

CHAPTER 7 - IRAN IN WORLD POLITICS AFTER THE WAR

a. **RUSSIAN ACTIVITY AND SEPARATION OF AZARBAIJAN.** As the Second World War drew to a close, Iran still was occupied by British, Soviet, and U. S. forces. So the struggle between opposing forces in Iran became more intense. The Iranian nationalist press took up the problem of the evacuation of Allied troops and insisted that these troops should leave Iran as soon as possible. The Anglo-Soviet-Iranian treaty of 1942 had provided that the Allied occupying forces should be withdrawn from Iran within six months after the cessation of the war. The British and United States Foreign Ministers at the Yalta Conference in February 1945 had suggested advancing the date as a gesture of goodwill towards Iran, but Molotov had said that his government would require time to consider the proposal. Agreement was reached, however, at the Potsdam Conference (17 July - 2 August 1946) that the occupying forces should be withdrawn from Teheran and that further stages of the withdrawal should be considered by the three Foreign Minister when they met in London in September. Meanwhile, the U. S. Government had unilaterally announced on 28 August that their troops would be withdrawn from Iran by 1 November except for about 2,000 who would temporarily maintain and guard military installations. The nationalist attitudes found their official expression in a demand of the Iranian government to Britain and Russia to withdraw their troops.

When the three Foreign Ministers met in London in September 1945, Bevin suggested, in a letter to Molotov on the 19th, that their two governments should agree on the withdrawal of their respective forces

from the whole of Iran by the middle of December, except that British forces might remain in the southern oil field area, and Soviet forces in Azerbaijan, until 2 March 1946 (6 months after the date of the armistice with Japan). Molotov replied, however, with a stiff adherence to that stipulated date, observing only that, "if necessary, the plan for the final withdrawal could be discussed between us towards the end of the said period". He saw no need for the three Foreign Ministers to discuss the question.¹

It was clear that, while paying lip service to the principle of withdrawal, the Russians did not surrender in reality any of their positions and gave ominous signs of intensifying their action in Iran, and, as a result of systematic Soviet policy, by the summer of 1945 the Iranian Government's authority in the Soviet-occupied northern provinces had been reduced virtually to zero. In that region the Tudeh party was in control of the chief towns, the communications, the police, and the prisons, in which they maltreated their political opponents in traditional style. When the Iranian Government sent a gendarmerie force to reassert their authority against the insurgent Tudeh party in the northern province of Mazandaran they were turned back by Soviet troops, while conversely left-wing mutineers from the Iranian army in Khorasan were exceptionally allowed through a Soviet checkpoint to support the Tudeh Party in rebellion in Gurgan province. Somehow the Iranian government managed to restore the Khorasan situation to normalcy, but in Azerbaijan matters turned for the worse, and that country became the scene of an internal conflict that

¹Bevin in House of Commons, 10 Oct 1945.

dimly foreshadowed the war that was to break out in Korea five years later. The local antagonists in this conflict were, on the one hand, the revolutionary Tudeh Party and its labor counterpart, the Central Council of United Trade Unions, both of which had become active during the war with the encouragement of the Soviet authorities, especially in their northern zone of occupation and in the capital; and, on the other hand, the forces at the command of the Iranian propertied classes, who dominated the Government and the administration. Neither side showed any restraint in using violence and terrorism against its opponents. The organization and direction of the anti-Tudeh forces was in the hands of the Chief of the General Staff, General Hasan Arfa, who, having a British wife, was a ready target for Tudeh and Soviet propagandists.

During midsummer of 1945, several Tudeh newspapers had opened a campaign for provincial councils, which the Iranian constitution had provided for setting up, but about which nothing had in fact been done. Their motive was revealed by their argument that, although the people of Azerbaijan had "shown that the reactionaries had very little influence over them" by returning Tudeh members in the general election of 1943, the latter could not overcome the "traitorous majority" in the central Parliament. So, the formation of an Azerbaijan Committee for National Liberation had been reported; and, though this report was denied, its substance was confirmed by the formation in that fertile and valuable province in August of a "Democratic" Party in which the local Tudeh Party speedily incorporated itself. The pretext advanced by Tudeh and Soviet propagandists for this action was once again the repressive police of the Iranian Government in handling the Tudeh agitation. The movement for autonomy drew strength from

the facts that the province had felt the heavy hand of Reza Shah, prejudiced against Azerbaijan because it had been the center of support for the Qajar dynasty which he had overthrown in 1923-25, and that the central Government did not permit the official use of the local dialect of Turkish. Nevertheless, the "Democratic" leaders found it expedient to stiffen their local supporters by infiltrating numerous political prospectors from Soviet Transcaucasia who could be readily distinguished among the heterogeneous population and multiplicity of dialects of Azerbaijan.

In August 1945, the Tudeh party staged a "rehearsal" in Tabriz. Its armed partisans, protected by Soviet troops, captured several government buildings and attempted to impose their rule upon the city and the adjacent area. At the same time a manifesto demanding administrative and cultural autonomy for Azerbaijan within the framework of the Iranian state was issued in the form of a leaflet. The manifesto claimed that 4,500,000 Azerbaijanis were deprived of their rights by the central government, and demanded freedom for Azerbaijanis to pursue their national development and to use their native language. The Iranian governor the former Premier Bayat, was powerless as Iranian gendarmes and army units were prevented from leaving their barracks by the Soviet authorities; attempts of the central government to intervene were fruitless, because the Iranian armed force that was sent from the capital to Mianeh and Tabriz was stopped by the Russians Red Army near Qazvin.

