

## ARTICLE

## Tribes and Smugglers in Iran's Eastern Borderlands, 1921–41

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### Abstract

Based primarily on British consular reports, this article studies transborder movement in Iran's eastern borderlands during the two decades following the rise of Reza Khan in 1921. It discusses two kinds of transborder movements: tribal exodus and smuggling. By examining the contexts of these transborder movements, this article explores the desire of the new state to assert sovereignty as it appeared in the borderlands and demonstrates that, rather than simply closing the borders, the Pahlavi state attempted to control the flows of people and goods, with dual effects. It introduced new constraints to mobility and as well fostered the development of borderland networks that enabled diffused transborder movement, making it harder for the authorities to control.

**Keywords:** Baluchistan; borderlands; citizenship; India; infrastructure; smuggling; tribe

An obscure hamlet called Dozdab, present-day Zahedan, emerged as the nodal point of an infrastructural network of Iran's eastern borderlands in the post-WWI period.<sup>1</sup> The initial rise of Dozdab owed much to the war, when the government of India approved the extension of India's North Western Railway from Nushki in Indian Baluchistan to Dozdab to address the twin concerns of German-Ottoman espionage and cross-border tribal raids.<sup>2</sup> After the war, as the railway terminus, Dozdab became a focal reloading point for rail traffic from India transferring to motor and camel traffic in Iran. To the east, the railway connected Dozdab to Quetta, which was tied to port cities such as Karachi and Bombay. South of Dozdab was Chahbahar on the Makran coast, which connected the borderlands to the Indian Ocean world. To the west lay Kerman, through which the Qajars theoretically exerted control over Baluchistan, connecting the region to central Iran. To the north, caravan tracks and motor roads connected Dozdab to Zabol and Birjand respectively. Further north of Birjand was Mashhad, the gateway to Soviet Central Asia, and Zabol was located only forty kilometers east of the porous Afghan-Iranian border. These urban centers that dotted the borderlands were connected by various Baluch and Hazara tribes who operated camels, as well as by truck drivers, primarily Sikhs from India. Across the sparsely populated, arid, and often mountainous borderlands, regional flows of people and goods circulated in all directions.

The early development of Dozdab coincided with two decades of rapid centralization following the 1921 coup d'état that led to the rise of Reza Khan and his ultimate ascension to

<sup>1</sup> Dozdab was renamed Zahedan in 1930. In this article, I use the name Zahedan when I discuss events that occurred after the name change.

<sup>2</sup> For this railway, see Mikiya Koyagi, "Drivers across the Desert: Infrastructure and Sikh Migrants in the Indo-Iranian Borderlands, 1919–31," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 39, no. 3 (2019): 375–88; and Abdollah Safarzai, "Ahdas-e Khatt-e Ahan-e Nushki beh Dozdab tavassot-e Englestan," *Majalleh-ye Pazhuhehsh-ha-ye Tarikhi-ye Iran va Eslam* 27 (2020): 157–78.

the throne as Reza Shah Pahlavi (r. 1925–41). Supported by a new generation of intellectuals, Reza Khan aspired to create a politically and culturally unified nation with Tehran as its uncontested center of power. To achieve this goal, his new regime began to implement numerous controversial policies, including sartorial homogenization, conscription, and military campaigns against autonomous centers of power, all of which met with opposition and resistance from a broad segments of Iranian society.<sup>3</sup>

The success of these policies was contingent on the effective control of movement of people and goods within the territorial nation. The new state's ideal of a unified nation required the speedy movement of troops from Tehran to the provinces. Likewise, the concept of a national economy was predicated on the smooth flow of goods between urban centers, the countryside, and ports of departure for import and export. At the same time, political elites of the early Pahlavi state feared the subversive implications of the unmonitored movement of people, goods, and ideas. The fear was accentuated particularly when the movement took place across the emerging national borders. A case in point was transnational pilgrimage traffic that linked holy cities such as Mashhad, the 'Atabat, and Mecca to the larger world of the faithful. Transnational pilgrimage threatened the homogeneity of the nation by attracting non-Iranian citizens with different sartorial cultures to Iranian shrine cities as well as by contesting Tehran's status as the undivided focal point of citizens' loyalty. For these reasons, the early Pahlavi state attempted to suppress pilgrimage to the 'Atabat and Mecca.<sup>4</sup> Transborder movement had to be regulated precisely because of its potential for facilitating and subverting national unity.

This article examines transborder movement between 1921 and 1941, focusing specifically on Iran's eastern borderlands. I emphasize that Iran's eastern borderlands were not peripheral backwaters that passively experienced increasing interventions by the centralizing Pahlavi state. The Iranian state certainly attempted to assert sovereignty in these areas by displaying symbols such as flags and uniforms as well as enforcing mundane bureaucratic practices such as form filling and fee payments at the customs offices.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the limited reach of state power contributed to the constant negotiation among leading political figures in Tehran, British consuls and political officers, local elites, and various social actors who exercised their mobility across emerging national borders.<sup>6</sup> Thus, as Matthew Ellis contends in his exploration of Egypt's western borderlands, territoriality was not imposed by centralizing states; it "emerged only through a complex and multilayered process of negotiation," through which both state conceptions of territoriality and local spatial practices were transformed.<sup>7</sup>

The result of this process was not necessarily a linear transition from borderlands to "bordered" lands.<sup>8</sup> Rather, as Willem van Schendel observes, the creation of national borders

<sup>3</sup> Houchang Chehabi, "Staging the Emperor's Clothes: Dress Codes and Nation-Building under Reza Shah," *Iranian Studies* 26, nos. 3–4 (1993): 209–29; and Stephanie Cronin, *Soldiers, Shahs and Subalterns in Iran: Opposition, Protest and Revolution, 1921–1941* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Alex Shams, "From Guests of the Imam to Unwanted Foreigners: The Politics of South Asian Pilgrimage to Iran in the Twentieth Century," *Middle Eastern Studies* 57 (2021): 7–8.

<sup>5</sup> For creation of the borderlands by establishing everyday bureaucratic practices, see Christopher Vaughan, Mareike Schomerus, and Lotje de Vries, eds. *The Borderlands of South Sudan: Authority and Identity in Contemporary and Historical Perspectives* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 9–11.

<sup>6</sup> For a study of British archival sources about this dynamic in late Qajar Sistan, among other places, see H. Lyman Stebbins, *British Imperialism in Qajar Iran: Consuls, Agents and Influence in the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2016). British rule in the frontiers of India relied heavily on a form of indirect rule administered by political officers in the Foreign and Political Department of the Indian government. They were responsible for interacting with tribal groups to maintain order. For this institution and the background of political officers, see Christian Tripodi, *Edge of Empire: The British Political Officer and Tribal Administration on the North-West Frontier, 1877–1947* (New York: Routledge, 2011), particularly ch. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew Ellis, *Desert Borderland: The Making of Modern Egypt and Libya* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 8.

<sup>8</sup> For this critique, see Pekka Hämäläinen and Samuel Truett, "On Borderlands," *Journal of American History* 98 (2011): 338–61.

with stricter measures of policing them induced the formation of new webs of relationships that sprang up “because of the border’s existence,” even though some preexisting relations were indeed weakened.<sup>9</sup> In Iran’s eastern borderlands, early Pahlavi policies did not simply constrain the mobility of inhabitants; they simultaneously generated new flows of people and goods that were rooted in local networks, and as such encompassed a broad segment of transborder societies.

I will discuss two cases to show how state formation fostered transborder networks instead of closing borders. The first case revolves around borderland tribes. Similar to the great tribal powers such as the Bakhtiyaris and the Qashqa’is, whose power was severely weakened by the end of the 1920s, the Baluchis faced various centralization policies between 1921 and 1941, most notably sartorial homogenization and disarmament.<sup>10</sup> Similar to other cases of tribal politics in this period, Baluchi relations with the Iranian state were marked by pragmatism and ad hoc decisions, not by inherent antagonism between the state and the tribes. Lacking sufficient military power, the Pahlavi state sought to maintain order not by absolute suppression of tribes but by evolving alliances that allowed some local tribal leaders to maintain power.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, tribal politics of the eastern borderlands had its idiosyncrasies, two of which are especially relevant to the present study. First, compared to southwestern and central Iran, the eastern borderlands were marked by the weakness of state power due to their remoteness. In fact, well into the late 1930s, the boundary commission had to cancel demarcating the disputed Indo-Iranian boundary because of local hostility generated by the ongoing military campaigns against several Baluch tribes.<sup>12</sup> Second, whereas the southwestern borderlands involved primarily two states, Iran and Iraq (including during the mandate period), the eastern borderlands involved Iran, colonial India, Afghanistan, and the Soviet Union during the period under discussion.<sup>13</sup> Tribal groups could often take advantage of networks that straddled multiple national borders. Given these characteristics, I investigate how tribes negotiated the meanings of borders—both physical and legal—and show that, despite new constraints on their mobility, the ambiguity of their citizenship and competing claims made by emerging states created opportunities for borderland inhabitants.

