

THE TRIUMPH OF DIPLOMACY.
JAMES BYRNES AND THE IRAN CRISIS OF 1946.

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Chapter Four

“A Full Scale Combat Deployment”

The March 2, 1946 deadline (mutually agreed upon at the London CFM) for the Soviet evacuation came and went without any sign that the Red Army was preparing more than a token withdrawal from northern Iran. Instead, while Qavam was in Moscow negotiating with Stalin and Molotov, the Kremlin issued a defiant statement that Russia would await "clarification of the situation" rather than evacuate Azerbaijan and Gilan, the most important provinces in their occupation zone. Only Khorasan, Gurgan, and Mazandaran provinces would be vacated. Then reports began to arrive in Washington from Robert Rossow, the American vice-consul stationed in Tabriz, that rather than leaving, the Soviets had surreptitiously sent substantial reinforcements into Iran including tanks.¹ The Soviets had been funneling reinforcements into Azerbaijan for some time (although denying it publicly) but Rossow's reports were particularly distributing news: the only possible purpose for Soviet tanks could be offensive and the quantities and secrecy implied a major undertaking.

On March 3, Rossow observed "450 Soviet trucks heavily laden with supplies, mainly ammunition, departed Tabriz toward Tehran." The next day, he noted twenty tanks and one hundred trucks departed Tabriz in the same direction while forty-six of the vaunted T-34 medium tanks arrived in the Azerbaijani capital city.² Minor elements of the Red Army occupation garrison were leaving—along with some 16 Sherman tanks left over from Lend-Lease—but experienced combat troops and tanks were taking their place. Minor Soviet troop withdrawals from northern Iran were being offset by the introduction of heavily armed reinforcements into Azerbaijan. Several truckloads of Soviet infantry headed out toward the Iraqi border supported by nine tanks and cavalry while a column

¹ Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 314-315; Gholam Reza Afkhami, *The Life and Times of the Shah*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 96.

² Robert Rossow (Vice Consul at Tabriz) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 3/5/1946, telegram # 761.91/3-546 in *Foreign Relations of the United States. Near East and Africa, 1946*. Volume VII (Hereafter cited as *FRUS*, Vol. VII) p. 340.

of tanks set out toward the Turkish frontier.³ At the same time, Soviet ground and air forces in Bulgaria were deploying for combat operations, almost certainly aimed at Turkey.⁴ Rossow eventually estimated that the Soviets introduced 500 medium and heavy tanks into Iran during the month of March—an impressive show of force by any standard, then or now.⁵ Rossow's reports would soon be placed into question by a skeptical press claiming he was too inexperienced to be credible and was probably panic stricken. In later years revisionist historians would amplify that critique by attributing Rossow's supposedly questionable reports to an effort to feed the Washington hardliners what they wanted to hear. An examination of developments in Azerbaijan province and the Kurdish zone during this period, however, verify the substance of Rossow's alarming reports that triggered the firm responses from Washington never before exhibited in American-Soviet relations. They woke Byrnes from his semi-apatetic feelings about Iran and launched his new policy of firmness toward Moscow. Indeed, Rossow's reports (substantiated by other sources in Tabriz) spoke with unmistakable clarity: as the deadline for withdrawal was reached, the Red Army was on the move into not out of Azerbaijan province and Moscow was directly sponsoring armed separatist movements hostile to the Iranian government. The degree of force being deployed indicated some strategic objective which Rossow believed was Tehran and beyond.⁶

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Contrary to the *zeitgeist* of the Roosevelt era, Rossow believed that the American-Soviet alliance during the war was a marriage of convenience that would go bad resulting in divorce after the defeat of the common enemy. When that happened he wanted to be in the neighborhood: "I requested Teheran because I felt that things were going to be taut and active and lively around the perimeter of the Soviet Union."⁷ Once in Iran he further

³ Robert Rossow (Vice Consul at Tabriz) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 3/5/1946, telegram # 761.91/3-546 in *Foreign Relations of the United States. Near East and Africa, 1946*. Volume VII (Hereafter cited as *FRUS*, Vol. VII) p. 340.

⁴ Michael Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*. (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 30.

⁵ Robert Rossow, "The Battle of Azerbaijan" *The Middle East Journal*. (Winter 1956, volume 10), 19.

⁶ Michael Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*. (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 31.

⁷ Rossow quoted in Peter Lisagor and Marguerite Higgins, *Overtime In Heaven. Adventures in the Foreign Service*. (Garden City, NY: Double Day and Co., 1964), p.137.

requested assignment to the consulate in Tabriz.⁸ It was a one man post yet being in Azerbaijan province would meet his goal of working very near the Soviet frontier. He may not have known that Iranian-Azerbaijan would be the first public battle between Moscow and Washington following the war but he knew it would be somewhere along the border, probably a spot with outstanding issues lingering from the war. For a man who wanted to be in the thick of things he made a wise choice, one that catapulted him into a level of prominence far beyond what his years (he was 27 at the time) and junior rank would normally have warranted.

Had Washington been paying attention during the course of the war Rossow's reports would not have come as so great a surprise. As early as February 1943 both Wallace Murray and J.D. Jernegan, assigned to the newly formed Iran desk at the State Department, warned of credible reports emerging from Azerbaijan that the Soviets were covertly supporting a pro-separatist campaign in Azerbaijan against the authority of the central government in Tehran; the Red Army was keeping Iranian government officials out of the Soviet occupation zone; pro-Soviet parties and persons in the north were receiving favorable treatment while loyalist to the regime in Tehran were under intense pressure and bullying to switch teams or leave; the introduction of Soviet political officers for the purpose of ideological indoctrination of the local population and advisors for the establishment of a Stalinist Five Year Plan; and that the Soviets were using grain shipments out of the bread basket of the country to Tehran to intimidate the shah's regime; etc. Murray and Jernegan further warned that events had progressed to the point that "*a soviet [republic] could be established overnight in Azerbaijan if the Russians gave the word.*" Prophetically Murray and Jernegan concluded that the developing

⁸ Bertel Kuniholm, Rossow's predecessor as vice-consul in Tabriz had been sacked by Washington because the Soviets claimed he was too anti-Soviet. His crime in the eyes of the Kremlin was gathering evidence of blatant interference in the internal affairs of Iran by the Soviet occupation authorities. These were activities that with rare exceptions his superiors at the State Department choose to ignore. Few in Washington were paying attention to reports from Iran and if they did they seldom cared to entertain anything that contradicted the official Soviet versions of events. Indeed, following the soft Soviet policy established by FDR, throughout the war no American diplomat in Iran filled a formal complaint on this issue even though the evidence was mounting of extensive Soviet interference in Iran's internal affairs. [Arthur Millspaugh, *Americans in Persia*. (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institute), 186; Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 318.] Like the veteran Kremlinologist Loy Henderson, Kuniholm was one of several highly qualified but skeptical men removed by Washington from important posts to appease Soviet sensibilities. The consequence of these actions placed the United States at a disadvantage in preparing for the postwar world including Iran.

situation would "...justify fears that Iran may prove a danger point when we come to the post-war settlement."⁹ They were ignored in 1943 but the mood in post-Rooseveltian Washington was changing and when Rossow was assigned to the consulate in Tabriz, reports about Azerbaijan province were finally receiving the attention they warranted. Moreover, they were now reports that were based in part on Rossow's direct investigation of activities in Azerbaijan province and thus could not easily be dismissed as exaggerations cooked up by informers or nervous reports from ill trained amateurs, Rossow having served in the OSS.

At the start of 1946 Rossow was increasingly alarmed by events in Iran and he believed his superiors should be as well. On February 11 he informed Washington that, far from preparing to leave Iran, the Soviet military had been signing long term contracts with locals for supplies.¹⁰ On March 6, he contacted Washington with a telegram that stressed the gravity of the situation in Iran: "All observations and reports indicate inescapably that Soviets are preparing for major military operations. Soviet troop reinforcements continue arriving night and day by truck and rail from Soviet frontier, and are being constantly deployed from here." All Russian troops departing Tabriz to other points in Iran, he continued, "are equipped for combat."¹¹ The next day, having observed the unloading of Soviet tanks and ammunition cases off rail cars in Tabriz, Rossow telegraphed a coded message to Washington which detailed what he had witnessed and concluded with an ominous warning that left no room for doubt: "*I cannot overstress the*

⁹ Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 158; John R O'Neal, *Foreign Policy Making in Times of Crisis*. (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1982), 80-81. Murray and Jernegan were also critical of the British colonial attitude in the south of Iran yet it was undeniable that it was the USSR that was sponsoring separatist factions in the north; closed their occupation zone to nearly all outside contact; and was suppressing any political activity in their zone that was deemed "anti-Soviet" none of which could have been said of the British who maintained a relatively open occupation zone and where the pro-Soviet Tudeh party operated. Nor where the British doing anything that implied they were planning to keep their military in Iran after the war. British attempts to recruit southern tribes (mostly Arabs who resented Tehran's campaign of Persianification and who in any case identified with Iraq) to support a British zone in the south if it came to that were meager compared to the Soviet sponsorship of the separatists factions in the north. More important was their support to the National Will party, an anti-communist and anti-secular party. Yet that hardly ever achieves the same level of influence as the Tudeh. [Nikki Keddie, *Modern Iran. Roots and Results of Revolution*. (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2009), 109.]

¹⁰ Robert Rossow (Vice Consul at Tabriz) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 2/11/1946, telegram # 891.00/2-1146 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 332-333.

