

## Investigating the English role in the March 3, 1921 coup d'état

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### ABSTRACT

The Iranian strategic situation has always received the attention of foreign powers including England, Russia and America and these powers; in order to reach their goals in the Middle East have always striven to utilize this situation. This research seeks to answer the question of how the English state interfered in and performed the March 3, 1921 coup d'état. The English failure in implementing the 1919 Treaty was considered a beginning for the devising the March 3, 1921 coup d'état. From the beginning of the March 3, 1921 coup d'état and after that, the English government intended for a strong government in Iran so to carry out the 1919 Treaty in another form in direction of its own benefits in Iran. This research has been conducted based on documents and evidence and via utilization of descriptive-comparative methods. The findings reveal that the main goal of the English government for endorsing the March 3, 1921 coup d'état was to establish an authoritative and centralized state and create a security belt for preventing the influence of Communism into Iran.

**Keywords:** Foreign policy, March 3/1921 coup d'état, England, Reza Shah

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### Appointment of Reza Khan

When the 1919 Treaty was not materialized due to public protests and hatred among Iranian people and the English policy hit the wall and since the English found that the contract they had stricken with Vosough Al-Dole could be executed in a manner they wished, they improvised another plan to force Iranians to succumb to it otherwise (Jami, 1998). Therefore, with the active participation of English Imperialists in Tehran, the confidential plan of a state backed coup d'état was organized (Grantosky, 1980). In regard to the appointment of Reza Khan and his introduction to English officials, there are various narrations:

#### Narration by Ardashir J. Reporter

Ardashir J. the salient character of the British Intelligence Service whose name is in contact with the establishment of the Pahlavi Dynasty entered Iran by 1893 and played an

amazing role during his own forty years of activity with regard to incidents of the second era of the Constitutional System (Parliamentary system) and the incidences after wards as well as the Reza Khan's accession to the throne. Mr. Ardashir Reporter met with Reza Khan in 1917 and was heavily influenced by his sense of patriotism. Ardashir Reporter writes in his memories: "Our first meeting happened miles away from the capital in a small village next to the Pirkbazar road between Rasht and Talesh.... The then Iran's Cossack army was deployed in Khorasan, Azarbaijan and Mazandaran and Guilan and Ghazvin, Rasht, Talesh and Khoy and Gharasoo and Tabriz were among the main centers of this force and the duty of this army was to preserve security in the region under the influence of Russia in general and preserve the Ghajar reign in special. The situation arising from the international wars and confidential reports which had been communicated to London from the internal developments of Russians had added to the significance of movements of the Cossack's units, because it was the single army that could shake turn thee balance in the favor of Russians whenever the Russians willed, though the cooperation with the Iranian officials and authorities. I knew that the Russian Cossack's regiment "Apsbern" amounting to 1200 soldiers were comprised of most proficient troops and its possible assignment was more important than preservation or restoration of order and comfort.

Since long ago, I had investigated the details into all the Iranian officials of Cossack's units and met some of them. Regarding Reza Khan, that which I was delivered was summarized in such words as "Courageous, tough, decisive" and it had also been added that Iranian officials and authorities were fully complying with him. The appointment had been arranged and in thee safe first meeting, his boastful and tall visage as well as his large mustache and influential eyes affected me. .... I spoke for a while till he burst into words and based on that which I told, it became clarified to me that I was meeting someone whose heart was filled with the fire of love for Iran and someone who could get his country survive. Reza Khan did not have academic literacy but he knew his country.

My later meetings with Reza Khan were arranged in different places and after more than one year in Ghazvin and Tehran. After a while, not so long, a sense of love and mutual affection was established between us. .... In a simpler language, I described to him the history, geography and political and social situation of Iran for him (Institute for political studies and researches; revelation of England and Iran's affairs and relations (4); How Reza Khan acceded to the throne?;

In his memories, Reporter writes: "during the meetings at the house of Lord Jamshid in Tehran, Reza Khan explained to me that Russian Cossack's officers were attracting cooperation from some Iranian Cossacks who captured the capital under the pretext of preservation and significance of the life of Shahs and occupied it. Ahmad Shah was doing nothing and could not act against the Russian Cossack commanders and maybe the main reason of which was that Colonel Swarovski had reaped a considerable amount of the Cossack's budget and gave bribed to the Shah and the English embassy knew about that. In this stage, at the order of the ministry of war in London and the Indian Regency, I arrived in close cooperation with General Ironside.

