

The Transiran Railway Project And English-Russian Relations At The Beginning Of The 20th Century

S.I. Gabrielyan

Doctor of Sciences, professor
National University of Uzbekistan
named after Mirzo Ulugbek

Abstract: This article details the diplomatic struggle between England and Russia over the construction of the Trans-Iranian railway. The issue of constructing this road has long been an object of geopolitical and geoeconomic interests of Great Britain and Russia. Financial and diplomatic forces were also involved in this struggle. The struggle for large concessions and monopolies in the Middle East became the object of an irreconcilable struggle between the major European powers. This is one of the pages of the "great game" that unfolded at the end of the 19th century in the world's East.

Keywords: Persia, diplomatic struggle, Baghdad railway, Trans-Iranian railway, Anglo-Russian rivalry in Iran, German penetration into the Middle East

1. Introduction. The beginning of the 20th century marked the intensification of international contradictions and the intensification of the struggle of leading powers for political and economic influence in various regions of the world. In this system of international relations, the Middle East acquired special significance, where the interests of the largest colonial powers clashed. One of the important factors influencing the nature of Anglo-Russian relations during this period was the implementation of transport and infrastructure projects aimed at strengthening the political and economic positions of the states in the region. And among such projects, the plan for the construction of the Trans-Iranian railway held a special place. This project was viewed not only as a means of developing Iran's transport system but also as a tool for geopolitical influence capable of changing the balance of power in the region.

2. Research methods. The methods used in writing the article can be grouped as follows. The most important was ideographic (narrative), with the help of which the confrontation between British and Russian diplomacy in order to establish geoeconomic dominance in Iran was revealed in detail. The historical-systemic method was also used, which allowed for all events at the end of the 19th century in Iran related to the possibility of European states obtaining the most profitable concessions and monopolies in Iran in the context of cause-and-effect relationships.

3. Research results. At the beginning of the 20th century, Russia entered the zone of industrial growth, and for the development of communications, a Trans-Sea railway was necessary [1].

Around railway construction projects in Iran, a struggle unfolded mainly between two main groups of Russian industrial capital. One group relied on real figures of growing Russian-Iranian trade turnover, the strategic interests of the military department, and the fact that the Julfa-Tawriz railway existed, which could be covered by railroads at any moment. The second group put forward opposing arguments, justifying their position by the need to create a counterweight to the Baghdad Railway, which threatened to deprive Russia of the advantages of European transit and its monopolistic position in northern Iran.

Since it was impossible to prevent the construction of this line in the future, the Russian government, in order to neutralize its negative influence, sought to take control of the Hanekin-Tehran structure. The threat to Russian interests in northern Iran increased when, in 1910, the prospect of attracting French and English capital to the Baghdad Railway Enterprise emerged. At the beginning of 1909, a memorandum was received in Petersburg from the British Embassy, in which it was reported that the director of a German bank, A. Gvinner, informed British financiers of his agreement to establish British control over a section of the Baghdad-Persian Gulf and to build it by the British [2].

The Russian Foreign Ministry has developed the idea of opposing the Baghdad railway to the Trans-Iranian one. A.P. Izvolsky and his successor S.D. Sazonov believed that "the Anglo-Russian agreement will not bring the full value it is capable of until it is completed by the adoption of the Trans-Iranian railway project, which will reduce the Baghdad line to a completely insignificant position" [3].

During 1909 and 1910, Izvolsky and the Russian emperor repeatedly expressed sympathy for the idea of connecting Russian and Indian roads through Iran in their conversations with English diplomats, but each time they encountered an evasive response from the British government.

The head of the Foreign office, E. Gray, was inclined to express sympathy for the project, as he was confident that Russia would never be able to find capital for the implementation of this grandiose project, but under the pressure of sharp objections from the Indian department, he was forced to ask Izvolsky not to insist on the British government's decision" [4]. This issue became the subject of discussion at the Special Meeting on Persia Affairs on October 15, 1910. As a result of the exchange of views between the ministers of trade and industry, communications, foreign affairs, finance, and military affairs, a unified point of view emerged, which Kokovtsev expressed: "If it is impossible to completely avoid the construction of the Tehran-Hankin line, which is undoubtedly harmful to us, then, of course, it is desirable that it be laid by us, otherwise we risk completely handing it over to the Germans, who have all the possibilities to achieve appropriate concessions and create a zone in Persia - Germany" [5].

At Stolypin's suggestion, P. Izvolsky was instructed during negotiations with German representatives to insist on Russia's preferential right to acquire railway concessions in northern Iran whenever it wishes; if the German side insisted, to declare that Russia would undertake the construction of the Tehran-Khankin line upon completion of the Enzeli-Tehran route and under the guarantee of the Iranian government.

