Sultan.[180] 1 toman was worth 10 qiran, and the exchange rate at the time was 55 qiran for one pound sterling.[181] The revenues accrued to him as governor thus equaled £900,000 in 1909, or approximately £140,000,000 in 2024. Even if most of this wealth consisted of the properties claimed, and would not be part of the normal annual revenues, there was still a lot of money in governorships. We can contrast this with Samsam-es-Saltaneh's revenues from his own

[178] The National Archives of the UK (TNA).
[179] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Isfahan News #9", FO 248/996; The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Monthly Summary for November 1909.", FO 248/966
[180] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Notes on the Bakhtiari Tribes and Their Chiefs by Lieutenant Ranking," 104–5.
[181] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Revenues Paid to the Chiefs.", FO 248/895

personal lands. He was reported to be one of the wealthiest of all the khans, and his annual revenues from his own lands amounted to 30,000 tomans – or ~£850,000 in 2024. The same source also mentions an annual income from miscellaneous revenues (which include shares in the Oil Syndicate and the Bakhtiari Road) as 20,000 tomans a year – or ~£570,000 in 2024. These were mere revenues, however, and a lot would still have to be paid for the expenses of his own troops and projects, but the sheer wealth potential provided by governorships clearly dwarfs those obtained by even the wealthiest khans. The wealth would, in theory, have to be redistributed, but in practice the loophole of "necessary expenses" used in clause 4 provided a lot of leeway for the khans to not give their rivals their fair share. However, at the time of writing this agreement, this was not yet known by all the khans. As presented, Sardar As'ad's agreement promised all the ruling khans great wealth, more power in the country, and peace amongst themselves. They only had to fight for the constitution.

Sardar As'ad was at the right place and the right time to involve the Bakhtiari with the revolution, but without the prior changes brought by the British and the Bakhtiari Road this would not have been possible. Increasing focus on trade and Isfahan's city life had begun to change the culture of the khans to be increasingly urbanized. In addition, their experience dealing with Europeans made it possible for the Bakhtiari to see the potential in a modernist ideology that simultaneously exalted and opposed European power. At the same time, the fact that the Bakhtiari were still a predominantly nomadic society with decentralized power had made it possible for Sardar As'ad and Samsam-es-Saltaneh to start fighting for the revolution without having to convince all the khans first. Finally, the *bastagan* system had made the khans so reliant on increasing their personal wealth, that Sardar As'ad was able to quite easily convince his brothers and cousins to join the revolution by promising them great wealth in the form of governorships. All this was done against the interests of their British allies, who had to uphold their agreement with the Russians. The Bakhtiari, driven by the changes in their material interests, were becoming a power in their own right, with ambitions that were no longer confined to their own territory.

THE TRIUMPH OF TEHRAN

For three decades after the death of their great ilkhan, the Bakhtiari khans had been engaged in an almost constant internal rivalry. They had squabbled for titles, lands, and wealth – as they had done for centuries before the rise of Hossein Qoli Khan Ilkhani – but now, that had all changed. Convinced by Sardar As'ad that the true prize, for all of them, could be found by fighting for the revolution, the Bakhtiari khans of the Ilkhani and the Hajji Ilkhani families were once again united in a common cause. This act started a decade of significant Bakhtiari presence within Iran's national politics, but also caused them to face new issues. In the end, the Bakhtiari would fail to keep a constitutional regime in place, but would hold onto a not insignificant amount of power nonetheless. By analyzing the actions of the Bakhtiari and their khans through the lens of their material incentives, this chapter attempts to answer the question of why the one-time saviors of the revolution would bring about its downfall only two years later.

THE MARCH ON THE CAPITAL

The month following the agreement between the khans, the Bakhtiari gathered their strength, growing their army to a size of more than 4000 riders in Isfahan alone.[182] Sardar As'ad and Samsam-es-Saltaneh coordinated with the other revolutionary cities, most notably the social-democratic and Armenian revolutionaries in Rasht, where a former royalist known as Sepahdar had become a leader on the revolutionary side.[183] The British and Russian governments both saw the writing on the wall, and hoped to prevent a further descent into chaos (and a loss of trade) by convincing the Shah to reestablish the constitution after all[184], but it was too little too late. In the middle of May, Sardar As'ad had made the decision to join with Sepahdar and march on Tehran together, while Samsam-es-Saltaneh would stay in Isfahan to hold the city.[185]

It was not certain that they would succeed, however, and there were still very real fears of Russian intervention. The Shah's court was still convinced that they would be able to beat the revolutionaries, and refused to negotiate. Though Russian troops would land in Gilan in July,

[182] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Isfahan News 1909 #9.", FO 248/965
[183] Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History*, 358–59.
[184] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Grahame's Letter to Samsam-Ul-Sultaneh.", FO 248/966
[185] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Isfahan News #20"; FO 248/966, Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History*, 358–59.

the British secretly encouraged the Bakhtiari to continue onwards to the capital.[186] After some indecisive skirmishes on the outskirts, the revolutionaries entered the capital on July 13th, 1909, and – in what became known as the Triumph of Tehran (*Fath-e Tehran*) – the joint Bakhtiari and Gilani forces took control of the city. After a few days of fighting, the Russian commander of the Cossack Brigade surrendered, and was commandeered by the revolutionaries to fight for their side. The Russians were still friendly with the Shah, however, and he and his guard managed to find shelter at the Russian Legation. It did not matter much. Two days after entering the city – in front of the ruined Majles building – the revolutionaries announced Mohammad 'Ali Shah Qajar had abdicated, and that his eleven-year-old son would take the throne as Ahmad Shah Qajar, with an elder family member acting as regent.[187] Make no mistake though, while the regent was not powerless, true power now lay with the Bakhtiari and the other revolutionaries.

Having retaken the capital, the revolutionary forces were careful not to agitate the two European powers any further, and by all accounts the Bakhtiari did not engage in the same kind of looting they had done when Isfahan was first captured.[188] The deposed Shah left Tehran, and went into exile in Russia, but the Russian army – which was still occupying many provinces in the north, including Azerbaijan, Gilan and Khorasan – made no efforts to reinstate him; at least for now.[189] The chaos of the revolution had made the roads of Iran dangerous, as a Dutch trade report notes. The only exception to this, from the European perspective, were the territories occupied by the Russians, and the Ahwaz-Isfahan Road, still guarded by the Bakhtiari.[190] The occupation of the north – which would continue all through the constitutional revolution – left a sour taste in the mouth of many Iranians, and the revolutionary-aligned press was filled with anti-Russian sentiment. As their allies, the British were not looked on too fondly either, although most revolutionaries were much more hostile to the Russians.[191] Despite this uneasy climate, the Bakhtiari, Armenian, and Gilani troops who now occupied the capital were, for the moment, allowed to continue with their plans by the two powers.

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[186] Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 118–19.
[187] Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History*, 359.
[188] Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 118–19; Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History*, 359–60.
[189] Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History*, 360.
[190] Nationaal Archief, "Verslag over W. Perzië Aan de Minister van Buitenlandse Zaken."
[191] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Monthly Summary #12", FO 248/959; Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History*, 361.