On October 23, news spread that several new divisions of the Red Army had entered Iran. Simultaneously the Democratic party displayed

vigorous political action. Early in November its Central Committee issued a proclamation defining its aim as the complete autonomy of Azerbaijan. On the next day Khavar-i-no published a list of Iranian officials who should be liquidated. The list included the names of the Commanding General, his chief of staff, and several gendarmerie and police officers. On 16 November all the elements who had rallied to the "Democratic" Party, came out in an open rebellion, cutting off all communications between Tabriz and Teheran, and seizing during the next night the town and railway junction of Miyanah, 100 miles southeast of Tabriz. Although the Soviet took care not to intervene openly her tactics consisted of obstructing all movements of the Iranian army or gendarmerie whenever they wanted to quell the riots, and of protecting all meetings and movements of the Democrats by posting armed Soviet detachments in their vicinity. Meanwhile an Iranian Government spokesman stated that arms which were being distributed to rebels from Russian trucks had been identified as being from the Iranian Army stocks confiscated by the Russians after their intervention in the summer of 1941.

On December 12, the provincial National Assembly was formally inaugurated in Tabriz. It was composed of 101 deputies, all Democrats or individuals forced into collaboration under duress. Its first step on its first day was to proclaim the Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan and to designate a government under the "premiership" of the veteran Comintern agent Jaafar Pishevari. The "government" of Azerbaijan announced that the autonomous state would be conducted on "democratic principles", but that it did not desire separation from Iran. It also issued a program that said that private property would be inviolable; that "traitors and

reactionaries" would be purged from the gendarmerie; that a "people's army" would be formed from local militia groups; and that Turkish would be the official language of the state. It added that the government would distribute to the peasants government-owned land as well as that of "reactionary landlords who ran away from Azerbaijan."

A few days after the constitution of the revolutionary government was completed, a new parliament was elected. The revolutionary troops were, as a rule, clad in Soviet uniform with Azerbaijani insignia.

Simultaneously with the events in Tabriz, a Kurdish uprising took place in western Azerbaijan. On December 15, 1945, a number of leaders of the Kurdish Democratic party met in the presence of Soviet officers at Mahabad and proclaimed a Kurdish People's Republic. In January 1946 Qazi Mohammed, Chief of Mahabad, was elected to the presidency of the Republic. He was a man of strong and authoritarian character, a hereditary judge and a religious leader. Among the members of the new government was Mulla Mustafa, a rebellious chief from Iraq, who after a protracted rebellion against the Iraqi government, had crossed to Iran. The Kurdish Republic sent observers to the Azerbaijan parliament but insisted on separate identity from the revolutionary government in Tabriz. Following the negotiations among Pishvari, Qazi Mohamad, and the Soviet representatives, a treaty was signed on April 23, 1940, between the Kurdish and Azerbaijan governments which provided for military alliance, fair treatment of minorities, exchange of diplomatic missions, and common diplomatic action toward the Teheran government. Thus the Kurdish uprising completed the separation of the whole province of Azerbaijan from the control of Teheran authorities. Unable to counteract this movement

of disintegration at home, the Iranian government decided to bring the matter to the newly formed United Nations.

At the opening of the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers on 19 December 1945, Stalin, at his first meeting with the United States Secretary of State, James Byrnes, emphasized the danger to the Baku oil fields of sabotage directed from Iran, in whose Government, he said, no confidence could be placed. The withdrawal of the Soviet forces from Iran on the stipulated date in March would depend on the conduct of the Iranian Government; and he reminded Byrnes that the Soviet-Iranian treaty of 1921 authorized the Soviet Government to send troops into Iran if there were a threat to Soviet security from a third party making use of Iran. Stalin was non-committal to Byrnes, at their second meeting, on a proposal made by Bevin that the Big Three should send a joint commission to Iran to investigate the various aspects of the problem; but on the afternoon of Christmas Day Molotov privately told Byrnes that he thought Bevin's proposal was generally acceptable, to which Byrnes replied that he was "particularly anxious" that the Iranian question should not be raised at the impending first meeting of the United Nations. On the same evening Bevin accepted all of several amendments to his proposal put forward by Molotov, except one that left in doubt the stipulated date for the withdrawal of troops from Iran (Bevin's contention was that this date had been established by the Anglo-Soviet-Iranian treaty of 1942 and should not be changed). When the three Foreign Ministers met again on the following afternoon it was evident that the Soviet attitude had hardened, for Molotov now said that the Iranian question was not properly on their agenda and could

not be considered.²

The Moscow Conference, was a turning point in the development of the Soviet-Iranian dispute. The fact remains, however, that nothing was done to relieve Soviet pressure on Azerbaijan. When the first session of the United Nations General Assembly was opening, Seyyid Hasan Tagi-zadeh, the Iranian Ambassador to London, formally requested the Security Council to investigate Soviet encroachments in Iran. The Iranian government accused the Soviet Union of interference in the internal affairs of Iran "through the medium of their officials and armed forces" and declared itself ready to furnish "a full statement of the facts" to substantiate its charges.