The second case examines the proliferation of smuggling during the 1930s as a consequence of the Trade Monopoly Law of 1931 and the disappearance of the North Western Railway from Iran in the same year. The monopoly law has been studied primarily through the lens of the state, focusing on how it was supposed to work.<sup>14</sup> As Julian Bharier mentions

<sup>9</sup> Willem van Schendel, “Spaces of Engagement,” in *Illicit Flows and Criminal Things: States, Borders, and the Other Side of Globalization*, ed. Itty Abraham and Willem van Schendel (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 56–57; italics mine. Eric Tagliacozzo also demonstrates the dual process of boundary production and boundary transgression in colonial Southeast Asia; see Eric Tagliacozzo, *Secret Trades, Porous Borders: Smuggling and States along a Southeast Asian Frontier, 1865–1915* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 3.

<sup>10</sup> For the implementation of early Pahlavi sartorial policies in Sistan and Baluchistan, see Nosrat Khatun ‘Alavi, “Negahi beh Hamsan Sazi-ye Lebas va Kashf-e Hejab dar Sistan va Baluchistan-e Dowreh-ye Reza Shah,” *Faslnameh-ye Tarikh-e Now* 7, no. 20 (2017): 3–19.

<sup>11</sup> For tribes and borderlands, see Stephanie Cronin, *Tribal Politics in Iran: Rural Conflict and the New State, 1921–1941* (London: Routledge, 2007); Arash Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2010); and Richard Tapper, *Frontier Nomads of Iran: A Political and Social History of the Shahsevan* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> India Office Records, British Library (hereafter IOR)/L/PS/12/3425, from Government of India, Foreign and Political Department, to secretary of state for India, August 21, 1931; from C. K. Daly, consul for Sistan and Kain, to the agent to the governor-general of Baluchistan, October 2, 1931; from the foreign secretary to the government of India to the undersecretary of state for India, May 10, 1935. See also IOR/L/PS/12/3406, Meshed diary, December 1938; and IOR/L/PS/12/3486, memorandum, political agent, Chagai, March 14, 1938.

<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that the southwestern borderlands were linked by water to the Persian Gulf world, including Kuwait and Bahrain. See Lindsey R. Stephenson, “Rerouting the Persian Gulf: The Transnationalization of Iranian Migrant Networks, c.1900–1940” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2018).

<sup>14</sup> Julian Bharier, *Economic Development in Iran, 1900–1970* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1971); Dariush Rahmani et al., “Qanun-e Enhesar-e Tejarat-e Khareji-ye Iran-e 1309, Zamineh-ha, Ahdaf va Peyamadha,” *Faslnameh-ye Elmi - Pazhuhesi-ye Tarikh-e Eslam va Iran* 21, no. 11 (2011): 25–55; and Seyyed Hassan

in passing, however, the monopoly law resulted in an increase in smuggling, as did many contemporary economic protectionist policies.<sup>15</sup> I explore the specific historical context in which a locally rooted smuggling infrastructure evolved in response to state policies, which in turn forced various layers of state power to adjust their responses to the smuggling networks.

### Writing a History of the Borderlands with Imperial Sources

Because the vast majority of the inhabitants of Iran's eastern borderlands did not leave their own historical records, writing their histories poses challenges. Existing scholarship on the area reflects this reality. Most commonly, historians acknowledge the qualitative and quantitative limitations of available sources and focus on examining the perceptions of Qajar political elites, relying particularly on nineteenth-century Persian travel writing carried out in the context of Qajar imperial production of knowledge about its frontiers and their inhabitants. Using these sources, Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, Arash Khazeni, and Christine Noelle-Karimi demonstrate how political elites from Tehran depicted frontier societies marked by environmental, ethnic, and cultural differences.<sup>16</sup> Taking a different approach, James Gustafson analyzes the political and economic adjustment of the elite military households in Bam by reading Qajar travel writing along with local histories and British accounts. He provides a socioeconomic history of local elites, admitting that it is a "rough picture of a changing frontier society."<sup>17</sup> Writing the past of the frontiers far away from imperial centers, historians necessarily rely on imperial sources, be they Iranian or British, with their peculiar preconceptions about local inhabitants.

The eastern borderlands, especially Sarhadd, the region of interior Baluchistan in which Dozdab is located, did not appear in early Pahlavi Persian travel writing, with the notable exception of Amanollah Jahanbani's description of his military campaign against Baluch tribes in 1928.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, indicative of the psychological remoteness of interior Baluchistan from Tehran, the area received very limited attention from the Iranian press, unlike other volatile yet strategically and economically significant provinces such as Lorestan and Khuzestan.<sup>19</sup> In contrast to the dearth of currently accessible Persian sources, we have rich British consular reports that provide fascinating details about the movement of people and goods across borders. This is not surprising. Until the 1930s, Baluch tribes had much closer relations with British consular networks than they did with Iranian political authority, including Tehran's representatives in nearby provinces such as Kerman and Sistan. The infrastructural network of the eastern borderlands was built, operated, and maintained primarily by the British. Due to their presence, these imperial sources can shed light on borderland societies of the early Pahlavi period in ways that other available textual sources do not.

Shojaee-Divkaleae, "Peyamadha-ye Tasvib-e Qanun-e Enhesar-e Tejarat-e Khareji dar Eqtesad-e Tejari-ye Iran (1310–1320 sh)," *Ganjineh-ye Asnad* 29, no. 1 (2019): 6–30.

<sup>15</sup> Bharier, *Economic Development*, 53, 86. For the proliferation of smuggling along the interwar Turkish-Syrian border, see Ramazan Hakkı Öztan, "The Great Depression and the Making of Turkish-Syrian Border, 1921–1939," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 52 (2020): 311–26.

<sup>16</sup> Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, "Baluchistan: Nature, Ethnicity, and Empire in Iran's Borderlands," *Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 4, no. 2 (2013): 187–204; Arash Khazeni, "On the Eastern Borderlands of Iran: The Baluch in Nineteenth-Century Persian Travel Books," *History Compass* 5, no. 4 (2007): 1399–1411; Christine Noelle-Karimi, "On the Edge: Eastern Khurasan in the Perception of Qajar Officials," *Eurasian Studies* 14 (2016): 135–77.

<sup>17</sup> James Gustafson, "Dye on the Frontier: Henna and the Military Elites of Nineteenth-Century Bam," *Iran Namağ* 4, no. 2 (2019): 66–92.

<sup>18</sup> Amanollah Jahanbani, *Amaliyat-e Qoshun dar Baluchistan* (Tehran: Chapkhaneh-ye Majles, 1930).

<sup>19</sup> For a brief newspaper report on road construction in Baluchistan, see Abdulvadood Sepahi and Mohammad Hassan Raznahan, "Mavane'-e Ejra-ye Qanun-e Sajl Ahval dar Baluchistan dar Dowreh-ye Reza Shah," *Ganjineh-ye Asnad* 29, no. 2 (2019): 99.

British officials recorded transborder movement in detail to meet specific needs related to the presence of Indian subjects in the Iranian territory. Involved in commerce as traders, merchants, and truck drivers, Indians needed British protection against the increasingly nationalist policies of the Pahlavi state, which attempted to strengthen the commercial position of Iranians at the expense of Indians. In response, Indians actively sought British consular interventions to maintain their position, which is one of the reasons consulates recorded licit and illicit commercial activities in the borderlands in detail. There also was a British fear of Indian expatriates in Iran. As anti-imperial nationalism gained momentum in post-WWI India, British consulates bolstered surveillance of Indian political activism outside of British territory to monitor the spread of subversive ideas into India. Mobile individuals such as truck drivers, traders, and merchants were deemed especially dangerous because of their ability to disseminate anti-imperial messages.<sup>20</sup>

In this context, British imperial sources used in this article should be read with two caveats in mind. The first relates to the category of “smuggling.” Smuggling is a response to state efforts to enforce economic policies evenly throughout their territories in the context of border formation.<sup>21</sup> Before the boundaries were demarcated, what British officials called smuggling could include local inhabitants’ mundane economic transactions. In fact, we should see rich yet necessarily fragmentary documentation about individuals who exercise transborder movement in this light, be they “smugglers,” “human traffickers,” or “refugees.” Rather than read documents only as descriptive accounts that demonstrate the empirical increase in the volume of illicit trade, we need to understand them, and the labels used, as reflections of growing state anxiety about the flows of people, goods, and ideas across newly demarcated borders.