¹¹ Robert Rossow (Vice Consul at Tabriz) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 3/6/1946, telegram # 861.24591/3-646 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 342-343.

seriousness and magnitude of current Soviet troop movements here. This is no ordinary reshuffling of troops but a full scale combat deployment.”¹² Rossow had been aware over the past several months, senior political commissars like Lt. General Atakshieff had secretly made their way into Azerbaijan province; their appearance could only be political i.e. to promote separatist political factions and those loyal or open to being aligned with the USSR. The insertion of political commissars flatly contradicted the official Soviet position that the Red Army deployment in northern Iran was for security purposes only. Now, at the start of 1946, there appeared not just political but fighting commanders. For example, the Soviet garrison commander, Lt. General Glinsky, was replaced by General Ivan Bagramian, a highly experienced military officer, who Rossow related to Washington had a “spectacular combat record,” (including the battle of Kursk, still the biggest tank battle in history) was the commander of the First Baltic Army during Second World War and regarded as the Red Army’s *premier* tank specialist.¹³ Bagramian was accompanied by a high level military staff.¹⁴ The course of events substantiated Rossow’s suspicions: over a three week period starting on March 4, Soviet tanks and armored vehicles were introduced into Azerbaijan province in increasing quantities. In deference to the sensitivities of the Russians, American intelligence gathering in Iran had been virtually non-existent during the war, a prohibition not reciprocated by the Soviets who regularly spied on the British occupation zone and the American PGC. The Russians maintained that wartime security dictated a policy restricting access to their occupation zone even by her allies yet when the war ended not only did the tight restrictions remain in effect they intensified. Even with diplomatic status Rossow (as well as most Western

¹² Robert Rossow (Vice Consul at Tabriz) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 3/7/1946, telegram # 861.24591/3-746 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, p. 344.

¹³ Robert Rossow (Vice Consul at Tabriz) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 3/6/1946, telegram # 861.24591/3-646 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, p. 342. Victor Sebestyen has recently revived the accusation that Rossow's reports were exaggerated or inaccurate this being one such example. Sebestyen claims that Bagramian (or Bagramyan) in fact was not in Iran and never left the Baltic at this time. [Victor Sebestyen, *1946. The Making of the Modern World*. (New York: Pantheon, 2014), 191]. Sebestyen, however, provides no evidence to confirm that Bagramian was indeed in the Baltic region and thus that Rossow was mistaken. He merely asserts it is the case whereas Rossow claimed eyewitness verification on his part.

¹⁴ Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 229. Hasanli also notes that at the same time the Soviet dispatched another top Soviet commander (F. Tolbukhin, Commander in Chief of Soviet Military Alignment) to Bulgaria to take charge of Red Army forces on the Turkish border. Tolbukhin, like Bagramian, was a veteran combat commander. [Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*, 229].

journalists) was denied official permission both from the Azerbaijani provincial government and the Soviet occupiers to travel freely in the province; to do so Rossow often resorted to outright violations of official restrictions or engaged in subterfuge. To supplement his direct observations (restricted by Soviet and Azerbaijani regulations) Rossow organized a network of informants.¹⁵

His flurry of urgent reports to Washington at the start of March was not the first time that Rossow had expressed concern about events in northern Iran. He had sent a pessimistic telegram to Byrnes on December 29, 1945 in terms similar to Truman's January 5 letter to the secretary of state: "Unless Soviet position can be altered, Iran government must accept the situation in Azerbaijan as *fait accompli*."¹⁶ On January 9, 1946, he warned Washington of an increasing number of heavily armed and menacing Red Army troops throwing their weight around Tabriz and pessimistically concluded that "...unless some sort of energetic action is taken, Azerbaijan must be written off."¹⁷ Abandoning Azerbaijan province was exactly what the Pentagon seemed willing to do. A January 31, report from the Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded: "Current Soviet moves with respect to Iran and Turkey appear to include the establishment of governments 'friendly' to the U.S.S.R., and bring these areas within the limits of the Soviet security zone. The recent *fait accompli* in Iranian Azerbaijan has virtually achieved Soviet aims in northern Iran."¹⁸ Although the report showed that American policy makers were starting to grasp the significance of Iran, it was out of sync with Truman's own thinking which rejected accepting any more accomplished facts from the Soviets *starting* with Iran whereas the Pentagon report states that the Soviet absorption of Azerbaijan province into the Russian sphere was indeed accomplished and implies Americans must accept it like it or not.¹⁹ However, the implication of the report's conclusion that Azerbaijan was only the first installment of a larger Soviet strategy to bring Tehran and Ankara under their umbrella

¹⁵ Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*, 347; Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 155.

¹⁶ Rossow quoted in Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 295.

¹⁷ Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 295.

¹⁸ Michael Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*. (New York: Free Press, 1992), 31.

¹⁹ That the American military leadership was willing to concede a Soviet sphere in northern Iran is a strong indication that the Pentagon was not spoiling for a fight with Russia in the region, indeed it was the reverse.

using Azerbaijan province as a launching pad, was in agreement with Truman's angry January 5 letter. Stalin had already put in a bid to for Russian trusteeship over Libya, parts of Spanish Morocco and he had begun to arm the Zionist insurgents fighting in Palestine. Pressure on Turkey to concede territory to Soviet Armenia was also intensifying. Azerbaijan province was the most overt manifestation of Stalin's probing into the region which during the war could be camouflaged under the catch-all justification of military necessity.

When the USSR occupied eastern Poland in 1939 they committed a massacre executing thousands of Polish army officers who were retreating in the face of the advancing *Wehrmacht*. Now in 1946, Rossow was receiving credible reports that persons critical of Moscow or loyal to Tehran or both were disappearing sometimes turning up across the border in Baku as "guests" of the Soviet regime, meaning *de facto* hostages, or not turning up at all. Rossow and others began to suspect a similar fate awaited the Iranian elites as that which had befallen the Poles. The same attempt to make an occupied country more dependent on Moscow by decapitating the local leadership Rossow suspected was now underway in Azerbaijan province.

The province had established a "People's Army" of Azerbaijan of around 4,000 troops wearing Red Army uniforms striped of Soviet markings. Their equipment and weapons were provided almost exclusively by the Soviets although in some cases weapons confiscated from the Iranian army were distributed by the Russians.²⁰ Some Azerbaijani leaders over the course of the past several months had been sent to Russia for military training and political indoctrination. The "prime minister" of the increasingly rebellious province was one Ja'afar Pishevari, a veteran communist who had been released from the shah's prisons under the amnesty declared after the Anglo-Russian invasion. Pishevari had been an agent of the Comintern for many years and was a dedicated Stalinist. Born in Azerbaijan, he had left for Baku in 1904, moved to Russia until the 1917 Bolshevik coup and then returned to Iran with the Red Army in 1918 becoming a minister in the ill-fated Soviet Republic of Gilan. Following the overthrow of that initial Soviet foothold in Iran, Pishevari returned to the Soviet Union and underwent

²⁰ Robert Rossow, "The Battle of Azerbaijan" in the *Middle East Journal*. Winter 1956, Vol. 10, 25.

substantial training followed by eventual dispatch back to his homeland as a Comintern agent. He was elected to the parliament in 1944 but his seat was immediately challenged. Credible accusations of Soviet sponsored ballot box stuffing in Azerbaijan combined with Pishevari's past high level association with the separatist Soviet Republic of Gilan placed his electoral victory in question. He did not help his case by engaging in over heated anti-government rhetoric even though the election that brought him to the Majlis was impugned on account of interference by the Russian occupying forces. His partisan antics alienated moderates in Tehran who might otherwise have supported him being seated in the legislature. In July 1944 his credentials were rejected by the Majlis and he lost his seat, a snub he did not soon forget.²¹ The composition of Pishevari's Azerbaijani government reflected their leader's loyalties. Most of his cabinet had either been educated and trained in the Soviet Union or had well established connections with domestic communists or both.²²

As we have seen, left leaning political prisoners (including those loyal to the USSR) emerged from prison cells under the amnesty declared by the more liberal minded Reza Shah Pahlavi following the Anglo-Russian invasion in 1941. Liberals, nationalists, reformers and moderates took advantage of the new atmosphere to launch newspapers and parties.²³ Yet, it was the communist movement that benefited more from the new atmosphere of tolerance than all the other camps combined. With their powerful Soviet patrons controlling the north; a more liberal environment in Tehran; the revival of trade unions which were fertile ground for communist agitation; the British in the south allied with Russia and seemingly unconcerned with anything outside of the giant oil refinery at Abadan; and the domestic right wing temporarily cowed, the communist movement flourished with little counterforce to tame it. Nowhere was this more evident than in

²¹ Faramarz Fatemi, *The USSR In Iran*. (New York: Barnes and Co., 1980), 58-59.

²² Nikki Keddie, *Modern Iran. Roots and Results of Revolution*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 111; Faramarz Fatemi, *The USSR In Iran*, 90. Dr. Salamollah Javid, minister of interior, was a veteran Iranian communist; General Jafar Kaviani, the minister of war, was from Soviet Azerbaijan; Mohammed Biriya, minister of education and Gholam Reza Elhami, minister of finance, had both been educated in the USSR; General Gholam Yahya Daneshyian was a native of Soviet Georgia who spoke no Farsi but was none the less placed at the head of the Fedayeen peasant militia. The head of the Azerbaijani provincial (now national) assembly was another seasoned Iranian communist, Ali Shabastari. The judiciary enjoyed no independence and was completely at the mercy of the executive.

²³ Nikki Keddie, *Modern Iran. Roots and Results of Revolution*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 107.

Azerbaijan (a province with a long history of radicalism) and in the Iranian capital. The Persian Communist Party attempted to capitalize on these advantages by softening its image. They joined in the in the pro-Allied campaign directed by Moscow by moderating their hostility toward the British in the south who are now embraced as "peace loving imperialists." They also dropped "communist" from their official title and from January 1942 what had been the Persian Communist Party was self-identified with the less ideologically loaded *Tudeh* or "masses" party. In September 1945, the Azerbaijan wing of the *Tudeh* followed the same logic and renamed itself the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan (*Firqah-I Dimokrat*) with Pischevari as its general-secretary. It was a thinly disguised maneuver: the old communist cadre remained well entrenched within the Persian Communist Party 2.0. It may not have been a completely voluntary move on the part of the Azerbaijani communists. According to *Tudeh* party leaders and Pischevari himself in his diary, Moscow had ordered the cosmetic change to a populist image to broaden the appeal of the communist movement in the province to include middle class Azeri radicals who might be alienated from Tehran and accepting social reforms but not necessarily attracted to communism or the USSR.²⁴ There is little evidence that that the Azerbaijani people were clamoring for this new party and even had they been, the occupying Red Army would never have allowed the formation of a political movement that did not have prior approval from the Kremlin. What Winston Churchill referred to in his "iron curtain" speech as a pattern of camouflaged communist movements emerging in Eastern Europe under the guise of populist or "democratic" parties was first anticipated in Iran and Azerbaijan province.²⁵ Oddly, the geographical and to some extent cultural split of the communist movement in Iran left that country in the unique position of harboring two official communist parties both endorsed by the Kremlin. The division of the communist movement by Moscow could easily be viewed as a strong indication that it was aiming to divide Iran. A separate Moscow centric communist party in Azerbaijan

²⁴ Ervand Abrahamian, "Communism and Communalism in Iran: The *Tudeh* and the *Firqah-I Dimokrat*" in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 1, No.4 (Oct. 1970), 291; Fatemi Faramarz, *The USSR In Iran*. (New York: Barnes and Co., 1980), 84; Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 274.