The Soviet reply to the Iranian complaint, dated 24 January argued that the question could and should be settled by means of bilateral negotiations, declaring at the same time that the events in Azerbaijan had no connection with the presence of Soviet troops, "as the indisputable and entirely objective facts bear witness" but were exclusively Iranian and internal, "the aspirations of the population" of northern Iran "for national autonomy within the limits" of the Iranian State, "which is nothing unusual for a democratic State." Vishinsky's letter also observed, however, that "the anti-democratic program activity, hostile to the Soviet Union, on the part of the reactionary forces" in Iran was creating "a danger of organized hostile actions, diversions and so forth" for Soviet Azerbaijan and Baku. The result of the Council's debate was to some degree disappointing to the Iranians since they were again left

²(Byrnes' speaking frankly. pp 18-21; Bevin in the House of Commons, 21 Feb 1946).

to their own devices, the Council referring the matter to direct negotiations between Russia and Iran.

In the meantime a cabinet crisis occurred in Iran. It was largely due to new Soviet pressure expressed by the severance of all trade between Azerbaijan and the rest of the country. The economic strain thus created was intolerable. Despairing of his ability to settle the quarrel with the Russians and yielding to persuasion, Premier Hakimi resigned on January 22 and the Majlis elected as Prime Minister, Qavam Saltaneh, who since his term as Prime Minister in 1942-3, had entered into a tactical association with the Tudeh Party and had used his local influence in their favor in the 1943 elections. He brought to the handling of affairs an assuredness and energy which many Iranian politicians lacked; and, though he now claimed in an interview to have no bias for or against any foreign nation but to be concerned only with serving Iran, he had been hailed in Iran for some two months as the one man capable of negotiating with the Russians. He received a friendly reply from Stalin to messages which he sent to the Big Three on assuming office, and on 18 February left in a Soviet aircraft to lead an Iranian mission to Moscow. He stayed in the Soviet capital from February 19 until March 11 but failed to reach an agreement. During these two and a half weeks he saw Stalin twice and Molotov four times.

Meanwhile the General Officer Commanding the British forces in Iran and Iraq stated that the remainder of the British troops in Iran would duly leave on the stipulated date, 2 March. On 1 March, however, Moscow Radio announced that the Iranian Prime Minister had been informed in Moscow, four days before, that the Soviet forces would be withdrawn, with

effect from 2 March, from the north eastern provinces "where the situation is relatively quiet, but that the Soviet forces in other parts of Iran will remain there pending clarification of the situation." In Teheran all ninety-six of the deputies present in the Majlis (the Tudeh fraction absenting themselves) cheered a speaker who called for a vigorous protest against this announcement, and in Moscow the Iranian Prime Minister sent Molotov a letter of protest.

The U. S. Government, who had not hitherto taken the lead in the dispute over Iran, was now roused to action. It stated in a note to Moscow dated 6 March that it could not remain indifferent to this decision to retain Soviet troops after the date stipulated by the 1942 treaty. The British Foreign Office also had not failed to press, through its Moscow Embassy, for an explanation of the continued presence of the Soviet forces in Iran.

Upon his return, Qavam Saltaneh told press correspondents that his negotiations in Moscow had produced no result. The Soviet Government had been unable to accept his main and pressing demand for the withdrawal of their demands, which were subsequently stated to be as follows:

(1) Soviet troops would continue to stay in some part of Iran for an indefinite period.

(2) The Iranian government would recognize the internal autonomy of Azerbaijan. If the Iranian government acquiesced in this request, the Soviet government offered to take steps to arrange that:

(a) The Prime Minister of Azerbaijan, in relation to the central government, would bear the designation of Governor General.

(b) Azerbaijan would have no Ministry of War or Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

(c) Thirty per cent of the Azerbaijan revenue would be paid to the Iranian central government.

(d) All correspondence with the central government would be in Iran.

(3) The Soviet government would abandon its demand for an oil concession. Instead it proposed that an Iranian-Russian joint stock company be set up with 51 per cent of the shares owned by the Soviets and 49 per cent by Iran.

Qavam said that he hoped for new negotiations about the Soviet troops when the newly appointed Soviet Ambassador arrived in Teheran, and that when they had been withdrawn, he would reopen negotiations with Russia; but that only the Majlis could agree to this, and by a recent law there could be no elections for a new Majlis, which was to end its term on March 11, until all foreign troops had been withdrawn.

On 14 March a State Department official announced that if the Soviet-Iranian differences were not settled before the Security Council met on the 25th and the Iranian Government did not themselves raise the matter, then the U. S. would do so.³ The State Department understood that the Soviet charge d'affairs had warned the Iranian Premier that his overnment would regard an Iranian appeal to the Security Council as an "unfriendly act", and the U. S. Ambassador in Teheran thereupon confirmed that his own Government would take the matter up if the Iranian did not. There was a difference of opinion in the Iranian Cabinet on the

³James F. Byrnes, ep. cit., p. 126

tactics to be employed; but on the 18th the Iranian Ambassador to the U. S., Hussain Ala, brought the dispute to the notice of the Security Council for the second time. This time he accused the Soviets of keeping their troops in Iran despite their March 2 deadline for withdrawal and of continued interference "through the medium of Soviet agents, officials and armed forces."

