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IRAN (PERSIA): RECORDS OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, 1883-1959



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Date Range: 1883-1859

Content: 91,207 images

Source Library: U.S. National Archives

Detailed Description:

Iran's geopolitical importance at the end of the nineteenth century made it a central focus in the "great game" of diplomatic rivalry between the major imperial powers, Great Britain and Russia. Popular protest against the Qajar government, which had begun in 1890 under the leadership of the Shiite hierarchy in opposition to a British tobacco concession, was revived in 1905 and forced the shah to order the election of a Majlis (parliament) and grant Iran a constitution in 1906. There followed five years of political struggle, known as the Constitutional Revolution, 1905-1911, between the new shah, supported by Russia, and the Majlis. The Constitutional Revolution aimed without success at the elimination of foreign interests. The attempts of constitutional governments to implement reforms were frustrated and central authority collapsed.

After a coup in 1921, Reza Khan, an officer of the Cossack brigade, became commander-in-chief of the armed forces and quickly consolidated his power. In 1925, the Majlis deposed the last Qajar shah and elevated Reza Khan to the throne. He established a centralized civil service and a national educational system. In this archive, for example, we find a 1931 report from the U.S. legation: "I have the honor to report that Reza Shah Pahlevi, though himself uneducated, is constantly showing new evidence of his confidence in education as the solution of the problems which have harassed Persia for centuries." Reza Shah Pahlevi established the University of Tehran in 1934, and in 1935, as part of the country's education

policy, the university admitted women. In 1941, however, Reza Shah was forced by the Allies to abdicate in favor of his son, who reigned until the Revolution of 1979.

By tracing events in the nineteenth century this archive places more recent events, such as the coup that toppled the Mossadegh government in 1953, in vital historical context. It will interest scholars in need of documents from the perspective of the U.S. State Department.