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Friedensengel, Weltgendarmen oder Handelsagenten
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- 1 Previous studies of the participation of Western nationals in Iran's official modernization program at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century have concentrated on the Austrians and the Belgians. This study considers the little known episode from 1911 to 1915 when Swedish officers were employed to establish a national gendarmerie in Iran. Basing his findings on wide-ranging Swedish, German, French, and British archival sources, in addition to some Persian material, the author considers the reasons why Sweden, a small country, neutral since 1830, and faced with two formidable neighbors of its own – Russian and Germany – would have become involved in setting up an internal security apparatus in Iran. Part of the answer Ineichen argues, is that already prior to World War I the Swedes were active in policing operations in various trouble spots around the world. Iran, a country that knew a high level of lawlessness in the early 20th century, was a natural choice for a similar initiative. Given a British ultimatum to reorganize the gendarmerie, Iran would probably have preferred German assistance. The British, in turn, would have liked to undertake this task themselves, but were prevented from doing so by a Russian veto. The result was that the task fell on a small, peripheral country with little or no political stake in Iran.
- 2 The remainder of the book discusses the fate of the mission, the successes – within two years the Swedes managed to set up a well functioning apparatus of almost 6,000 men

that could vie with the Russian brigade and that by 1914 controlled 1,700 km of roads, with an emphasis on the trade route connecting Tehran with Bushihr – alongside the obstacles – cultural misunderstandings with sometimes tragic consequences, skeptical and distrusting Iranians, and a lack of funding. The author stresses how in the course of time the Swedish mission evolved more and more into the type of peacekeeping mission that the modern world has become accustomed to, a task that the Swedish officers were ill equipped to undertake. What really doomed the undertaking was, aside from financial troubles, perceived German sympathies among the Swedes at a time when Germany was expanding its influence in Iran, and an increasingly negative Russian stance expressed in efforts to decrease German activity in the north of the country. The outbreak of WWI in August 1914 enabled Sweden, fearful that its officers might get involved in military conflict, to withdraw its sponsorship without too much loss of prestige.

- 3 The study is similar to previous books on foreign assistance in that it offers little or nothing on the Iranian side of this story. It does, however, adds a piece in the puzzle of the intricate relationship between Iranian and foreign advisers in the crucial moment in Iran's modern history.

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Thèmes : 4.3. Histoire de l'Iran moderne (à partir de 1905)

AUTEURS

RUDI MATTHEE

University of Delaware