²⁵ Winston S Churchill, *Never Give In! The Best of Winston Churchill's Speeches*. (New York: Hyperion, 2003), 420-421.

would help to set the stage for a separate Azerbaijan, one designed to end up in the Soviet sphere.

Under which ever name, Soviet inspired political factions in Azerbaijan were proposing a social and political transformation composed of radical land reform, cultural liberation, nationalizations and a trajectory toward what they called deep autonomy but not yet formal independence.²⁶ Still few doubted that the Pischevari government would embark on its own foreign policy which was bound to be highly sympathetic toward the USSR. Indeed, according to some close to Pischevari, the establishment of the Democratic Party was motivated in part because he believed the Tudeh leadership in Tehran had not been radical enough in the past and not effective in achieving power thus justifying his own ideologically purity and muscle flexing. In addition, ironically like the old Shah, the Tudeh had not been particularly responsive to the culture of the Azerbaijani people promoting instead nationalism and Persianification demanding, for example, that all communications be conducted in Farsi and snubbing the use of minority languages.²⁷ The Tudeh's comrades in the provinces were treated as rubes leading to resentment by the latter. Communists in the countryside frequently felt as much ignored by their comrades in Tehran as the general population did by the national government, something that Pischevari was determined to reverse on both counts.²⁸ Once in power, Azeri, the Turkish based language of his people, became the official language of Azerbaijan province and

²⁶ Nikki Keddie, *Modern Iran. Roots and Results of Revolution*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 111. It is tempting, as some revisionist historians do, to say the economic, social and cultural transformation of Azerbaijan province as proposed by the Pischevari government and under Soviet sponsorship was little different from England's activities in the south of the country. Gholam Reza Afkhami correctly points out, however, that the Soviet sponsored plans for radical transformation were distinct from the British in the south. Whatever else one may think of the British occupation it maintained the *status quo ante bellum* both in culture, tradition and socio-economic and was not comparable to the disruption underway in the north. [Gholam Reza Afkhami, *The Life and Times Of The Shah*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 91]. If the British liked the traditional landlord friendly social structure the way it was they did intrude into politics. First they saved the monarchy by insisting on palace coup that replaced one shah with another shah and then they backed the formation of the right-wing National Will Party as a counter force to the Tudeh and communist led unions. Its stronghold was in the British occupied south. [Nikki Keddie, *Modern Iran. Roots and Results of Revolution*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 109.] The first instance it could be argued was a matter of military necessity to achieve to quickly stabilize Iran and thus begin the flow of war supplies to Russia. The second, however, was designed to protect their oil interests.

²⁷ Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 388.

²⁸ Ervand Abrahamian, "Communism and Communalism in Iran: The Tudeh and the Firqah-I Dimokrat" in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 1, No.4 (Oct. 1970), 291

forced Persianification by Tehran was unilaterally terminated.²⁹ The Azeri culture would now be allowed to flourish without fear of retaliation from Tehran. With Moscow weighing in on the side of the Democratic Party and the rebellious Tabriz government, the Tudeh leadership had little choice but to abandon their promotion of national unity and the supremacy of Persian culture. In reality the communist leadership centered in Tehran remained Persian chauvinists and their support for Azerbaijani nationalism, even when led by communists, was only halfhearted and largely to placate their patrons in the Kremlin.³⁰ Moreover, status played a role in their attitude and it is doubtful the Tudeh leadership ever gave up hope of reclaiming the sole franchise as the only pro-Soviet party in all of Iran rather than split it with the Azerbaijan communists. On October 19, Tudeh Party leader Reza Radmanesh explained the party line to the Majlis that the Democratic Party in Azerbaijan province was not a tool of the Soviets but that his comrades considered them to be allies and guardians. Ominously he added that Moscow could not remain indifferent to the fate of Azerbaijan province or the growth of “reactionaries” in Iran or the presence of “foreigners.”³¹ Keen powers of deduction were not required to conclude whom he meant by “foreigners” or the obvious contradiction that the Tudeh considered their Russian comrades to be exempt from that category. Moreover, he failed to explain why, at least officially, they welcomed the presence of American PGC during when the war was hot and not when it was over.

Under Democratic Party rule in Azerbaijan, pictures of the shah or favorable references to the monarchy were banned and sometimes replaced by portraits of Stalin while the Iranian national flag and anthem were also prohibited and replaced by Azerbaijani versions.³² Anyone loyal to the central government or opposed to the communist movement in the province fell under immediate and intense suspicion by the

²⁹ Nikki Keddie, *Modern Iran. Roots and Results of Revolution*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 111.

³⁰ Fatemi Faramarz, *The USSR In Iran*. (New York: Barnes and Co., 1980), 84. In spite of their common loyalty to the USSR, the rift between the Tudeh and the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan remained deep and long lasting. They did not reunify until 1960 about thirteen years after Pishavari's government was dismantled by the national Iranian government and army and Azerbaijani separatist schemes ended. [Ervand Abrahamian, "Communism and Communalism in Iran: The Tudeh and the *Firqah-I Dimokrat*" in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 1, No.4 (Oct. 1970), 291.]

³¹ Radmanesh quoted in Fatemi Faramarz, *The USSR In Iran*. (New York: Barnes and Co., 1980), 83.

³² Robert Rossow (Vice Consul at Tabriz) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 2/11/1946, telegram # 891.00/2-1146 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 332-334.

Soviet occupiers and if they owned firearms they often had their weapons confiscated.³³ Communications with the outside world, including Tehran, were subject to monitoring and censorship and infrequently interrupted in any case.³⁴ As Mark Etheridge observed in Eastern Europe the Soviets and their allies justified their crack down on Iranian liberals, social-democrats, academics, religious figures, nationalists, traditional conservatives, moderates and monarchists on the grounds that they were rounding up “fascists” and “reactionaries.”³⁵ Most of the large land owners, pro-government politicians (including governor of the province Saham-us-Soltan-Bayat) and better off merchants took the hint and beat a hasty retreat for Tehran. The Iranian army division stationed in the province surrendered to Pischevari's government without firing a shot.³⁶

In another effort to expand the appeal of his incipient people's republic, Pischevari reached back to the Bolshevik inspired Baku Congress (1920) announcing an Islamic *jihad* against the relatively secular central government in Tehran on the same day that Stalin delivered his “election day” speech in Moscow.³⁷ Although publicly Pischevari had thus far maintained the party line—carefully only implying formal independence for Azerbaijan—he clearly stated now that the all of the Iranian people should rise up against Tehran and overthrow the national government in the name of Islam.³⁸ On another occasion he addressed the central committee of his party and was not shy about his regional ambitions claiming that his government had been chosen by “world public

³³ Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 154.

³⁴ John R. O'neal, *Foreign Policy Making in Times of Crisis*. (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1982), 88; Manucher Farmanfarmaian, *Blood and Oil: Memoirs of A Persian Prince*. (New York: Random House, 1997) 176-177.

³⁵ At the Yalta summit Charles Bohlen had warned the American delegation to be leery of the Soviets constant use of the word "fascist." That label, he said, was used by the Soviets to identify anyone they did not like (e.g. social-democrats; conservatives; liberals; clergy, etc.) and that changed all the time. [Charles Bohlen, *Witness to History*. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), 191.]

³⁶ Nikki Keddie, *Modern Iran. Roots and Reustls of Revolution*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 111; Gholam Reza Afkhami, *The Life and Times of the Shah*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 93.

³⁷ Known in the West as the "election day speech" (election to the Supreme Soviet) delivered in the Bolshoi theatre, Stalin stated there would be no postwar liberalization of the economy. The new Five Year Plan would keep the USSR on a war footing with an emphasis on heavy industry not consumer production. There would be no shift away from arms production. Stalin also asserted that because the USSR survived the war and triumphed it was proof of the superiority of the communist system. [Kenneth Weisbrode, *The Year of Indecision, 1946*. (New York: Viking, 2016), 99.] It was a return to the thick Leninist ideology that had at least publically the Soviets had avoided during the wartime alliance with America.

³⁸ Robert Rossow, “The Battle of Azerbaijan” *The Middle East Journal*. Winter 1956, volume 10, 25.

opinion” to be the “standard bearer of democratic awakening not only in Iran but in the entire Near East as well.”³⁹

On February 14 Rossow had warned Washington that although Pischevari had not said so formally, his words were tantamount to a declaration of independence.⁴⁰ Pischevari’s thinking also took on a bizarre, ultra-left tone issuing a decree, for example, abolishing unemployment now and forever exclusively by executive order. To ensure compliance by the general population, his government established a secret police modeled on the Soviet NKVD although with the more innocuous sounding name “Society of Friends of Soviet Azerbaijan.” together with the real NKVD and SMERSH⁴¹, they launched a reign of terror in Azerbaijan featuring strong arm tactics, intimidation and kidnappings. Rossow recalled that “anyone who showed opposition or even reluctance was lucky to get off with only a pistol whipping and clubbing.”⁴² Pischevari’s other base of support was a “tough little professional Azerbaijani army” of a thousand or so soldiers, smartly dressed in Red Army donated uniforms and brandishing Czech sub machine guns, some light artillery and light tanks from the Soviets.⁴³ They were

³⁹ Pischevari quoted in Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 335.

⁴⁰ Robert Rossow (Vice Consul at Tabriz) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 2/11/1946, telegram # 891.00/2-1146 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 332-334. Revisionist historian Ervand Abrahamian claims that the Soviets sponsored "provincial" but *not* secessionist governments in northern Iran. [Ervand Abrahamian. *The Coup*. (New York: The New Press, 2013), 41.] Abrahamian's interpretation, however, is at odds with the established evidence. The quantity and quality of Soviet support for the regime (welcomed by Pischevari) strongly implies a plan to detach Azerbaijan province from Iran with the willing assistance of Pischevari's government.

