

the global dominance of the Royal Navy. Faced with this new situation the British and Russians settled their old quarrels, and in 1907 made a treaty establishing spheres of influence within Iran. The Iranians were not consulted. The Russians got the north, and the British the southeast, adjacent to the border of British India. The British sector was quickly extended westward after 1908 to include the newly discovered oilfields. From this point on Britain's prime interest in Iran was oil.

Although the Russians succeeded in ousting the constitutionalists and in reinstating a monarchist government in the name of Ahmad Shah in Tehran in December 1911, most of the country remained beyond its control: lawless or dominated by tribal chiefs. The outbreak of the First World War deepened the chaos, as Turks, Russians, Germans, British, local revolutionaries, monarchists, tribes, and (later) Bolshevik forces fought each other sporadically over Iranian territory—another testament to the impotence of the Qajar government, which had declared an optimistic neutrality in 1914.

***Did the British put Reza Khan in power in 1921?  
Was he a British stooge?***

In the early stages of the First World War in Iran, the British lost ground (in 1915–1916), but kept their grip on Khuzestan and the oilfields. By the war's end the British had come out on top, because most of their opponents had been defeated, but they were not in control. They had four small armed groups in the country, but the great distances, poor roads, and continuing instability meant those forces were almost unable to communicate with each other. The country was in a desperate state; law and order had broken down, trade had slumped; disease and famine had caused widespread loss of life. In London Lord Curzon, the Foreign Secretary,

insisted that Iran should come under British political control, according to the terms of an Anglo-Persian agreement, which was signed in 1919 between the British and Ahmad Shah's ministers. But the agreement never entered into force, because the Majles, true to the principles the constitutionalists had asserted in 1906, refused to ratify it. British commanders on the ground in Iran began to realize that whatever Lord Curzon might think, a more limited solution had to be found, more focused on the essential British interest—oil—and more manageable given the very limited military force available to the British in Iran.

As the impasse over the Anglo-Persian agreement persisted toward the end of 1920, overall command of British troops in Iran passed to General Edmund Ironside, a man with a decisive and independent frame of mind. Without consulting London, Ironside found a solution to the British predicament that would enable him to withdraw British troops safely from most of the country. The Cossacks, expanded to weak division strength during the war, still had Russian officers (marooned in Iran after the revolution of 1917). Ironside removed them and appointed Iranians from the ranks in their place. He then selected one of them, Reza Khan, as the *de facto* commander, and gave him to understand that if he were to march on Tehran and set up a military government, British forces would not stand in his way.

In February 1921 Reza Khan did just that, and set up a new government in association with a mixed group of nationalists and former constitutionalists. British troops withdrew (except in the southwest, around the oil fields). Less than five years later, having defeated various separatists, rebels, and tribal warlords in the provinces (and after attempting to set up a republic), Reza Khan had himself crowned as the first Shah of a new dynasty, the Pahlavi dynasty.