

9-2-2015

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Firuz Kazemzadeh. (New York, NY: I. B. Tauris, 2013. Pp. xvii, 711.
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Recommended Citation

Clark, J.D. (2015). Russia and Britain in Persia: Imperial Ambitions in Qajar Iran. *This Historian*, 77(3),539-540. https://doi.org/10.1111/hisn.12072_3

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***Russia and Britain in Persia:
Imperial Ambitions in Qajar Iran.***

By Firuz Kazemzadeh. (New York, NY:

I. B. Tauris, 2013. Pp. xvii, 711. \$85.00.)

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This is a reprint of the author's classic study of British and Russian policies and intervention in Iran from the 1860s to 1914. For this edition, Firuz Kazemzadeh has consulted Russian archive materials and books that became accessible after the fall of the Soviet Union. Yet he maintains that those sources confirmed his earlier conclusions, and he has made no changes to this edition. The book is basically "a case study in imperialism," tracing the steady increase in penetration that occurred, and it largely relies upon British and Russian primary sources (vii). The few Persian sources that are cited are almost always secondary ones.

The book opens with the Russian conquest of Central Asia in the 1860s and 1870s when British protests were answered with disingenuous

denials of any intention to annex the region. The long chapters that follow shift the focus to Iran. The first deals with the massive Reuter Concession [1872] and the compensatory Falkenhagen one to Russia, both of which were cancelled, but which marked the beginning of the commercial penetration of Iran. Thereafter, the Russians gained a decade-long moratorium on railroad construction in Iran. "Once again . . . the clash of the two powers produced a deadlock" (240). They were more successful in the following period, when they competed for concessions in river navigation, trade, banks, and advisors. With the cancellation of the Tobacco Régie in 1892, however, Britain retreated from its "forward" policy while the Russians' aggressiveness intensified, gaining them numerous concessions. An Iranian inclination toward Russia in the late 1890s "reflected a growing loss of faith among Iran's ruling elite in their own ability to withstand Russian encroachment and in British ability, or desire, to protect" the country (284). By the turn of the nineteenth century, loans to the bankrupt Iranian state had become bones of contention, and the Russian aim in granting them was "to gain

exclusive control over Persian finances, which meant exclusive control over the government” (326). The British did succeed in acquiring the D’Arcy oil concession of 1901, however, which “turned out to be one of the more significant documents of the twentieth century” (357–358). Circumstances eventually compelled the British and Russians to end their rivalry by dividing Iran into spheres of influence according to the terms of the 1907 Convention. During the tumultuous Constitutional Revolution [1905–1911], Britain sympathized with the constitutionalists while Russia firmly backed Mohammad Ali Shah and the monarchists. In the final chapter, the title of which is taken from that of W. Morgan Shuster’s famous book *The Strangling of Persia*, Russian ultimatums compelled the Iranian government to expel American advisors. Though St. Petersburg eventually moderated its policies, by the beginning of World War I Iran had “ceased to exist as a state,” and Russia and Britain continued to occupy much of the country.

Though interpretation of events is limited, Kazemzadeh demonstrates a skillful use of diplomatic documents to construct a coherent and detailed narrative of British and Russian actions,

supplemented by explanations of domestic Iranian politics. This book is highly recommended for anyone seeking to understand the complexities of imperial policies in Iran and thus the background for events that occurred later in the twentieth century.