I attached valuable importance for the Reza Khan's theories about the Cossack's force and I finally introduced him to General Ironside. Ironside saw the same characteristics in Reza Khan I had seen previously and we both had respect for this person. Upon many measures, the commander colonel and the Russian officer left the Cossack's army and the army's affairs came under the control of English forces commander in the north of Iran.

### **Ironside's narration**

In his memories, Ironside states: "Colonel Smith had introduced him Reza Khan (Taghavi, 2004)". In his previous memories Ironside had observed that the Tabriz's battalion was better and more cheerful than that of other places. More, Smith had told him that the Tabriz' battalion had acted well and overcame the attack by the Bolsheviks in the north of Manjil. They had also gone to Ghazvin for renewal of mechanisms. Ironside had asked for the same of their commanders and he later found him. This officer was Reza Khan with weird shoulders, modest head and a height of 180cm. His eagle like nose and glaring eyes has given him a cheerful visage. Reza Khan was shaking of the Malaria fever and but he did not show it and did not go for Treatment. Ironside being influenced by him immediately decided to appoint him temporarily as the commanders of Cossack's battalion. Colonel Smith was charged to control the internal and financial affairs of the Cossacks (Ghani, 2008).

Ironside and Smith concluded that persistence of presence of General Homayoun in the camp could entail adverse impacts. Ironside ordered Smith: Give leaf of absence to Homayoun to go and visit his properties". Upon this decision, the full control of Cossacks was handed to Reza Khan (Ghani, 2008). After a while, Ironside found that he may have exaggerated in the ability of Reza Khan. His candidate was a good chieftain but he lacked a political position and he was relatively unknown in the English embassy. Thus, it was possible for him not to establish the post of prime minister. He should have had a non-military, more famed and politically savvy counterpart. Maybe Norman and the others could have revealed the deficiencies of Reza Khan and he found out that he needed the Norman's cooperation (Ghani, 2008). Norman perceived that his new candidate, Seyed Zia could perform that which his previous prime ministers could not afford. Seyed Zia in the eye of Norman was an individual who had proved his loyalty to Britain during years of war and had remained loyal to Vosough in the hardest time of the reign (Ghani, 2008).

It was simple for Norman to reason that Mixing Reza Khan and Seyed Zia, both enthusiastic and eager was the only report; though they could have acceded to power through unusual ways. Kerzen was so realistic to find there was no more way. Kerzen always wanted an authoritative prime minister and Seyed Zia was apparently such a person. Reza Khan had promised Ironside jot to manipulate with the arrangement of the tenure; thus Ghajar could assume their posts and order could have been established. Reza Khan and Seyed Zia were fully complementing each other; one was having a hand in political affairs and the other revived the army so to withstand against the Bolsheviks. More importantly, the main goals of the 1919 Treaty could be fulfilled because Seyed Zia had promised that he would appoint British financial and military advisors (Ghani, 2008).

Ironside was thinking of a certain time to release the Cossacks from the constraints of the English. This task should have been done a month before the retreat of their corps towards Baghdad. Ironside was still worried about the release of the troops and decided to speak to Reza Khan about the conditions of leaving the tenure of Cossacks' division. In his memory booklet, Ironside writes: "(Ghani, 2008)... "After an interview I just had with Reza Khan today, I handed him the full control of Iranian Cossacks to him. Up to now, I have not seen an Iranian officer to be so much straightforward and clean. I explained to him that I wished to get him release from my own constraints and he must from now provide Colonel Smith all the arrangements that if the reveals of Guilan ever attempt to strike Ghazvin or Tehran, he needs to stop them. In the presence of Smith, I had some lengthy talks with Reza Khan. At first, I wanted to get him a written commitment, but finally I reached a conclusion that a written document is to no avail in

this case; because if he ever wishes to violate the commitments he has given us, it suffices for him to state that he was under pressure to write that document and that document is accordingly null and void. However, I clarified two subject matters for him:

1. I told him not to strike us in the back with the guns and ammunition we have provided him with; such action would result in his demise;
2. He must promise not to oust the king after his arrival into Tehran (Maki, 1979).

