

CHAPTER 6 - ALLIES ATTITUDES AND ACTION IN WARTIME

a. SOVIET PURPOSES. "We have not, and cannot have, such war aims as the seizure of foreign territories and the subjugation of foreign peoples -- whether it be the peoples and territories of Europe or the peoples and territories of Asia, including Iran." Thus spoke Josef Stalin in November 1941.¹

Despite this fair-sounding declaration, the policy of the Soviet Union, in placing the northern provinces of Iran under her military occupation in August 1941, was evidently to treat them at least as an autonomous area distinct from the rest of the country.

The Anglo-Russian declaration, on the day of the invasion, stated that the Allies had entered Iran as friends to eliminate the German threat to the people of Iran and to establish order and stability. They promised people liberty, prosperity and abundance. In practice it was exactly opposite to this. What the Russians gave to Iran were signs that they were embarking upon a long-range policy that would effect basic changes in the political, economic, and social life of the provinces under their occupation. Soviet representatives regulated their economic relation with the Iranian government like conquerors, considering only Russian's advantage. The Soviet zone was closed to foreigners. Between 1942 and the end of the war no foreign newspaperman was permitted to enter

¹Josef Stalin.

the zone. The presence of the Red Army resulted in panic among the more prosperous elements of the northern provinces. Many left hurriedly and settled for the duration of the war in Teheran. Foremost among them were big landowners. Their estates were left to caretakers; some landowners remained, but they also felt the impact of the presence of the Red Army. A ban imposed on the export of staple foodstuffs from the Soviet to other zones separated the northern provinces from the rest of the country even more than travel limitation. This ban primarily affected grain and rice and proved to be almost disastrous to the rest of Iran inasmuch as central and southern Iran represented a food-deficit area.

Aside from the economic inconveniences to Iran resulting from the division of the country, political consequences even more important developed. Under the Russian political officers very quietly but systematically the Communist group began to guild a satellite state in their zone. The consolidation of Soviet control in the northern provinces followed the usual satellite methods. The Communists started to incite the mobs and peasants against the businessmen and landowners, suppressed the pro-government papers in the northern cities, and persistently prepared the ground work in the north with a view to making a radical political change at an appropriate time.

Soviet activities were not limited to the north, exclusively. In Teheran there was put into motion a formidable propaganda apparatus, to obtain as many adherents to the Soviet cause as possible. The center of propaganda was located in the Soviet Embassy under the direction of the press attache. It employed a considerable number of officials, many of whom were natives of Soviet central Asia or the Caucasus, and most of whom had an excellent knowledge of the Iranian language. The post of

press attache was entrusted to Comrade Danil. S. Komissarov, who maintained direct and constant contact with a host of newspapers in Teheran. Another center of propaganda was the Irano-Soviet Society for Cultural Relations. The Society constituted a branch of the well-known Soviet institution V.O.K.S. which specializes in dispensing propaganda abroad through cultural mediums. It manifested great vitality in Teheran and in the provinces. It established libraries of Soviet publications, conducted courses on Russian language and literature, organized innumerable lectures, concerts, receptions, art exhibitions, and sponsored shows.

Early in 1942, however, the Soviets took steps to set up a Communist party called the Tudeh (masses) and they also organized a Communist trade union. The Tudeh party was a reincarnation of the old Communist party of Iran. As pointed out in previous chapters, under the regime of Reza Shah the Communist party was obliged to go underground, and official persecution never permitted it to exert important influence in the country. In 1938 mass arrests by the Iranian police threw many Communists or communist sympathizers into jail. There they languished until the entry of Soviet troops into Iran in 1941. Released as a result of foreign invasion and the subsequent amnesty to all political prisoners, the Communist leaders proceeded quickly to organize the new Communist party "Tudeh". It was, of course, an open and legal political organization enjoying the freedom of the new Iranian wartime "democracy". Among the founders of the part were Reza Rusta, released from jail, to become famous later through his activities among the workers of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company; Iraj Iskandari; Dr. Morteza Yasdi; and Dr. Reza Radmanesh. Some-

