

The establishment of the Chinese legation in Tehran: Chungking's Middle Eastern strategies and the British Foreign Office (1941-1942)

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Abstract

In 1942 the Republic of China established a legation in Tehran. Neither during the last years of the Qājār dynasty nor during the subsequent reign of Rezā Pahlavī did the Chinese manage to send a diplomatic mission to the capital of the Empire. The change in attitude by the Persian government must therefore obviously be attributed to the new international role of Iran after the Anglo-Soviet invasion of 1941, the abdication of Rezā Pahlavī, and the accession to the throne of his son Moḥammad Rezā Pahlavī. Furthermore, the Republic of China, engaged in the hard and long conflict with Japan, was trying to build a diplomatic network in the Near and Middle East that would also support the international re-legitimation after the humiliations suffered since the First Opium War. In particular, the opening of the legation meant the full implementation of the Sino-Persian treaty of 1920. After more than twenty years, the political meaning of that document was probably reconsidered in light of the negotiations with the United States and the United Kingdom regarding extraterritorial rights. The paper, therefore, outlines the political issues and objectives around the opening of the Chinese legation, trying to analyze the role played by the Foreign Office and the British legation in Tehran.

Keywords: Iran-China relations; Iran during the Second World War; Chungking Government; extraterritoriality; Foreign Office

Introduction: the Sino-Persian treaty of 1920¹

Shortly after the end of the First World War, as part of the new international arrangements that were being defined, the Empire of Persia and the Republic of China signed a treaty of friendship in Rome on June 1, 1920.² The Persian Majles³ passed the ratification law on November 7, 1921.⁴ Then, the ratifications of this agreement were exchanged in the Italian capital on February 6, 1922.⁵ The treaty consisted of seven articles. In addition to the promise of “amitié sincère et une constante bonne intelligence entre l'Empire de Perse et la République de Chine et leurs sujets ou citoyens respectifs” (Article 1), the document essentially concerned the status of the Persians in China and the Chinese in Persia (Articles 3 and 4), who were not granted rights of extraterritoriality. This was particularly significant: actually – considering the international events of the two countries between the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – this aspect can be considered the main objective of the agreement (on this, see: Chen, 2019). Alongside this, however, great attention was also given to the exchange of diplomatic representatives. In particular, Article 2 of the agreement provided for the sending of ambassadors, ministers plenipotentiary, or chargés d'affaires who were to receive the same treatment reserved for representatives of the most favored nations,⁶ while Article 5 regulated the appointment of consuls-

¹ I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments. In order to make reading easier, the APA referencing style was used only for secondary sources. The primary sources, on the other hand, were indicated in the footnotes in a manner consistent with historical research.

² The full text of the treaty in French and its English translation is in: Société des Nations, *Recueil des Traités et des Engagements Internationaux enregistrés par le Secrétariat de la Société des Nations*, Volume IX, Lausanne, 1922, No. 240. – Traité d'amitié entre la République de Chine et l'Empire de Perse, 1er juin 1920, pp. 18-21. The text was written in Persian, Chinese and French, but according to Article 6 of the treaty “[e]n cas de divergence d'interprétation du texte, le texte français fera foi”.

³ In this paper, for the Persian language, I have adopted the transliteration system elaborated by the United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN) and by the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use (PCGN) (BGN/PCGN 1958 System). As for the Chinese, I have adopted the Wade-Giles phonetic transcription system. Tehran and the Saadabad Pact are transcribed according to the common English forms.

⁴ *Majmū'eh-ye qavānīn dūreh-ye qānūngožārī-ye chahārom*, Qānūn rāje' beh taşvīb-e 'ahdnameh-ye mavadat va dūstī beyn-e dowlat-e 'aleyh-e Īrān va dowlat-e jamhūrī-ye Chīn, 16 'Aqrab 1300 [November 7, 1921], pp. 223-225.

⁵ Société des Nations, *Recueil des Traités et des Engagements Internationaux enregistrés par le Secrétariat de la Société des Nations*, Volume IX, Lausanne, 1922, No. 240. – Traité d'amitié entre la République de Chine et l'Empire de Perse, 1er juin 1920, p. 18.