The second caveat pertains to spatial production. Imperial documents naturalize a particular metageography, or a “set of spatial structures through which people order their knowledge of the world.”<sup>22</sup> This is done through repeated descriptions of certain spatial connections such as tribal networks, smuggling rings, pilgrimage routes, and migration patterns in various reports that constantly refer to each other and render the collective knowledge produced in the documents as the natural order of things.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the kind of sources that historians use have an imprint on the spatial scales that their studies present. For example, in his discussion of Indian Ocean historiography, Fahad Bishara points out the very different images of connected space that the use of different sources can reveal; whereas scholarship that relies heavily on British sources depicts the Persian Gulf region within the orbit of India, his use of Arabic sources links the same region to the west Indian Ocean.<sup>24</sup> We need to be mindful of how documents do not simply reflect spatial structures; they also are productive of those structures.

Thus, the spatial connectivity that this study elucidates should be considered only one of the many ways in which the borderlands were linked to regional infrastructural networks. When we read Iranian imperial sources, we get a very different picture, as they tend to emphasize interior Baluchistan’s historical linkage to Iranian state authorities through Kerman (and through Sistan and Qa’en to a lesser extent) while underplaying its transnational connections. Jahanbani’s account is a case in point. Written by a military commander of the emerging Pahlavi state, it presents Baluchistan’s recent past from the perspective of the expansion of Tehran’s authority during the Naseri period, interrupted by its temporary

<sup>20</sup> Koyagi, “Drivers.”

<sup>21</sup> For the term *smuggling* as a reflection of state perspectives, see Tagliacozzo, *Secret Trades*, 19.

<sup>22</sup> Martin W. Lewis and Kären Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), ix.

<sup>23</sup> John M. Willis, “Writing Histories of the Arabian Peninsula, or How to Narrate the Past of a (Non)Place,” in *JADMAG* 1, no. 1 (2013): 30–35.

<sup>24</sup> Fahad Ahmad Bishara, “Narrative and the Historian’s Craft in the Arabic Historiography of the Gulf,” in *The Persian Gulf in Modern Times: People, Ports, and History*, ed. Lawrence G. Potter (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 47–72.

weakness following the Constitutional Revolution. It also depicts Baluchistan as clearly demarcated into British and Iranian Baluchistan, detailing the administrative structure of the Iranian side but barely mentioning the British presence in those administrative districts.<sup>25</sup> Despite their own limitations, British imperial sources can challenge the nationalist spatial framework that Iranian imperial sources construct, opening the possibility of situating the borderlands in multiple networks of connectivity.

### Competing Citizen Claims

When Reza Khan came to power in 1921, the Iranian state had only a limited presence in its eastern borderlands. Indeed, its influence had waned significantly in Baluchistan during the turmoil of the Constitutional Revolution (1905–11), creating a political vacuum in the tribal areas.<sup>26</sup> This vacuum posed a security threat to the colonial government of India that ruled the Indian side of Baluchistan, as tribal raids into the British territory intensified and threatened communication routes during World War I. To stabilize the political situation, the British sent troops to Sarhadd and stationed them in Khash, Sarhadd's main urban center. British political officers also organized tribal levy corps to defend the borderlands and paid cooperating tribal chiefs subsidies for assisting the government of India. Thus, modeled after colonial rule on India's northwestern frontier, British presence in the borderlands increased during the war and resulted in close Anglo-Baluchi relations among those tribes that joined the tribal levy corps.

The Rigis were one of such major Baluch tribe. They lived across the Indo-Iranian border around Ladgasht (in Indian Baluchistan), Kuh-e Taftan, and Mirjaveh (in Iranian Baluchistan), engaging primarily in animal husbandry. Like other tribes of the eastern borderlands, they were part of the local economy; they obtained grain from adjacent fertile areas such as Sistan and Narmashir, while providing items such as firewood, wool, and ghee to urban dwellers.<sup>27</sup> Their relationship with the British dated back to the late nineteenth century, when they provided manpower for British-organized tribal levy corps to protect imperial infrastructure in the borderlands.<sup>28</sup> This relationship was strengthened during the war, as approximately two hundred Rigi tribesmen served in the Sarhadd Levy Corps, building roads and serving as messengers and postal carriers.<sup>29</sup> The strategic importance of the Rigis to the Indian government increased further with the extension of the Indian railway

<sup>25</sup> Jahanbani, *Amaliyat-e Qoshun dar Baluchistan*.

<sup>26</sup> For a study that emphasizes Qajar control of interior Baluchistan, see Qasem Siyasar, *Tarikh-e Peydayesh-e Zahedan: Faraz va Foruz-e Zahedan* (Zahedan: Entesharat-e Taftan, 2003).

<sup>27</sup> For general information on the Rigis and other major Baluch tribes, see Jahanbani, *Amaliyat-e Qoshun dar Baluchistan*, 10–11; IOR/L/MIL/17/15/6/1, Military Report on Persia, vol. 4, part 1: Persian Baluchistan, Kerman, and Bandar Abbas, 1922, 64–66; and IOR/L/PS/10/787, from consul for Sistan to Percy Loraine, November 16, 1925.

<sup>28</sup> A prime example of this was the British-built Nushki–Sistan trade route (opened in 1896). The Rigis were paid for the “protection” of the caravan route. See IOR/L/PS/10/875, from F. W. Johnston, agent to the governor-general and chief commissioner in Baluchistan, to Denys Bray, Esquire, foreign secretary to the government of India, April 21, 1923; and IOR/L/PS/10/591/1, from T. Keyes, political agent, Kalat, to the secretary of the agent to the governor-general in Baluchistan, March 13, 1924.

<sup>29</sup> For a history of Sarhadd with a focus on tribal politics in relation to the British prepared by a British political officer in Baluchistan, see British Foreign Office Records (hereafter FO)248/1280, from A. B. Dew, agent to the governor-general and chief commissioner in Baluchistan, to foreign secretary to the government of India in the Foreign and Political Department, December 23, 1919. British political officers organized a number of levy corps during World War I, relying on local tribal groups. For the Sistan Levy Corps, see IOR/L/PS/10/748, “Sistan Levy Corps, 1915–1920,” from Lieutenant Colonel F. B. Frideaux, consul for Sistan and Kain, to the foreign secretary to the government of India, May 12, 1918; from B. J. Gould, consul for Sistan and Kain, to the secretary to the government of India, September 6, 1919; and from B. J. Gould to the foreign secretary to the government of India, October 7, 1920. For the Sarhadd Levy Corps, see IOR/L/PS/18/C/208, “Persian Baluchistan (including the Sarhad and Persian Mekran), the Quetta–Nushki extension railway,” 1922; and IOR/L/PS/10/785, “Future British Policy and Administrative Arrangements in Persian Baluchistan,” May 11, 1917.

to Dozdab via Mirjaveh. They agreed to give the railway access to water,<sup>30</sup> provide camels for military campaigns, and guard the railway.<sup>31</sup> In return, along with several other tribal leaders, Rigi chiefs received subsidies and a supply of rifles and ammunition on loan.<sup>32</sup> This arrangement continued during the postwar period.<sup>33</sup>

Having inherited the “preoccupation with the nation’s periphery” from late nineteenth-century nationalist discourse, the new regime in Tehran viewed the arrangement with great suspicion for two principal reasons.<sup>34</sup> First, the railway itself violated Iranian sovereignty, as it was constructed in Iranian territory without approval of the Iranian government and was operated by non-Iranian workers who lived in facilities around Dozdab Station. Second, at the beginning of the 1920s, Baluch tribes such as the Rigis were still paid by the government of India for protecting Britain’s imperial infrastructure, maintaining close relationships with British political officers but having no direct relationship with Tehran.

The two issues were linked to the broader question of postwar British presence in Iranian Baluchistan, most literally in the form of British troops stationed in Khash. For the new regime in Tehran, the presence of foreign troops on Iran’s soil had to end immediately. For the government of India, the costly commitment in Iranian Baluchistan had to end as soon as the Iranian government restored order in the borderlands. Even though tribal raids had subsided somewhat by the early 1920s, the political situation was far from stable, as Baluch tribal leaders such as Dust Mohammad Khan claimed autonomy.<sup>35</sup> The Iranian desire to retake control and the British desire to withdraw led to an agreement regarding cooperation against tribal forces, including use of the railway by Iranian armed forces. The agreement culminated in an official ceremony ending the British occupation of Iranian Baluchistan on March 1, 1924. In the presence of Baluch chiefs, Iranian troops, and British troops, the Iranian commanding officer, Salar Amjad, thanked the British for keeping Sarhadd in order and promised the tribesmen that the Iranian government would treat them justly. The Union Jack flying at the garrison in Khash was replaced with the Iranian tricolor flag, symbolizing the transfer of power to the attendees.<sup>36</sup>

In response to this development, tribes like the Rigis needed to forge relations with Tehran. Already in 1923, the military commander in Kerman had ordered the Rigi chief to provide tribesmen for the campaign against Dust Mohammad Khan and the Damanis, a Baluch tribe that had an alliance with him.<sup>37</sup> Following the British withdrawal from

<sup>30</sup> Water supply had to be improved significantly for railway operation. A new reservoir and pipes to transmit water were built; IOR/L/PS/10/594/1, from T. Keyes, political agent, Kalat, to the secretary to the agent to the governor-general in Baluchistan, March 13, 1924.