THE RETURN OF CONSTITUTIONAL RULE

In August, local elections were held all throughout the country to select the representatives for the newly reestablished Majles[192], and the interim government began handing out governorships and other offices to friendly individuals. In November of that year, the Majles was officially reopened. The first cabinet of the restored constitutional regime found its heroes holding the highest positions, with Sepahdar becoming the new Prime Minister (and minister of war), and Sardar As'ad becoming the minister of the interior.[193] They immediately set out to bring their new government into working order, and wanted to prevent them falling into the pitfalls that had plagued the previous Majles: financial issues, foreign intervention, and military weakness.[194] The list of priorities given by the new cabinet had at the top the reorganization of the army, followed by debt consolidation and reform of the treasury, and the incorporation of foreign advisers.[195] All these would, in time, play key roles in how the Constitutional Revolution would play out.

However, the new government was not able to provide the sense of stability they wanted. Throughout 1910, the cabinet was plagued by chaos, and despite wanting to return to Europe to seek medical treatment, Sardar As'ad had to stay in Tehran.[196] In order to bring their new projects into fruition, the cabinet required money which they did not have, so they sought loans from the British and Russian legations.[197] However, with the ever-increasing anti-Russian and anti-British sentiments dominating the local press, the cabinet found it difficult to maintain the friendly relations that these loans would require. The Foreign Minister in particular was singled out for his failure to do anything against the Russian occupation. So, after an impassioned speech by Taqizadeh – where he was criticized for doing nothing "beyond mentioning the matter to the Russian Minister at a tea party" – the Foreign Minister lost a vote of confidence and was dismissed from office in February.[198] This was followed by a succession of different crises occurring almost every month for the rest of the year. In March, a cabinet crisis had the result of three of their ministers resigning[199]. In April, Sepahdar took over Sardar As'ad's portfolio after Sardar As'ad tried to use his position as

[192] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Isfahan News 1909 #31.", FO 248/967
[193] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Monthly Summary #12.", FO 248/959
[194] Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, 119.
[195] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Monthly Summary #12." FO 248/959
[196] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Monthly Summary 1910 #1."
[197] The National Archives of the UK (TNA).
[198] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Monthly Summary #2."
[199] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Monthly Summary 1910 #3."

minister of the interior to get a rival ilkhan of the Qashqai removed, straining relations between the two leaders. Sepahdar's popularity waned throughout his time in government, and they had a full restructuring of the cabinet in May, but Sepahdar's cabinet still managed to fall that July, whereafter both Sepahdar and Sardar As'ad lost their ministries and became deputies in parliament instead.[200] In the end, they had accomplished little of what they set out to do. Even the loan that they had asked for at the beginning of the year was only granted by the British a week after the fall of the cabinet.[201]

Sardar As'ad would not have to wait long to get another chance at a cabinet position, for in the chaos of revolutionary politics, this new cabinet would only hold on for a month. In the third cabinet, Sardar As'ad would become the minister of Foreign Affairs[202], and he would become notable for his "ultra-Nationalist views".[203] Despite initially sitting with Sepahdar in the more moderate faction of parliament, over time Sardar As'ad had become increasingly vocal about his anti-Russian sentiments. He strongly opposed any attempts to negotiate with the Russians and demanded the unconditional withdrawal of their troops[204], saying that "the Russians have openly declared that they only look for pretexts, and it is quite evident that it is impossible to satisfy them!".[205] With time, this developed into an increasingly anti-British sentiment as well.

A British report claims that Sardar As'ad's ideological zeal was merely political ambition, that his speeches were only for show; a way to increase his local power as Sepahdar's popularity waned.[206] However, this should not be taken at face value. The report continues by mentioning that both legations were worried about this development, and that, in the end, the khan's mind had "been changed owing, according to his own account, to his discovery that the democratic principle in Persia was erroneous and that it is essential to be on friendly terms with both Russia and Great Britain".[207] The likelihood that this spontaneous change of political stance was purely coincidental is vastly outweighed by the likelihood that the two legations put him under pressure. Great Britain still held financial and political leverage over

[200] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Annual Report 1910."
[201] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Monthly Summary 1910 #7."
[202] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Monthly Summary 1910 #9."
[203] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Annual Report 1910."
[204] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Monthly Summary 1910 #9."
[205] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Monthly Summary 1910 #7."
[206] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Annual Report 1910."
[207] The National Archives of the UK (TNA). "Annual Report 1910"

him and his fellow khans, and it is not difficult to imagine that they used this influence to push Iranian politics away from anti-imperialist sentiment. Downplaying Sardar As'ad's beliefs appears to be a face-saving maneuver by the British, who may not have liked being the people responsible for smothering a fledgling democratic movement in its crib. Nevertheless, they succeeded. Sardar As'ad, whether strong-armed or by his own accord, repaired his relationship with Sepahdar and returned to the moderate wing of parliament. At the end of the year, they formed another cabinet with Sepahdar as prime minister, which held "as its main object the improvement of relations with Russia".[208]

BAKHTIARI RIVALRIES

At the same time as this political chaos in Tehran, the Bakhtiari threatened to start a war amongst themselves. It began with the distribution of political offices to various Bakhtiari khans. Even before the opening of the Majles, the interim government had begun distributing governorships to friendly candidates, and Sardar As'ad wanted to place more Bakhtiari in power, but Samsam-es-Saltaneh was skeptical that this could be seen as an obvious play for power. In a discussion with Sardar As'ad, Samsam-es-Saltaneh admonishes his brother for his brazen distribution of offices to Bakhtiari khans, which he believes will lead to the downfall of their government. Despite his brother's warnings, Sardar As'ad pushed through, and he gave command of three military regiments to Sardar Mohtashem (Hajji Ilkhani), Sardar Zafar (Ilkhani), and Muntasziz-ed-Dowleh (Ilkhani) and the governorship of Yazd to Sardar Jang (Hajji Ilkhani).[209] Bakhtiari governorship of Yazd would prove to be a mixed bag. The local Zoroastrian community, though not directly assisted by their new governor, were spared the persecution they had faced under previous governors, and trade and safety on the roads quickly increased. On the other hand, taxes were being introduced and collected to an, according to the British, excessive extent. In addition, Sardar Jang also employed other means to increase his personal wealth. In a report to the British Legation, he was "stated to have amassed a large sum of money since his arrival, many offenders escaping punishment by the payment of money".[210]

By the letter of their agreement, Sardar As'ad was not required to give government positions to members of the Hajji Ilkhani family, but clearly, he saw either a need or a benefit in doing

[208] The National Archives of the UK (TNA). "Annual Report 1910"
[209] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Isfahan News 1909 #33."
[210] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Isfahan News 1909 #31."

so. If I would be allowed to speculate, it might be possible that members of the Hajji Ilkhani family had gotten wise to the importance of these governorships after Samsam-es-Saltaneh's very profitable tenure the preceding year. In order to protect the carefully-won peace between the two families, Sardar As'ad might believe that a compensation was required to bring the two families back to an equal position. Another option is that – with Sardar As'ad's position in Tehran and Samsam-es-Saltaneh planning to join him there – the Ilkhani family was deemed to hold too much political power, as it would ultimately be in their hands to decide to whom these very lucrative positions would be granted. Again, for the purposes of equality between the families, compensation might have been required. In both cases, Sardar As'ad – despite his brother's misgivings – believed it necessary to put large portions of the country under Bakhtiari control, not because it would enrich him personally, but to protect the peace and the status of the Bakhtiari as a whole. In this way, the internal rivalries and decentralized power of the Bakhtiari incentivized their politicians to act much more boldly in their rise to power than would have otherwise been the case. However, despite these efforts, Sardar As'ad did not manage to pacify the two families.