⁶ “Les Ambassadeurs, Ministres plenipotentiaires ou Chargés d'affaires qu'il plairait à chacune des deux Hautes Parties contractantes d'envoyer et d'entretenir auprès de l'autre seront reçus et traités, eux et tout le personnel de leur mission, comme sont reçus et traités dans les deux pays respectifs, les Ambassadeurs ou Ministres plenipotentiaires des nations les plus favorisées, et sauf de droits relatifs à la juridiction consulaire, ils y jouiront de tout point des mêmes prérogatives et immunités”.

general, consuls, vice-consuls and consular agents.⁷

Both articles, however, were not followed by actual appointments of ministers until the Second World War.⁸ Neither during the last years of the Qājār dynasty nor during the reign of Rezā Pahlavī was a Chinese legation opened in Tehran. Only a few months after Moḥammad Rezā Pahlavī's ascended to the throne, the Chinese attempts gained success. This paper tries to outline the events that led to the opening of the Chinese legation in the capital of the Empire in 1942 and above all the political significance of this action in the context of the Second World War. In addition, an attempt will be made to understand the role of the Foreign Office and the British legation in the Iranian capital in this respect. Furthermore, I will try to reason on the relationship of the full implementation of the 1920 treaty with the issue of extraterritorial rights that were still recognized to the United States and the United Kingdom at the time of the facts described in the paper.

A new emperor

At the end of August 1941, the Empire of Iran was invaded by the British and the Soviets (see Stewart, 1988 and Eshraghi, 1984). The following month, Rezā Pahlavī abdicated.⁹ On the afternoon of September 17, 1941, Moḥammad Rezā Pahlavī was sworn in before parliament as the new emperor.¹⁰ Therefore, on January 29, 1942, Iran signed a treaty of alliance with the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union.¹¹

⁷ "Les deux Hautes Parties contractantes ont le droit de nommer des consuls généraux, consuls, vice-consuls ou agents consulaires pour résider dans les principales villes ou dans les ports de l'autre, partout où de pareils agents sont admis à résider et, sauf le droit des juridictions consulaires, ils jouiront des mêmes privilèges que les agents consulaires des pays favorisés. Les agents ci-dessus mentionnés sont tenus, avant d'exercer leurs fonctions, d'obtenir l'exequatur d'usage du gouvernement du pays où ils auront à les remplir. Les deux Hautes Parties contractantes s'abstiendront de désigner des commerçants comme consuls généraux, consuls, vice-consuls ou agents consulaires, *excepté* à titre de consuls honoraires".

⁸ However, a Persian consulate was established in Shanghai in 1934, The National Archives, Kew-London (further only TNA), FO 371/18141, F 6800/1157/10, Sir A. Cadogan (Peking) to Foreign Office (J. F. Brenan to His Majesty's Minister, British Legation, Peking, October 1, 1934), October 6, 1934, ff. 160-162.

⁹ *Gahnameh-ye panjāh sāl Shāhanshāhī-ye Pahlavī, I*, Pāris: Soheyl, n.d., p. 180.

¹⁰ *Gahnameh-ye panjāh sāl Shāhanshāhī-ye Pahlavī, I*, Pāris: Soheyl, n.d., p. 181.

¹¹ *Gahnameh-ye panjāh sāl Shāhanshāhī-ye Pahlavī, I*, Pāris: Soheyl, n.d., p. 195. The Persian text of the treaty is in: Māzandarānī, 'A. V (tālīf), Rāhnamā-ye 'ohūd va 'ahdnameh-ha-ye tārikhī-ye Īrān, Tehrān: Chāp sharq, 1341 [1962/1963], pp. 335-339; English text: The Department of State Bulletin, VI, 147 (April 18, 1942), Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1942, pp. 249-252 (source: British Cmd. 6335).