<sup>31</sup> Whereas the Rigis guarded the areas around Mirjaveh, the Ismailzais, another Baluch tribe, guarded the areas around Dozdab; IOR/L/PS/10/787, T. Keyes, lieutenant colonel, liaison officer, Sarhad, “Situation in the Sarhad,” August 16, 1925.

<sup>32</sup> IOR/L/PS/10/875, from the governor-general of Baluchistan, Sibi, to the foreign secretary to the government of India, January 24, 1923; IOR/L/PS/10/787, from the consul for Sistan to Percy Loraine, November 16, 1925; from Percy Loraine to Austen Chamberlain, December 23, 1925.

<sup>33</sup> IOR/L/PS/10/785, from the Foreign and Political Department, to Viscount Peel, secretary of state for India, October 19, 1922.

<sup>34</sup> Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804-1946* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 102.

<sup>35</sup> The Baranzais, Dust Mohammad Khan’s tribe, became powerful in Baluchistan during the constitutional period. Trying to maintain his autonomy, Dust Mohammad Khan even attempted to publish an article in the Bombay-based *Khelafat* newspaper, asking Sunni Muslims of India to support his cause against the oppressions of the Iranian government. See IOR/L/PS/10/594/1, from Colonel T. Keyes, political agent, Kalat, to F. W. Johnson, agent to the governor-general in Baluchistan, April 21, 1923; and from consul of Kerman to resident, Bushire, June 8, 1923. For Tehran’s request for the withdrawal of British troops, see IOR/L/PS/10/785, telegram from minister in Tehran to the foreign secretary to the government of India, January 30, 1923.

<sup>36</sup> IOR/L/PS/10/594/1, from T. Keyes, political agent, Kalat, and liaison officer, to the secretary to the agent to the governor-general in Baluchistan, March 9, 1924.

<sup>37</sup> IOR/L/PS/10/875, “Sardar Taj Muhammad Khan, Reki’s Position in Sarhad in Relation to the Persian Government,” April 21, 1923; IOR/L/PS/10/594/1, “Affairs on Mekran Border,” December 22, 1923.

Iranian Baluchistan in 1924, the Iranian state, represented by the military commanding officer, inherited the role played by the Indian government through the British political officer.<sup>38</sup> With funds provided by Tehran, the commanding officer paid subsidies to chiefs of tribes like the Rigis in return for their protection of infrastructure.<sup>39</sup> The Rigi chief, Idu Khan, did more than protect the railway for the new regime. In addition to joining the Iranian military campaigns against Dust Mohammad Khan, he functioned as a liaison between local representatives of the Iranian state and various Baluch leaders.<sup>40</sup> As he played an increasingly prominent role as the intermediary for the Iranian state, Idu Khan politically survived the Reza Shah period, unlike many other Baluch tribes, with the Rigis enjoying privileges such as being allowed one year to sell their arms instead of having their weapons confiscated without compensation.<sup>41</sup> Idu Khan's position was not secure, however. Reflecting the general experience of tribal chiefs in early Pahlavi Iran, he was temporarily detained multiple times by local military authorities as a hostage to extract concessions from tribesmen on contentious issues such as disarmament.<sup>42</sup> He also was captured by other Baluch leaders who saw him as a pawn of the Iranian government, reportedly prompting him to complain about being viewed with suspicion by both the government and Baluch leaders. Although he also was alleged to be a British pawn, his relationship with individual British officers did not last the reign of Reza Shah.<sup>43</sup>

Similar to Idu Khan, all Baluch chiefs had to work out new relationships with the Iranian government in the broader context of intensifying state attempts at integrating the nation and asserting sovereignty along the frontier. Baluch tribesmen protested an Iranian commanding officer's attempt to treat tribal levies as if they were regular troops by clipping their beards and imposing uniforms to strip them of their tribal distinctness. They resisted Tehran's attempts at imposing sartorial regulations, conscription, disarmament, and national registration cards.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, they had to send their children to newly established state schools, where Baluch children learned national history and geography in Persian, although they demanded that the teachers be Sunni Muslims.<sup>45</sup> Further north in Sistan and Qa'en, tribal leaders faced the erosion of their power as the new state implemented tax reform introduced by American advisers to increase revenues, accompanied by limited attempts at land distribution.<sup>46</sup> Each of these encounters raised frustrations, especially among tribal chiefs who had the most to lose from weakening of their autonomy.

<sup>38</sup> It is important to note that these commanding officers had their own agendas that could diverge from those of Tehran, as illustrated by the removal of Salar Amjad shortly after his campaign in Baluchistan for leading a rebellion. See Stephanie Cronin, "Opposition to Reza Khan within the Iranian Army, 1921–26," *Middle Eastern Studies* 30 (1994): 739–40.

<sup>39</sup> IOR/L/PS/10/594/1, from T. Keyes, political agent, Kalat, and liaison officer, to the secretary to the agent to the governor-general in Baluchistan, March 9, 1924.

<sup>40</sup> IOR/L/PS/11/272, "Persian Baluchistan: Sarhad Series, Part 5," August 31, 1926.

<sup>41</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3403, diary of consul, Sistan and Kain, November and December, 1928.

<sup>42</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3403, diary of consul, Sistan and Kain, May 1930; IOR/L/PS/12/3472A, Annual Report 1933, 70.

<sup>43</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3486, political diary, consulate general, Khorasan, May 1935, June 1935, July 1935, September 1935.

<sup>44</sup> IOR/L/PS/10/787, from consul for Sistan and Kain to Percy Loraine, November 16, 1925. IOR/L/PS/12/3403, diary of consul, Sistan and Kain, July 1930, October 1931. For struggles against the national registration card, especially during the 1930s, see Sepahi and Raznahan, "Mavane'-e Ejra-ye Qanun-e Sajl Ahval." For resistance to these policies in other provinces, see Cronin, *Soldiers, Shahs and Subalterns*. For the Pahlavi state's attempt at demarcating citizenship in the southwestern borderlands, see Stephenson, "Rerouting the Persian Gulf," particularly ch. 3.

<sup>45</sup> IOR/L/PS/11/272, from consul for Sistan and Kain to the secretary, political department, India Office, London, March 12, 1927; IOR/L/PS/12/3403, diary of consul, Sistan and Kain, October 1 to November 15, 1929; Jahanbani, *Amaliyat-e Qoshun dar Baluchistan*, 5. For modern educational institutions in Dozdab/Zahedan specifically, see Siyasar, *Tarikh-e Peydayesh-e Zahedan*, chs. 9–13.

<sup>46</sup> The taxation rate was to increase from one-third to two-fifths of the produce. See IOR/L/PS/12/3403, diary of consul, Sistan and Kain, April and May 1927.



In response, thousands of tribesmen began to migrate to India, Afghanistan, and the Soviet Union. Although not a novel response in itself, tribal mass exodus occurred particularly when state interventions were combined with Tehran's failure to pay tribal subsidies in a timely manner, which was more likely a reflection of the state's financial crisis in the late 1920s than a sign of a coherent change in state policy vis-à-vis tribes of Baluchistan.<sup>47</sup> Most tribes accepted state power, if not willingly, as long as they received subsidies. Once the subsidies stopped, however, they expressed dissatisfaction by vacating their areas in Iranian territory, causing shortages of the goods and labor they provided to urban dwellers. More seriously, they raided roads in Iran to loot caravans and trucks, only to escape across national borders, taking advantage of the absence of extradition treaties between Iran and its neighbors.