At the beginning of 1910, Samsam-es-Saltaneh gave up his governorship in Isfahan to join his brother in Tehran. To replace him, a Hajji Ilkhani khan was appointed as governor: Sardar Ashja'.[211] Not long after his appointment, a large group of Qashqai began forcefully demanding tribute from many villages in both Fars and Isfahan, and – much to the dismay of the British – began robbing important roads. Sardar Ashja', however, appeared to do very little to combat these attacks. Anytime the governor would send out his troops, they would either flee from or join the robbers, but never attacked. The central government would apportion him funds to do something against these attacks, but the number of troops never seemed to grow much, with the money instead disappearing into his pockets. In Isfahan, both the British and Sardar Zafar began to grow increasingly displeased with the governor's behavior, and they demanded to inspect the troops, which Sardar Ashja' refused.[212] His lax attitude towards the Qashqai robbing the roads and extorting villages in Isfahan and Fars was not a coincidence, though.

The Qashqai ilkhan responsible for these attacks – Soulat-ed-Dowleh – had taken over as de facto governor of Fars in January, and from there had begun to make inroads into the province

[211] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Isfahan News #9."
[212] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Isfahan Situation - Qashqai Inroads."

of Isfahan as well.[213] But Soulat-ed-Dowleh was a long-term ally of the Hajji Ilkhani family, and a long-term enemy of the Ilkhanis. As far back as February, there were reports that Sardar Ashjaa and Soulet-ed-Dowleh arranged confidential meetings between themselves, and it is very likely that the two colluded with one another.[214] The Qashqai ilkhan also allied himself with the Sheikh of Muhammerah in April, who was a personal enemy of Sardar As'ad. The British at the time describe this as a plot to limit Bakhtiari influence[215], but it seemed to specifically be a plot to limit the power of the Ilkhani family, not the Bakhtiari as a whole.

Sardar As'ad, who at this point was still minister of the interior, tried to use his position to get Soulat-ed-Dowleh removed as ilkhan, but he was not able to find support with his colleagues. He appointed Soulat-ed-Dowleh's brother, Zeigham-ed-Dowleh, as the new Qashqai ilkhan in the hope of drawing support away from his enemy, but his colleagues interceded when the two Qashqai ilkhans began to fight each other. This is when Sepahdar and Sardar As'ad switched portfolios. Sepahdar, as the new minister of the interior, immediately reversed Sardar As'ad's decision and reestablished Soulat-ed-Dowleh as the only official Qashqai ilkhan, as well as officializing his governorship of Fars.[216] Of course, both the British and the Ilkhani family were furious with this decision, but from the perspective of the cabinet the conflict was an inter-tribal issue, not a rebellion against the government. Involving themselves in such affairs would only make it seem that the government unduly favors the Bakhtiari. So, instead of relying on the intercession of the government, Sardar Zafar took up arms against the Qashqai himself, joined by many other khans of the Ilkhani family, on the orders of Sardar As'ad.[217]

The Hajji Ilkhani family was very alarmed by this development. They came to believe that after Soulet-ed-Dowleh would be defeated, that the Ilkhani armies would turn on and crush them as well. In order to prevent such a fate, the Hajji Ilkhani began openly supporting the Qashqai, and the Bakhtiari almost broke out into a war amongst themselves.[218] This was not truly what either side wanted though. Sardar As'ad and Samsam-es-Saltaneh – together with Sardar Mohtashem of the Hajji Ilkhani – began to use all the influence they had to prevent

[213] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Annual Report 1910."
[214] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Isfahan News 1910 #5."
[215] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Annual Report 1910."
[216] The National Archives of the UK (TNA).
[217] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Isfahan News 1910 #35"; The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Monthly Summary 1910 #9."
[218] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Annual Report 1910," 16.

things from escalating, which mostly consisted of trying to get Sardar Zafar and Amir Mujahid (a Hajji Ilkhani khan) to calm down. With great difficulty, they managed to succeed, and in December all the khans came together in Tehran to make peace.[219] The interference of Sardar As'ad in tribal affairs did not sit well with the Majles, however, who verbally attacked him for interfering in matters "which did not concern him" and engaging in an "unauthorized campaign against the unoffending Kashgai Chief". His waning popularity might have even caused him to lose out on the regency, as a British report notes that "it is significant that when the Mejliss voted for a successor to the late Azad-ul-Mulk [the teenage Shah's regent] no votes were given to Serdar Assad", implying that without this interference he could have been a viable candidate.[220] The decentralization of the Bakhtiari had made it possible for Sardar As'ad and his brother to support the revolution in spite of the other khans, but it had also proven itself a huge risk to the stability of their rule and a detriment to any grander political ambitions.

THE END OF THE REVOLUTION

1911 began with another new cabinet, once again without Sepahdar and Sardar As'ad, who would return to Europe for medical treatment.[221] This cabinet, however, would manage to implement reforms with lasting consequences. Their attempt at military reform involved the formation of a new gendarmerie – under the command of Swedish officers – in order to phase out the militias and independent Bakhtiari forces which they had relied on up to this point.[222] The new cabinet also set into motion the reorganization of the ministry of finance. They invited five Americans to Iran to serve various roles in the ministry, the most important being their new treasurer-general: William Shuster.[223] This had been attempted before, back when Sardar As'ad had been foreign minister, but he had not asked the two powers for permission. As a result, Britain and Russia had used their diplomatic influence to make the U.S. and Italy (who Sardar As'ad had asked for gendarmerie officers) refuse their requests.[224] Evidently, the new cabinet enjoyed a better relationship with the legations than Sardar As'ad had back in his

[219] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), 37.
[220] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Monthly Summary 1910 #10."
[221] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Note Tehran Dec 2 1911."
[222] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Monthly Summary 1911 #1."
[223] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Monthly Summary 1911 #2."
[224] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Annual Report 1910," 9–10.

openly nationalist phase, and Shuster arrived in Iran that spring. At that point, however, the cabinet had already been replaced by a new one; once again under Sepahdar.[225]