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On September 16, 1941, the same day Iranian Prime Minister Moḥammad 'Alī Forūghī read the Shah's abdication letter before the Majles,¹² the then Chinese minister in Ankara Chang P'eng-ch'un (P. C. Chang)¹³ spoke with the Persian ambassador in the Turkish capital to define the establishment of a Chinese diplomatic mission in Iran.¹⁴

In this regard, in his communication sent to the Foreign Office on October 7, 1941 (and received the following day), the British ambassador to Turkey Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen explained that the various Chinese attempts had not produced concrete results in the past, despite the 1920 treaty.¹⁵ Chang P'eng-ch'un, although unsure, attributed the previous failures to Japanese pressure on the Iranian government.¹⁶ Indeed, Chang explained to Knatchbull-Hugessen, the goal of the Chungking Government was precisely to extend the Chinese diplomatic network in the region in order to limit Japanese action and for this, they were asking for British help: "Minister affirms orders from Chungking Government to increase Chinese diplomatic and consular representation in the Near and Middle East in order to counter balance Japanese influence and would be very grateful for any support which His Majesty's Government could give him to this end".¹⁷ On October 8, 1941 – therefore the same day on

¹² *Gahnameh-ye panjāh sāl Shāhanshāhī-ye Pahlavī, I*, Pārīs: Soheyl, n.d., p. 180.

¹³ TNA, FO 371/53567, F 11994/25/10, Record of leading Personalities in China, August 19, 1946, p. 4.

¹⁴ British Library, London (further only BL), IOR/L/PS/12/654, Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugessen to Foreign Office, October 7, 1941, f. 12. The diplomat had already sent a note on the matter in July: BL, IOR/L/PS/12/654, Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugessen to Foreign Office, October 7, 1941, f. 12.

¹⁵ BL, IOR/L/PS/12/654, Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugessen to Foreign Office, October 7, 1941, f. 12.

¹⁶ "Chinese Minister states matter has been raised several times in the past, but that hitherto no reply has been received probably owing to Japanese pressure at Tehran", BL, IOR/L/PS/12/654, Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugessen to Foreign Office, October 7, 1941, f. 12.

¹⁷ BL, IOR/L/PS/12/654, Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugessen to Foreign Office, October 7, 1941, f. 12. Indeed, Chinese action in the Middle East was particularly active during the period under review. Sir H. Seymour wrote to Eden on May 5, 1942 from Chungking: "As well as exchanging representatives of diplomatic rank with the Government of India, the Chinese Government have been showing considerable activity in enlarging their treaty relations with other countries and in increasing Chinese representation abroad, presumably on account of the propaganda value of such steps, and in preparation for the more important rôle which China expects to play in world affairs after the war. This activity has been particularly in evidence in the Middle East. Since the beginning of the year new treaties of amity have been concluded with Persia and Iraq; relations with Turkey and Czechoslovakia have been resumed by the arrival of a Turkish Chargé d'Affaires and a Czech Minister in Chungking; and agreement has been reached with the Egyptian Government for the establishment of a Chinese Legation in Cairo. Relations with Poland and Mexico are shortly to be resumed by the exchange of representatives. Agreement has been reached for the appointment of a Chinese Minister to the Vatican. Chinese proposals for the exchange of diplomatic representatives with the Governments of Afghanistan and the Union of South Africa have, however, not been accepted by either Government. [...] The Chinese Government have also been active in Moslem affairs, both in China and in the Middle East Their instrument for Moslem propaganda is the Chinese National Islamic Federation, which was founded with the object of absorbing the older Moslem associations, and thus unifying the Moslems of China in the struggle with Japan, countering Japa-