For the Soviets the publicity of an international hearing in which they stood in the defendant's box was obviously most inconvenient. Their only hope lay in continuance of direct negotiations with the Iranian Premier, which might result in an agreement favoring their interests. This is probably the reason that suddenly Andrei Gromyko informed the Secretary General of the United Nations that movement of Soviet troops from Iran was expected, since negotiations between the two Governments were in progress, and his Government accordingly asked that consideration by the Security Council should be postponed until 10 April.⁴ On 20 March the new Soviet Ambassador, Ivan V. Sadchikov, arrived in Teheran and was reported to have given the Prime Minister a message from Stalin. On the 23rd the Prime Minister told a press conference that it was possible that as a result of direct negotiations the Soviet troops might begin to withdraw before the Security Council met in two days' time; meanwhile, he had instructed Hussain Ala to avoid any statements and actions likely to lead to further misunderstandings, which was taken to be a rebuke for Ala's letter of the 20th objecting to the Soviet request for delay in the Security Council proceedings. On April 4, the day of the Council's decision

⁴U. N. Security Council: Official records.

to defer further proceedings, the Soviet Union and Iran concluded an agreement that comprised the following provisions:

(1) The Red Army was to be evacuated within one month and a half after March 24, 1946.

(2) A joint stock Irano-Soviet Oil Company was to be established and ratified by the Fifteenth Majlis within seven months after March 24.

(3) With regard to Azerbaijan, since it is an internal Iranian affair, peaceful arrangements will be made between the Government and the people of Azerbaijan for the carrying out of improvements in accordance with existing laws and in benevolent spirit toward the people of Azerbaijan.

The details concerning the oil company were contained in the letters exchanged on the same day between Qavam and Sadchikov, the new Soviet Ambassador to Iran. The Soviet government would acquire 51 per cent and the Iranian government 49 per cent of the company's stock. The agreement would be valid for twenty-five years, after which the Soviet and Iranian governments would each possess 50 per cent of the stock. This agreement would hold for another twenty-five years.

Thus a settlement was reached between Iran and Russia, but at a heavy price. The British press regarded it as a Soviet triumph and even suspected that a secret agreement might be hidden behind it. The comment of the London Sunday Dispatch of April 7 was typical of British editorials. "Russia got most of what she wants in fact, if not in form, while Soviet troops were still in Iran. The oil agreement will not be formalized until the Iranian Parliament gives its consent. But there is no such parliament and the next elected will, it is understood, contain a sufficient number

of pro-Soviet deputies to insure that the oil concessions go through."

The Soviet government, now that the oil agreement had been made, was interested in bringing about an agreement between the central government of Iran and the Azerbaijan rebels as soon as possible. Such an agreement would permit Azerbaijan, as an Iranian province, to send a substantial number of deputies to the Majlis, who, together with other pro-Soviet elements, would ensure the ratification of the oil deal. On his part Qavam, anxious to reach an agreement with Tabriz, announced a program for the return of Azerbaijan to the jurisdiction of the Iranian state.

On 22 April Teheran Radio broadcast the central Government's proposals for Azerbaijan. It stated that the heads of departments would be selected by the Provincial Council and confirmed by the Central Government. A Governor-General would be appointed by the Central Government in agreement with the Provincial Council. The Commandant of the gendarmerie would be appointed by the Central Government. The official language would be Iranian. . . .The activities of democratic political organizations and workers' unions in Azerbaijan would be free. . . .No action would be taken against the people or workers of Azerbaijan in respect of any part taken by them in the "democratic" movement. A bill would be submitted to the next Majlis to increase the number of deputies from Azerbaijan to correspond with the real population of that province.

An Azerbaijan mission, wearing the uniforms of their "National Army" arrived in Teheran on the 28th. They were led by Jaafar Pishevari. The negotiations were protracted and on 3 May Tabriz Radio, which had all along been displaying a defiant attitude towards Teheran announced that a

twenty-years' treaty between the "National Governments" of Azerbaijan and Kurdistan had been signed on 23 April.

A fortnight in Teheran, however, brought no result from the mission. Pischevari insisted on three points unacceptable to Qavam. These were (1) the right of the Azerbaijan government to appoint a governor for the province; (2) the distribution of state-owned land to the peasants; and (3) the appointment of commanders of the Azerbaijan army and gendarmes by the Azerbaijan government.

On 6 May Hussain Ala informed the Security Council that official investigations by his Government had shown that the evacuation of the northeastern and Caspian provinces by Soviet troops was complete. His Government had been informed "through other sources" that the evacuation of Azerbaijan would be completed before 7 May; but, because of the interferences previously complained of, Iran Government officials had exercised no effective authority in the province since 7 November 1945 and had therefore been unable to verify these reports by direct observation; they would report to the Council as soon as they were able to ascertain the true state of affairs. They were accordingly asked (the Soviet delegation again resentfully absented itself) to make a further report by 20 May. A majority on the Security Council, led by the U. S. and Britain, had on 15 and 23 April ruled that the Iranian case should remain on the agenda until 6 May, despite the Iranian Government's withdrawal of their complaint on 15 April in "complete confidence in the word and pledge of the U. S. S. R. Government." This had led Gromyko to protest with injured innocence "that certain States consider Iran as a sort of pawn, which may be moved in any direction, depending upon circumstances and upon

the political game which is being played at the moment. . . . Efforts to use Iran as small change in the bargaining game of international politics can serve no good purpose."