Shuster made a very good first impression on both the politicians in Tehran, as well as the British; being seen as capable, earnest, and determined. The finance minister and the Majles soon implemented a bill that gave their American treasurer sweeping powers to reform the entire ministry, and to "prevent the wholesale robbery of the State Treasury by corrupt officials".[226] Eventually it turned out that Shuster's sympathies lay with the more radical democrats of parliament, to the dismay of both the moderates and the British and Russian legations, who began to move against him. At the same time, the new gendarmerie was also not all that the government had hoped for. They were often undisciplined, and suffered massive desertion even during routine activities. For such a stellar performance, the gendarmerie cost the government twice what a similar force of Bakhtiari did. In addition, the creation of the new gendarmerie was ill-received by the Bakhtiari, seeing as it was meant to replace them as the military arm of the revolution. When asked to help with local bandits after the gendarmerie failed to get rid of them, Samsam-es-Saltaneh voiced his displeasure by flat-out refusing to help the government.[227] The lack of a reliable military became a big problem when the former Shah, Mohammad 'Ali, returned to Iran at the head of an army. However, a solution was found. A week after word of the Mohammad 'Ali's landing had reached Tehran, Sepahdar resigned as Prime Minister, and Samsam-es-Saltaneh was appointed both Prime Minister and minister of war in his stead. Immediately, Samsam-es-Saltaneh declared martial law, with the full approval of the Majles, and began arresting many of the people considered sympathetic to the former Shah.[228] Over the following months, the Bakhtiari and their khans led many of the military operations, and they were very successful.[229] Mohammad 'Ali was defeated and fled back to Russia, but Samsam-es-Saltaneh remained as Prime Minister.

During his tenure as Prime Minister, Samsam-es-Saltaneh had to oversee the crisis that would eventually bring the revolutionary period to an end. It began with Shuster, whose vocal support of the democratic faction had made him an enemy of the ministers, the regent, the British, and most importantly, the Russians.[230] The Russians had wanted to see the ex-Shah

[225] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Memorandum 162."
[226] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "The Treasurer General: New Law Relating to Mr. Shuster."
[227] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Memorandum 184."
[228] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Monthly Summary - July 13th to August 9th 1911."
[229] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Monthly Summary - August 10th to September 4th."
[230] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Local - 25th October 1911."

succeed, but did not openly support him. However, when – after his defeat – the properties of royalists were seized by Shuster, the Russians took this as an insult. These properties were acquired with a mortgage from the Russian Bank, and they used this pretext to order the Russian-led Cossack troops to occupy the properties, demanding compensation for the insult.[231] Compensation was given, but this was not enough, and Russia broke off diplomatic relations with Iran on the 19th of November. They mobilized their troops – who were still occupying the north[232] – and handed the government of Iran an ultimatum on the 29th: The removal of Shuster from office, the promise not to employ foreigners again, and compensation for all expenses the Russians had occurred up to that point in their occupation of the north.[233] Samsam-es-Saltaneh's government and his fellow Bakhtiari khans wanted to accept the Russian ultimatum, but the Majles would not give in and rejected the ultimatum. The Bakhtiari khans, in a conversation with British officials, blamed Shuster and the Democrats for "provoking Russia", and they asked the British for advice on whether they should return home, or if they should take power into their own hands:

> "They were hesitating whether to use their position to effect a coup d'etat and take power into their own hands which they could easily do … they then asked whether a coup d'etat would lead to the intervention of the two Powers. They declared that the Govt. they established could easily dismiss Shuster and would work in harmony with the two powers."[234]

The British Legation discussed this with the Russians, but both legations felt that they could not give any guarantees to the Bakhtiari without first obtaining approval from their own governments.[235] However, they did implicitly support this idea, saying that they could "assure the Khans again of the friendly sympathy of the two Governments as long as the Bakhtiaris act in a manner friendly to the two Powers".[236] When the Majles rejected the ultimatum a second time, the Bakhtiari-led government came into action. Troops were sent to occupy the Majles building, and many of the Democrats were refused entry.[237] Of the 70 people normally in the Majles, only 39 attended the session that day, most of them part of the Moderates. Even

[231] Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History*, 370.
[232] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Translation of Telegram Received Sunday November 19th, 1911."
[233] Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History*.
[234] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Interview with Bakhtiari Khans: Possible Coup d'état."
[235] The National Archives of the UK (TNA).
[236] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Note - Tehran December 15th 1911."
[237] Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History*, 373.

with this blatant rigging of the vote, Samsam-es-Saltaneh was only barely able to obtain a majority his plan: the formation of an "independent" committee to determine their answer to the Russian ultimatum. Sardar As'ad, as a member of the Majles, was appointed as one of the five members to serve on this committee. Unsurprisingly, the committee decided to accept the ultimatum. The day that the Russian minister was informed of their acceptance, the ministers and Moderates of the Majles visited the regent, and asked for the dissolution of the Majles. With the Democrats not there to offer any opposition, the regent's decree was passed and troops were sent to occupy the Majles building.[238] When the doors of the Majles closed that day, the revolution had come to an end.

The actions of the Bakhtiari khans during the constitutional revolution paint a complex picture. On the one hand, much of their involvement in the first place had been coordinated by Sardar As'ad, who seemed to be a true believer in the cause of constitutionalism and nationalism. On the other hand, this involvement was mostly predicated on a promise of wealth and power towards the other khans. Sardar As'ad, for all his efforts, would in the end still choose for the wealth and stability of the Bakhtiari over his constitutional ideals. The trouble with the Qashqai showed that he was willing to use whatever influence he had to protect the interests of his family, even if it cost him politically. Furthermore, his hostility towards Britain and Russia could not be maintained for long. Even if he himself would have been willing to lose out financially in favor of his ideals, he relied on the support that the other khans provided him. Since the khans had been roped into the revolution by the promise of wealth in the first place, it would have been very hard to keep their support if that wealth was taken away. The road tolls might not have provided similar levels of wealth to governorships, but oil was supposed to pass through the pipes the very next year, so burning bridges with Britain would have cost the khans dearly. Thus, it is not a surprise that most Bakhtiari khans allied with the predominantly wealthy landowners of the moderate faction, and that they were dedicated towards maintaining a good relationship with the two Great Powers. By the end of the revolution, the constitutional regime had started to become less friendly to the Bakhtiari, and the threat of being replaced by the gendarmerie loomed in the background. With all these factors combined, the fact that the people who had at one point saved the revolution would be the ones to end it is disappointing, but not surprising.

[238] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Monthly Summary December 1911."

THE LAST YEARS OF THE QAJARS

The decade between the end of the Constitutional Revolution and Reza Khan's coup d'état was a tumultuous period in Iranian history. Though Qajar absolutism was ostensibly restored with the closing of the Majles, the grip of the government on the country was weakened tremendously. At the same time, multiple alternatives to imperial rule were still floating around. The constitutionalist nationalism of the revolution had not yet been stamped out, but new ideas such as the socialism of the Jangali movement or Reza Khan's authoritarian modernism would also make their attempts at becoming the dominant political system during this decade. During all this, the Bakhtiari khans were still holding onto the power they had obtained during the revolution. However, by the end of the decade, the Bakhtiari would lose what remained of their prior dominance to the Pahlavis. The aim of this chapter, then, is to explain how the internal troubles of the Bakhtiari – brought about by a combination of their political structure, British meddling, and the widening gap between the Bakhtiari elite and the rest – affected their decline on the political sphere, bringing about an end to their decades-long rise to power.