which the Foreign Office received the message of Knatchbull-Hugessen – another communication was sent from London to the British diplomatic representation in Tehran: “Surely Persian Ambassador in Angora must know whether application comes from Chinese Government at Chungking or from Puppet Government at Nanking?”.¹⁸ The Foreign Office was replying to a previous telegram dated September 29, 1941, from Sir Richard Bullard, the British ambassador in Tehran.¹⁹ The diplomat had explained that before giving an answer, the Iranian government obviously wanted to clarify which ‘Chinese’ government had initiated the question, namely the nationalist government based in Chungking or the collaborationist government of Wang Ching-wei.²⁰ The Foreign Office was not particularly enthusiastic about the Chungking Government’s action. In this regard, in the communication from the Foreign Office to Bullard quoted earlier we read: “I [*Eden?*] am not aware of any important Chinese interests in Persia, and I doubt if this is the time to encourage establishment of new diplomatic Missions at Tehran. If however Persian Government are anxious to accept proposal, we would not wish to raise objection, provided of course that proposal comes from Chungking Government”.²¹ A few days later, on October 22, another communication from Knatchbull-Hugessen to the British legation in the Iranian capital reiterated the Chinese insistence: “Chinese minister has enquired how matter is progressing as he is anxious to send Mr. Wang of his staff to Tehran in connexion with this proposal. Visa was applied for to Persian Embassy here over a month ago but no reply has yet been received”.²² It is evident that the Chinese relied on London in this matter. The approval of the Iranian government was communicated by the British legation in Tehran to Knatchbull-Hugessen in early November 1941: “I [*Sir R. Bullard*] am informed by Minister for Foreign Affairs that Persian Government have agreed and that he is telegraphing Angora to that effect”.²³

nese intrigues in the Mahometan world, and of impressing upon the Chinese Moslem minority that they can be good followers of Islam as well as being loyal Chinese citizens and followers of Sun Yat-sen. The second general conference of the federation was held in Chungking at the end of March. Amongst the resolutions adopted was one sponsored by Chen Li-fu, Minister of Education, recommending that the Koran be translated into Chinese; and manifestoes were drafted to Moslems in China and in other countries stressing the grant played by Islam in the fight against Japan. On every possible occasion stress is laid on the point that the Moslems of China are not a racial unit but a religious group, an allegation which is far from being true in the case of the Moslem communities of Kansu and the New Dominion”, TNA, FO 371/31679, F 4089/1689/10, Sir H. Seymour to Mr. Eden, May 5, 1942, f. 22 (p. 3).

¹⁸ BL, IOR/L/PS/12/654, From Foreign Office to Tehran, October 8, 1941, f. 11.

¹⁹ BL, IOR/L/PS/12/654, Sir R. Bullard to Foreign Office, September 29, 1941, f. 13.

²⁰ “Persian Ambassador in Angora has informed the Minister for Foreign Affairs that application has been made to him for the establishment of a Chinese Legation in Tehran. Before replying the Persian Government would like to know whether application comes from the Chinese Government recognised by His Majesty’s Government”, BL, IOR/L/PS/12/654, Sir R. Bullard to Foreign Office, September 29, 1941, f. 13.

²¹ BL, IOR/L/PS/12/654, From Foreign Office to Tehran, October 8, 1941, f. 11.

²² BL, IOR/L/PS/12/654, From Angora to Tehran, October 22, 1941, f. 10.

²³ BL, IOR/L/PS/12/654, From Tehran [Sir R. Bullard] to Angora, November 1, 1941, f. 8.

The expulsion of the Japanese diplomats

Despite the approval, however, the legation was not opened immediately, but it was necessary to wait for the days following the breakdown of diplomatic relations between Iran and Japan and the departure of the Japanese diplomats. Finally, British²⁴ and especially American²⁵ pressure on the Iranian government from the first weeks after Japan's declaration of war against Washington and London led to the breakdown of diplomatic relations between Iran and Japan on April 12, 1942.²⁶ On April 22, the Iranian police banned any propaganda in favor of Berlin, Tokyo, and Rome²⁷ and on April 25 the Japanese legation left the country aboard a Russian ship.²⁸

Therefore, on April 29, 1942, the British ambassador in Chungking, Sir Horace Seymour, wrote to the Foreign Office reiterating the Chinese impatience: "Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs informs me that Persian agrément for Chinese Minister Tehran was requested some six weeks ago but that the Persian Government do not reply. The Chinese Minister for Foreign Affairs would be grateful for any action you could take through His Majesty's Legation Tehran to expedite the matter as they want to get this Mission started".²⁹ Unlike the inertia proposed by the Foreign Office in October, before the war with

²⁴ For example: BL, IOR/L/PS/12/526, Foreign Office to Tehran, February 2, 1942, f. 90; BL, IOR/L/PS/12/526, From Tehran [Sir R. Bullard] to Foreign Office, February 14, 1942, f. 87. The British had come to envision the possibility of a new military operation in Tehran (BL, IOR/L/PS/12/564, Mr. Holman to Mr. Eden, June 21, 1942, f. 121).