On the 11th Tabriz Radio announced that the negotiations with the Central Government had broken down; and warned the central government that any attempt by Iranian forces to invade Azerbaijan would constitute a breach of the agreement with the Soviet Union, and that the Azerbaijan national army is now ready to fight against the "enemies of freedom."

The break in negotiations with Azerbaijan leaders in Teheran was not ginal. Both sides had good reasons for desiring a settlement. On May 17 talks with Pischevari were reopened, this time at Tabriz. The Iranian mission was headed by Muzaffar Firuz, Director of Propaganda under Qavam, who throughout the whole crisis maintained a decidedly pro-Soviet attitude. On June 14 a ten-point agreement was finally concluded. Its provisions were:

- 1 - The Azerbaijan parliament will become a Provincial Council.
- 2 - The Provincial Council will make four nominations for the Provincial Governor General, and the central government's Minister of Interior will appoint one of them.
- 3 - The Azerbaijan army will be incorporated into the Iranian army with a commission arranging details.
- 4 - Azerbaijan's irregular soldiers will become part of the national gendarmerie.
- 5 - The Provincial Treasury will receive 75 per cent of Azerbaijan taxes, with Teheran receiving the rest.

6 - Using Azerbaijan labor, the central government will build railways between Miuanah and Tabriz.

7 - The Teheran government will assist in establishing a proposed Azerbaijan university.

8 - Both Iranian and Turkish will be recognized as official languages, and primary school instruction will be given in each.

9 - The government will pay for private lands confiscated by the Azerbaijan regime for distribution to the peasants and will approve the distribution of public lands.

10 - Election laws will be revised to establish parliamentary representation on a population basis.

The agreement was undoubtedly a victory for the Communists. While preserving the nominal authority of Teheran over the province it conceded virtually all the wishes of Pischevari; the most important controversial points - land distribution, selection of the governor, armed forces, taxes, and parliamentary representation - were solved in favor of the Azarbaijan regime. The fact that the negotiations that led to the agreement were conducted by Firuz, a man of doubtful loyalty, and not in Teheran but in Tabriz, where they were reportedly under the benevolent eye of the Soviet Consul General, was not without significance.

First of all, in fulfillment of the agreement, Qavam appointed a new governor general for Azarbaijan. Pischevari himself did not obtain any public office, yet as chief of the Democratic party of Azerbaijan he remained the virtual boss of the province.

Meanwhile, in the chief towns of Iran, thousands of opportunists had been enrolling themselves as trade unionists or members of the Tudeh as

being evidently the party of the future, while in the country districts the Tudeh claimed with considerable exaggeration the formation of peasants' unions everywhere and "veritable peasant's revolts" in some areas, with refusals to pay rents, looting of the landlords' granaries, and seizure of their land.

On 1 August Qavam formed a new Cabinet, in which Muzaffar Firuz, now openly pro-Tudeh, became Vice-Premier and Minister of Labor and Propaganda; and in addition, included three Tudeh members. They were Iraj Iskandari, Minister of Commerce and Industry; Dr. Keshavarz, Education; and Dr. Morteza Yazid, Health. Significantly, however, Qavam retained for himself the key portfolios of the Interior and Foreign Affairs. This cabinet had many characteristics of classical Communist infiltration into the governing apparatus of a non-Communist country. Such penetration usually began with granting to the Communists industrial, labor, education, and propaganda agencies and ended by conceding to them the key portfolios of Interior, Defense, and Foreign Affairs.

Meanwhile a Moscow radio commentator was reported to have said, "The attitude of the Soviet Union towards Iran is one of such friendship as has seldom been found in all history between a great state and a comparatively small one" and to have gone to criticize conditions in the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's Concession in the southwest Iran province Khuzistan, where the British authorities were accused of obstructing the Tudeh-dominated trade union and all "democratic" parties and organizations.

Simultaneously a general strike broke out in the section owned by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. In fact, as early as 1942-3, the Tudeh party had sent agents to Khuzistan with orders to stir up dissatisfaction

among the workers in the oil fields and in the great refinery at Abadan. These agents had strict instructions to act discretely, however, and not to cause any major upheaval as long as the war continued, so as not to jeopardize the flow across Iran of the war material that Russia urgently needed and the Western Allies were supplying, including aviation gasoline from the Abadan refinery; but the agents had been told to arrange for large-scale disturbances to occur in Khuzistan as soon as possible after the end of the war, when the Allied supplies of material to Russia would have ceased.⁵ The strike occurred at Abadan in mid-July. It involved 100,000 native workers and resulted in 17 killed and 150 wounded among the company's European and native personnel. The strikers were led by Reza Rusta, a Tudeh leader prominent in Iranian trade unions. The Iranian military and police forces thereupon intervened and soon restored order; the strikers, however, refused to return to work. On 10 July Muzaffar Firuz arrived from Teheran at the head of a government commission, and persuaded the strikers to return to work by promising them wage increases and other advantages, and also releasing on bail five of the Tudeh leaders whom the local Iranian military governor had arrested. Afterwards, in order to appease the Tudeh representatives who had been taken into the Iranian Cabinet, this governor was court-martialled for the steps that he had taken to restore order during the strike. The strike also resulted in the loss of more than 300,000 tons of oil and endangered general production. Thus Communist influence was felt not only in Teheran, but also in the southern

⁵Dr. Lawrence Lockhart, The Cause of the Anglo-Persian Oil Dispute.

areas, vitally affecting the security of the British Empire and the smooth operations of the British Navy.

b. BRITISH REACTION AND RETURN OF AZERBAIJAN. It was characteristic of the Iranian political situation that nothing that happened between Iran and the Soviet Union could remain of indifference to Britain. In Iran, the extension of Soviet power into the government itself and into the south was a point on which the British were adamant, and called for vigorous action.