Ironside states: "Reza Khan accepted both my request and promised to behave as I said". This interchange with Reza Khan confirmed to Ironside that that he had found the man he was intending for; Reza Khan, too would guarantee the withdrawal of the British corps and would prevent the fall of Tehran at the hand of Bolsheviks. Ironside writes: "Iran needed a leader in the hard days it was facing with and this man is undoubtedly a valuable man" (Ghani, 2008). Two days after this meeting, Ironside was summoned to Baghdad via telegraph to assume his own mission there; but prior to leaving Iran, he made a short trip to Tehran and arrived in Ahmad Shah. In this meeting, he did not speak of the arrangements he had with Reza Khan in Ghazvin and said to his Excellency that it is a bad thing not to use such a deserved officer (General Reza Khan) remaining unemployed in Ghazvin. However, the next day when he went to Norman, he told him all the plans for the Coup he had devised with Reza Khan (Maki, 1979).

Sir Denis Wright (British former ambassador in Iran) writes in a book under the title of "England among Iranian": Reza Khan had promised to Ironside at the Grand Hotel in Ghazvin not to oust Ahmad Shah; but later Reza Khan, upon one of his own close allies to London asked Ironside to exempt him from this request and the historical commitment on the night of 1921, February 12. Ironside, thanking this mood assured him to do so because the Iranian nation wanted a change in the dynasty; hence the Pahlavi general was exempted of the promise he had given" (Maki, 1979).

That Ardashir J. Reporter had directly introduced Reza Khan to Ironside or by means of Colonel Smith does not distort the fact that in fact it was the English Intelligence Service which identified Reza Khan to Ironside. Thus, Reza Khan who had been under monitoring of the Intelligence services of Britain was so confidential to the English that he was assigned to carry out the March 3, 1919 (Taghavi, 2004).

### **Coup d'état allies**

It is said that 5 people were allies for the Coup d'état and had sworn and sealed the back of the Koran; this Koran is now at the hand of Masoud Khan Keihan. These five people were: Seyed Zia Al-Din, Reza Khan Mir Panj, Major Masoud Khan, Colonel Ahmad Khan (Amir Ahmadi) and Colonel Kazem Khan (Sayah). Statements by Seyed Zia regarding the Coup d'état as follows: One week prior to the movement of the troops, people went out of the city for maneuver because after the defeat of the Cossack's forces and escape of Russian officers and their ouster from the position they were holding, people of Cossack's forces were dispersedly residing in the villages of Ghazvin and were suspending for a month and if some help was provided for their lives, it was on the English and Indian part until the General's Cabinet formed a board for the custodianship of dispersed Cossacks and it was under the control of Mir Vosough and membership of Masoud Khan and Captain Kazem Khan and Zaman Khan Behnam. For the Cossacks and English to have relations together, Colonel Smith who had been employed as the gendarmerie officer was promoted to the liaison position (the said person had been employed

according to the 1919 Treaty)...On the Friday night, 1000 people from the Cossack's forces presided by Reza Khan Mir Panj and 100 people under the command of Esfandiar Khan moved towards Tehran. They arrived in Karaj on the Saturday's morning.