what later they were joined by twenty other leftists, among whom Ja'afar Pischevari became widely known as a result of the role he was to play in Azarbaijan. Pisherari had a long and stormy career as a Communist. Born in Iranian Azarhaijan in 1888, he went to Baku in 1904 and stayed there until the revolution. In 1918 he arrived in Iran with the Red Army under the name of Seyyid Ja'afar Baku Bayi. In 1920 he became Minister of Interior of the Revolutionary Gilan Republic. After its collapse he went to Russia and became active in the Comintern under the name of Sultan Zadeh. His Comintern errands took him to a number of countries in the Middle East. Pretending to be a victim of Soviet purges in 1936, Pischevari reappeared in Iran. The Iranian government watched him closely and kept him in protective custody in Kashan. As a result of the amnesty in 1941 Pischevari was released. He went to Teheran, became editor of the daily Ashir, and helped found the Tudeh. The organization of the party followed the pattern of other Communist parties. It had a central Executive Committee of ten members, and a control commission of eight members. Its affairs were run by three secretaries. The party's main press organ was Rahbar, edited by Iraj Iskandari. Mardom, an organ of "antifascist" organizations of Iran, edited by Dr. Radmanesh; and Zafar edited by Reza Rusta. In its official program the Tudeh avoided giving the impression that it might have revolutionary aims. Following the pattern adopted later in some eastern European countries, it did not call itself communist. It demanded neither the nationalization of private property nor the collectivization of land. On the contrary, its platform included all the essential features of traditional liberalism, exactly as did the other Iranian parties. The Tudeh demanded progressive labor legislation, including social insurance,

which would cover large groups including Army officers, soldiers, and their families; the legalization of trade unions; improved standards of living for the peasants; strict price controls to curtail inflation; free education and general health services; the elimination of reactionary elements from public life and the restitution of democratic practices; equality for minorities; reform of the administration and of the judicial system; disarming of nomad tribes and promotion of order and security; national industrialization; friendly relation with all of Iran's neighbors; and the elimination of foreign interference. The one factor that might distinguish this program from that of other political parties was its stress on the welfare of the workers and of the peasantry. The first year of the party's existence was devoted to organizational activities. The party press was established. A network of local branches was spread in major cities throughout the entire country, particularly in the northern Soviet-occupied zone. The party's tactics consisted first in enlisting the support of the working class and then that of the intelligentsia. Younger Iranian intellectuals, often western-trained and frustrated in their ambitions because of the outmoded social system, constituted a chronically discontented class. Following the prescriptions of Communist congresses, the party did not neglect to appeal to them. In this action the party was applying the classical Communist tactic of forming a coalition with the liberal, anti-imperialist bourgeoisie in semicolonial areas.

As a result, under the worst circumstances of the wartime unrest, the Soviet authorities and the Tudeh party found an ideal condition for the growth of Communism: a mass of landless peasants and underpaid workers, a number of middle-class discontented and frustrated intellectuals, several

political prisoners, and the greater part of the intellectual group -- to these were added the relatives and families of those prisoners who had either died of natural causes in prison or had been strangled in prison cells. Some of these intellectuals provided the militant care of the Tudeh party. These were joined by many frustrated men and women who were not Marxists, but demanded a radical change in the decadent administration, and many students and younger intellectuals who were attracted by the prospect of free tuition and the stipends offered by the society, and who were generally eager to hear something about Soviet life, economics, and government. Some of these Iranians were either outright Communist or sympathizers with Soviet doctrine, but the majority were men of moderate and liberal ideas. Of course, in a weak and sick society like wartime Iran, Communism spreads exactly in the way that tuberculosis affects neglected, underfed patients. The germ of communism can be found everywhere in the country, waiting to take hold of any population that has suffered from low vitality for any reason whatever.

In August 1944, the Tudeh held its first national congress in Teheran; this was an overt manifestation of its strength and influence. 109 delegates from all over the country participated. The congress went on record as favoring a number of progressive reforms, for continuing the struggle against fascism, and for maintaining a friendly policy toward Iran's neighbors. The work of the part was reviewed and officers were elected to the party's central post.

Earlier in the year the parliamentary elections gave eight seats to the Tudeh deputies, and these deputies, in contrast to all the rest of the Majlis, behaved in a disciplined way, stressing in their speeches that they

represented an organized party. The election of the Tudeh candidates was not without its dramatic sidelights. Among those elected from the Soviet zone was the deputy Pishevari. Claiming, however, alleged irregularities in their election, the Majlis, by a majority vote, refused to seat the two men. This step infuriated the Tudeh. A number of mass demonstrations were organized at which the populace demanded the recognition of the mandated in the Soviet zone for these men.