⁴¹ SMERSH was a Russian acronym for "Death to Spies" an agency that was Stalin's own pet project. It amounted to a roaming counter-intelligence bureau with a license to kill at will suspected enemies of the USSR. It was officially disbanded at about the same time the Iran crisis was ending in mid 1946. That Pischevari's secret policy felt confident enough to call themselves the friends of "Soviet Azerbaijan" spoke volumes and is often overlooked by revisionist historians who claim Rossow's reports of separation objectives by Azerbaijan province and affiliation with the Soviet bloc were invented or exaggerated.

⁴² Robert Rossow, "The Battle of Azerbaijan" in *The Middle East Journal*. Winter 1956, volume 10, p. 19.

⁴³ Another source of weapons for the Azerbaijani armed forces was ironically the government in Tehran. During Operation Countenance the British captured a huge stock of rifles from the Iranian army. The Soviets requested the rifles for the Red Army then fighting for its life against the advancing *Wehrmacht*. The British did so thinking they would be used on the Eastern Front but they carefully recorded the weapons before they turned them over to the Russians. After the fall of the Pischevari government in late 1946 and the reassertion of Iranian national power into the renegade province the Iranian army found the rifles stockpiled in Tabriz. A check with the inventory lists the British had compiled when they were originally donated to the Russians left no doubt: the rifles had never left Iran but had been immediately stashed in Azerbaijan province and not used on the Eastern Front. It was further proof that as early as 1941 the Soviets had long term plans to linger in Iran and probably arm separatist rebels. At a minimum they

frequently and thoroughly drilled by Soviet advisors and participated almost daily in joint maneuvers with Russian troops.⁴⁴ (In contrast, the Iranian *gendarmerie* under Col. Schwarzkopf's tutelage had no such relationship with the American PGC which in any case was not a fighting force but logistical and technical. Indeed, the PGC leadership never expressed much enthusiasm for the *gendarmerie* or Schwarzkopf's mission.) Rossow observed some of the maneuvers which included extensive training with artillery, tanks, rocket launchers, and other offensive equipment although the Russians only allowed their Azerbaijani comrades to retain lighter weapons under their control.⁴⁵ Only moves approved by the Soviets were acceptable and without independent access to offensive weapons, the Azerbaijanis would have to seek Russian approval in advance for any aggressive actions. However, that did not stop Pischevari from talking about his strategic ambitions: "If necessary," he told his troops, "we shall go to Tehran and demolish the reactionary government which is suppressing our freedom."⁴⁶

The Soviets were obviously determined that their allies be trained and prepared if and when Moscow decided to endorse offensive actions. Aside from Soviet troops, the Azerbaijani military depended on support from a larger but less reliable popular militia or *Fedayeen* commanded by an officer native to Soviet Georgia. Like the Soviet army, the Azerbaijani military had powerful political commissars assigned to co-command units thus maintaining Democratic Party control over the armed forces. Rossow also observed thousands of Soviet Azerbaijanis appearing on the Iranian side of the border. Pischevari's

were keeping that option open. [Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 278-279, fn 188.]

⁴⁴ Robert Rossow (Vice Consul at Tabriz) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 2/11/1946, telegram # 891.00/2-1146 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 332-334; Robert Rossow, "The Battle of Azerbaijan" in *The Middle East Journal*. Winter 1956, volume 10, p. 25. At the start of February 1946, the military district of Baku in Soviet Azerbaijan dispatched 104 army officers of Azeri background across the border to Azerbaijan, several of whom, Hasanli notes, had been awarded the Hero of the Soviet Union medal. They joined 49 officers from the 4th Army (headquartered in Baku), 32 "military specialists" and 120 "special task officers" already dispatched to Azerbaijan province. The "military specialists" were present to assist in the formation of a "national army" in Azerbaijan province. In a report to Moscow, the communist party boss of Baku, M.J. Baghirov, in February said that 700 party members and military officers were present in Iranian Azerbaijan to train and guide partisan groups combating "reactionary" forces. [Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 206].

⁴⁵ Robert Rossow, "The Battle of Azerbaijan" in *The Middle East Journal*. Winter 1956, volume 10, p. 25.

⁴⁶ Pischevari quoted in Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 217. In this speech Pischevari threatened to march on Tehran no less three times in one paragraph.

government classified them as *muhajirs* or “refugees” but it was clear to Rossow that they were imported from Baku, posing as locals, with orders to bolster Pischevari’s armed forces.⁴⁷ George Kennan had warned that the Soviets would employ “fissionist techniques” in Iran and Turkey as they had in Eastern Europe: manipulating ethnic differences to peel-off territory on the Russian borders and incorporating them into the Soviet Union. He had written to Washington that “...Soviet fissionist techniques seems to be based on racial affinities transcending the Soviet border.”⁴⁸ Given that ethnic minorities startled the whole border of the USSR it was a target rich environment. Reza Shah's Western inspired reforms and centralization policy had been aimed at creating a modern nation state yet they also exacerbated tribal, regional and ethnic differences because they came with heavy doses of Persian cultural chauvinism in the name of national unity and progress the latter being defined as Westernization.

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Contemporaneously, the Iranian Kurds recognized their hour had arrived. Indeed, at the end of the war the Kurdish nationalists in Iran issued a statement that the moment had arrived "to take advantage of the liberation of the world from fascism and to share in the promises of the Atlantic Charter." Like the nomadic and other non-Persian peoples of Iran, the Kurds had been subjected to the most extreme version of Reza Shah’s de-tribalization campaign to bring about a national loyalty to the central authority and adoption of Persian culture that prohibited both the official use of their language and traditional dress. Kurdistan was also officially demoted as a province following the Great War.⁴⁹ On January 22, Qazi Mohammed, with obvious Russian approval and support in the form of a jeep load of Red Army officers from the local garrison, wielding Tommy guns and himself clad in a Russian army uniform topped with a turban, announced an “Autonomous Kurdish Republic” centered in the mountain town of Mahabad. He thanked the Soviet Union for their support and pledged loyalty to the Kurds' new Russian friends

⁴⁷ Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980). 309; Lisagor, Peter and Higgins, Marguerite. *Overtime In Heaven. Adventures in the Foreign Service*. (Garden City, New York: Double Day and Co., 1964), 144.

⁴⁸ George Kennan quoted in Thomas Hammond, (Ed.) *The Anatomy of Communist Takeovers*. (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1976), 454.

⁴⁹ Kevin McKiernan, *The Kurds*. (New York: St. Martins, 2006), 51; Ervand Abrahamian, "Communism and Communalism in Iran: The *Tudeh* and the *Firqah-I Dimokrat*" in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 1, No.4 (Oct. 1970), 296,

which was reciprocated by much fanfare on Radio Moscow. Indeed, it was the first and only time a Kurdish republic had been established and recognized by a great power. Qazi Mohammed also embraced the Pishavari government in Tabriz as comrades with a common grudge against Tehran and common friends in the Kremlin. The announcement was followed by the traditional multiple volleys of gun fire and endless dancing without which no Kurdish celebration would be complete. The Kurdish flag was raised and a tiny national parliament of 13 members established. Like their counterparts in Tabriz, they were supplied with surplus Red Army uniforms minus the Soviet markings.⁵⁰

Qazi Mohammed was a charismatic figure from a respected Kurdish family. Although he asserted affinity with Pishavari in Tabriz there were some crucial differences: Pishavari was trained as a professional Comintern agent but Qazi Mohammed was an Islamic law judge; Qazi Mohammed's goal was limited to national independence for the Kurdish people whereas Pishavari aimed at radical social and economic reform if not revolution combined with independence. That agenda pointed to the incorporation of Azerbaijan province into the Soviet system. The American operative Archie Roosevelt jr. observed that Qazi Mohammed was “a man of deep convictions, backed with a rare courage and self-sacrifice, but tempered with broad-mindedness and moderation.” The Soviet position in Iran, the growing and intense hostility between Moscow and the Tehran government, and Russian sponsorship of an Azerbaijani separatist movement, all represented a unique moment for the Kurds to press their cause. It was an opportunity they did not intend to pass up. Kurds from throughout the Middle East followed events in Mahabad closely, expressed sympathy for their brethren in Iran, especially the younger generation who often regarded the established Kurdish leadership as too conservative and ineffective—unwilling to take the kind of bold adventure that Qazi Mohammed was embarking on.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Christiane Bird, *A Thousand Sighs, A Thousand Revolts: Journeys in Kurdistan*. (New York: Random House, 2005), 274; Bruce, Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 305; Archie Roosevelt, Jr. “The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad” in *The Middle East Journal*. July 1947, volume 1, p. 257.

⁵¹ Roosevelt, Archie, jr. “The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad” *The Middle East Journal*. July 1947, volume 1, 257; Christiane Bird, *A Thousand Sighs, A Thousand Revolts: Journeys in Kurdistan*. (New York: Random House, 2005), 274-275. Kurds from Iraq, fighting their way out of a fight with the British, crossed over into Iran and joined the newly declared Kurdish Republic centered in Mahabad. Armed with weapons captured from the British, they were led by Mullah Mustafa Barzani. When Soviets troops eventually

Iranian Kurds fell within the Soviet occupation zone during the war and they generally kept a lid on Kurdish separatism both to satisfy their American allies (to the limited extent they were paying attention to Iran) who promoted national unity and central authority in Iran but more importantly because Russian influence with the Kurds was far more tenuous than with the Azerbaijanis. The Kurds were suspicious of all outsiders and the Soviets were no exception. Moreover, communist parties in the region had rarely championed Kurdish independence or even autonomy. Instead they advocated assimilation of the Kurdish people into the majority population and the superiority of the dominant language and culture which in Iran was Persian. As a result the communist parties—a vital political conduit for Soviet influence—had little influence among the Kurdish people anywhere in the Middle East. Further, tribal leaders among the Kurds recognized a threat to their authority from foreigners even if they, as in the case of the Russians, were at odds with Tehran. During the course of the wartime occupation, however, the Russians did not directly challenge tribal authority or even maintain much presence in the Kurdish enclave as long as internal order was maintained and food provided for their military.⁵² Over time if the Soviets intend a long stay in Iran and perhaps beyond, they would have to establish communist political influence in the Kurdish zone, as they had among the Azeri people, to support their aims. That would certainly result in a clash with the authority of the tribal leadership. Yet, if the Iranian-Kurdish bid for independence or even autonomy required support from one of the great powers if they were to be successful they would have to seek it from the Soviets. For their part, the Soviets would have yet another weapon in their war with Tehran and perhaps another client state from which they could penetrate into Turkey which had its own large and discontented Kurdish population.⁵³

The Americans barely paid attention to the Kurds but they did consistently promote national unity in Iran and looked unfavorably on separatism by any minority.

withdrew from Iran, Barzani was offered political asylum in the USSR. He readily joined the retreating Soviet troops streaming back to their frontier. [Kevin McKiernan, *The Kurds*. (New York: St. Martin's, 2006), 52.]