THE SPIRIT OF INSUBORDINATION

The winter of 1912 was harsh, and the citizens of Isfahan were on the brink of starvation. When word came from the capital that the Russian ultimatum had been accepted, people took to the streets. These were mostly journalists and members of the local democratic party, and they were supported by Sardar Ashja'. He had been replaced as governor by his cousin, Sardar Zafar, and saw this as an opportunity to undermine his rival. Even after the protests were subdued, mood in town remained tense. Sardar Zafar and his underlings were reported to extort the people for extra taxes, often with excessive violence, and often for much more than was legally owed.[239] Meanwhile, the price of bread only continued to rise, even into the early spring. Women took to the streets to protest for their access to food, but anytime they tried, they were forcefully dispersed by the police.[240] Not only the city was restless, however. Ever since the end of the revolution, the Bakhtiari rank-and-file had become a source of trouble for the British, and for their own leaders.

[239] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Isfahan News #2."
[240] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Isfahan News #15."

In the months after the revolution, trade along the Bakhtiari Road had become increasingly disrupted. There were reports of "some of the Khan's servants" seizing the pack animals of merchant caravans, holding them hostage until they were able to receive payment.[241] All the way up to the end of the constitutional revolution, the records, telegrams and notes of the British Foreign Office scarcely make reference to anyone of the Bakhtiari not part of the two ruling families. Even in these cases of blackmail, they are seen merely as the tools of the khans, rather than as independent agents with wills of their own. The Lynch company blames the khans for the actions of the rank-and-file, but later messages reveal that their assumptions had been wrong:

> "From a credible source I am informed that for the last eight months or more the Bakhtiari tribesmen – exasperated by the grinding exactions of the Khans – have been ripening for revolt and only await an opportuinty [sic] to cast off all semblance of obedience to their tribal Chiefs. It is possible that this spirit of insubordination may have been fostered by contact with the 'Constitutional' ideas current in the Capital.
>
> It is scarcely necessary to point out that should the Bakhtiari tribesmen once get out of hand, the Khans might find it very difficult to recover their former ascendancy. It would therefore be to their own advantage and to that of British interests that the Khans should hasten to repress any symptoms of lawlessness while it is yet time."[242]

The power held by the great khans was based on their subjects. Without the support and loyalty of their troops, the Bakhtiari leadership would not have been able to place themselves at the center stage as the military arm of the revolution. The wealth that they had managed to acquire through their deals with Great Britain had been based on their independence from the Shah, which was in turn built upon the backs of the rank-and-file. For a Bakhtiari khan, military power and the potential for riches went hand-in-hand. However, when they used thousands of these men to fight as part of a revolution built upon ideals of liberty and equality, they also exposed their own soldiers to ideas that would threaten the very bonds of loyalty which they had taken for granted. This was only exacerbated when many of the khans did not return to their home country, preferring to stay in the cities as new members of the urbanized Iranian aristocracy. Rather than being personally known to their subjects, the leading khans just "raise their money in Bakhtiari and for the most part spend it outside the

[241] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Mules Seized by the Chiefs on the Ahwaz Road."
[242] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiaris Ripening for Revolt."

country".[243] The traditional loyalties still had their inertia, and would not fully disappear, but its cracks had begun to show. Ambitious khans among the Bakhtiari did not see this as a problem though, and tried to use this "spirit of insubordination" for their own benefit:

> "The younger Bakhtiari Khans – headed by Amir-i-Mujahed [the youngest son of Hossein Qoli Khan Ilkhani] – discontented with their exclusion from profits and emoluments are said to be bent on opposing the mission of Sirdir-i-Jang, now about to leave Tehran for Bakhtiari to re-establish order on the road."[244]

The return of Sardar Jang to Bakhtiari territory and his mission to restore order would see much more direct British interference in Bakhtiari politics than had previously been the case. Rather than merely advising and negotiating with the khans in charge, the British Minister now communicated directly with relevant parties, such as these rebellious young khans.[245] The British Legation clearly feared the khans losing control of their subjects, which – since they had placed so much of their Iranian strategy in Bakhtiari hands – would be disastrous for Britain's imperial interests in the region, and they did not believe that they could succeed without British aid. In both Tehran and Isfahan, the Bakhtiari had grown immensely unpopular. Ever since the end of the constitutional revolution, the Bakhtiari had, out of necessity, grown much closer to both the Russians and the British, and the people resented them for it. An internal letter from the British Legation states that the people of Isfahan would gladly support anyone "who might hold out to them a reasonable hope of shaking off the hated yoke of the Bakhtiaris".[246] They were no longer fighting for any cause or ideology, but merely to maintain the power they had acquired during the revolution, and Great Britain wanted to help them do it.

In the fall of 1912, the officials of the British Legation supported Sardar Jang (of the Hajji Ilkhani) as candidate for ilkhan. The infighting among the Bakhtiari threatened the stability needed to protect British interests and so, rather than embarking on a strategy of divide-and-rule, they pushed for Sardar Jang having virtually dictatorial powers. For a set period of five years, Sardar Jang and his ilbaig (Sardar Bahadur) would have the rights to collect all the revenues that previously would have been shared among the two families.[247] The only

[243] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Note on Bakhtiari Policy."
[244] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Isfahan News #27."
[245] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Message to Young Khans."
[246] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Russian Protection to Sardar-i-Zaffar."
[247] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Note on Bakhtiari Policy."

condition given was that he would not be allowed to interfere with the private properties of the other khans. A promise which he would soon break.[248] By directly interfering in the internal politics of the Bakhtiari, the British caused Bakhtiari power to concentrate even further, but stability would be ensured as long as the ilkhan could be trusted to further British interests in the region. Their idea relied on the assumption that the enormous potential for personal profit – that the khans had been incentivized to chase due to "the wastage caused by the pay and allowances of the bastagan"[249] – all but guaranteed conflict among the two families; a train of thought that they would later also use when attempting to stop the appointment of Bakhtiari governors.[250] As they saw it, if Bakhtiari stability required the khans' exit from national politics and the return to their home country, then they would try to keep them a local power at best. For a time, this plan seemed to work. Despite objections from the other khans, who were obviously displeased by this cut into their own profits, reports from only a year later state that "the Khans are on the best of terms with H.M. Legation", which is much more positive language than was used any time before or during the Constitutional Revolution.[251] However, this was only the calm before the storm, and the resentment against the British hiding just below the surface would reappear when war came to Iran.