By 1944, however, it was clear that, powerfully supported as it was by the presence of the Red Army in Iran and by parallel Soviet official propaganda, the Tudeh party had gained more and more adherents and increased its influence. The party had also become an outright tool of the Soviet policy; at the time of the oil crisis the Tudeh party behaved in a disciplined way, staunchly supporting Soviet demands.

This was a great shock treatment for the Iranian government, nationalist-patriotic parties, and native conservatives, as well as the western powers.

b. BRITISH POLICY. It has been already made clear that, because of Iran's geographical position, the country's commercial opportunities, and the valuable British-owned oil fields at the head of the Persian Gulf, the British government has long and consistently looked upon Iran as an area closely related to the security and vital interest of Britain. The traditional policy has been to maintain Iran as a buffer state and as a means of checking Russian expansion southward, while taking all possible advantage of Iranian markets and resources.

For these reasons Britain considered her interests in Iran vital, especially in the South. British interests were both strategic and commercial. The general strategic interest was determined by the fact

that South Iran borders India and the Indian Ocean. In addition, Britain had in the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company an interest which was considered vital and which represented a combination of the strategic and commercial.

In 1944, Iranian oil production amounted to over 102 million barrels, and Iran had become the fourth largest oil-producing country in the world. This oil field with the refineries and port installations constitutes the most important industrial development in Iran. Moreover, while the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company had benefited Iran, especially Khuzistan, in many ways, the company at the time represented and exercised a considerable political and administrative influence in and around the area of its operation.

Those doing detailed work of executing British policy, the British representatives in Iran and in London, had been an extremely well-informed body of men. The same circumstances that had motivated and molded British policy had tended to select and develop men fitted to apply it.

As a result of her long experience in colonial and other problem areas, the British have almost instinctive understanding of the essentials of their policy and type of behavior that is expected of those who carry it out.

No doubt many individuals deviate from the code; but, whenever possible, something is done to eliminate or neutralize the undesirable type.

In keeping with the diplomatic requirements of an Oriental country, the British maintained in Teheran a large diplomatic staff, dignifiedly housed, headed by Sir Reader Bullard, and reported to by consular officers in all of the principle cities. In addition, political agents operated in

different parts of the country, particularly in the tribal regions. On the whole, the British intelligence service was the best in Iran.

Throughout the South and West, British consuls and political agents played a part and exercised an influence considerably beyond the ordinary duties of such officials. They organized or settled disputes between tribal chiefs, and in some cases acted informally as judges in local controversies. The British also still had their Iranian proteges. In the South the Bakhtiari tribesmen showed a strong attachment to the British. Many of the deputies from the South and West acknowledged their pro-British feelings and customarily sought and followed the advice of the British Embassy and its representatives. Most of the Prime Ministers consulted the British Ambassador on many matters. Usually a prime minister took care to include in his cabinet pro-British as well as pro-Soviet ministers. However, under all these circumstances, and despite the fact that, after the occupation of Iran, the British intervened seriously in internal Iranian policy, they made no attempt to seal up their zone against communist influences. It is one of the ironies of history that the Tudeh party was first helped and encouraged by the Iranian director of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. The newspaper Mardom, which was created with the financial support of Mustafa Fateh, the Iranian director of the Company, later became the official organ of the communist part of Iran. Even later on people in Iran believed there were two Tudeh parties. The one was called by Iranians "made in London" and the other was believed to be a product of Moscow. (This was claimed by Dr. Mossadegh, too)

According to Riza-Shahshahami, a propagandist for the Tudeh in the U. S., "The British authorities offered their support - although on a

very small scale - to the newly formed Tudeh party," for its "immediate program of fighting against Fascism, punishment of those responsible for the excesses of the time of Reza Shah".²