⁵² Roosevelt, Archie, jr. "The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad" *The Middle East Journal*. July 1947, volume 1, 248.

⁵³ Bruce Kuniholm. *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 380.

The British also supported a unified Iran in theory but were not beyond backing separatist factions in the south if and when it suited their ends, which of course was always reduced to one thing: the steady flow of cheap oil to the Royal Navy. The Kurds had little relationship to oil in the south of the country (or anywhere else in Iran) making British support highly unlikely especially since a successful Kurdish movement in Iran would likely spillover into the Kurdish areas of Iraq where England did have also have established interests again reducible to oil. A successful Kurdish nationalist movement could also inspire other such movement in the British Empire, an after effect that Whitehall would have preferred to avoid. For the Iranian-Kurds that only left the Soviet Union as a great power they could turn to for support. It was a symbiotic relationship: both Russia and the Kurds wanted a weakened national government in Tehran and thus create an environment favorable to their aims.

Kurdish suspicion of Russia was deep, as they recalled the Russian army's harsh treatment of the Kurds during the Great War combined with the resentment of an atheistic society by a religious people and an historic distrust of outsiders. However, America came to view the Kurdish separatist movement, at least in Iran, as part of the Soviet program rather than a marriage of convenience between two otherwise unlikely partners. That was an error by Washington since it inhibited breaking off the Kurds from their relationship with the Russians and Pishvari's government in Tabriz perhaps with a proposal for deeper autonomy that was guaranteed not to benefit the USSR. America's commitment to national unity simply would not allow for an arrangement that would have appealed to the otherwise anti-communist Kurds. In any case, Qazi Mohammad's profuse thanks to the Soviets did not help to allay fears in Washington. For their part the Iranian Kurds felt ignored by everyone but Moscow and Tehran and the latter's attention was always negative: enforcing Westernized dress codes established by the old shah; restrictions on the Kurdish language and customs; forced acceptance of Persian culture; etc.

On August 16, 1943 several young middle class Kurds founded the *Komala-i-Zhian-i-Kurd* or Committee of Kurdish Youth. The Komala represented the nucleus of a new nationalist party that restricted its membership exclusively to Kurds and promoted a pan-Kurdish homeland. Although centered in Iran, the Komala's influence spread to Iraq,

Turkey and Syria.⁵⁴ A pro-Soviet left-wing developed within the Komala and communist leaning Kurds were granted the freedom to distribute leftist and Soviet propaganda in the Russian occupation zone whereas non-communists, almost certainly the overwhelming majority of the Kurdish population, were encouraged to remain silent except on purely nationalist issues. Qazi Mohammad became the chief representative of this left wing of Kurdish nationalism, the Kremlin's man in the Komala. It was necessary support yet the Komala leaders were reluctant to include him due to his radical politics, his loyalty to a foreign power, his authoritarian bent and resentment of his prominent family. Although the program of the Komala expressed no affinity with communism or atheism and proposed that all members of the Big Three be treated equally, and even though the Soviets were not initially prepared to promote Kurdish nationalism, the Komala inevitably fell into Moscow's orbit.⁵⁵

Like some of their comrades in Azerbaijan, several dozen younger Kurdish guerrillas were shipped to the Soviet Union for military training at a service academy. Arms and technical support were promised by the Soviets and they built the Komala a new auditorium for gatherings and administration. As the Russians set up friendship and cultural societies in Azerbaijan similarly they established Soviet-Kurdish societies (*Anjoman-i-Farhangi-Kurdistan-u-Shuravi*) in Mahabad which, of course, operated as a vehicle for Russian political and military influence.⁵⁶ "The walls of the building in which his [Qazi Mohammed] government was housed," an observer noted "were plastered solidly with Soviet propaganda posters; his newspapers and magazines contained a large proportion of Soviet material translated word for word into Kurdish; and his poets composed panegyrics to Stalin and the Red Army."⁵⁷ Friendship and cultural exchange for the Soviets was a one way street. Rossow reported that cultural organizations and events often were just a pretext for Soviet and Azerbaijani or Kurdish officials to

⁵⁴ Christiane Bird, *A Thousand Sighs, A Thousand Revolts: Journeys in Kurdistan*. (New York: Random House, 2005), 174-175; Kevin McKiernan, *The Kurds*. (New York: St. Martins, 2006), 51.

⁵⁵ Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 154.

⁵⁶ Archie Roosevelt, Jr. "The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad" in *The Middle East Journal*. July 1947, Vol. 1, 252.

⁵⁷ Archie Roosevelt, Jr. "The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad" in *The Middle East Journal*, 264.

“accidentally” run into each other and thus coordinate actions and exchange information.⁵⁸

Perhaps because the Soviets had a minimal presence in the Kurdish enclave and communism had limited appeal to the Kurds, the socialist agenda being advanced by the Pischevari government was absent in Mahabad. Unlike Tabriz, speeches in Mahabad frequently and profusely thanked Russia for support and friendship but they rarely advocated land reform, collectivization, class warfare and no radical social agenda was carried out by the separatist Kurdish government. One American observer noted that “...in contrast to the rest of Azerbaijan, Kurdistan was to outside appearances free of Soviet agents. Aside from a few Iran-Sovtrans truck drivers, Soviet citizens were almost unknown in the area and Soviet agents kept under cover.” Russian operatives were certainly on the ground but not overtly in control as they were in Tabriz and their influence was limited.⁵⁹ The Mahabad government shared a common goal with Moscow of undermining the central government in Tehran; the Soviets had also implied that they favored the establishment of a pan Kurdish state crossing the Iraq, Turkish and Iranian borders—the long cherished dream of all Kurds. Sympathy and cooperation with Russia was genuine but based on realism rather than ideology and was mixed with a healthy distrust of foreign powers, an attitude shared by Kurds throughout the region. Plenty of photos of Stalin were on display but the presence and influence of the Red Army and Soviet political officers in Mahabad (often Muslims or Kurds from Soviet Azerbaijan) although real was never as great as in Tabriz.⁶⁰ One of the few Americans to visit Mahabad while the Kurdish Republic was still in operation was the embassy military *attaché* Archie Roosevelt Jr.⁶¹ In September 1946, having seen both Tabriz and Mahabad,

⁵⁸ Robert Rossow (Vice Consul at Tabriz) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 2/11/1946, telegram # 891.00/2-1146 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 332-334.

⁵⁹ Archie Roosevelt, jr. “The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad” *The Middle East Journal*. July 1947, Vol. 1, 264.

⁶⁰ Archie Roosevelt, Jr. “The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad” *The Middle East Journal*, 251.

⁶¹ Rossow had been ordered by the embassy in Tehran to stay out of the Kurdish zone since they feared the Kurdish fighters might not respect his diplomatic rank or fears that the isolated region would be ideal for the Soviets to stage a provocation against him. [Wallace Murray (Ambassador in Iran) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 3/18/1946, telegram # 861.24591/3-1846 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 332-334.] Fortunately for decision makers in Washington, however, Loy Henderson's assistant Edwin Wright had spent six weeks in the Kurdish zone in the spring of 1945. His report, noted Bruce Kuniholm, proved invaluable to the State Department one year later. [Bruce Kuniholm, *the Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 320.]

Roosevelt was struck by the far more relaxed atmosphere of the latter over the former which had experienced a mini reign of terror under the Pischevari government. Not everyone agreed, however, that the Mahabad government or the Kurds were as innocent as they appeared. Rossow rejected Roosevelt's soft interpretation of developments in the Kurdish areas and concluded that Soviet influence there was strong; indeed, he labeled the Mahabad government a "People's Republic" and a "Soviet puppet regime."⁶² Roosevelt, however, had the benefit of direct observation of the scene in Mahabad and Rossow undoubtedly took the gratitude to Moscow paid by Qazi Mohammad too seriously.⁶³ Still, Rossow had a point; although not Stalinist like the Pischevari government in Tabriz, the Mahabad government had chosen a side to achieve their nationalist ends and that was with the Soviet Union.

Just as Rossow believed the reforms by Pischevari's government in Tabriz were necessary and long overdue so too the atmosphere improved dramatically for average Kurdish residents, liberated from Reza Shah's modernization, Europeanization programs and Persianification policy. "Mahabad itself," noted Archie Roosevelt, "from a typical drab-Persian provincial town, had become picturesque and colorful, its streets thronging with Kurds in national costume, free for the moment of the hated Iranian soldiers and gendarmes." Text books, school curriculum, newspapers, magazines and poetry in the Kurdish language also made an appearance in Mahabad, printed on a press donated by the Soviets. A Kurdish language radio station was founded as well as a national theater. The distinctive Kurdish culture was allowed to resurface and flourish without fear of retaliation from Tehran.⁶⁴

⁶² Robert Rossow, "The Battle of Azerbaijan" in *The Middle East Journal*. Winter 1956, volume 10; 21.

⁶³ Rossow may have also assumed, not without some justification, that if a movement gained Stalin's support it must *ipso facto* be communist and loyal to the USSR. That would have been in keeping with his track record. Stalin's support for non-communist movements was slim making support for the Kurds in Iran unlikely unless it had a communist friendly government. Yet, in what was a precursor of Nikita Khrushchev's policy of supporting radical nationalist but non-communist movements in the colonial world, the Soviets in this case did find common cause with the non-communist Kurds. Like Khrushchev's strategy a decade later, the criteria in this case not ideological affinity but a mutual interest in weakening the Western powers primarily the United States and England. Both the Kurdish nationalists and the Soviet communists aimed at undermining the pro-Western regime in Tehran (for the USSR to facilitate expansion into the Persian Gulf and for the Kurds to found the conditions for their independent homeland) making for a marriage of convenience.