WORLD WAR I

The outbreak of the Great War sent shockwaves throughout the world, and just so for Iran. Sandwiched between and dominated by two entente powers, its declaration of neutrality in November of 1914 did not manage to accomplish much. The truth was that, despite protests from the Qajar government, the two powers wanted to use the northwest of Iran as a battlefield on which to fight the German and Ottoman Empires. The people of Iran were given little choice, and existing political and ethnic tensions were fanned by both sides in order to hurt their enemies. The Ottoman side used pan-Turkism to try and get the Turks in Azerbaijan to fight the Russian-aligned Armenians, and the Sultan used his status as Caliph to call on all Muslims to resist and fight their opponents, even reaching out to non-Sunnis. In Tehran, many looked to the Germans for guidance instead. The Majles had been reopened after the outbreak of the war, in December 1914, and the democrats had not forgotten the events of the

[248] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Sardar i Muhtasham's Complaints against Sardar i Jang."
[249] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Note on Bakhtiari Policy."
[250] The National Archives of the UK (TNA).
[251] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Monthly Summary 1913 November."

Constitutional Revolution. Although they were a smaller faction than they had been during their heyday, they quickly restarted their anti-British and anti-Russian activities. The German Empire, who had comparatively little interest in Iran, was deemed a much safer ally for Iran by these Democrats.[252] In addition, many notable intellectuals of the nationalist movement had developed their worldviews whilst living in Germany, as part of the "Berlin Circle", and they held up German-style modernist monarchism to be an example for Iran.[253] Their pro-central power stance became such a problem that many Democrats had to flee Tehran when the allies threatened to occupy the city.[254]

Bakhtiari involvement in the First World War was, first and foremost, concerned with the issue of the oil fields, which had become even more important for Britain with the outbreak of the war. The British did not need the Bakhtiari to fight for their side, as their oil could still be obtained if Qajar Iran remained "neutral", but even this would be more difficult than they had hoped for. The Bakhtiari were not immune to the developments around them, and many had begun to seriously consider the Ottoman Caliph's call to Jihad. Hoping that he would intervene, British officials spoke with Sardar As'ad, who still remained in Tehran, but he did not prove as amenable as they would have liked:

> "It would be advantageous if some display were made at Ahwaz of Bakhtiari good will, so that the tribes who were still hesitating as to whether or not they should throw in their lot with the so-called Holy War might see that the Bakhtiaris were with the sheikh of Muhammerah in opposing the ridiculous cry of 'Jehad'. All that they had been asked to do would have been in keeping with Persia's declared neutrality, I said, since the govt. had not pronounced itself in favour of a Holy War. Serdar Assad endeavoured to excuse the actions of the Khans on various grounds. (1) that they could not take action without the express orders of the govt. (2) that the men would possibly not obey the khans, and (3) that a forward policy might have meant ruin in their country."[255]

Rather than fighting for the British, or even adhering to strict neutrality, multiple *babs* and their khans had decided to fight on the side of the central powers. What's more, Sardar As'ad's comment concerning the obedience of their men suggests that this had not been a top-

[252] Atabaki, "The First World War & Great Power Rivalries," 1–3.
[253] Matin-Asgari, *Both Eastern and Western: An Intellectual History of Iranian Modernity*.
[254] Atabaki, "The First World War & Great Power Rivalries," 1–3.
[255] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Letter 12 March 1915."

down decision by the khans. Rather, it seemed to be an extension of the "spirit of insubordination", which the khans felt they had to go along with. However, the fact that British intervention had cost many of the ruling khans access to the revenues certainly did not help their case. The central powers, for their part, were ready to pounce on this opportunity. The Germans began targeting important Bakhtiari khans for gifts and bribes, to the point that it became "common talk in [the] Bakhtiari camp"[256] The British had made themselves so unpopular with the Bakhtiari, that the only khans willing to sign an agreement promising neutrality and the protection of the oil fields were those who had the strongest ties to Britain: Sardar As'ad and Samsam-es-Saltaneh in Tehran, and the ilkhan and ilbaig in the Bakhtiari country.[257]

Despite signing this agreement, Samsam-es-Saltaneh and Sardar As'ad couldn't offer all that much help either. Samsam-es-Saltaneh was reported to be involved with the democrats on account of his "rabid pro-german son".[258] In addition, all the Bakhtiari in Tehran had been disarmed and put under surveillance after an incident in Isfahan, where a number of Bakhtiari khans had taken up arms against the Russians (but not directly against the British) and looted a Russian bank.[259] The ilkhan and ilbeg tried as best as they could to keep the peace, and offered reparations to their government and the British Legation for the breach in neutrality, though they declined to mention any possibility of reparations for the Russians.[260] Some of the khans involved with this attack hoped that the British would be "secretly pleased", as they believed that the Anglo-Russian rivalry would resume after the war. However, the British were not pleased at all, and became unwilling to put any further trust in the Bakhtiari. To the dismay of large sections of the Bakhtiari, they helped the Zill al-Sultan and his family return to Isfahan, after which his son took over as governor of Isfahan.[261] The actions of the Bakhtiari during the war had caused irrevocable damage to British-Bakhtiari relations, and the erosion of trust between the two parties would affect their cooperation over the years to come.

[256] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari 85."
[257] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Agreement of Neutrality Bakhtiari Khans."
[258] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari 41, 1918."
[259] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Translation of Letter from 'Yadullah' Shalamsar to Sarun Ul Mulk (Son of Sardar Zafar)."
[260] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Translation of Telegram from Bakhtiari Khans in Chaharmahal to Bakhtiari Khans in Tehran."
[261] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Captain Noel's Report, August 9th."

THE TROUBLES WITH LEADERSHIP

After the war had ended, the Legation would note that, of the khans, "nearly all sided with the enemy, and only two remained entirely faithful to us"[262]. This referred to Sardar Jang, the ilkhan, and Sardar Zafar, who would eventually succeed him as ilkhan. In 1916, Sardar Jang was still ilkan, and the British assured him full support in attempting to regain control of the other khans. They would supply him with arms and ammunition, adding that "any Khan opposing or intriguing against them will be regarded by us as disloyal to the central Government and hostile to British interests and will incur our active displeasure".[263] The combination of this supply of arms and allowing him pseudo-dictatorial powers turned the position of ilkhan into the lynchpin for the whole British strategy in Bakhtiari territory. They justified this change of strategy as such:

> "*Divide et impera* has ever been the traditional unchangeable watchword of diplomats and rulers, but the application of this principle of division in Persia has not resulted in the domination of the Bakhtiaris, who are much more eager to listen to von Kardorf and Pugen than to the English diplomats, to whom they owe their present political position and strength."[264]

The only guarantee they had that the Bakhtiari would not join their enemies was the fact that the khans in Tehran, surveilled as they were, functioned as "honoured hostages".[265] Given that the relationship was so fragile, who held the position of ilkhan became an issue of paramount importance. Thus, when Sardar Jang's term ended in 1917, the British Legation did everything in their power to make sure that his successor would be just as friendly to British interests as Sardar Jang had been. The obvious choice would have been Samsam-es-Saltaneh, as he was someone both the British and the Bakhtiari could agree on, but he still remained in Tehran.[266] Sardar As'ad was of ill health and thus he was also not a viable candidate. In fact, he would pass away later that year.[267] Without a clear candidate, the internal struggles for power among the Bakhtiari reared their head once again.