²⁵ For example: *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers*, 1942, Vol. IV, The Near East and Africa, Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1963 (further only FRUS IV 1942) The Secretary of State to the Minister in Iran (Dreyfus), January 19, 1942, p. 325; The Minister in Iran (Dreyfus) to the Secretary of State, February 8, 1942, p. 326; FRUS IV 1942, The Acting Secretary of State to the Minister in Iran (Dreyfus), February 25, 1942, p. 326; FRUS IV 1942, The Acting Secretary of State to the Minister in Iran (Dreyfus), March 6, 1942, p. 326; FRUS IV 1942, The Minister in Iran (Dreyfus) to the Secretary of State, March 11, 1942, p. 327; FRUS IV 1942, The Acting Secretary of State to the Minister in Iran (Dreyfus), March 28, 1942, p. 328. Furthermore, in March, the British ambassador in Washington specifically addressed Sumner Welles for a further American intervention: "The British Ambassador called to see me this evening at my request. The Ambassador brought up the question of the continued diplomatic representation of Japan in Tehran. He said that his Government had learned that Japan intended materially to increase diplomatic representation in that capital for purposes which, of course, were obvious. He requested that a further message be sent to our Minister in Tehran urging him to request again that the Iranian Government sever diplomatic relations with Japan, and that this Government use as a leverage the economic assistance which the Iranian Government was requesting of us. I said I would be glad to have a further message sent to our Minister", FRUS IV 1942, Memorandum of Conversation, by the Acting Secretary of State, March 23, 1942, pp. 327-328.

²⁶ *The Department of State Bulletin*, VI, 147 (April 18, 1942), Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1942, p. 345. Diplomatic relations with Rome and Berlin had been broken shortly after the invasion in 1941 and consequently Italians and Germans had already been expelled (Hamzavi, n.d., 14).

²⁷ *Gahnameh-ye panjāh sāl Shāhanshāhī-ye Pahlavī*, Vol. I, Pāris: Soheyli, n.d., p. 204.

²⁸ BL, IOR/L/PS/12/526, C. in C. in Middle East to G.O.C. 10th. Army Iraq, May 3, 1942, f. 14.

²⁹ BL, IOR/L/PS/12/654, From Chungking [Sir H. Seymour] to Foreign Office, April 29, 1942, f. 7.

Japan, Sir H. Seymour was openly in favor of British intervention on Tehran³⁰ and just two days later, on May 1, the Foreign Office asked Sir R. Bullard to take action on the Persian government: "Chinese Government have informed His Majesty's Ambassador that they applied for agrément for Chinese Minister at Tehran some six weeks ago but have had no reply. Please endeavour to expedite issue of agrément. Chinese Government are anxious to open this Mission".³¹ However, on the same day, another telegram from Seymour explained to London that: "[t]he matter [is] settled".³² Therefore, the British ambassador to China asked to stop any action³³ and on May 2 the Foreign Office informed Bullard about it.³⁴

The appointment of Li T'ieh-cheng

Li T'ieh-cheng (Li Tieh-tseng) was placed at the head of the Chinese mission in Tehran.³⁵ His appointment was announced on May 5.³⁶ Li T'ieh-cheng, therefore, presented his credentials to the Shah on June 28.³⁷ The choice was explained by Seymour to Eden with these words: "After Dr. Quo Tai-chi's [*Kuo T'ai-ch'i*] appointment as Foreign Minister a number of changes took place in the personnel of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of which the appointment of Mr. Li was one of the first. These changes were construed in some quarters as constituting to some extent a replacement of pro-American by pro-British influence, and Dr. Li was in fact generally regarded as being pro-British. He is well spoken of for his industry and integrity, and has always been very friendly to this Embassy".³⁸ Furthermore, the British diplomat communicated that "[i]n a statement regarding Mr. Li's appointment issued by the Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reference is made to the antiquity of Sino-Iranian relations, and to the introduction of Zoroastrianism and Nestorianism into China, which are described as constituting a kind of spiritual bridge between China and Iran".³⁹ This aspect is particularly interesting. There was no mention of Islam, but the Chinese, in line with the value given by the Pahlavī