In the autumn of 1910, a group of Russian entrepreneurs submitted to the Council of Ministers the "Letter of the Initiators of the Construction of the Great Indian Road" [6], in which it was planned to give the road a private character. According to the authors, the most suitable route of the Trans-Persian railway for both states - Russia and England - would be Baku-Tehran-Kirman-Nushki, further connecting with Indian railways. Two other directions leading to the sea - Chahbar and Bandar Abbas - were also considered possible. Financing and construction along the entire line were planned jointly with the involvement of French capital. The project initiators allowed the Persians themselves to participate in the construction due to their debt to Russia and England.

As a result, the Council of Ministers adopted the following resolution: "Sympathy with the main idea of the project for the construction of a railway from Western Europe to India through Russia and Persia and not encountering obstacles for the formation of a Society for Preparatory Work on this issue (Societe d'Etudes), the Council of Ministers considers it necessary, however, to indicate that the implementation of this project should not cause any damage to the state treasury of Russia and should correspond to the economic interests of Russia" [7].

At the beginning of November 1910, I.A. Zvegintsev traveled to London to resolve this issue. He was received by the Minister of Foreign Affairs E. Gray in the presence of his assistant A. Nikolson [8]. The concessions just made by the Russian government of Germany in Potsdam prompted British diplomacy to maneuver cautiously in the matter of railway construction in Iran. Having considered the issue of the Trans-Persian road, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs expressed his personal opinion on the expediency of constructing the road from a political point of view. Regarding the strategic side of the issue, E. Gray reported that the draft has been submitted for discussion to the State Defense Commission for its resolution. At the end of the conversation, the Minister of Foreign Affairs proposed to I.A. Zvegintsev to discuss the financial side of the case with the Director of the Bank of England, F.H. Jackson [9].

The director of the English bank is showing increased interest in the project. But the representatives of the Russian initiative group began negotiations not with the British, but with French financiers, with whom they had long-standing close ties. Some initiators of the Trans-Iranian Railway project did not rule out the possibility of German capital's participation in this enterprise [10].

The representative of the Russian side, V.I. Timiryazev, traveling through Berlin, met in November 1910 with the director of the German bank and the Baghdad Railway, Gvinner, to discuss his attitude towards the project and the possibility of German capital's participation in the railway construction. Externally, Gwynner expressed his consent to participate in the expenses of "Sosete d'Etude." But after Timiryazev's departure, the directors of a German bank, materially interested in the success and profitability of the Baghdad Railway, through their London colleague Ernest Kassel, raised an alarm and began to act against the dangerous competitor of their enterprise.

Paris bankers, for their part, appealed to Lord Revelstock - director of the Bering Banking House - with a proposal to participate in financing the new Indo-European route [11].

In December 1910, a Russian consortium was created to organize preparatory work for the implementation of the Trans-Iranian railway project. It included 12 major Russian banks. But among the Russian industrial bourgeoisie, there were many who opposed the construction of this road.

The struggle of two groups of Russian industrial capital around the construction of railroads in Iran was reflected in a fierce polemic that unfolded at the end of 1910 on the pages of the Russian central press. The Moscow bourgeoisie and all the opposition press sharply criticized the idea of the Trans-Iranian Railway. Some Petersburg newspapers also expressed concerns about possible negative consequences of road construction.

On November 9, 1910, a representative assembly was held in Moscow, in which about 50 representatives of the Moscow industry, as well as some members of the State Duma, participated. The meeting rejected any railway construction projects in Persia as extremely harmful to Russia's economic interests and decided to ask the government during negotiations with Germany and England to pay special attention to the interests of Russian industry regarding the Iranian market.

The next day, "New Times" attacked Moscow entrepreneurs who didn't want to take a single step to conquer the foreign market. He was deeply angered by the fact that Iran was perceived by the producers only from the point of view of Mitkal's interests. "New Times" defended the Trans-Persian road project on behalf of "Russia's industrial interests and common national, economic, and political interests" [12].

In January 1911, simultaneously with the Russian-German dialogue on the line between Tehran and Hanekin, the Council of Ministers of Russia agreed to create an international consortium for the construction of the Trans-Persian railway, although the Russian treasury still did not take any financial responsibility for its implementation.

The idea of the Trans-Iranian railway was generally perceived positively in English society, only doubts were expressed regarding its financial viability. For the London cabinet, the opinion of the Indian government on this matter was of decisive importance.

The Viceroy of India, Ch. Harding, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Indian government, G. McMahon, and other officials, outwardly, viewed the idea of the Trans-Iranian railway positively. However, among the officials of diplomatic and military agencies, there were many who opposed the Indo-European path [13].