⁶⁴ Archie Roosevelt, Jr. "The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad" in *The Middle East Journal*. July 1947, Vol. 1; 261-262.

Although theoretically united in a common cause of national independence, friction over territorial boundaries between the new Kurdish republic and Azerbaijan quickly emerged. Moscow attempted to gloss over with little effect. Indeed, initially Pischevari opposed Kurdish assertions of independence as a separate republic. Instead he proposed Kurdish cultural autonomy within Azerbaijan. The Russians overruled him and eventually forced a treaty between the two governments in Mahabad and Tabriz. The Soviets also insisted they provide mutual military assistance to each other “whenever necessary.” Thus, in spite of minimal sympathy among Iranian Kurds for the USSR, the latter had intervened with the communist Pischevari on their behalf.⁶⁵ Further, dealings with Tehran, the agreement continued, “will be conducted in the joint interest of the Azerbaijan and Kurdish national governments.” The Soviets were not reluctant to characterize the two governments as national and thus endorse the full-fledged independence that they told Washington and London they opposed. Both Mahabad and Tabriz were directed by the Kremlin to respect the cultures and languages of the respective peoples. The treaty concluded that anyone or group trying to separate the “historic friendship” between the Mahabad and Tabriz governments must be “destroyed,” meaning, of course, the central government in Tehran and any of their agents who promoted disunity between the two break away provinces.⁶⁶ It sounded good, but when the Pischevari government began to negotiate with Tehran without any consultation or consideration for the Mahabad government and indeed excluding them from the discussions—a violation of the Soviet backed treaty—the Kurds began to wonder if they had traded unequal minority status within the Iranian state for more of the same from the Azerbaijani government in Tabriz.⁶⁷

On September 12, 1945 Kurdish leaders had been gathered by Red Army Captain Namazaliev and told they were wanted in Tabriz by the Russian consul-general. Once in

⁶⁵ Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 181. Of course, Moscow may well have concluded an independent Kurdish republic in Iran might suit their interests better than an autonomous zone in Azerbaijan because the former would be more inspiring (and thus destabilizing) to the Kurds in Iraq and Turkey, two countries that were on Stalin's menu.

⁶⁶ Roosevelt, Archie, jr. “The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad” *The Middle East Journal*. July 1947, volume 1, pp. 258-259.

⁶⁷ Walter Laqueur, *Communism and Nationalism in the Middle East*. (New York: Frederick Praeger, 1956), 230.

the Azerbaijani capital the Kurds were packed on a train car and informed they had actually been summoned to Baku for a parley with the Soviet authorities. Grand strategy for the region that had been delayed during the war but now with the USSR victorious it could now be discussed. The conference lasted for several days and nights in between lavish dinners, the theater and the opera. The Soviets detailed the wrongs suffered by the Kurdish peoples in Iran and promised they would act in the Kurds national interests. The Tudeh which had themselves promoted Persianification of minorities and had never supported independent Kurdish nationalism, also received harsh criticism from the Soviets, no doubt to the great satisfaction of the assembled Kurds. It was a clever maneuver that earned Moscow credit with the Kurds. Yet, the Soviets were not thrilled with the Komala which although it had a pro-Soviet left wing still was not within Russian control. They advised the establishment of a Democratic Party modeled on the version headed by Pishevari. A renamed party would, it was implied, have a much greater appeal and higher probability of international acceptance and although they did not say so, a new broad based party would offer pro-Soviet forces greater opportunities to influence the leadership. Contrary to Moscow's formal obligation to avoid domestic interference, Kurds who did not support a new political party it was suggested, would find themselves at odds with the Soviet occupying forces and few doubted what that meant.⁶⁸ For their part, many Kurds made it clear that they no longer could be satisfied with mere verbal support from Moscow but required weapons and money—a step the Russians had thus far been reluctant to take. Soviet Azerbaijan President Baghirov, a close friend of the dreaded NKVD chief Lavrenti Beria, addressed the group and explained that the Soviet Union supported the nationalist and separatist aspirations of the Kurds and indeed all the minority groups in Iran, implying they intended to support a breakup of the country. Yet, it would not be prudent to launch a Kurdish rebellion at that moment because, said Baghirov, bigger things were in the works: Soviet grand strategy envisioned a Kurdish rebellion in Turkey and Iraq and nationhood should await the uprising of their brethren in these countries. In the meantime, Baghirov insisted that the Iranian Kurds view the

⁶⁸ Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 274-275; Archie Roosevelt, jr. "The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad" *The Middle East Journal*. (July 1947, volume 1), 253-254.

struggle as part of the Azerbaijani provincial rebellion and follow the lead of the Pishvari government. Given the evolution of events in the near future it was clear that the regional shake up Baghirov was referring to meant the Kurds would not have to wait long to receive Moscow's full approval. Baghirov promised money, artillery, tanks, advisors and machine guns would be provided to the Kurds in due course. Without direct knowledge of the meeting some months earlier, Rossow had sensed as much; he reported to Washington on March 5, 1946 that in Mahabad "Kurds are preparing to assert claim to Turkish Kurdistan and plan to commence military operations to that end soon."⁶⁹ When the Kurdish delegation left Baku each were each given a souvenir: a heavily framed color portrait photo of Stalin. They were not alone: portraits of Stalin had already begun to appear on prominent display in public places and even private homes throughout the Kurdish enclave.

After returning to Iran, Qazi Mohammad moved quickly to fill the Soviet prescription to transform the Komala into the Democratic Party modeled on the one founded by Pishvari in Tabriz. The new party program proclaimed the Kurd's desire to enjoy the fruits of victory over the Axis and the benefits of the implementation of the goals of the Atlantic Charter. Following the strong suggestions of the Soviets they did not demand independence at this point but rather semi-independence meaning home rule: making the Kurdish language official, protection of Kurdish culture, local policing etc. The program ended with a resounding call to arms: "Long Live Kurdish Democratic Autonomy!"⁷⁰ It was all a prelude to the official statement of total independence on January 22, 1946. By February the Soviets began to make good on their promise and delivered 5,000 firearms—including American Lend-Lease weapons—to Mahabad. There were no tanks or artillery but they thoughtfully provided "tank destroyers"—bottles of gasoline stuffed with wicks to hurl at enemy armor—a flammable cocktail mix named after the Soviet Foreign Minister, Vyacheslav Molotov. The Russians also thoughtfully provided a full set of instruments for a marching band perhaps in anticipation of a victory parade. It was a significant development for the Kurds;

⁶⁹ Robert Rossow (Vice Consul at Tabriz) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 3/5/1946, telegram # 761.91/3-546 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, p. 340.

⁷⁰ Archie Roosevelt, jr. "The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad" *The Middle East Journal*. (July 1947, volume 1), 255.

previously Soviet support had been private and mostly indirect. Contacts had been made by chief political commissar of Soviet Azerbaijan, Lt. General Salim Atakchiov and the Kurdish leadership had been wined and dined across the border. In early 1946 Moscow had dispatched Salahaddin Kazimov, a Soviet Army captain, to Mahabad to advise the Kurdish fighters.⁷¹

What Rossow had feared in January 1946 was materializing in March, at bayonet point. As word spread of the deployment of the Red Army reinforcements, panic gripped Tehran sending many packing to the south. The wealthy, big land owners, middle class professionals, national government officials and army officers, led the way. A small minority of the elite, like Qavam, himself a big land owner, made their peace with the Soviets and their property went unmolested. When the crisis grew more intense, Rossow was openly identified and denounced in the Russian media. His car was stopped and searched by Soviet soldiers even though he was a recognized diplomat stationed in Tabriz and a representative of one of the Big Three at that.

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Not all the social and political programs being implemented in Azerbaijan by the Pischevari regime were unpopular and many stood in refreshing contrast to the slow (or even non-existent) pace of reform promoted by Tehran. The expulsion of Reza Shah and his replacement with his son was a palace *coup* not a revolution. The old ruling class—big landlords, wealthy industrialists and large merchants combined with the army officer corps—remained intact and in control. The middle classes, professionals and intellectuals let alone the working and rural classes were denied access to real political power. One effect of Reza Shah's modernization programs had been to speed the growth of the professional and educated middle class but with the unintended consequence that their desire for political participation also increased commensurate with their growing economic importance. That was a concession that Reza Shah, however, was unwilling to make recognizing that it would ultimately result in a constitutional republic with himself, if he survived, as little more than a figure head.

⁷¹ William Eagleton, *The Kurdish Republic of 1946*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 41-45; 62-63; 74.

Land reform, improvement of the transportation network and public facilities, establishing schools, anti-illiteracy campaigns, nationalization of the banks (which left Pischevari's government flush with cash) etc., often met with popular approval both inside Azerbaijan and out. Reza Shah had willingly allowed Iran's agricultural regions to wallow in semi-feudalism rather than challenge the land barons with a reform program. Azerbaijan paid the lion share of taxes to the national state but got very little in return. Pischevari's government insisted the bulk of tax money would now stay within the province. Tehran dispatched Morteza Bayat to Tabriz to assess the situation. He publicly agreed with the people of the province that the national government had neglected their needs over the years but urged the Azeri people compromise with Tehran not a turn toward Moscow.⁷² Rossow agreed that many of the reform measures adopted by Pischevari were indeed welcome and necessary changes.⁷³ The State Department concurred; the political advisor to the America's United Nations delegation told Edward Stettinius "The people of Azerbaijan have just cause for complaint against the central government, whose administration in Azerbaijan has been oppressive, corrupt and inefficient."⁷⁴ The peasantry of Azerbaijan—the majority of the population—had been ruthlessly exploited by a largely absentee landlord class backed up by corrupt Iranian army officers, policemen and bureaucrats. Few, if any, among the Azerbaijani farming, laboring and middle classes missed the departure or isolation of these venal officials and parasitical landlords. Yet, Pischevari's strategy of turning to Russia for patronage alienated just as many of his potential supporters, particularly among the middle class for whom nationalism had as strong an attraction as social and political reforms and increased the anxiety in Washington which was now beginning to ask just where Pischevari's agenda ended.⁷⁵ Seeking direct assistance from outsiders was likely to upset many nationalists to begin with but Russia was all the more problematic both because of its alien Marxist-Leninist ideology, official atheism which offended Muslims and because, unlike the United States or even England, it was more likely, if given the

⁷² Faramarz Fatemi, *The USSR In Iran*. (New York: Barnes and Co., 1980), 88-89.