³⁰ "I support the request", BL, IOR/L/PS/12/654, From Chungking [Sir H. Seymour] to Foreign Office, April 29, 1942, f. 7.

³¹ BL, IOR/L/PS/12/654, From Foreign Office to Tehran [Sir R. Bullard], May 1, 1942 (d. May 2, 1942), f. 6.

³² BL, IOR/L/PS/12/654, From Chungking [Sir H. Seymour] to Foreign Office, May 1, 1942, f. 5.

³³ BL, IOR/L/PS/12/654, From Chungking [Sir H. Seymour] to Foreign Office, May 1, 1942, f. 5.

³⁴ BL, IOR/L/PS/12/654, From Foreign Office to Tehran [Sir R. Bullard], May 2, 1942, f. 4.

³⁵ BL, IOR/L/PS/12/654, H.J. Seymour to Anthony Eden, May 13, 1942, f. 3; BL, IOR/L/PS/12/654, Adrian Holman to Anthony Eden, June 29, 1942, f. 2.

³⁶ BL, IOR/L/PS/12/654, H.J. Seymour to Anthony Eden, May 13, 1942, f. 3.

³⁷ BL, IOR/L/PS/12/654, Adrian Holman to Anthony Eden, June 29, 1942, f. 2. Li was promoted to the rank of ambassador in March 1945 after the diplomatic missions of Iran and China had been elevated to embassies the previous month. The Iranian minister had presented the credentials to Chiang Kai-shek on October 3, 1944 (*China handbook: 1937-1945*, compiled by Chinese Ministry of Information, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947, p. 182).

³⁸ BL, IOR/L/PS/12/654, H.J. Seymour to Anthony Eden, May 13, 1942, f. 3.

³⁹ BL, IOR/L/PS/12/654, H.J. Seymour to Anthony Eden, May 13, 1942, f. 3.

dynasty to the oldest spiritual and cultural roots of the Persian nation, referred to Zoroastrianism. It should be mentioned in this regard that, however, in 1921 Arbāb Kaykhosrow, at the time representative of the Zoroastrian community in the Majles, had heavily criticized the treaty of 1920 in parliament.⁴⁰ Arbāb Kaykhosrow – beyond ancient and medieval history – saw, in the agreement, economic damage to Persia fearing the importation of Chinese products and had also asked the government for explanations regarding the opening of an embassy in China which he considered an unnecessary expense.⁴¹

Seymour then continued in his communication to the Foreign Secretary: "Emphasis is also laid on the fact that the Sino-Iranian treaty of amity of 1920 was the first treaty based on equality and reciprocity signed by China as a result of the movement for the abolition of the unequal treaties. This fact may explain the importance the Chinese attach to the present appointment, and probably also their concern over the apparent lack of interest shown by the Government at Tehran in delaying for so long before granting the agrément for Mr. Li".⁴² In fact, this should be highlighted as perhaps the issue that most directly involved the Chinese, which accompanied and completed the effort put in place for the construction of a Near and Middle Eastern diplomatic network. Considering that at that time the abolition of the extraterritorial rights was being negotiated with the British and Americans (see, inter alia: Chan, 1977), fully implementing the 1920's treaty with the Persian Empire can also be interpreted as an additional pressure placed on London and Washington. As is well known, the two bilateral treaties with which the United Kingdom and the United States renounced their extraterritorial rights were then signed on January 11, 1943.⁴³

Furthermore, in terms of relations with Middle Eastern and Near Eastern countries, in order to better frame the role of the opening of the legation in Tehran, a rapid presentation of other Chinese diplomatic successes in the region is needed. In particular, the two cases that are directly associated with the legation in Iran should be emphasized. Indeed, one of the first tasks entrusted to Li T'ieh-cheng

⁴⁰ *Možākerāt-e Majles*, dūreh-ye chahārom, jalaseh-ye 38, 16 'Aqrab 1300 [November 7, 1921], p. 226.

