

The Impact of British Small Arms on Iran during the First Half of the 19th Century

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In this article, the author investigates the impact of the introduction of new weaponry and related technologies on Iran during the first half of the 19th century, concentrating his analysis on the process of their introduction in the case of small arms from the British Empire.

After a brief overview of the production and use of firearms in Iran prior to the 19th century, the author turns to the issue at hand and concludes that 1) the introduction channel was limited to the governmental arms supplies from the British Empire, and other routes, such as the arms trade, smuggling and supplies from the other governments were of only slight importance; 2) British arms supplies were closely related to the comprehensive military support for establishing a Western-style army in Iran, which was necessitated by the diplomatic and political circumstances facing Iran at that time and Britain's policy regarding the Qajar Dynasty; 3) British-made small arms were evaluated in relation to the creation of *Sarbāz*, the Western-style infantry corps, and were distributed among its troops, thus supporting their activities from the materiel aspect; and 4) the introduction of small arms-related technologies initiated the production of British-style small arms in Iran, which indicates that the technological gap between Britain and Iran at that point in time was not as wide as generally thought.

The introduction of British-made small arms and related technologies into Iran certainly had a important impact, in the sense that it promoted a change in the character of military power in Iran by materially supporting the creation of a Western-style army. However, its importance in the extra-military field was still limited in comparison with the latter half of the century. The author's findings thus show the character of the period in question as a transition phase toward the superiority of Western Europe and North America in military technologies.