⁷³ Robert Rossow, "The Battle of Azerbaijan" *The Middle East Journal*. (Winter 1956, volume 10), 18-19.

⁷⁴ Faramarz Fatemi, *The USSR In Iran*. (New York: Barnes and Co., 1980), 79.

⁷⁵ Ironically, it could be argued that Pischevari was implementing Reza Shah's modernization policy. The old shah had been stuck with a harsh reality: modernization and independence required turning to an outside party other than Russia or England. He turned to Germany. Pischevari also realized that modernization and independence required an outside sponsorship although he turned to Russia.

chance, to stick around for a long time. A reform minded delegate to the Majlis expressed this nationalist sentiment when he stated in parliament that “The people of Azerbaijan are dissatisfied with conditions in the country but let me also remind you that few will revolt against the central government under the banner of a foreign power...”⁷⁶

The condition of the Azerbaijani capital of Tabriz was a case study of neglect by the national government. Reza Shah boasted about progress under his modernization program yet nearly all of the accomplishments were confined to Tehran, the one exception being the Trans-Iranian railway.⁷⁷ By the time he was deposed, Tabriz, one of the largest cities in all Iran with a population of one quarter million, had barely entered the twentieth century: roads, rarely paved, were for horses and donkeys only; modern buildings were few and most dwellings were dried mud huts; electricity and modern conveniences were infrequent if at all. It was a sad end to a city that had once been the vibrant center of all trade from Europe into Persia in the days before the opening of the Suez Canal shifted that route to the south.⁷⁸ It could be a colorful and romantic place to an outsider—especially when Red Army cavalry, distinguished by pale blue shoulder boards, great overcoats and fur caps, came galloping through the streets wearing sabers on their hips and tommy guns slung over their shoulders but daily life for Azerbaijanis was primitive and crude not picturesque. Yet, whatever the value of the long overdue socioeconomic reforms in Azerbaijan brought about by Pishevari, they were moves being taken in isolation from the rest of the country and under the supervision of a foreign power both factors that undermined what otherwise would have been a reform movement with popular support in the court of world public opinion.

Azerbaijan was the primary food producing region for Iran placing it in a strategic position to effect the direction of the nation with a social upheaval. In other words, politics was not local; a social and political revolution in Azerbaijan would almost certainly destabilize the country as a whole. A classified American military intelligence

⁷⁶ Faramarz Fatemi, *The USSR In Iran*. (New York: Barnes and Co., 1980), 88.

⁷⁷ Ironically the Trans-Iranian railway which linked the south and north of the country and perhaps the greatest accomplishment of the old shah's modernization project made “neutral” Iran an even more tempting target for the Soviet and British armies since it meant a line of communication from the warm water ports to the Soviet border already was in place in 1941.

⁷⁸ Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 317-318.

report in early 1946 confirmed this assumption noting that Soviet domination of the food growing provinces in Iran was “a lever of no mean value” in forcing concessions from an underfed Tehran.⁷⁹ Stalin had already demonstrated his willingness to use food as a weapon during the collectivization of agriculture in the USSR with brutal consequences for the peasantry. If a similar policy was implemented in Azerbaijan province the implication would then exist that the rest of Iran would have to be brought into line with the Sovietized north or force a north-south split of the country or face starvation from a food boycott by Tabriz. Stalin had said as much when he spoke to his Yugoslavian comrade Milovan Djilas in 1945 and announced the general principle that the Red Army would export the Soviet system wherever and whenever it occupied foreign territory. “It cannot be otherwise,” Stalin promised.⁸⁰ Had Tehran even been inclined to grant autonomy to Azerbaijan, to do so at gun point would have left the national government without any legitimacy, weakened and open to future pressures from without and within. Recognition of autonomy, at least under conditions of foreign military occupation, would not have been the end but the beginning. Both Rossow and Truman believed it would have presented to Ankara as proof that the Soviets could leverage major concessions from her neighbors at bayonet point.⁸¹

There was a dizzying and circular logic to the Soviet explanations for their conduct in northern Iran. If Azerbaijan and perhaps some Kurdish territory were allowed to separate from Iran then the Soviets could retain the Red Army in place claiming that they were not on Iranian soil anymore, no longer an occupying army, and thus not in violation of the 1942 treaty or subject to the 1943 Big Three Tehran declaration. Yet they would have had to violate those very documents to get to the point of being free of their constraints by sponsoring a separation of Azerbaijan from Iran. They would have violated Iranian sovereignty and independence in order not to violate it. The same Orwellian

⁷⁹ Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 152.

⁸⁰ Stalin quoted in Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 117.

⁸¹ Thus, Rossow noted that the newly proclaimed Kurdish People's Republic centered in Mahabad also claimed sovereignty over the Kurdish zones in southern and eastern Turkey. "Even the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic," he further noted, "got into the act with a claim, announced on March 5, on the northeastern Black Sea provinces of Turkey, including the port of Trabzon." [Robert Rossow, "The Battle of Azerbaijan" in the *Middle East Journal*. Winter 1956, Vol. 10, 17-32.]

reasoning applied when the Soviets consistently placed barriers in the path of American journalists attempting to visit the Russian occupation zone. The Soviets on the one hand vociferously maintained in diplomatic, political and media circles that reports of disturbances in Azerbaijan were grossly exaggerated if not outright invented in London, Washington or Tehran or all three. Yet, at the same time Westerners (especially journalists) and sometimes Iranians from the central government were routinely denied visas for entry into their occupation zone on the pretense that it was unsafe due to the very civil unrest then denied were taking place.⁸²

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On March 4 Byrnes met with Truman to consider the failure of Russia to leave Iran. Although not yet fully informed of the worrying reports of what was transpiring in Iran, Truman was concerned enough by what he did know to request a report from Byrnes. Iranian Ambassador Ala had already approached Byrnes on March 2 asking for a formal American protest to the Soviets about their activities in his country. Ala, however, was not acting with any instructions from his government so he was politely refused just as the Iranian ambassador in England had been put off at the inaugural sessions of the Security Council when he approached Byrnes for reassurances of American support.⁸³ The day following the conference with Truman and after contacting Prime Minister Qavam to confirm that Tehran had not asked the Russians to remain in Iran and desired that they leave immediately, Byrnes issued a protest to the Soviets that was delivered on March 6 to the Kremlin by George Kennan—the same day that Churchill delivered his “iron curtain” speech at Westminster College. The note, Truman recalled, was “diplomatically polite” yet firm.⁸⁴ It said that Red Army troops remained in Iran after the agreed upon date and that the Soviets were ignoring the vigorous protests of the government in Tehran to leave. Anticipating that the Kremlin would claim that Washington was not a signatory to the 1942 Tripartite Treaty and thus without any

⁸² Dean Acheson (Acting Secretary of State) to Wallace Murray (Ambassador in Iran), 1/19/1946, telegram # 891.00/1-1246, in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 304-305.

⁸³ James Byrnes (Secretary of State) to Wallace Murray (Ambassador in Iran), 3/3/1946, telegram # 861.24591/3-346, *FRUS*, Vol. VII, p. 336.

⁸⁴ Rossow characterized the note delivered on March 6 as a “*pro forma* protest.” [Robert Rossow, “The Battle of Azerbaijan” in the *Middle East Journal*. Winter 1956, Vol. 10, 17-32.] The second and sterner note issued by the State Department is detailed in Chapter Five, p. 200.

standing to protest what the Soviets did or did not do in Iran, the note reminded them that the United States was a party to the Tehran declaration of 1943 which, although vaguely, had outlined a future of independence for Iran and return to prewar sovereignty. As inadequate as that document had been it now proved it was better than nothing by affording Washington a formal basis for an American interest in seeing foreign armies leave Iran. Because of the 1943 Big Three declaration it could not be said to be a purely bilateral issue between Russian and Iran as the Kremlin would have preferred. Moscow's current activities in Iran violated that declaration; "...the decision of the Soviet government to retain Soviet troops in Iran beyond the period stipulated by the Tripartite Treaty," the note stated, "has created a situation with regard to which the Government of the United States, as member of the United Nations and as a Party to the Declaration Regarding Iran dated December 1, 1943, cannot remain indifferent."⁸⁵ The citation of the authority of the United Nations and the Big Three declaration on Iran would become crucial factors in the coming showdown. Yet, indicating that Washington did not consider the Big Three dead, the note called for a return to the wartime spirit of cooperation between the allied powers starting with Iran. The case of Iran, it was implied could be an exit for the Big Three or it could its renewal. Withdrawing from Iran, the note suggested, would help revive the halcyon days of the Tehran conference in 1943: "The Government of the United States, in the spirit of friendly association which developed between the United States and the Soviet Union in the successful effort against the common enemy and as a fellow member of the United Nations, expresses the earnest hope that the Government of the Soviet Union will do its part, by withdrawing immediately all Soviet forces from the territory of Iran..."⁸⁶ The note ended with a request for a speedy reply. Officially the Soviet government ignored the note leading to even more frustration in Washington.⁸⁷ The official Russian media dismissed the reports of new and substantial Soviet troop deployments into Iran as hysterical exaggerations, even surreal, claiming

⁸⁵ Harry Truman, *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman. Years of Trial and Hope*. (Garden City, New York: Double Day, 1956), 94.

⁸⁶ Harry Truman, *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman. Years of Trial and Hope*. (Garden City, New York: Double Day, 1956), 94-95.

⁸⁷ Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 320.

that the reports absolutely did not “correspond to reality.”⁸⁸ The Soviet media began a relentless campaign of counterattack on Churchill’s “iron curtain” address at this point, which Truman believed was partly designed to divert attention from the Soviet troop buildup in Iran.⁸⁹ Byrnes reacted to the Kremlin’s snub with the unusual step of releasing the American note to the news media. Byrnes was saying, in effect, that America would not be ignored. As his strategy evolved he would make the imbroglio public on more occasions signaling to Moscow that he would not allow the matter to be confined to the diplomats seated at the conference tables.