⁴¹ *Možākerāt-e Majles*, dūreh-ye chahārom, jalaseh-ye 38, 16 'Aqrab 1300 [November 7, 1921], p. 226.

⁴² BL, IOR/L/PS/12/654, H.J. Seymour to Anthony Eden, May 13, 1942, f. 3.

⁴³ Text of the Anglo-Chinese treaty: *Treaty between His Majesty in respect of the United Kingdom and India and His Excellency the President of the National Government of the Republic of China for the Relinquishment of Extra-Territorial Rights in China and the Regulations of Related Matters (with exchange of notes and agreed minute)*, Chungking, January 11, 1943 [Ratifications exchanged at Chungking, May 20, 1943], Treaty Series No. 2 (1943), Cmd. 6456, London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1943; text of the Sino-American treaty and exchange of notes: *United States Statutes at Large*, 1943, Vol. 57, Part 2, Washington: United States Government Printing Press, 1944, *Treaty between the United States of America and the Republic of China for the relinquishment of extraterritorial rights in China and the regulation of related matters* (Treaty Series 984), pp. 767-799.

by his government was in fact to establish diplomatic relations with Afghanistan.⁴⁴ The latter country, in addition to sharing an ancient cultural heritage with its Persian neighbor, had signed in July 1937 together with Iran, Iraq, and Turkey the non-aggression pact known as Saadabad Pact.⁴⁵ To this end, Li had turned to the Afghan ambassador in Tehran and had requested help, through Bullard, from Great Britain.⁴⁶ Despite the initial resistance,⁴⁷ the Sino-Afghan Treaty of Amity was signed in Ankara on March 2, 1944 and ratifications were exchanged on September 30, 1944.⁴⁸ In addition, on April 8, 1944, Li also presented his credentials to the king of Iraq as the Chinese minister in the country.⁴⁹

Conclusions

The events relating to the opening of the Chinese legation in Tehran clearly fit within the wider international repositioning of Iran after the Anglo-Soviet invasion of 1941 and the decisive choices made by the young Shah. However, the documents seem to show that there was no direct involvement of the British authorities. It does not seem that the British legation in Tehran worked to put pressure on the Iranian government in favor of the Chinese. This attitude of quiescence can justifiably be attributed to the indication of the Foreign Office which, as seen, already at the beginning of October 1941 had preferred not to object, but at the same not to support the establishment of the legation. It should be emphasized that this position predates the start of the war between the British Empire and Japan in December 1941. On the contrary, after Sir H. Seymour's telegram from Chungking of April 29, 1942, the Foreign Office asked Sir R. Bullard for direct intervention, but as seen, the matter had already been

⁴⁴ TNA, FO 371/31683, F 5904/1837/10, Sir R. Bullard to Mr. Baxter, August 7, 1942.

⁴⁵ Official text of the treaty in French and English translation: Société des Nations, *Recueil des Traités et des Engagements internationaux enregistrés par le Secrétariat de la Société des Nations*, Volume CXC, Lausanne, 1938, No. 4402. – Traité de non-agression entre le Royaume d'Afghanistan, le Royaume de l'Irak, l'Empire de l'Iran et la République turque, 8 juillet 1937, pp. 22-27.

⁴⁶ TNA, FO 371/31683, F 5904/1837/10, Sir R. Bullard to Mr. Baxter, August 7, 1942.

⁴⁷ For example: TNA, FO 371/31683, F 4352/1837/10, Chinese Ambassador. (conversation), June 11, 1942.