The London Times diplomatic correspondent commented on 3 August 1946 that British employees of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company were still dissatisfied with the Iranian Government's provisions for the maintenance of law and order. The British Admiralty had on 17 July ordered three warships to Iraqi territorial Waters in the Shattul-Arabi off Abadan, as was permitted under the Anglo-Iraqi treaty of 1930; and on 2 August the government of India (then still under British control) announced: "In order that they may be at hand for the protection, should circumstances demand it, of Indian, British, and Arab lives, and in order to safeguard Indian and British interest in South Iran, troops are being sent from India to Basra". On the following day the Iranian Government issued a statement criticizing the British action, on the ground that they were fully capable of managing their internal affairs without outside interference. But simultaneously reports reached Teheran that the British protege, Sheikh Khazal of Mohammora, who had lived in exile in Iraq, had gathered a force of Arab warriors and raided Khuzistan. This appeared to be a British-sponsored separatist movement in the south which could be interpreted as a countermove to the separatism incited by the Soviets in the north. More-

over several tribal chieftains in the south announced that they were very critical of the Tudeh and its increased influence. A few days later the Iraqi independence party demanded the return of Khuzistan to Iraq, arguing that the province, inhabited mainly by Arabs, should return to an Arab country. In turn a news dispatch from Baghdad said that one of the leading chieftains of Khuzistan, Sheik Abdullah, had arrived in the Iraq capital enroute to Cairo to protest to the Arab League against the mistreatment of Arabs by the Iranian government.

On the other hand, reports were heard about Soviet military concentrations north of the Azerbaijan border. On the 8th of September it was announced that a Bakhtiyari plot with the aim of overthrowing the government was reported in Isfahan "with foreign help." On the 20th a rising of the Qashgai and other tribes in the Southern provinces was reported. A coalition of Qashgais, Bakhtiyaris, and several minor tribes from Fars, Khuzistan and the Gulf Coast was formed. Three days later the provincial governor arrived in Teheran with a list of demands which the tribal leaders, and urban personalities opposed to the Tudeh, had drawn up at Shiraz, the provincial capital. They called for the resignation of the Tudeh ministers from the Cabinet, and the same degree of provincial autonomy that had been granted to Azerbaijan in June. At the same time the rebels captured Bushire, ~~Abadan~~, Kazerun, and besieged Shiraz. The revolt spread even to Kerman, from which a petition signed by a number of religious leaders reached the government, demanding elimination of the Tudeh from the Cabinet and public life.

New York Times, on 24 September commented on the situation: "Long and carefully laid British plans to detach the oil field from Persia and

incorporate them into Iraq appear to be maturing. The tribesmen who have seized ports of the Persian Gulf are well armed, and it was not their own government which provided them with sub-machine guns, rifles and ammunition . . . It is known that representatives of these tribes have recently made visits to Basra, where British H. Q. is situated. . . An atmosphere in which it will be possible for the British to carry out their threat to send troops across the frontier to 'protect British lives and property.'"

The Moscow radio and press openly accused the British of instigating this revolt. Three British officials were special targets of Russian anger. They were Colonel Underwood, British military tribal expert; Alan Charles Trott, Consul General at Ahwaz; and C. A. Gault, Consul General at Isfahan.

The Tudeh press afterwards alleged that at the end of August the Iranian Government had come into possession of a document revealing a secret conference of Bakhtiyari and Qashgai chiefs and British agents in the presence of Trott, the British Consul-General of Ahwaz. Anxious lest their gains in Teheran be erased, the Russians dispatched to Iran the Chief of the Middle East Department in the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This dignitary was reported to have pressed the Iran Government for speedy ratification of the oil agreement and also to have proposed an alliance with the suggestion that Iran withdraw from the Saadabad Pact of 1937.

The visit of the Soviet official was not without effect. On September 28, the Iranian government asked the British to investigate charges against both the afore-mentioned consuls and on October 1 it formally demanded the recall of Trott. The day before, the revolting tribes had presented a 24-hour ultimatum to the mission that the government had sent to Fars. Facing such an uncompromising attitude, the government mollified its stand,

and two weeks later a settlement was reached with the chiefs of the tribes. The government recognized most of the tribes' demands. In such a situation the Tudeh propangandist afterwards wrote, "the Tudeh party's collaboration with Qavam longer had no meaning. On 16 October, in accordance with the decision of the Party's Control Committee, the three Tudeh Ministers refused to take part in the work of the cabinet."⁶

Qavam reformed his Cabinet on the 19th, dropping the three Tudeh ministers and also Muzaffar Firuz, whom he appropriately appointed Ambassador to Moscow.

