



Analyzing the Actions of the Governor of Kurdistan, Sharif al-Dawlah, as a Precursor to the Project of Building an Authoritarian Government during Reza Shah's Reign

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Abstract

In the historical memory of the people and in the research of historians, there is a prevailing belief that the creation of a centralized and authoritarian government in Iran was the work of Reza Shah, and that it at least began with his actions after the 1299 coup. The main issue of this research, which was carried out using a descriptive-analytical method and based on newspapers and documents from that period, is to critique this belief and present evidence to show that such a project was first initiated during the Vossug-ad-Dawleh government, with the cooperation of the British. One of the first signs of the implementation of these actions can be seen in Sharif-al-Dawlah, the ruler of Kurdistan province from 1297 to 1300.

The project of building an authoritarian state was first initiated during the Vossug-ad-Dawleh period, with the support of a group of constitutionalists. The conditions caused by the First World War, the collapse of the Ottoman and Russian monarchies in Iran's neighborhood, and the emergence of ethnic states led them to the conclusion that the preservation of Iran's territorial integrity was not possible through democratic or constitutional means. This request aligned with British policy, which required a strong and centralized government in Iran to combat the influence of communism in its colonial territories in the Middle East, and therefore received support from Britain. After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and the Allied victory in the First World War, Britain gained control over most of the Ottoman territories in the Middle East and established several Arab states as colonies. Additionally, the collapse of the Russian Empire and the establishment of a communist republic led by Lenin introduced a new adversary for Britain. The Soviet Union not only politically competed with Britain but also ideologically opposed it. As a proponent of Marxism, the Soviet Union viewed Britain as the representative of the capitalist and imperialist world, and by encouraging workers to revolt against capitalists, it challenged the entire Western world. Britain was concerned that communism would spread into its colonies in the Middle East and that the Soviet Union would gradually replace British influence. The British strategy to counter the Russian threat was to support the creation of a centralized, dependent, and powerful government in Iran, which would serve as a strong barrier between Soviet territory and British colonies in the Middle East, preventing the Russians from gaining



access to open waters via the Persian Gulf. Britain pursued this goal by signing the 1919 agreement with Iran during the prime ministership of Vossug-ad-Dawleh.

Looking at this agreement, it is clear that Iran was informally placed under the protection of Britain, with British advisors playing a central role in the creation of a centralized government. During the time of Vossug-ad-Dawleh, the ruler of Kurdistan was Sharif al-Dawlah, who sought to suppress the influential tribes and nobles of Kurdistan with the support of Britain. For the first time, Britain deployed its planes to Kurdistan to assist Vossug-ad-Dawleh in quelling the opposition, even bombing the dissenters.

The main question is: what actions did Sharif al-Dawlah undertake at both the state and local levels, which Reza Shah later repeated, developed, and deepened at the national level? The findings of this research show that several key actions were initiated before Reza Shah, including the establishment of military rule, the creation of modern administrative institutions, the curbing of centrifugal forces, the suppression and elimination of nomadic tribes, and the establishment and expansion of schools that promoted public education in the Persian language. These measures were the foundation for the creation of a centralized government and were first implemented in Kurdistan. Reza Khan, who was the commander of a small group of Kazakhs stationed in Kurdistan at the start of Sharif al-Dawlah's rule, was closely involved in or aware of these actions.

Reza Khan's presence in Kurdistan during Sharif al-Dawlah's rule made him intimately familiar with the latter's actions and policies. As a military commander, Reza Khan personally participated in suppressing several rebellions. Like many military leaders of the time, he did not believe in being lenient toward opponents or those who fomented disorder and chaos. While Reza Shah's later actions cannot be directly attributed to the influence of Sharif al-Dawlah, the purpose of this research is to demonstrate that the establishment of a centralized government in Iran, with British cooperation, began before Reza Shah's rise to power. Beyond Kurdistan, the suppression of Mirza Kuchik Khan Jangali's revolt in northern Iran and Shaikh Mohammad Khiābāni's rebellion in Azerbaijan are other notable examples of the Qajar government's efforts to centralize power with British support.

Keywords: Kurdistan, Sharif al-Dawlah, centralism, authoritarianism, Pahlavi government, World War I, England.

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