⁴⁸ *China handbook: 1937–1945*, compiled by Chinese Ministry of Information, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947, p. 181; text of the treaty: TNA, FO 371/41655, F 1355/1355/10, Mr. Sterndale Bennett (Angora) to Eden, March 16, 1944 (Treaty of Friendship between China and Afghanistan).

⁴⁹ *China handbook: 1937–1945*, compiled by Chinese Ministry of Information, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947, p. 182. The Sino-Iraqi Treaty of Amity had been signed in Baghdad on March 16, 1942 and bore, for the Chinese side, the signature of P. C. Chang (*China handbook: 1937–1945*, compiled by Chinese Ministry of Information, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947, p. 182).

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resolved.⁵⁰ In Iran, there was at least an indirect role through the British and US action aimed at expelling Japanese diplomats after the beginning of the hostilities of the Japanese against the United States and the British Empire at the end of 1941. Considering the very few days that passed since the departure of the Japanese legation and the resolution of the question, it is reasonable to think that Japanese pressure on the Iranian government was the main obstacle to the opening of the Chinese mission. This, as seen, had been the hypothesis made by Chungking's representative in Ankara Chang P'eng-ch'un to Knatchbull-Hugessen a few months earlier, in October 1941, when Tehran had not yet even authorized the legation.

The Chinese effort to obtain a legation in the capital of the Iranian Empire can instead be outlined in the perspective of that international legitimation that China was rebuilding during the Second World War. There was, naturally, also a more specific objective due to the conflict with Japan and therefore a strategic need to build a diplomatic network with the countries of the Saadabad Pact and beyond.⁵¹ Li T'ieh-cheng, as said, was in charge of establishing diplomatic relations with Afghanistan and was later appointed Chinese minister in Iraq. Furthermore, as seen, together with the broader post-war objectives, the construction of this network could also be framed within the negotiation with the United States and the United Kingdom on the end of extraterritorial rights. A century after the First Opium War, this goal was an essential step to cancel the ancient humiliations.

⁵⁰ It has to be underlined that already in February 1942 John Brenan, former British consul in Shanghai and at the time at the Eastern Department had realized the possibility of using the Chinese diplomatic network to build an alternative Pan-Asian narrative: "China now provides our main argument and support against Japan's pan-Asian propaganda. We should therefore help the Chinese in every way to disabuse other Asiatic peoples on the subject of the real Japanese plan of domination. It will come much more convincing from the Chinese, as fellow-Asiatics, than from us", TNA, FO 371/31683, F 1837/1837/10, Sir John Brenan's minute, February 26, 1942. On the contrary, in September, Sir J. Brenan saw the difficulties of such a strategy: according to him, then, the political action of nationalist China in Asia did not seem to respond to the needs of the British Empire (TNA, FO 371/31683, F 6583/1837/10, Sir John Brenan's minute, September 22, 1942).

⁵¹ In this regard, one can add, to the documents already cited, the position expressed by Chang P'eng-ch'un to Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugessen in February 1942: "Chinese Minister went on to say that his policy is to establish diplomatic relations with all independent countries in the Near and Middle East threatened by Axis aggression, as he felt that China having suffered so much, was in a position effectively to interpret to Governments concerned the realities of the situation. With Turkey and Iraq a start had been made. With Persia conversations had been concluded for an eventual exchange of Ministers. But to Afghanistan he attached particular importance as Japan was still represented in Kabul. Minister went on to say that he hoped ultimately to deal also with Egypt. Minister concluded by emphasizing that this policy, which had as its object the strengthening of morale in countries mentioned, had recently been illustrated in another form by visit of Chiang Kai-shek to India, and his conversations with Nationalist leaders. It was however a policy that could not bear fruit without support of His Majesty's Government which he much hoped would be forthcoming", TNA, FO 371/31683, F 1837/1837/10, Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugessen to Foreign Office, February 23, 1942.

In closing, it should be emphasized that the Chinese interests and position have been interpreted on the basis of the British documents. Further research on Chinese documents could outline further political and economic aims. However, at the moment the reasons presented by the British documentation seem substantially consistent with the actions implemented by the Chungking Government.

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