The Anglo-Indian military department strongly opposed the idea of using the Karachi-Sibi-Quetta-Nushki railway as the main section of the Indo-Caucasian route, believing that this road, on the basis of which the entire plan for the mobilization and deployment of Indian troops to the southern borders of Afghanistan is based, must undoubtedly maintain its current strategic importance, which will inevitably be lost if passengers and cargo of the great highway follow it. The Anglo-Indian General Staff did not want to open the Sestan and Nushki-Sestan caravan route to the railway.

The military department offered an English section of the Karachi road leading along the Arabian Sea coast to Gwadar-Chaharbar-Jascus to Bandar Abbas, where they would like to have a junction with the Russian section. The direction along the shores of Mekran seemed most advantageous for British military circles. Indeed, in this case, the railway would stretch 800 miles from Bandar Abbas to Karachi along a coastal strip suitable for engineering needs, constantly under the fire of the English fleet and in tactical contact with it. In the future, British fortifications and a military port will be built in Bandar Abbas, and the edge of both collars - Russian and Indian - will be under the fire of the British fleet and fortresses. The British section of the road towards Mekran would also cut off Russia from the Arabian Sea and effectively hand over all of Southeastern Iran to the British. Moreover, such a 600-thousand-kilometer road route increased its length, consequently, became more expensive, and moreover, brought it closer.

While the direction of the Trans-Iranian railway was being discussed in Anglo-Indian government spheres, in February 1911, unexpectedly for the Russian government, the British ambassador to Tehran began a petition to the Iranian government to grant England a concession for the construction of the Mohammer-Horramobod railway.

One of the chief directors of the Anglo-Persian company, the Imperial and Anglo-Russian banks Greenway, proposed financing the construction of a railway from Mohammer to Khorramabad. And it was at this time

that the request of the Iranian government for a loan was granted - the board of the Shahinshah Bank provided the latter with 120 thousand tumans as a future loan.

In mid-March, British Ambassador J. Barkley, on behalf of his government, delivered a note to the Iranian government requesting the possibility of building a port in Khor Musa and a railway from this point to Khorramabad with a branch to Mohameri. The Russian government's response consisted of a petition granting the right to build a railway between these cities to the Julfa-Tabriz Road Society.

Both proposals were rejected by the Iranian government under favorable pretexts, but the British government persistently sought a variant of the Mohammer-Horramobod line. The Russian government had grounds for serious objections to this route, as it could become a crucial means of England's trade and economic expansion in central and western Iran and threaten Russian interests in the northern part of the country. Moreover, if it were to be connected with Russian roads in northern Iran in the future, the strategic importance of this line would increase immeasurably, as it would facilitate the task of concentrating troops against Russia in northern Azerbaijan by Turkey or other hostile states.

In connection with these circumstances, the Russian Foreign Ministry held a series of consultations with all interested agencies. The position of the military ministry proved decisive: "Due to political unwillingness to oppose English concessions," the military minister proposed to England to make concessions, but "to receive compensation from the latter: 1) in the form of an obligation to widely finance the railway, important for Russia, from Julfa through Hoy to Tauris, 2) in the form of a request for the right, with the financial support of England, for the Russians themselves to build a road from Tauris to the south, in the zone of Russian influence, to build a road with Russian roads and ensure its influence on operation".

However, the Russian government was forced to give consent to the British project. In March 1911, after ensuring the fulfillment of most of the demands of the Iranian government, the Tsarist authorities withdrew the detachment from Qazvin. On May 2, 1911, the British ambassador to Petersburg, D. Buchanan, was instructed to convey to the acting head of the Foreign Ministry, Neratov, that the British government "is preparing to approve the project and express consent to the commencement of negotiations between interested groups in England and Russia under the following conditions: 1) The line must enter the sphere of British influence in Bandar Abbas instead of Kerman and merge with the Indian railway network in Karachi, not in Nushka; 2) the width of the road will be changed in Bandar Abbas or at any other point where the line enters the sphere of influence of England in Persia" [14].

In addition, the British government assumed "in exchange for England's assistance in this project, the consideration of which showed much greater benefit for Russia than for England and India," refusing to consider or support the road project near the Iranian-Afghan border in Russian or neutral zones in Iran, supporting England's appeal to the Iranian government with a request to provide concessions for 4 branches of the proposed cross-road: 1) Mohammir-Khoramabad with a branch to the future port in Khor Musa, 2) Bandar Abbas-Shiraz-Akhaz, 3) Bandar Abbas or Chahwar to Kerman, 4) Bushir to the point of the cross-line.