From the British viewpoint the tribal rebellion fulfilled its aims. The spread of Tudeh influence in the south was arrested and Communist infiltration into the nerve center at Teheran was ended. On June 30 Qavam announced the formation of a new political party which, with oriental cunning, he called the Democratic party. This Democratic party had nothing in common with its namesake in Azerbaijan and was composed exclusively of pro-Qavam and non-Communist elements. The new party has destined to play a major role in the forthcoming elections to the Fifteenth Majlis.

Meanwhile the date of 24 November, by which Qavam had undertaken in April to submit the draft Soviet-Iranian oil agreement to the Majlis for ratification, was rapidly approaching. One of the purposes of the visit to Teheran of the head of the Middle Eastern department of the Soviet Foreign Ministry at the end of September had presumably been to hasten this, and on 6 October it had been officially announced that the Shah had signed

⁶Abbas Iskandari, Moyen Orient, Oct-Nov 1950, pp. 13-14

the decree for the elections. There was still considerable discussion about when they should begin, however, the left wing dutifully calling for speed, the conservatives urging postponement on account of the unsettled conditions in the provinces.

On 4 November the Prime Minister announced that the elections would begin on 7 December, and on 21 November he further stated that "in order to ensure freedom of voting and to suppress possible disturbances" they would be held under the supervision of government forces throughout the country including Azerbaidjan. This certainly was a courageous policy, because it meant the introduction of the Iranian Army into Azerbaijan, and the challenging of the status quo in the province.

Two days later, after a conference between the Shah, the Prime Minister, and the army commanders, the "Democrat" Governor-General of Azerbaijan was informed that this decree would apply to his province also. Amid violent protests from Tabriz, the United States Ambassador, George V. Allen (Deputy Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs in the Department of the State, who was appointed Ambassador to Iran) announced on the 27th:

"It is the well-known policy of the American Government to favor the maintenance of Persian Sovereignty and territorial integrity. This principle is embodied in the United Nations Charter.

"The intention of the Persian Government to send its security forces into all parts of Persia, including any areas where such forces are not at present in control, for the maintenance of order during the elections, seems to me an entirely normal and proper decision."⁷

⁷Daily Telegraph, 28 November 1946

This attitude was confirmed by the U. S. Acting Secretary of State, Dean Acheson.⁸

On the same day, it was reported that the Soviet Ambassador left his sick-bed to protest to the Shah and the Prime Minister against the governments' "unfriendly policy"; the Soviet Union could not "look with favor on bloodshed in Azerbaijan". He reminded the Premier of the still-pending oil agreement. But Qavam's action had adroitly posed the Soviet Union with two mutually exclusive alternatives; either having a Majlis elected as a preliminary to the submission of the oil agreement for ratification, or to maintain the Communist regime in Azerbaijan at the price of an indefinite postponement of ratification. To combine both alternatives it would be necessary to invade Iran again or at least to threaten an invasion; and Russia's foreign policy in general had recently ascribed both to the resistance which the United States and Britain had shown to her aggressive demonstrations since the end of the war and to the acute internal difficulties arising from the reconstruction of her war-ravaged economy.

On November 24, encouraged by the manifestations of a more determined and co-ordinated western policy, the troops were ordered to march into Azerbaijan to supervise parliamentary elections. Meanwhile, Qavam rejected a suggestion by the Azerbaijan Provincial Council that the central government should content themselves with sending inspectors and press correspondents to watch the conduct of the elections by the provincial authorities, and proclaimed on 3 December that the opening of the elections was postponed until the 11th. In reply Tabriz Radio announced that the provincial

⁸New York Times, 11 December 1946.

"Government" had distributed arms to all workers, members of the "national militia" and youth associations and, alleging that the Central Government's troops had crossed the provincial boundary, made the rousing declaration: "after all our efforts and bloodshed for the creation of our republic, we will defend it to the last drop of blood".

But apart from a few minor skirmishes, the Azerbaijani-Democrats were unable to put a stop to the central army's advance, and the government troops crossed the provincial border on the 10th meeting with only slight resistance from opposing forces. After entering Miyanah on the following day they received news of the capitulation of the "Democrats". Resistance now petered out, except from isolated groups of enthusiasts, and the government troops entered Tabriz on the afternoon of the 13th. Pischevari escaped to the Soviet Union. Some time afterwards he was reported killed in a motor accident at Baku. A number of Democrats followed him across the border, and the rest dispersed.

At the same time the government army captured the Kurdish stronghold of Mahabad. Qazi Mohammed, the president of the Kurdish Republic, and his brother were caught and, after a trial, shot. While Mulla Mustafa and about a thousand of his followers succeeded in crossing the frontier into Soviet Azerbaijan, the triumph of the government was complete. Azerbaijan was reunited with the rest of the country exactly a year after separation.

On 13 December a mob of Azerbaijan expatriates in Teheran, exultant at this news, destroyed the democrat party headquarters. The party's newspapers, Rahbar and Zafor, were suppressed, their clubs attacked and closed, and their power reduced to impotence in the capital.

The road was thus opened for parliamentary elections. These began on January 11, 1947, and were concluded in most districts by February. Yet it was only in the middle of August that the Fifteenth Majlis was finally inaugurated.