In their exodus, tribes often turned to their transborder connections. Those connections could be familial, as intermarriages linked various tribes across borders. Others relied on their claim to British citizenship,<sup>48</sup> which some argued they had acquired through their service in tribal levies in the past. For example, although the Rigis generally managed to realign themselves with the Pahlavi state in a relatively successful way (especially compared to their former ally, the Ismailzais), the Rigi chief also was prepared to migrate to Indian Baluchistan, where he allegedly had a legitimate citizenship claim due to the Rigis' past service in the Sarhadd Levy Corps.<sup>49</sup>

Indeed, the citizenship of former British allies became a troublesome issue in the 1920s, approximately when the Iranian government began to issue national identification cards to urban residents of southeastern Iran.<sup>50</sup> The issue was particularly contentious for tribesmen in the borderlands. In the case of the Rigis, the main question was the citizenship of those around Mirjaveh and Ladiz, both in Iranian Baluchistan. They spent a great amount of time in Indian Baluchistan, and they claimed to have dual citizenship, which contradicted the Iranian government's assertion that they were exclusively Iranian citizens. The Rigis' claim rested on their communication with Reginald Dyer, who led the British military campaign in Sarhadd during World War I; in a document with the signatures of tribal chiefs, Dyer promised that they would acquire British citizenship in return for their service. In the period under discussion, borderland tribes used such promises when they escaped Iran into Indian Baluchistan to claim their legal right to stay there, even though postwar British officials ultimately denied the tribes' claims to British citizenship in an effort to maintain amicable relations with the central government in Tehran.<sup>51</sup>

The tribal exodus also was encouraged by Afghan and Soviet attempts to attract potential cultivators for their pockets of fertile areas in the borderlands. In the 1920s, the Soviet Union offered Baluch and Afghan tribesmen free land in Turkmenistan and advance money to purchase seeds, attracting approximately 3,460 families from Sistan, Baluchistan, and Afghanistan over several years.<sup>52</sup> Likewise, the Afghan government offered free land and tax exemptions for two years to tribal leaders in Iran who would move to Afghanistan with their followers.<sup>53</sup> Emerging states in the region, including Iran, shared the fear of not having a sufficient

<sup>47</sup> IOR/L/PS/10/787, from Percy Loraine to Austin Chamberlain, December 23, 1925; IOR/L/PS/12/3403, diary of consul, Sistan and Kain, April and May 1927, June 1927, August and September 1929, June 1930, July 1930, January 1931, July 1931, May 1932, June 1932, September 1932.

<sup>48</sup> For the widespread possession of British passports among Baluchis in Chahbahar, see Sepahi and Raznahan, "Mavane'e Ejra-ye Qanun-e Sajl Ahval," 99–100.

<sup>49</sup> IOR/L/PS/11/272, from consul for Sistan and Kain to secretary, political department, India Office, March 12, 1927.

<sup>50</sup> Sepahi and Raznahan, "Mavane'e Ejra-ye Qanun-e Sajl Ahval," 100.

<sup>51</sup> IOR/L/PS/10/594/1, "Sarhad Series, Part 2"; from Terence Keyes, political agent, Kalat, and liaison officer, to the secretary to the agent to the governor-general in Baluchistan, March 9, 1924, and June 15, 1924.

<sup>52</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3403, diary of consul, Sistan and Kain, December 1927.

<sup>53</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3403, diary of consul, Sistan and Kain, October 1932; IOR/L/PS/12/3486, extract from Khorasan political diary, August 1936.

population to achieve economic development.<sup>54</sup> These anxieties resulted in competing agricultural development programs to attract populations, which afforded tribal populations new transborder connections.

Admittedly, tribal exodus had its limitations. For one thing, it was an action that emerged out of weakness. By the late 1930s, tribes that escaped often came back to Iran in destitution, ultimately surrendering to Iranian military authorities. Also, as Shaherzad Ahmadi notes in her study of Iran's southwestern borderlands, local officials disregarded orders from the capital and mistreated emigrants even when nationalist rhetoric encouraged immigration.<sup>55</sup> A similar disregard of the national policy by local officials in Turkmenistan and Afghanistan appears to have happened to tribes who responded to Soviet and Afghan state advertisements, as many of them eventually returned to Iran.<sup>56</sup> More commonly, tribal leaders simply did not have the intention of emigrating permanently. They escaped to neighboring countries as leverage to negotiate terms for their return with Iranian authorities. Their primary demand was usually specific, such as the payment of subsidies without delay or their exemption from disarmament. Finally, it also is important to add that, although tribal leaders felt threatened by the increased presence of the central state, tribal rank-and-files did not necessarily share the same interest as their chiefs, as certain policies could benefit them at the expense of the tribal chiefs.

Despite these limitations, the fact that tribes continued to resort to serial migration throughout the early Pahlavi period indicates that the eastern borderlands did not become "closed." In fact, during the 1930s, some inhabitants of Baluchistan evaded state attempts to register citizens by moving to places as distant as Oman and Zanzibar.<sup>57</sup> They continued to negotiate with representatives of the Iranian government, who tried to bring tribal leaders back by offering generous terms such as monthly subsidies, hoping that they would exert their influence and keep other tribes under control.<sup>58</sup> When leaders anticipated Iran's military operations against them, they moved their wealth (most likely including arms) across the border to avoid confiscation.<sup>59</sup> In these ways, albeit to a limited degree, transborder movement functioned as leverage of the tribes against the increasing presence of state power.

### The Making of Smuggling Networks

A 1929 British consular report noted, "smuggling on the eastern border is practically non-existent."<sup>60</sup> This was an overstatement; in the same year, the same consulate reported the circulation of Iranian silver coins across networks of illicit trade in the borderlands.<sup>61</sup> Baluchis and Hazaras engaged in arms smuggling across the eastern borders throughout

<sup>54</sup> For the Iranian perception of losing population, see Cyrus Schayegh, "Hygiene, Eugenics, Genetics, and the Perception of Demographic Crisis in Iran, 1910s–1940s," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 13 (2004): 335–61.

<sup>55</sup> Shaherzad Ahmadi, "Smugglers, Migrants, and Refugees: The Iran-Iraq Border, 1925–1975," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 52 (2020): 708–11.

<sup>56</sup> Especially in the 1930s, northeastern Iran witnessed a large number of refugees who escaped collectivization efforts in the Soviet Union, as holders of Iranian citizenship were expelled. See IOR/L/PS/12/3406, Meshed consular diary no. 13, for the period ending July 15, 1931; no. 15, for the period ending August 15, 1931; political diary, August 1938; and IOR/L/PS/12/3405, from G. F. Squire, consulate general for Khorasan, to chargé d'affaires, Tehran, May 31, 1938.

<sup>57</sup> Sepahi and Raznahan, "Mavane'-e Ejra-ye Qanun-e Sajl Ahval," 103–4.

<sup>58</sup> For examples of conciliation, see IOR/L/PS/10/875, "Sardar Taj Muhammad Khan, Reki's Position in Sarhad in Relation to the Persian Government," April 21, 1923; IOR/L/PS/10/594/1, "Affairs on Mekran Border," December 22, 1923; IOR/L/PS/12/3403, diary of consul, Sistan and Kain, November 1930; and IOR/L/PS/12/3486, political diary, September 1935.

<sup>59</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3503, Intelligence Summary no. 6, March 12, 1938.

<sup>60</sup> IOR/L/PS/10/787, "Report on the Nushki-Duzdap Railway," from C. K. Daly, consul for Sistan and Kain, to R. H. Clive, August 19, 1929.

<sup>61</sup> Iranian silver coins were used to pay for smuggled goods from Afghanistan. After entering Afghanistan, they were used to pay for Indian goods in market towns such as Peshawar and Chaman. In addition, Baluch tribesmen

this period.<sup>62</sup> In fact, smuggling in the borderlands has been a major concern for state powers since the demarcation of boundaries.<sup>63</sup> That said, smuggling is certainly not a timeless practice. It evolves and transforms in interaction with concrete state policies that often ignore their implications in the borderlands. What goods to smuggle, what route to take, and who becomes involved are all contingent questions.

Despite the overstatement, the consular report from 1929 correctly characterized the limited scale of smuggling in Iran's eastern borderlands when compared to the explosion of smuggling in 1931. This timing deserves attention, given that state monopolies of major consumption items such as tea and sugar had already been implemented in the 1920s, artificially raising prices of monopoly items on the Iranian side of the border.<sup>64</sup> The fact that smuggling did not increase drastically until 1931 is particularly intriguing, given that one of eastern Iran's chief import items was sugar. In this section, I discuss how smuggling prospered in the 1930s, foregrounding it in two interrelated developments rooted in the Pahlavi state's attempts to increase control over economic activity in remote provinces.