However, British cooperation and American indifference at the time also emboldened the Russians. So they were convinced that they would be able to incorporate northern Iran into the communist empire. In all circumstances the Tudeh unwaveringly maintained its loyalty to the Soviet cause. As long as Soviet policy manifested its restraint in criticizing the West (1941-1943) the Tudeh press was also cautious in its tone. When disagreements between the Soviets and the West came more conspicuous, the Tudeh increased its anti-western hostility and began to indulge in more attacks against the Anglo-Saxon powers. At that time Britain, realistically enough, tried to oppose Soviet encroachment by using, with moderation, somewhat similar weapons. Thus, to counteract Tudeh activity, they supported a pro-British party, Eradeye-Melli, formed by former Primer Zia ed-Din, who lived in British-controlled Haifa prior to his return. Rumor attributed to the British heavy financing of Seyyid Zia's campaign. Evidence of this is obviously lacking in view of the secrecy inherent in any such dealing, but such financial aid is highly probable. It is worth while mentioning, however, that Zia ed-Din's party appeared on the scene only in late 1943. This means, if we credit the British with the sponsorship of this movement, that they were reluctant to have recourse to such an obviously anti-communist device for a considerable period. The increasingly aggressive attitude of the Tudeh prompted them to take this decisive step. However, Zia ed-Din

²New York Daily Worker, 6 December 1945

derived his support not only from the British, but also from the land-owners and tribes; nor did he ignore the Majlis; as a deputy he himself worked among them to counteract the activities of official Soviet propaganda. The British also opposed the Communists through their own propaganda emanating from the embassy's Public Relations Bureau and the British Council. They handled skillfully an impressive number of anti-Soviet dailies and periodicals and co-operated, instead of obstructing, in the solution of Iran's economic problem. In this cold war of propaganda and political intrigue Britain was handicapped by the moderation, if not the actual timidity, of her tactics. Eager to maintain unity with her Soviet ally, she was usually on the defensive. She hesitated to use the same offensive language, a normal feature of Soviet propaganda, and in the overall balance sheet of psychological warfare she appeared to be losing ground. This was not so much the result of lack of attempts at persuasion, but rather of Iranian respect for and fear of strength. And strength was manifested primarily by the Soviet Union.

Between 1941 and 1943 however no strong anti-communist party existed and the burden of opposing Communism fell upon the shoulders of the government and provincial representatives who daily had to face all the complications resulting from direct Soviet obstructionism or from anarchy produced by the more violent activities of the Tudeh. The small political parties that had been formed prior to Seyyid Zia's arrival could not be considered a match for the Tudeh, closely-knit in itself and fully conscious of its aims. Zia ed-Din did not make a secret of his anti-Communist feelings. His press organs waged a relentless struggle against the Tudeh, accusing it of treason, subversive activities, antireligious propaganda, violence, sabotage, hooliganism, and hypocrisy. The invectives used by Seyyed Zia

ed-Din's press against the communists were as strong as those addressed to him by the Tudeh. But it is note-worthy that until the oil crisis Seyyed Zia's newspapers carefully avoided direct attacks on the Soviet Union.

c. THE NORTHERN OIL CRISIS. The oil of the Middle East, as a great and as yet unexploited source, inexitably became the subject of discussion among the Big Three, and it was reported that at the Teheran conference of 1943 this subject, and especially the oil of IRAN, had been an item on the agenda,⁽³⁾ thus, in the Autumn of 1943, the Anglo-Dutch Shell Company had sent representatives to Teheran, and they were followed early in 1944 by representatives of Standard Oil, Socony-Vacuum Company, and the American Sinclair Oil interests, all competing for concessions in south-east Iran. In April the Iranian government engaged a private American firm of oil consultants to draft a standard concession to which all applications might be required to conform, and on 22 July the arrival was announced of two American engineers, Hoover and Curtice, who were to advise the government on the development of the country's oil resources, arrangements which were criticized by Tudeh deputy Radmanesh in a Majlis debate. Then on 8 August the U. S. and British Governments published the text of a bilateral oil agreement which looked forward to the establishment of a world oil authority intended to assure "that, subject always to considerations of military security and to the provisions of such arrangements for the preservation of peace and prevention of aggression as may

(3) (Kirk, survey 1939-1946. The Middle East 47U.)