Qavam's Democratic party won a substantial majority of seats. The opposition led by Dr. Mossadegh counted about twenty-five deputies. The Communists won two seats. The first week of the Majlis was spent on routine business. Simultaneously, behind the scene, there was feverish political activity preparatory to the inevitable debate on the oil agreement.

On 12 August the Soviet Ambassador handed to Qavam a draft treaty on the lines of the oil agreement of April 1946. Six days later Qavam was reported to have told him that he disliked the terms of the agreement and could not force the Majlis to ratify it, whereupon the Soviet Ambassador Sadchikov, on 28 August, handed him a note drawing attention to his Government's violation of the agreement and describing their actions as "a return to the policy of hostility and discrimination against the Soviet Union pursued under the Government of Reza Shah, and under the government of Saed," which succeeded it.

Once the Soviet Government's failure to withdraw their troops from Iran by the stipulated date had aligned the United States Government with the British Government in resisting the Soviet Cold War in this sector, there was for eighteen months no apparent divergence between British and United States policy over Iran; but a divergence was now to appear which was fraught with important consequences for future years. The British Government was apprehensive that, if the Iranian Government were encouraged

to reject outright the Soviet demand for the joint development of the oil resources of northern Iran, their latent nationalism might be tempted to challenge the Anglo-Iranian concession in the south,⁹ and in the first week of September the British Ambassador handed Qavam a note which recommended that:

"The Persian Government might be well advised to leave the door open for further discussion ... the Persian Government should not give a blank refusal and leave the matter at that. If they could not accept the Soviet draft treaty-because it was put forward as a demand - they might leave opportunity for revised and fairer terms to be presented."¹⁰

Meanwhile, on 11 September the United States Ambassador in Teheran made a statement which Iranian opinion interpreted as full encouragement to reject the Soviet proposals outright:

"Certain rumors and allegations have appeared concerning the attitude of the United States in this matter, and I have been asked to state my Government's position.

"The American Government has frequently made known its respect for Iran's sovereignty. An important aspect of sovereignty is the full right of any country to accept or reject proposals for the development of its resources.

"Iran's resources belong to Iran. Iran can give them away free of charge, or refuse to dispose of them at any price, if it so desires.

"The United States has no proper concern with proposals of a commercial or any other nature made to Iran by any foreign government, as long as those proposals are advanced solely on their merits, to stand or fall on their value to Iran.

"However, we and every other nation of the world do become concerned when such proposals are accompanied by threats of bitter enmity" (Associates of Qavam had stated on the previous day that the Soviet ambassador had warned him that the Russians would consider Iran a "bitter blood-enemy" if the Majlis did not ratify the agreement,¹¹ and would make statements that it would be dangerous for Iran to refuse).

⁹New York Times, 13 September 1957

¹⁰London Times, 15 September 1947

¹¹New York Herald Tribune, 11 September 1947

"The United States is firm in its conviction that any proposals made by one sovereign government to another should not be accompanied by threats or intimidation. When such methods are used in an effort to gain acceptance, doubt is cast on the value of the proposals themselves . . .

"The United States had dedicated its full energy and resources to freeing the peoples of the world from the fear of aggression. Our determination to follow this policy is as strong as regards Iran as it is anywhere else in the world. Patriotic Iranians, when considering matters affecting their national interest, may therefore rest assured that the American people will support fully their freedom to make their own choice!"¹²

This statement was undoubtedly of capital importance as far as the policies of Qavam and the Majlis were concerned.

The Soviet Ambassador handed Qavam on 15 September a second note couched in "extremely severe" terms demanding that "delaying tactics" should be abandoned; the Soviet press and radio kept up a violent campaign of abuse and misrepresentation directed against both the Shah and the Iranian Government.¹³

At last, on 22 October, after Qavam had given the Majlis a lengthy account of his negotiations with the Soviet Union by a vote of 102 to 2 despite loud objection from the communist deputy Abbas Iskandari. Instead, a bill, introduced by Deputy Rez-Zadeh Shafag and sponsored by Aavam himself, was adopted containing the following provisions:

(a) Iran will explore her own oil resources during the next five years with her own capital.

(b) The Premier's negotiations for an oil agreement with the Soviet Union were null and void.

(c) Iran will not be permitted to grant any concession to foreign powers or to have foreign partners or assistance in oil exploration.

(d) If oil is found in Iran within the next five years, the govern-

¹²New York Times, 12 September 1947

¹³New York Herald Tribune, 12 September 1947

ment might negotiate with Russia with a view to selling oil.

(e) Iran must negotiate with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company to obtain a higher share of its profits.

On November 20 a third note sent to Qavam by the Soviet Embassy accused the Iranian government of hostile activity against Russia, and hinted at the possibility of a rupture of diplomatic relations.

The events just after world war II in Iran such as the artificially engineered Azerbaijan rebellion, the strikes and violence in Khuzistan, the infiltration of Communists into the central government, and the episode of the oil concession prove that the Soviet Union has not renounced her plans for revolutionary and imperial expansion into and through Iran. On the other hand, Britain's classical counteraction through tribal revolt in the south and the appearance of Indian troops at Basra, as well as her continued general interest, seem to indicate that the role of Iran in overall British strategic and political concepts has not changed.

Under these pressures Iran frequently looked toward the United States, an entirely new factor with its importance for political and economic developments in the Middle East.