The first development was the ratification of the Trade Monopoly Law by the majlis on March 11, 1931. Preceded by the tea and sugar monopoly (1925), the opium monopoly (1928), and the tobacco monopoly (1930), the law cemented the etatist economic policy of the early Pahlavi state, pushed by its leading figures such as Abdolhoseyn Teymurtash, the Minister of Court, and Ali Akbar Davar, the Minister of Justice.<sup>65</sup> It restricted imports and promoted exports to improve Iran's chronically negative trade balance, which had only been exacerbated by the Great Depression; to acquire import licenses, merchants were required to obtain export certificates based on the value of their exports. Moreover, a lengthy list of luxury items was completely prohibited from import.<sup>66</sup> The law's impact was felt in Iran's frontier provinces. In Mashhad, Kerman, Birjand, and Zahedan, legal trade declined rapidly, making the British consul for Sistan and Qa'en despair that the monopoly law "crippled our trade in East Persia."<sup>67</sup> Although its implementation lapsed in the following years, the law increased the role of the state in foreign trade, especially through the establishment of trading companies.<sup>68</sup> The monopoly law significantly slowed down Indo-Iranian trade, but, remarkably, its impact on smuggling was rather limited. For

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took silver coins to purchase smuggled goods at railway stations in Indian Baluchistan. See IOR/L/PS/12/3415, "Annual Commercial Report for the Province of Sistan and the Kainat for the Year 1928-29," 2.

<sup>62</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3414. Meshed Intelligence Summary no. 2, for the period ending January 17, 1931; no. 11, for the period ending June 6, 1931; and no. 14, for the period ending July 28, 1931. For the smuggling of state-monopolized items such as tea and sugar via sea routes in the coastal areas, see IOR/L/PS/10/787, from C. K. Daly, consul for Sistan and Kain, to R. H. Clive on August 19, 1929, "Report on the Nushki-Duzdap Railway."

<sup>63</sup> For arms smuggling through Baluchistan in the late Qajar era, see Kashani-Sabet, "Baluchistan," 201-2. For tea smuggling as part of the local economy in the 1970s, see Philip Carl Salzman, *Black Tents of Baluchistan* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 141-4.

<sup>64</sup> IOR/L/PS/11/276, Clive to Austen Chamberlain, January 13, 1927. For smuggling of state-monopolized items in the Turkish-Syrian borderlands, see Öztan, "Great Depression," 312-3.

<sup>65</sup> For the desire of early Pahlavi political leaders, see Rahmanian et al., "Qanun-e Enhesar-e Tejarat-e Khareji-ye Iran."

<sup>66</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3415, "Annual Commercial Report for the Province of Sistan and Kain, including Zahidan and the Zarhad, for the Persian Year 1931-32." For the decline of exports after 1929 and the clauses of the monopoly law, see Shojaee-Divkalaee, "Peyamadha-ye Tasvib-e Qanun-e Enhesari," 12-14.

<sup>67</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3399, from C. K. Daly, consul at Sistan and Kain, to the foreign secretary to the government of India in the Foreign and Political Department, November 22, 1932. For the decline of trade in Mashhad, see IOR/L/PS/12/3401, Meshed commercial diary, May 1931. The daily traffic of trucks dropped from approximately forty per day to two to three on the Birjand-Zahedan road; IOR/L/PS/12/3415, "Annual Commercial Report for the Province of Sistan and Kain, including Zahidan and the Sarhad, from the Persian Year March 1932-March 1933." Indian merchants who had been dominant in the Kerman import trade since the nineteenth century closed down their businesses; IOR/L/PS/12/3444, "Trade Report of Kerman Consular District for the Year Ending March 20, 1932."

<sup>68</sup> Shojaee-Divkalaee "Peyamadha-ye Tasvib-e Qanun-e Entesari."

smuggling to kick in, it took a second, and perhaps more decisive, development, which happened only a few months after the ratification of the monopoly law: the closure of the railway between Zahedan and Nok Kundi in June 1931.

The railway's future was never certain in postwar Iran. Recognizing that the original military purpose of the railway no longer existed, British officials in different branches of the empire expressed competing views regarding whether the railway should remain or be dismantled. In particular, despite the railway's strategic value for the British Empire, operational costs of railway that penetrated sparsely populated desert were a source of concern.<sup>69</sup> In the 1928 negotiations with Teymurtash, Robert Clive, the British minister in Tehran, threatened that the Indian desert section of the railway would be dismantled unless the Iranian government agreed to contribute monetarily to railway operation.<sup>70</sup>

For the Iranian government, the core issue was legal. In 1926, the Iranian Customs Administration demanded that the North Western Railway in Quetta pay taxes to transport stones for ballast from a quarry in the vicinity of Dozdab to the Indian side of the track. The government also contended that customs duty should be levied on consumables transported by ration trains for Indian railway employees working in the Iranian section. The railway administration refused to pay the bill, countering that the railway was running at a great loss to the Indian government while bringing precious customs revenue to the Iranian government, which lacked an efficient system of taxation at the time.<sup>71</sup> Given these benefits to the Iranian government, the railway insisted that the customs duty on rations should be exempted. Tehran chose not to press the issue, and the Iranian director of the customs office in Dozdab ignored the regulation in light of the railway's aid to Indo-Iranian trade, a decision that was at least tacitly approved by local officials and governors of eastern Iran. This ad hoc compromise among local officials lasted without serious ramifications throughout the 1920s.<sup>72</sup> From Tehran's perspective, such an arrangement was precisely the problem: Iranian customs law was not being applied to a foreign railway on Iranian soil not because of an official agreement between the two governments but because of informal arrangements worked out locally.

The Trade Monopoly Law was ratified in this context of rising Anglo-Iranian tensions over the status of the railway. Within one month of the ratification of the monopoly law in March 1931, the Iranian Customs Administration returned to the payment of customs dues, to which the British Minister responded with an explicit threat to close down the railway. In early June, Mohammad Ali Foroughi, the Iranian foreign minister, sent an ultimatum to the British legation, arguing that in accordance with the monopoly law the entry of rations from India must accompany an equivalent value exported to India.<sup>73</sup> When the June ration train was not allowed entry to Iran, the government of India ordered the withdrawal of all railway staff and discontinued service between Zahedan and Nok Kundi on June 25. For the British, the railway was not worth the cost anymore, as Indo-Iranian trade had come to a standstill following the implementation of the monopoly law.<sup>74</sup> The Iranian section of the railway did not reopen until World War II again created the need for an efficient transportation system for military purposes.

<sup>69</sup> For postwar discussions of the future of the railway among British officials, see Koyagi, "Drivers," 377–80.

<sup>70</sup> FO416/113, Annual Report 1927, from Robert Clive to A. Henderson, 24–35; Annual Report 1928, from Robert Clive to A. Henderson, 17–29; Annual Report 1929, from Robert Clive to A. Henderson, 16.

<sup>71</sup> Even during the heyday of Indo-Iranian trade via Dozdab, the Indian desert section of the railway (Nushki-Dalbandin–Nok Kundi–Mirjaveh) operated at a loss of approximately 600,000 rupees a year. See IOR/L/PS/10/787, from the foreign secretary to the government of India to undersecretary of state for India, May 20, 1926.

<sup>72</sup> IOR/L/PS/11/272, from consul for Sistan to the foreign secretary, government of India, November 23, 1926; commercial diary of consul, Sistan and Kain, September and October, 1927; from C. K. Daly, consul for Sistan and Kain to minister in Tehran, April 23, 1930.

<sup>73</sup> FO416/113, Annual Report 1931, from R. Hoare to John Simon, 45–47.

<sup>74</sup> From government of India, Foreign and Political Department, to secretary of state for India, June 21, 1931; July 10, 1931.

The disappearance of the railway changed the material conditions in which Indo-Iranian trade was conducted. When the railway was in operation, despite the relative difficulty of escaping customs when transporting goods across the border by train, the low risk of tribal raids and the speed of transport made importing goods by train more profitable than smuggling them across the harsh terrains of the Indo-Afghan-Iranian borderlands. This was particularly so in the case of bulky and inexpensive goods such as tea and sugar. Combined with the natural environment of the borderlands, the railway disincentivized smuggling, concentrating cross-border trade on the single-track.

The closure of the railway changed this situation. It eliminated the most efficient method of transporting these goods, forcing licensed importers to use the road that connected Nok Kundi and Mirjaveh with Zahedan. The problem was that the road from Nok Kundi to Zahedan was not made for heavy motor traffic. Whereas the large pads of camel feet improved the caravan track as they treaded, heavy wheeled traffic could easily ruin the road surface, requiring constant maintenance.<sup>75</sup> Consequently, the road between Zahedan and Mirjaveh became impassable within two months of the railway's closure.<sup>76</sup> In another two months, the road from Mirjaveh to Nok Kundi also became impassable, requiring immediate repair.<sup>77</sup> As transporting a large amount of goods became difficult, the cost of transport skyrocketed, and Mashhadi merchants switched their exports from Zahedan to Mohammerah (present-day Khorramshahr), a Persian Gulf port located in a corner of Iran diametrically opposite to Mashhad.<sup>78</sup> The increase in transport costs was reflected in retail prices, as exemplified by the case of sugar in Zabol, in the center of Sistan by the border with Afghanistan. The official price of sugar in the city rose by 100 percent within one month of the railway's closure.<sup>79</sup> Such a rise of official prices throughout Iranian urban centers made smuggling a lucrative endeavor.