They vanguards came to Shah Abad along with Ahmad Khan. Two hours later in the noon, Seyed Zia and Major Masoud Khan who had come from Tehran arrived in Shah Abad; Capitan Kazem Khan was anticipating them and Reza Khan was immediately notified of this. He came from Karaj on a car and at three o'clock, an advisory session by the said person was formed in the western room of Shah Abad: 1. Seyed Zia, 2. Major, Masoud Khan, 3. Capitan Kazem Khan, 4. Reza Khan Mir Panj, 5. General Ahmad Agha Khan. Some negotiations were formed, most important of which were that all five swore they would commit themselves to preserve the independence of the nation and protect it against the foreigner troops and keeping of Ahmad Shah (Maki, 1979).

### **March 3, Coup d'état**

Close to half night, the Cossacks entered the city and as it was supposed, no resistance was made against them. Only one police station resisted against them which was assumed to be a misunderstanding. At Dawn, 22 February, the entire city was in the hand of the Cossacks. Members of the cabinet escaped by the night as the Cossacks entered the city and the General took refuge to the English embassy. The king's Court had become house of terror because there were rumors surrounding the city that Seyed Zia had decisions about the revolution. Martial laws were declared in Tehran.

The telephone communication of the inside of Tehran and other provinces was cut off. At this time, Cossacks were active and looted most if the Tehran's bazars and peoples' houses. However, Reza Khan claimed that it was not true. On the first days after the Coup d'état, it seemed that life in Tehran was dead (Meliklf, 1978:33-34). The English foreign minister (Norman), concerning his own meeting with Ahmad Shah on the Third day of August writes: "I saw the Shah today and advised him to establish relations with the leaders of the Movement and respond positively to their requests, because this is the only thing he could do. I assured him about his own health and safety and though he had been terrified, but he spoke nothing of running" (Ironsides, 1984).

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> February, Bagher Khan the representative of Seyed Zia came to the court and assured the Shah about the good will, love of the king and patriotism of plotters. Then, he assigned Shah Seyed Zia as charged for forming the cabinet. In a special decree, Shah gave Reza Khan the title of Chieftain of the Corps and hence Reza Khan was officially assigned to commandership of the Cossack's Army. With the sunset of Tuesday, two sheets of declaration were released from Reza Khan who had been appointed to the commandership of Cossack's Division which is as follows:

"I give order:

*First article:* all the citizens of Tehran must be silent and obedient to military rules;

*Second article:* Martial law is established in the city and no one has the right to frequent the city from 8 O'clock afternoon except for military and police officers

*Third article:* People suspected of creating disruption by military and police officers will be immediately arrested and punished.

*Fourth article:* All journals, press sheets must cease working up until the formation of the state and upon orders they will be permitted to be released.

*Fifth article:* Assemblies in houses and various places are entirely prohibited and in crossings, if over three people are found to be associating, they will be dispersed with force major.

*Sixth article:* the door of all drinking houses and theaters and cinemas must be shut down and any drunkards will be punished

*Seventh article:* Until the government is formed, state offices and divisions will be shut;

*Eight articles:* Those who do not comply with such issues will be referred to the country and punished hard;

*Ninth article:* Kazem Khan will be appointed to the position of commandership of the city.

"God's providence has allowed for this opportunity and you see we are in the capital. We did not capture the capital, because we could not raise our guns where our majesty king is present. We just came to Tehran to make the city deserving a true statehood and centrality of the government; a government which thinks of its own people, a government which is not just watching miseries of people rather a government who values the troops and nation. We are soldiers and devoted and are ready to defend our country and we have no which except for grandeur and glory for our people... long life the king his majesty". From 4 o'clock a.m. they began to arrest lords and influential peoples well as democracy seeking people and the opponents of the 1919 Treaty (Maki, 1979). Malak Al-shoaray Bahar writes in this regard: "From the onset of morning, at the order and command of Coup players in accordance with a "Arrest Plan", police officers along with dozens of Cossacks had been dispatched. The officers were in the leading and the Cossacks were accompanying. They entered the officials of the would arrested then along with the confiscation of their belongings. They would take them somewhere and no one knew where they had been taken. No one knew what would happen to him... in a week, close to 80 people of any groups or class were imprisoned and had been jammed into a room (Bahar, 2007).