be in force, adequate supplies of petroleum shall be available to the nationals of all peaceable countries." This apparently disturbed the Russians and on 6 September the Iranian Government was informed by their Ambassador in Moscow that the Soviet Government was sending a mission to Teheran to discuss the oil concession of Northwest Iran, which had been operated for some years by a syndicate with Soviet participation, but abandoned in the late 1920's; the Soviet Government had informed the Iranian Government on 30 August 1941, immediately after the Anglo-Soviet intervention, that they expected favorable consideration for Soviet rights in this concession. The Iranian Premier, Saed, replied he would be very glad to receive the Soviet mission, which arrived on 15 September under the leadership of the Deputy Foreign Commissar, Serejei I Kavtaradze. On 27 September, Kavtaradze, after returning from a visit to the north asked for a five year exploratory concession for the whole of the five northern provinces. After a geological survey of the region had been made, the concession area would be redefined and limited to the regions in which oil sources and the possibility of their industrial exploitation were assured. The Iranian Government had, however, already decided on 2 September (four days before they were informed of the pending Soviet mission) after a cabinet reshuffle, to grant no new concessions to foreigners until after the war; and though the Premier now conveyed the Soviet proposals in detail to the cabinet and the Majlis, they stood by their previous decision. A second approach to the cabinet and Majlis by the Premier, after informing Kavtaradze of this initial setback, was no more successful. Kavtaradze then remarked that the answer was equivalent to a rejection of the Soviet proposal and would darken the relations between the two countries. Saed suggested a compromise whereby his govern-

ment should forthwith undertake the study of the Soviet proposals, but their decision would be deferred until after the war. Kavtaratze, however, rejected this proposal.

Six days after the publication of the Iranian Government's decision the Soviet trade-union newspaper Trud on 22 October launched a sharp attack upon the government; and Kavtaradze gave a large number of Iranian journalists an interview at the Soviet Embassy on 24 October at which he stated "he was obliged to declare clearly and plainly that Soviet circles had interpreted the Iranian Government's decision in an absolutely negative way. Public opinion in the U.S.S.R. considered that the government of M. Saed, in adopting such an attitude towards the Soviet proposal, had set themselves on the road to darken the relation between the two countries. The Government of M. Saed had produced no cogent argument in favor of such a decision, whereas against it were the strong proofs which touched the higher and vital political and economic interests of Iran.

"Personally he was absolutely certain that the friendship between the U.S.S.R. and Iran, which during the war had been fully and successfully tested, could not in any way be shaken, and that what was to the interest of both parties, and would consolidate the friendly relations between the U. S. S.R. and Iran, would be satisfactorily solved. He hoped that Iranian public opinion, of which the liberal press of Iran was the representative, would play its part in promoting the work."

Responding to this cue, a violent press campaign by the Tudeh party launched a denunciation of the Government, asserting that Iran would benefit economically from the proposed concession to Russia in view of the unemployment which threatened when aid to Russia came to an end; and

they insisted that, to reject the Soviet proposal, after considering for so long the grant of concessions in the South to American and British interests, would be an impolitic piece of discrimination. Economic policy in the Soviet Zone of occupation now began to pay even less regard than formerly to Iranian interests; a wave of mass demonstrations against the Iranian government's policy was staged in the cities of the Soviet Zone; in Teheran Soviet trucks carried considerable numbers of Tudeh party-members to a demonstration before the Majlis, while Soviet army detachments "happened" to march through that part of the city at the very same time, thus paralyzing any attempt by the Iranian authorities to repress the demonstrations, since any action against them could be interpreted as directed against the Soviet forces. The situation now hung fire for some days, the U. S. and British governments announcing their acceptance of the Iranian Government's sovereign right to postpone the grant of concessions until after the war. The Moscow propaganda machine there upon turned from indirect incitement to more overt threats against the Iranian Government.

On 2 December Dr. Mohamanad Mossadegh, who on 29 October had both opposed the Soviet demands and attacked the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's concession, introduced a bill providing that: "No Prime Minister or other member of the government may enter into negotiations for oil concessions with any foreign government or with any foreign oil companies, or sign any concession or agreement relating to oil. . .

"The penalty for the infringement of this law is to be solitary confinement for periods ranging from 3 to 8 years, with permanent dismissal from the government service."