Smuggling was sustained through the participation of a broad segment of local societies in the borderlands. Traders responded swiftly to the new situation. In addition to hiring Indian and Iranian truck drivers to smuggle along the Nok Kundi–Zahedan route when the road conditions permitted, they branched out. Soon after the closure of the railway, Indian traders based in Zahedan opened branches in Chaman, an approximate midpoint between Quetta and Kandahar.<sup>80</sup> Their decision to begin operating in this small Indian town by the Indo-Afghan border reoriented some trade and smuggling from Zahedan to Sistan via Afghanistan.<sup>81</sup> This way, at least for a portion of their business, they would be able to bypass not only Iran's trade monopoly law but also increasingly strict visa regulations and the issuance of driving permits for foreigners, which required Indian traders to visit consulates in large cities such as Mashhad and Quetta, both of which were far way from the Indo-Iranian border.<sup>82</sup> Iranian traders in Zahedan also used the India–Afghanistan–Sistan route and were reported to be making fortunes in late 1931.<sup>83</sup> Thus, in addition to the Nok

<sup>75</sup> IOR/L/PS/10/595, from Lieutenant Colonel W. G. Grey to comptroller-general, Department of Overseas Trade, June 14, 1919, enclosure no. 2, "Trade Routes to Khorasan."

<sup>76</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3403, diary of consul, Sistan and Kain, August 1931.

<sup>77</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3403, diary of consul, Sistan and Kain, October 1931.

<sup>78</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3408, commercial report, Sistan and Kain, November 1931.

<sup>79</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3408, commercial report of consulate, Sistan and Kain, July 1931.

<sup>80</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3406, Meshed consular diary, for the period ending December 1931; IOR/L/PS/12/3403, diary of consul, Sistan and Kain, April 1932; IOR/L/PS/12/3407, Meshed consular, political diary, July 7, 1942.

<sup>81</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3408, commercial report of consulate, Sistan and Kain, June 1931. This general Indo-Iranian route via Sistan and Afghanistan was historically more important than the Zahedan route, which required crossing the desert. For example, at the turn of the century, camel caravans carried smuggled rifles and ammunition from the Persian Gulf into northwestern India via Sistan and Afghanistan. See IOR/L/PS/10/595, memorandum from Sir John Ramsay, agent to the governor-general of Baluchistan, to foreign secretary to the government of India, September 30, 1936.

<sup>82</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3399, extract from Sistan consular diary for July 1931.

<sup>83</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3426, Meshed intelligence summary for the period ending January 14, 1932.

Kundi–Zahedan road that paralleled the former railway track, various routes became corridors of illicit trade throughout the 1930s.

Ordinary travelers also were involved in smuggling. For example, in 1937, a group of Indian Shi'ī pilgrims returning from Mashhad was caught smuggling silk, 160 pounds of almonds, and three Russian sewing machines. They had been commissioned to transport these goods on behalf of Indian traders.<sup>84</sup> Likewise, an Isfahani Armenian woman was known to transport jewelry between Bombay and Tehran via Zahedan, despite jewelry being prohibited from import as a luxury item by the Trade Monopoly Law.<sup>85</sup> Wives of Iranian officials also engaged in smuggling, as illustrated by the examples of the wife of a military officer who was caught with 300 smuggled silken garments and the wife of a Mirjaveh customs official who was caught carrying contraband goods whose total value amounted to 10,000 riyals.<sup>86</sup> These ordinary travelers transported smuggled goods primarily on the main road between Zahedan and Mashhad. The prevalence of smuggling on this road was such that whoever traveled northward on this road aroused a fair amount of suspicion from government officials.<sup>87</sup>

As Cyrus Schayegh critiques, the rigid conceptual boundary of state and society fails to capture how smuggling worked in the borderlands, as many individuals were simultaneously officials and smugglers.<sup>88</sup> The tribesmen of Iran's eastern borderlands especially illustrate this point. Taking advantage of their intimate knowledge of local geography, Baluch and Hazara tribesmen traveled on multiple routes all along the eastern border transporting goods by camel. In particular, Birjand and Zabol, two major urban centers between Zahedan and Mashhad, functioned as reloading locations for switching to camel transport handled by Baluch tribesmen, who transported goods to Afghanistan.<sup>89</sup> At the same time, Baluch tribal leaders occupied key official positions for controlling the flow of goods on both sides of the border. Rigi leaders such as Idu Khan had his nephew were employed by the Customs Frontier Guards on the Anglo-Indian side, and his son-in-law was employed by the Zahedan Road Guards Department on the Iranian side. In addition, his brother was a levy official on the Anglo-Indian side.<sup>90</sup> Baluch tribes like the Rigis may have resisted the imposition of the Pahlavi hat, one of the most dreaded state sartorial regulations in this period, but they certainly wore many hats.<sup>91</sup>

Baluch tribesmen were not the only ones who held official positions while smuggling. When police officers and road guards captured smugglers transporting goods out of Iran, they confiscated those goods but often did not hand them over to customs. Instead, the confiscated goods were stored until the officers and road guards hired smugglers of their own to transport them to India.<sup>92</sup> Their complicity in smuggling surfaced only when their smugglers were caught transporting items such as almonds and silk.<sup>93</sup> Officials also participated in

<sup>84</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3406, Meshed consular diary, August 1937. See also IOR/L/PS/12/3406, Meshed consular diary, January 1938.

<sup>85</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3406, Meshed consular diary, March 1940.

<sup>86</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3406, Meshed consular diary, June 1938.

<sup>87</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3406, Meshed consular diary, June 1937.

<sup>88</sup> For the case of the interwar Levant, see Cyrus Schayegh, "The Many Worlds of Abu Yasin; or, What Narcotics Trafficking in the Interwar Middle East Can Tell Us about Territorialization," *American Historical Review* 116, no. 2 (2011): 293–4. For a similar methodological critique, see Mark B. Salter, "To Make Move and Let Stop: Mobility and the Assemblage of Circulation," *Mobilities* 8 (2013): 7–19.

<sup>89</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3408, commercial report, Sistan and Kain, June 1932; IOR/L/PS/12/3414, Meshed intelligence summary for the period ending October 29, 1931; IOR/L/PS/12/3407, Meshed consular, political diary, July 7, 1942. Using their intimate knowledge of local geography, Baluch tribesmen hid smuggled items in the desert to avoid persistent search by the police and customs officials. See IOR/L/PS/12/3406, Meshed consular, political diary, August 1938.

<sup>90</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3486, political diary for September 1935.

<sup>91</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3403, diary of consul, Sistan and Kain, November 1930 and October 1931.

<sup>92</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3406, Meshed consular diary, September 1937.

<sup>93</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3406, Meshed consular diary, September 1938 and March 1940.

smuggling by forging documents in return for a kickback. Because import certificates were highly coveted, traders bribed customs officials to record export goods multiple times, which allowed them to maximize the volume of import without counterbalancing it with export as required by the Trade Monopoly Law. Furthermore, customs officials could fake the value of the export items, as illustrated by the case of an Iranian trader who was found to have declared twenty parcels of saffron, a highly valued commodity, as an export item, whereas the contents were actually hyssop, an inexpensive medicinal herb.<sup>94</sup>

In short, following the disappearance of the railway that concentrated cross-border movement, a loose infrastructure system of smuggling took shape across the deserts and mountains of the eastern borderlands.<sup>95</sup> This infrastructural system facilitated the transport of various goods in and out of Iran. Silver coins, silk, dried fruits, and nuts were frequently smuggled out of Iran.<sup>96</sup> Silver smuggling was especially lucrative, as the value quadrupled or even quintupled in Indian trade centers such as Nok Kundi and Quetta.<sup>97</sup> The proliferation of smuggling was such that an estimated 100,000 silver qeran coins were exported on the Zahedan–Nok Kundi route alone during one week in June 1932.<sup>98</sup> Items that were smuggled into Iran included sugar, tea, sewing machines, automobile spare parts, liquors, and opium.<sup>99</sup> Sugar smuggling was especially rampant. Consumers could purchase Russian and Javanese sugar in villages near cities such as Zabol and Birjand at prices much lower than the official price.<sup>100</sup> In Zabol, the price of contraband sugar loaf was half of the official rate.<sup>101</sup> In fact, legally imported sugar at the official rate became hard to obtain as merchants stopped selling officially imported sugar; they knew that it would be impossible to compete with smuggled sugar. When all merchants declined to sell sugar as official retailers of the government monopoly, even the governor of Sistan purchased smuggled sugar, following the lead of the citizenry.<sup>102</sup> In Zahedan, local demands were met “almost entirely from smuggle stocks.”<sup>103</sup> Throughout the 1930s, smuggling continued to be a fundamental form of economic activity for all inhabitants of the borderlands.