It is clear that the British government's concerns influenced the nature of the British Foreign Ministry's note, caused by Article I of Russia's draft agreement with Germany regarding Russia's refusal to object to the implementation of the Baghdad Road. The British feared that after the agreement was concluded, Russia would be deprived of the opportunity to support them in resisting the construction of the Baghdad-Persian Gulf section, on which the London cabinet had not yet reached an agreement with the German government. The four lines proposed by Britain in southern Iran were to neutralize the Tehran-Khanekin branch and the southern section of the Baghdad road in the future, if they fell into Germany's hands.

Thus, to support the Trans-Persian railway project, the British government wanted to obtain 4 roads, 3 of which passed through the neutral zone, thereby securing its complete dominance in southern and southwestern Iran.

In July 1911, the temporary manager of the Russian Foreign Ministry, A.A. Neratov, instructed the Russian ambassador to London, A.K. Benkendorf, to inform the British government that the Russian government had no objection to Karachi, but could not agree with Bandar Abbas, since the road would go in a direction unfavorable to Russia's trade interests and would approach the road to Baghdad.

Meanwhile, the Russian initiative group was making efforts to attract foreign capital to their enterprise. In the summer of 1911, P.L. Bark traveled to London and Paris to clarify the attitude of local bankers towards

the project. He managed to secure the support of major French banks interested in Russian industry and railways. With the support of the French government, interested in strengthening Anglo-Russian relations, a French financial group was created.

In April 1911, Bark and Gukasov began negotiations with Lord Reveltstock - director of an English bank and head of the Bering Brothers trading house, who participated in the Russian credit of 1906. They offered him to participate in the preliminary expenses for the implementation of the road project, but Reveltstock declined the offer.

4. Conclusion. In summary, we can conclude that the Russian-German negotiations on the Baghdad road and the policies of both states in Iran, which lasted more than five years, ultimately led to the conclusion of an agreement between Germany and Russia in Potsdam in 1911. However, this was a short-term resolution of the dispute. The world was approaching a bloody decision.

References

- 1.Ivanov M.S. Iranskaya revolyutsiya 1905-1911 gg. – M., 1957, s. 449 [Ivanov M.S. The Iranian Revolution of 1905-1911. - M., 1957, p. 449] [in Russian]
- 2.Astafyev I.I. Potsdamskoye soglasheniye 1911 g. Istoricheskiye zapiski, t.85, 1970, s. 128. [Astafyev I.I. Potsdam Agreement of 1911. Historical Notes, vol.85, 1970, p. 128.] [in Russian]
- 3.Spring D.W. The Trans-Persian railway project and Anglo-Russian Relations. 1909-1914. The Slavonic and East European Review. L. 1976, p. 63
- 4.Spring D.W. The Trans-Persian railway project and Anglo-Russian Relations. 1909-1914. The Slavonic and East European Review. L. 1976, p.62
- 5.Jurnal «Krasniy arxiv» t.3 (59) s. 53. ["Red Archive" Journal, Vol. 3 (59) p. 53] [in Russian]
- 6.RGVIA - Rossiyskiy Gosudarstvenniy Voenno-istoricheskiy Arxiv, f.2000, op.1, d.7726, ll.36-52 [RGVIA - Russian State Military Historical Archive, f.2000, op.1, d.7726, p.36-52] [in Russian]
- 7.RGVIA, f.2000, op.1, d.7726, l.52 [RGVIA, f.2000, op.1, d.7726, p.52] [in Russian]
- 8.RGVIA, f.2000, op.1, d.7699, l.200 [RGVIA, f.2000, op.1, d.7699, p.200] [in Russian]
9. RGVIA, f.2000, op.1, d.7699, l.200 [RGVIA, f.2000, op.1, d.7699, p.200] [in Russian]
- 10.Spring D.W. The Trans-Persian railway project and Anglo-Russian Relations. 1909-1914. The Slavonic and East European Review. L. 1976, p.62
- 11.RGVIA, f.2000, op.1, d.7699, l.207 [RGVIA, f.2000, op.1, d.7699, p.207] [in Russian]
- 12.«Novoye vremya», 11 noyabrya 1910 g. ["New Times," November 11, 1910] [in Russian]
- 13.Bestujev I.V. Borba v Rossii po voprosam vneshney politiki nakanune pervoy mirovoy voyni (1910-1914 gg.) Istoricheskiye zapiski, t. 75, M., 1965, s.204 [Bestuzhev I.V. The struggle in Russia on the eve of the First World War (1910-1914) on foreign policy issues. Historical Notes, vol. 75, M., 1965, p.204]. [in Russian]
- 14.Ivanov M.S. Iranskaya revolyutsiya 1905-1911 gg. – M., 1957, s. 449 [Ivanov M.S. The Iranian Revolution of 1905-1911. - M., 1957, p. 449]. [in Russian]