



Oil and the Killing of the American Consul in Tehran

Mohammad Gholi Majd

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In the wake of World War I, British attempts to exclude American oil companies from Iraq and Persia caused serious strains in Anglo-American relations. In May 1921 an 'oil entente' was reached that granted American oil companies an 'open door' and 'equal opportunity' in Iraq, and in return America acknowledged British domination of Persia and monopoly of its oil. This entente was soon tested when Persians gave an oil concession to the Sinclair Oil Company of New York and tried to rid themselves of the recently installed Pahlavi dictatorship. It was in the midst of this unrest, in May of 1924, that American Vice-Consul Robert Imbrie arrived in Tehran. Almost immediately after his arrival, Imbrie began sending reports to Washington that were highly critical of the British policies in Persia. On July 18, 1924, Imbrie was brutally murdered in Tehran, supposedly by a mob of religious fanatics. To save face and avoid international complications, the U.S. government accepted the Persian government's version of the killing. In this detailed examination of Anglo-American, American-Persian, and Anglo-Persian relations, author Mohammad Gholi Majd argues that Imbrie was in fact the victim of a conspiracy. Using records of the U.S. Department of State, this text examines how the murder enabled Britain to maintain its monopoly of Persian oil and further consolidate the Pahlavi dictatorship. The killing of Imbrie ultimately facilitated the consummation of the Anglo-American oil entente.

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