Iranian authorities attempted to prevent smuggling in many ways. The Zahedan branch of the state-owned clothing company opened a mobile shop to sell cheap Japanese clothes to local populations across Baluchistan at reduced rates to disincentivize smuggling of foreign clothes into Iran.<sup>104</sup> In Zabol, a branch of the National Bank reportedly ceased to issue silver coins, which were used to pay for contraband goods from Afghanistan as smugglers did not accept banknotes. The effectiveness of this measure, however, was questionable given that

<sup>94</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3408, commercial report, Sistan and Kain, December 1931 and February 1932.

<sup>95</sup> For example, see IOR/L/PS/12/3401, Meshed commercial diary, December 1931; IOR/L/PS/12/3445, consul of Sistan and Kain diary, January 1932; IOR/L/PS/12/3406, Meshed consular diary for the period ending December 31, 1931; and IOR/L/PS/12/3399, from C. K. Daly (consul at Sistan and Kain) to the foreign secretary to the government of India in the Foreign and Political Department, November 22, 1932.

<sup>96</sup> For silk, dried fruits, and nuts, see IOR/L/PS/12/3401, Meshed commercial diary, November 1937, February 1938, and June 1938.

<sup>97</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3408, commercial report, Sistan and Kain, November 1931.

<sup>98</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3367, diary of consul, Sistan and Kain, June 1932. For more on silver smuggling, see IOR/L/PS/12/3406, Meshed consular diary for the period ending December 31, 1931.

<sup>99</sup> Tea was smuggled from both Afghanistan and Persian Gulf port cities in the south. See IOR/L/PS/12/3401, Meshed commercial diary, December 1931. For the smuggling of Russian sewing machines, see IOR/L/PS/12/3401, Meshed commercial diary, July 1937. For opium from Afghanistan, see IOR/L/PS/12/3415, “Annual Commercial Report for the Provinces of Sistan and Kain, including Zahidan and the Sarhad, for the Persian Year March 1932–1933 and March 1933–March 1934.” For other items, see IOR/L/PS/12/3406, Meshed consular diary, May 1938; IOR/L/PS/12/3408, commercial report, Sistan and Kain, December 1931; and IOR/L/PS/12/3414, Meshed intelligence summary for the period ending October 29, 1931.

<sup>100</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3403, diary of consulate, Sistan and Kain, June 1932.

<sup>101</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3403, diary of consulate, Sistan and Kain, August 1932, January 1933; IOR/L/PS/12/3408, commercial report of consulate, Sistan and Kain, April 1932.

<sup>102</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3403, diary of consulate, Sistan and Kain, February 1933.

<sup>103</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3408, commercial report of consulate, Sistan and Kain, June 1932.

<sup>104</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3401, commercial diary, consulate general for Khorasan, October 1939.

coins from the interior continued to circulate in Zabol.<sup>105</sup> Such indirect measures were combined with the inspection of all trucks that crossed the Indo-Iranian border as well as the threat of the death penalty for the smuggling of certain goods.<sup>106</sup> Whatever measures were taken, however, recurring reports of smuggling throughout the 1930s indicated that the Iranian state was unable to police the border effectively.<sup>107</sup>

In addition to the obvious fact that Iran's eastern border was too porous, threats of harsh punishment from Tehran were unworkable for two reasons. First, imprisonment and the death penalty would deprive the customs of revenue. Rather than punishing perpetrators, customs officials often chose pragmatism. For example, in June 1932, customs discovered an Iranian trader in Zahedan who had smuggled various contraband goods, including 1,415 cases of tea and 1,003 bags of sugar, which could have generated a duty of 1,400,000 rials. Instead of imprisoning the merchant or confiscating the items, however, customs officials let him keep trading so that he would pay off the arrears by installments.<sup>108</sup> The decision to collect customs duties retrospectively tacitly acknowledged smuggling as a reality of the borderland economy.<sup>109</sup> Second, the deep involvement of borderland officials made it impossible to crack down on smuggling. Both the Iranian and Indian governments were well aware that they would not eradicate smuggling. The maintenance of order in the borderlands required the incorporation into institutional frameworks of the local Baluch whose cross-border family networks played a crucial role in facilitating smuggling.

The proliferation of smuggling had implications for borderland inhabitants. In the 1930s, many inhabitants of the eastern borderlands, including urban populations, were not Iranian citizens, even though they might have lived in Iran for their entire lives. The official fiction of cracking down on smuggling proved a good pretext for Iranian governors, military commanders, and police chiefs to clear the borderlands of non-Iranians. When penalizing individuals for smuggling, non-Iranian citizens were disproportionately targeted for arrest, imprisonment, and expulsion, whereas Iranian traders did not face inspections of their inventory.<sup>110</sup> In fact, the governor-general of Khorasan went so far as to argue for the deportation of all Indian truck drivers to prevent smuggling.<sup>111</sup> To justify the removal of non-Iranians, this logic was tied to other issues related to the ambiguous belonging of borderland inhabitants, such as their noncompliance with sartorial regulations and their historical ties to the British through the tribal levy corps. Based on a combination of these reasons, hundreds of Indian and Afghan traders as well as Hazaras and Baluchis were expelled from the borderland cities and villages sporadically throughout the 1930s, and Iranian citizens on the other side of the border were expelled in retaliation.<sup>112</sup> At the same time, smuggling constantly undermined attempts by local authorities to subjugate tribal forces. When authorities banned the sale to tribal rebels of monopolized items (including grain, sugar, and other consumables), the tribes quickly devised a chain of smuggling networks.<sup>113</sup> In short, the disappearance of rail infrastructure in 1931 did not diminish the mobility of inhabitants; rather it redirected them and brought about an informal smuggling infrastructure that led to diffuse transborder movement across the borderlands, making the area harder for Iranian authorities to control.

<sup>105</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3408, commercial report of Consulate, Sistan and Kain, August 1932; IOR/L/PS/12/3404, diary of consulate, Sistan and Kain, February 1933.

<sup>106</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3403, diary of consulate, Sistan and Kain, July 1932, August 1932.

<sup>107</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3486, extract from Khorasan political diary, July 1936; IOR/L/PS/12/3407, Meshed consular diary, July 7, 1942.

<sup>108</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3408, commercial report of consulate, Sistan and Kain, June 1932.

<sup>109</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3486, political diary, June 1935.

<sup>110</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3403, diary for consul, Sistan and Kain, April 1932.

<sup>111</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3406, Meshed consular diary, December 1931.

<sup>112</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3406, Meshed consular diary, September 1938, October 1938, May 1939; IOR/L/PS/12/3472A, Annual Report 1938, 10; IOR/L/PS/12/3405, from G. F. Squire, consul general for Khorasan, to minister of Tehran, December 6, 1938.

<sup>113</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/3486, extract from Khorasan political diary for July 1936.



## Conclusion

Almost twenty years ago, Stephanie Cronin edited a volume on state-society interactions during the two decades following the 1921 coup, aptly entitled *The Making of Modern Iran*.<sup>114</sup> The process of making modern Iran involved more than the extension of state power from Tehran that elicited reactions from social groups in many corners of Iran. By considering borderlands that straddled multiple territorial states, this paper has shown that Pahlavi attempts at national integration and demarcation produced increased connections with places outside the national territory; the making of modern Iran involved the creation of movement on multiple scales and in multiple directions. Transborder connections in Iran's eastern borderlands evolved in interaction with various layers of other emerging states in the contact zones, and borderland inhabitants actively shaped their spatial practices for political and financial gain. Therefore, at the time of Reza Shah's forced abdication in the summer of 1941, Iran's eastern borders were far from closed.

As discussed earlier, however, the present study heavily relies on British sources. Future explorations into Soviet and Afghan sources (neither of which were consulted for this article) may illuminate the extent of inland connectivity not maintained and monitored closely by British officials (e.g., Khorasan's connection to Soviet Central Asia and Sistan's link to Afghanistan).<sup>115</sup> This would situate Iran's eastern borderlands not just in relation to Iranian state authorities but allow multi-scalar spatial perspectives.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Stephanie Cronin ed., *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society under Riza Shah, 1921–1941* (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>115</sup> For an intellectual infrastructure that linked Iran and Afghanistan with Euro-American institutions, see Nile Green, "New Histories for the Age of Speed: The Archaeological-Architectural Past in Interwar Afghanistan and Iran," *Iranian Studies* 54 (2021): 349–97.

<sup>116</sup> Michiel Baud and Willem van Schendel, "Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands," *Journal of World History* 8, no. 2 (1997): 211–42.

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