The bill was rushed through the Majlis with double urgency and passed without any amendment, against the opposition of the Tudeh members,

one of whom had vainly proposed the cancellation of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's concession. On 9 December Kavtaradze returned to Moscow after holding another recriminatory press conference. An offer by the Iranian Government to the Soviet Embassy, that the northern oil fields should be exploited by an Iranian Company assisted by Soviet capital, machinery, and experts, and the product shipped to the U.S.S.R., apparently received no reply. The first round of the Iranian-Soviet duel was over; in reality it was also a Soviet-Western duel.

In contrast, however, to the direct action characteristic of Kavtaradze's visit, Soviet policy **resorted to** indirect methods. The main instrument of this indirect Soviet action was the Communist party Tudeh. What was, under such circumstances, the attitude of the U.S.A.?

d. AMERICAN ATTITUDES. The Anglo-Russian occupation, and the end of the German penetration in Iran, seemed to create a kind of vacuum in the country. Iranians naturally began looking for a new partner to help and assist them to develop their resources and protect them against the pressure of their two old and predatory neighbors.

The remembrance of the Iranians of the assistance and help given by some people of the United States, such as the excellent work of Morgan Shuster in 1911 and Dr. A. C. Millspaugh from 1922 to 1927; the services rendered by Dr. Samuel M. Jordan, president of the American College, and Dr. Philip P. MacDowell, the head of the American hospital in Teheran; the support of President Woodrow Wilson in their fight against the British in 1912; and the new internationalist policy of the United States, which involved her in world affairs with her entry into World War II, all caused the Iranian choice to fall on the United States. American aid to Britian

and Russia was a good augury. This constituted the background of Iranian-American relations in wartime. The rapprochement between the two countries was expressed by the engagement by Iran of a number of American advisors. Furthermore, the presence on Iranian soil of American troops sent to speed up supplies to Russia afforded an additional point of contact. Finally, the interest that the United States quite formally manifested by signing the Teheran-Iranian Communiqué was a factor of prime importance in Irano-American relations.

The most important fact about American policy in wartime was that the role of United States existed only in the economic sphere and in the purely technical sphere of speeding up the supplies to Russia.

The United States extended both technical and economic assistance. Early in 1943 at the request of the Iranian government, Dr. Millspaugh arrived for the second time to administer Iran's public finances. He was granted wide executive powers by the Majlis and was authorized to hire sixty American aides. An American military mission was invited to advise on the administration of the army, and another mission, headed by Colonel Norman Schwartzkopf of Lindbergh kidnaping fame, was entrusted with the reorganization of the gendarmerie (rural police). American experts were active also in the departments of agriculture, municipal police, health, and others. Iran benefited also from American economic assistance. In 1942 lend-lease was extended to Iran, and America assumed its share of responsibility in the Middle East Supply Center.

Politically, Americans showed good will and friendliness toward the Iranians. This good will was symbolized by the release on December 4, 1943, during the Teheran Conference of President Roosevelt, Prime

Minister Churchill, and Premier Stalin, of a Communique complimentary to Iran. This communique was Roosevelt's idea. It acknowledged Iran's services in the transportation of supplies from overseas to the Soviet Union, promised her economic assistance both during and after war, and, invoking the Atlantic Charter, reiterated the Big Three's "desire for the maintenance of the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iran." The Communique was greeted with joy by the Iranians, who were eager to hear good tidings concerning their eventual return to full independence, but it seemed that it was not a legal commitment on the part of the United States. In that period of blossoming friendship with Russia, the United States was neither ready nor willing to give any far-reaching political guarantees to Russia's small neighbors. Washington apparently believed that an optimistic joint statement from the Big Three would be sufficient. In pursuing such a policy, the American government indicated that (a) it valued wartime unity with the Soviet Union above other considerations and (b) that it was either unaware of or indifferent to Soviet and British aims on Iran. At the time of Kavtaradze's visit, it became known, for example, that some British and American corporations were seeking oil concessions in South-eastern Iran. Premier Saed's refusal to grant concessions extended to those powers as well. This elicited a statement from the American ambassador, Leland B. Morris, that the United States respected Iran's sovereign right to refuse concession.

The United States did nothing to deliberately oppose Soviet schemes in Iran and it left the burden of counteraction on the British. The Iranians, who, after Germany's ouster, had looked toward American as a

friendly third Power (and who for this reason had invited many American experts), were disappointed. By the same token the Soviet authorities, encountering no American front, were greatly emboldened.