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[262] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari 18, 1921."
[263] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Grahame's Telegram from Basra to Tehran."
[264] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Tehran Report 22nd of June."
[265] The National Archives of the UK (TNA).
[266] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Noel's Report 26th of April 1917."
[267] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari Affairs 176."

The first to be chosen as ilkhan had been Sardar Mohtashem of the Hajji Ilkhani, but internal intrigues led by Amir Mujahid had quickly caused most of the Ilkhani family to reject his authority.[268] Captain Noel – who had been a vocal supporter of strengthening the office of ilkhan[269] – thus proposed that they use this opportunity to set up Sardar Zafar (who was considered very loyal to the British) as the ilkhan.[270] However, the British officials were not of one mind about this. Others, like the consul in Isfahan, Mr. Grahame, were not as enthused by this idea. Grahame had grown skeptical of the effects that British meddling had on the Bakhtiari, saying that the "ideas of their own importance have been sadly exaggerated by the attentions we have piled on them of late".[271] He and his colleagues strongly opposed Noel's pick for ilkhan, partly due to Sardar Zafar's reputation as governor of both Kerman and Isfahan, where he had not made himself beloved by either the people or the British Legation.[272]

Still, Noel's plan went into action, and the British officially supported Sardar Zafar. However, all the other khans could see that the Legation was still debating the issue internally, and the process of selecting an ilkhan dragged on for months. During this time, other khans regularly approached Noel to try and get his support, showing how important the British had made themselves as kingmakers. However, Noel stuck with Zafar, saying that "his finances demand his getting into office", referring to the ever-increasing expenditures of his *bastagan*. In the meantime, Sardar Mohtashem remained as the de jure ilkhan, but as he held no actual power, the Bakhtiari remained effectively leaderless for most of the year.[273] Still, when Sardar Zafar was named the official ilkhan, Sardar Mohtashem saw this as a usurpation, and war between the two khans threatened to break out.[274] Zafar did not find the support he had hoped for, however. The khans in Tehran were especially displeased with his appointment, but this only made the British feel forced to double down on their policy of backing Zafar.[275] Where British meddling had once created a tenuous, but stable, peace under Sardar Jang, the power that now lay with the office of ilkhan – in addition to the lack of governorships available – had made it the only target for Bakhtiari political ambition. The British Legation was stuck in a mire of its

[268] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Noel's Letter to Churchill, 7th of January 1917."
[269] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Captain Noel's Report, August 9th."
[270] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Noel's Letter to Churchill, 7th of January 1917."
[271] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Grahame's Letter to Churchill, 19th August 1916."
[272] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Kerman Consulate Response to Noel."
[273] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari Affairs 87."
[274] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Isfahan News 1918 #28."
[275] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Noel's Telegram to Churchill, September 18th 1917."

own making. If Zafar lost the ilkhanship, they could lose what control they had left over the Bakhtiari, and Sardar Zafar knew this. He was in a precarious situation, but was able to leverage his essential status with the British to obtain vast sums of money and arms to supply his own men.

> "Serdar Zaffar informs me that he has no intention of coming south this winter. Having met with staunch opposition from his brother Khans and without any support whatever from Tehran he feels he can no longer continue as Ilkhani. He has neither money nor arms and revenue of the country has already decreased enormously on account of the prevailing scarcity. … He states that he would require about 50,000 tomans [£14,000,000 in 2024] for journey south"[276]

With support such as this, Zafar would be able to raise more cavalry from the people who would otherwise have gone over to the opposition, but securing his position would still prove a difficult task, considering his widespread unpopularity.[277] The British gave him the money, but dissenting voices in the Legation began to grow more and more prevalent. Noel writes that "No Khan can stand long as an Ilkhani friendly to us unless he has our support" [278], but he was one of the last remaining advocates among British Officials for such support. Others started believing that "even if we succeed in maintaining Zaffar we shall so antagonize the Khans as to make it impossible for us to carry on with Z.s. successor".[279] Subsequent proposals to give Zafar an additional monthly subsidy of 16,000 tomans (for an annual sum of approximately £50,000,000 in 2024) were denied by the British Treasury.[280] Support still continued, but to a lesser extent, and it was not enough to keep tensions between the khans from rising.

Luckily, a diplomatic solution was reached before the two camps could come to blows. During a meeting of all the khans, the powers and privileges of the ilkhan implemented under Sardar Jang were cancelled, and the rights of the two families reestablished. Sardar Zafar would be allowed to continue serving as ilkhan until early 1920, but this cut to his revenues (to only 400 tomans a month) would mean that he had "no prospect of paying off his still numerous debts". Sardar Zafar knew that without considerable outside help he would not be

[276] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari Affairs 206."
[277] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Memorandum to the Civil Commissioner in Baghdad."
[278] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari Affairs 109."
[279] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari Affairs 174."
[280] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Telegram to Balfour, 24 Dec 1918."

able to win the looming conflict, and so signed the agreement in spite of the financial issues this would cause him.[281] The question of who his successor would be was still up in the air, but with the lessened power of the office, most khans lost interest and started looking for governorships again. Although stability had returned to the Bakhtiari, British officials were quite displeased to see all their work over the past half-decade be undone. They wrote that they would accept whoever would be appointed as ilkhan, but "then leave Bakhtiari to stew in its own juice until we are ready to take it over and run it properly".[282]

A New Revolution

The war had ended by then, and although Iran was far from stable, the role that the British Empire played in the country had fundamentally changed. The Russian Revolution had taken away the dominant reactionary influence of the Tsar, with which Britain could contrast itself as the more progressive of the two imperialist powers, but now the roles were reversed. The Soviets supported numerous socialist and communist movements in Iran, especially in the north, but their ideology managed to spread beyond those areas as well. The British, with their vast web of business interests in the country, feared the potential of an Iranian revolution, and tried to do everything to combat it. Thus, when "Bolshevik sentiment" started spreading among the Bakhtiari, their disentanglement from Bakhtiari affairs had to be reversed.[283] What this "Bolshevik sentiment" entailed, exactly, or how widespread it was, is difficult to say. However, it was widespread enough that British officials began to worry that many of the lesser khans – who had seen the wealth gap between them and the older members of the ruling families increase tremendously – would adopt such sentiments.[284] On the Bakhtiari side, the older khans were reported to be terrified of this development as well. When the northern provinces fell under socialist control during the Jangali movement, Samsam-es-Saltaneh and the other khans began rallying their troops. If the socialists managed to come close to the capital, in a warped echo of the events of 1909, the Bakhtiari would be ready to capture Isfahan and march on the capital to defend it against the revolutionaries.[285] Sardar Zafar had even suggested secession, and the creation of an independent Bakhtiari state centered on Isfahan that would be able to stand against the North:

[281] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari 88."
[282] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari 102."
[283] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari 31."
[284] The National Archives of the UK (TNA).
[285] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari 34."