However, the one hundred day measures by the Zia Cabinet, besides imprisoning famous people like Teimour Tash and Farmanfarma and prosecution of Mosaadegh and issuance of declarations and exciting statements and some measures like closing down gamble houses and prohibition of alcoholic beverages were as follow (Shamim, 2008):

1. The first measure by Zia's state who had taken office after the Reza Khan's Coup was that he announced the 1919 Treaty as not existing (wright, 2007).
2. The Seyed Zia's cabinet signed the Brotherhood Treaty between Iran and the Soviet on 8<sup>th</sup> March, 1921. Finalization of 1921 Treaty made assurance to the English about the northern parts and the danger of the Russians as well as expansion of Communism to a great extent (Rahmanian, 2012).
3. On the eighth day of 1922, the state's declaration on evacuation of Ghazvin from the English force was released in journals and some Gendarmeries and Cossacks were concentrated for avoiding Bolsheviks and suppression of Mirza Koochak Khan Jangali.
4. IN the beginning of 1922, Major Masoud Khan was charged with the ministry of war to go to Ghazvin and take delivery of the Cossacks who were under the control of English officers.
5. Upon the command of the Prime Minister Seyed Zia, Colonel Mohamad Taghi Khan Pesian, the commander of Khorasan's gendarmerie arrested the Governor of Khorasan named Ahmad Ghevam.

Norman, on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1921, i.e. four days after the coup, via a telegraph communicated to lord Kerzen under the title: highly confidential" said:

Seyed Zia has provided me with the confidential intelligence regarding policy he is supposed to reveal after the formation of his cabinet; firstly, he wishes as far as he can to limit the number of the cabinet's members and entrust the performance of duties of most of the ministries without appointing any minister with the deputies of the same ministries. In his opinion, without declaring the cancellation of the Treaty, his cabinet never managed to start working. However, as he said in combination with the declaration related with the cancellation of the Treaty another declaration under such content will be published where it states the intention y the Iranian government's decision to revoke such a Treaty is not any sort of hostility towards the Great Britain and the new Cabinet will do its bets to prove Iran's good intention towards England which is thought of the main condition for the Iranian survival.

IN addition, (under the assurance Seyed Zia gave me), necessary strides will be immediately taken so that a number of English advisers and officers will be engaged in working in war ministries however their employment will be privately so that enemies cannot have the pretext and say the Treaty has been revoked.

The employment of English staffs shall not attract attention by the public people and for the same reason, in the formal declaration which will be referring to the duties of such advisors, the word "English" word won't be produced and it will be stated that the new government intends to employ some European advisors for organizing some miniseries of Iran. General Ironside writes in his memories in direction to the events of the 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1921 as following:

"I have been notified that Reza Khan has carried out the Coup plan successfully. He acted manly on the promise he gave me in Ghazvin not to offend the Shah and proves his good intention.... I assume all people of Iran believe that the Coup plan has been devised by me and I have monitored the plan behind the stage. If they want the truth, yes that is the reality" (Sheikh-Al-Eslami, 1988).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

After the failure of the 1919Treatym the English politicians arranged the devise of Coup for their persistence of their own reigning Iran and Seyed Zia Tabatabaei and Reza Khan were charged to execute the plan. With the occurrence of the March 3, 1921 coup d'état, a new basis and a new manner for the exploiting of Iran by English Players began and Iranians political and economic dependency on the west increased. The main English goal in endorsing the March 3, 1921 coup d'état was to create a military dictatorial and a security belt for preventing the influence of Communism into Iran.

While conducting the March 3, 1921 coup d'état, the role of English agents like Ironside and Norman was manifest, though internal factors were vested upon military and political leaders of the March 3, 1921 coup d'état such as Reza Khan from the Cossack's battalion and Seyed Zia from the Zargande committee. The winners of the March 3, 1921 coup d'état were in fact Reza Khan and the England and the losers were at first Ahmad Shah and the Seyed Zia and later Constitutionlists and clergies.

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