> "If situation foreshadowed in your circular of Jan 8th occurs and North Persia turns Bolshevik and Shah goes it seems not at all unlikely that Bakhtiari Khans will try to establish an independent Govt in central Persia as they already hold so much. Sardar Zafar and others seem in fact to have already suggested this course at their recent conference here … Their proposition seemed to me then premature but if a pro Bolshevik Republic is proclaimed in the North it might be worth considering.
>
> If any such development should occur would it not be to our interest to sympathise with movement and perhaps even to support Khans the majority of whom would probably become amenable to our influence and for their own sakes to cooperate with us in making some stand against Bolshevik penetration in the South?"[286]

The British were hesitant to support such a project, but feared losing their investments even more. The Minister, to whom the above letter was sent, replied by saying that they would support "any reasonable de facto government"[287], giving implicit support to the idea should Tehran fall. The Bakhtiari khans and the British were in close communication about this, and the khans would "in any circumstance do their utmost to protect our interests which they feel acutely to be identical with their own and will not move without fullest consultation with us".[288] This would have been the culmination of everything that had occurred over the preceding decade. The Bakhtiari and the provinces they controlled would break away from the government to fully cement their power over the region, acting both in the interests of their most wealthy and powerful khans, and in the interests of the British who supported them. Iran would have been divided between a Soviet north sponsored by Moscow and a Bakhtiari south where London would hold tremendous influence, mirroring the division reached by the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907. However, this is not the way that history would play out. The events of WWI and the issues with Sardar Zafar's ilkhanship had made the British hesitant to fully trust the khans. Noel – who was still among the British officials most positively inclined towards the Bakhtiari – writes that "it would seem fatal to pin our faith on the Khans and use them as our sole weapon".[289] Thus, when an alternative solution appeared in the form of Reza Khan, the British dropped any and all ideas of an independent Bakhtiari state. Their oil was safe, and that was what mattered most.

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[286] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari 4."
[287] The National Archives of the UK (TNA).
[288] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari 18."
[289] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), "Bakhtiari 47."

CONCLUSION

This thesis began with the question "what shape did Bakhtiari involvement in early 20th-century Iranian politics take, and to what extent can this be explained through the interconnected developments of British involvement on the one hand, and social or economic changes among the Bakhtiari on the other?". During the early 20th century, the Bakhtiari came to hold an important position within Iran's political arena. During the Constitutional Revolution, they placed themselves at the center stage by making themselves the military arm of the revolution, but they did not manage to turn this into true, long-lasting dominance. Their forays into politics were marred by corruption, short-term self-enrichment, constant attempts by the khans to get the upper hand on their rivals, and a lukewarm commitment to ideological concerns, all the while trying to avoid breaking out into an intertribal civil war. This disorganization made the Bakhtiari a ripe target for a divide-and-rule strategy by other powers; first by the British, who used it to advance their own imperial interests, and later by the Central Powers, to undermine British control of the Bakhtiari. Their trouble with implementing any sort of long-term political vision would see Bakhtiari power decline in the decade after the Constitutional Revolution, and by 1921, the possibility of regaining their former dominance had all but disappeared. Any chance at a Bakhtiari-led Iran depended on British support, but the khans had proven themselves too unreliable an ally for such plans to be seriously considered.

The rise and fall of the Bakhtiari can both be explained through a combination of their nomadic way of life, the particular innovations of their unification, and the influence of Great Britain. Based on the work of Sneath, the Bakhtiari khans can be interpreted as an aristocratic ruling class with their own material interests, and by working with the fundamental assumptions of Marxian thought, these material interests can explain the decisions and actions of this class. As a nomadic people, the internal social structure of the Bakhtiari saw power decentralized into the hands of mostly-independent khans in control of their own small, but thoroughly militarized subjects. Throughout the decades, this decentralization remained a fundamental issue, fanning the flames of ambition and internal rivalry that attempts at centralization during the nineteenth century would not be able to stamp out. However, their military power also made it possible to retain a significant level of independence from the Qajar government, which made it possible for the British to begin dealing with the Bakhtiari and their khans, as it gave them a way to spread their influence through the country without

having to go deal with the concerns of Tehran. The Bakhtiari khans, for their part, began as willing partners to the British, as they had become increasingly focused on acquiring the finances necessary to pay their troops. After unification, control of the Bakhtiari lay in the hands of just two families, who could no longer rely on traditional systems of loyalty, herds, and looting to maintain their armies. Instead, they created a system of retainers (the *bastagan*) that were personally loyal to their employer, but required a significant financial investment. Thus, to gain the upper hand on their rivals – a necessity in the competitive and chaotic politics of the nomadic Bakhtiari – they constantly had to seek out new sources of revenue.

With European contact and an increasing reliance on trade, money, and urban concerns – at the cost of their traditional pastoralism – widened the rift between the Bakhtiari khans and the rank-and-file, but it also gave the khans a closer connection with the intellectual climate of early twentieth-century Iran. Unlike almost all other nomadic tribes, the Bakhtiari decided to side with the predominantly-urban revolutionaries after one of their own had been convinced of the potential in this new movement. Most khans, however, were motivated by the promise of wealth and power, and so any ideological concerns had to be brushed aside once Britain and Russia began exerting pressure on them. Throughout the revolution and beyond, the focus on obtaining governorships (or the ilkhanship once governor positions were no longer available) was the key objective of the Bakhtiari khans, and their decentralized power structure and personal armies could make the threat of conflict quite tense. This made the Bakhtiari an unreliable ally, and attempts by the British to stabilize their politics only exacerbated the problem.

As the gap between the khans and their troops widened – especially once socialist sentiment started spreading among the ranks – they only became more reliant on British money and aid, who had trouble seeing the benefits in continuing this relationship. The decentralization and military potential of the Bakhtiari had at one point been able to propel them to the highest political offices in the country, but it incentivized them to act in self-interested and short-sighted ways, which made it impossible to maintain their position for long. The very nature of their society had made it possible for them to succeed, but it also contained the seeds for its own destruction. In the end, Bakhtiari power collapsed, and Iran would enter a new chapter without the Bakhtiari at the helm.

FURTHER RESEARCH

This thesis ends just with the rise of Reza Khan, but further research can continue this story into the Pahlavi era, building upon similar works on the Bakhtiari in the 20s and 30s.[290] In addition, any further research would benefit a great deal from the inclusion of a wider variety of sources; especially the Persian and Bakhtiari texts that this thesis was only marginally able to include. Even so, I believe that the sources that were available were still able to sketch a compelling and convincing narrative that was able to illuminate aspects of a less-studied (but nevertheless still very important) period in Iranian history.

[290] Cronin, "Riza Shah and the Disintegration of Bakhtiyari Power in Iran, 1921-1934."

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