On March 4, Rossow received reports from his Iranian office staff that fifty trucks loaded with Soviet soldiers had left Tabriz for the outer boundary of the Soviet occupation zone at Karaj, about twenty miles from Tehran. At the same moment, the American air *attaché* in Tehran, Major Carl P. Garver, observed Soviet tanks being deployed at Karaj. The dominate view in Tehran was that a Soviet move on the city was imminent—probably in conjunction with turmoil created by the Tudeh inside the capital—sometime during the Iranian New Year holiday at the end of the month. Consequently Col. Schwarzkopf deployed the *gendarmarie* to protect Tehran.⁹⁰ The next day, Rossow’s staff also learned that the Soviets had sent a shipment of heavy forage to a village on the Turkish border with Iran, an ominous development since two of the Soviet divisions stationed near Tabriz were horse cavalry with artillery support. He was also receiving reports of Russian troop movements toward the Turkish and Iraqi frontiers. The obvious implication was that Soviet goals were region wide. Then the atmospheric Soviet cavalry units began to leave Tabriz and tanks began to appear. “Troops glutted the town [Tabriz]”, Rossow recalled, “the pale blue shoulder markings of the Soviet cavalry being almost entirely replaced by the red-piped black, with gold tank silhouette, of the Soviet armor. The streets and roads were clogged with military vehicles which supplanted the

⁸⁸ George Kennan (*Chargé* in the Soviet Union) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 3/15/1946, telegram # 851.24591/3-1546 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, p. 356.

⁸⁹ Truman, Harry. *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman. Years of Trial and Hope*. (Garden City, New York: Double Day, 1956), 95; Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 323.

⁹⁰ George Lenczowski, *Russia and the West in Iran*. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1949), 298; Rossow, Robert. “The Battle of Azerbaijan” *The Middle East Journal*. Winter 1956, volume 10. p. 20.

animals of the earlier occupation force.”⁹¹ Prior to the evacuation deadline Rossow had noted that the Soviet military presence in Azerbaijan, although large compared to the British and the non-combat American forces, was still not of an offensive character: three under strength divisions—one infantry and two horse cavalry—with only sixteen Sherman tanks and a few self-propelled guns that they made little effort to conceal.⁹² That would soon change both in quantity and quality. By mid-March, the *New York Times* reported that the size of the Soviet force in the north had doubled to 60,000 soldiers but other reports placed the figure at 75,000 with 30,000 alone stationed in Azerbaijan in addition to the copious amounts of tanks observed by Rossow and his staff. Soviet military aircraft had also been observed buzzing Tehran.⁹³

At this moment Rossow had heard that the new heavy tank known as the “Stalin” was spotted outside Tabriz. American intelligence knew little of this tank so Rossow on March 15, drove to the rail station in an attempt to catch sight of them. The nearest he could get to the rail yard did allow him to glimpse heavy tanks on rail cars which he assumed was the Stalin model. On the way back into Tabriz, an *impromptu* Red Army roadblock stopped Rossow’s car. A sergeant demanded that Rossow and his driver get out; the soldier spoke no English but made his instructions clear by brandishing his machine gun. The official consular car prominently displayed an American flag and Rossow replied to the Soviet by pointing at the flag and repeating “Amerikanski Kon-soool.” “When I tried to explain again who I was,” recalled Rossow, “the sergeant slipped the bolt of his Tommy gun, and I watched his finger come down on the trigger as the muzzle was lowered into my face.” Rossow realized compliance was the better of valor at the moment and bolted from the back seat. The Russians then searched the car and ordered Rossow into the front seat while the sergeant climbed in the back where he pressed the barrel of his machine gun onto Rossow's head. The Russian ordered Rossow’s driver to pull into the rail yard where they had earlier observed what they thought where the heavy Stalin tanks. Ironically inside the rail yard is exactly where

⁹¹ Rossow, Robert. “The Battle of Azerbaijan” *The Middle East Journal*. Winter 1956, volume 10, p. 20.

⁹² Rossow, Robert. “The Battle of Azerbaijan” *The Middle East Journal*. Winter 1956, volume 10, p.19.

⁹³ John R. O’neal, *Foreign Policy Making in Times of Crisis*. (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Pres, 1982), 88; David Robertson, *Sly and Able. A Political Biography of James F. Byrnes*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), 471.

Rossow wanted to be albeit under different circumstances. The car was parked within twenty five feet of what was indeed a Stalin tank. The sergeant disappeared into an office leaving Rossow to eye ball the tank and memorize as many details as he could while a variety of Soviet officers considered his fate. Rossow was undoubtedly pleased that he had achieved empirical confirmation that the Soviets were introducing heavy armor into Azerbaijan and of a type unfamiliar to Americans yet at the same time he could not shake the realization that his accomplishment would only be useful only if he lived to report it. It crossed his mind that the German consul in Tabriz had “disappeared” shortly after the Anglo-Russian invasion never to be heard from again. Rossow would be spared a similar fate when a Soviet officer appeared and gruffly questioned Rossow’s driver in Russian eventually ordering the vice-consul out of the area. When he returned to Tabriz, Rossow lodged a protest with the man he characterized as the “master mind” of the Azerbaijani separatist rebellion: Soviet Consul-General Krasnik. Krasnik apologized for the incident but also assured his American counterpart that there was no need to inform Washington over such a trifling matter. Of course, if their roles were reversed and Krasnik failed to report such a matter to higher authority his days would have been numbered. Indeed, contrary to Rossow’s belief that his Russian opposite was the “master mind” of the Azerbaijani rebellion in Iran it is highly doubtful that Krasnik did or said anything that was not preapproved by the Kremlin. In any case, Rossow did not consider the incident trifling and told his superiors that he had been arrested by the Russians. Washington responded by sending reinforcements: Farsi and Russian speaking assistants from the embassy in Tehran and a military *attaché*.⁹⁴

The assistant military *attaché* at the Tehran embassy—Captain Alex Gagarine—proved to be particularly useful to Rossow. Gagarine, prepared for anything, drove up from Tehran in a weapons carrier but he was disappointed to encounter little Red Army activity *en route*. He had crossed several military check points but had been passed through without difficulty—hardly verification of the major military operations that Rossow had reported. He strongly suspected, however, that since he was of Russian descent, spoke the language fluently and because he was wearing a sheep skin jacket

⁹⁴ Peter Lisagor and Marguerite Higgins, *Overtime In Heaven. Adventure in the Foreign Service*. (Garden City, New York; Doubleday and Co., 1964), 159-161; *FRUS*, Volume VII, 358-359; Rossow, Robert. “The Battle of Azerbaijan” *The Middle East Journal*. Winter 1956, volume 10, p. 18.

rather than his regular army uniform, he might have been mistaken for a Soviet officer. Not for the last time on his mission he had made no effort to correct any such misimpression by Russian sentries.

Gagarine again had reason to suspect that Rossow had exaggerated his reports when he arrived in Tabriz. The seemingly placid atmosphere hardly appeared that state of siege and reign of terror that the vice-consul had described. Gagarine had left Tehran fully prepared to accept Rossow's opinion that an aggressive Soviet campaign was in the offing yet he could not help being a bit skeptical of Rossow's judgment. Rossow quickly remedied Gagarine's doubts by inviting him on night surveillance mission around Tabriz. He had discovered that from the town's Islamic graveyard one could have an obstructed view of the Russian tank park. He had surreptitiously spied on the Soviets from this point over the past several nights keeping a record of tanks and artillery. Together with Gagarine they counted sixty T-34 medium tanks, fifteen heavy tanks, forty 122 mm cannons, sixteen 76 mm howitzers, six three inch anti-aircraft guns, and some five hundred 2.5 ton American made trucks. It would have infuriated but not surprised Patrick Hurley to have learned that lots of the materiel Rossow and Gagarine were inventorying in Tabriz had been given to the Russian from American Lend-Lease. The evening's observation at a minimum vindicated Rossow's reports of a substantial Soviet military commitment to their Azerbaijani comrades. Further observation and counting of tanks and transport continually confirmed that interpretation.⁹⁵ Both the quantity and quality of the hardware that the two observed vastly exceeded the defense requirements of Azerbaijan even if the province opted for full separation from Iran. Gagarine reported back to the embassy that he personally observed 25 Soviet tanks heading in the direction of Tehran and saw Red Army and local communist militia acting in coordination.⁹⁶ Eventually Gagarine concluded and reported to Washington that between March 4 and March 19, a minimum of 235 Soviet tanks had been introduced into Tabriz and dispatched throughout the province along with 3,500 trucks.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Peter Lisagor and Marguerite Higgins, *Overtime In Heaven. Adventures in the Foreign Service*. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1964), 161-162.

⁹⁶ *FRUS*, Volume VII, p. 364, fn. 24.

⁹⁷ Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 319, fn 41.

Gagarine proved invaluable in the gathering of intelligence on the Soviet build up in Azerbaijan. Although Rossow had taken considerable risks, particularly for a diplomat, Gagarine acted impetuously yet to great effect. On the way to Tabriz he thought that his appearance and Russian language skills might have convinced more than a few sentries that he was a Soviet officer. Now, poking around Tabriz he was sure of it and he made no effort to disabuse any Russian soldiers who mistakenly thought him Russian. When he and Rossow approached a Russian army barracks, the vice-consul thought Gagarine would turn around at the perimeter but instead he drove into the compound itself. As Gagarine had assumed, the sentries indeed mistook him for a Russian officer and waved him in. Driving about the compound they got a good look at things and gathered intelligence until challenged by some junior officers. Gagarine explained that they could not be held responsible for what the guards at the gate assumed about them and in any case they were only on a harmless joy ride. The Russian officers did not believe him and were inclined to arrest the pair but in the end only sent them packing. Later Gagarine and Rossow agreed that fear of punishment by their superiors for such a gross security lapse in the first place was probably what saved them from being jailed as spies or even "disappearing."⁹⁸ It was worth the risk: Gagarine's military training enabled him to note that nearly every soldier they saw was equipped with a gas mask—important circumstantial evidence that a unit is preparing for combat operations and stunning confirmation of Rossow's warning to Washington that a "full scale combat deployment" was underway. Moreover, no one in the Soviet leadership could possibly believe that their Iranian military was armed with poison gas and thus a further indication that Moscow's goals probably exceeded Iran alone and that her expected opposition was not likely to be local but possibly one or more of the great powers. On March 23, Gagarine was again on an intelligence survey in the hills above the city looking down on a Soviet

⁹⁸ Peter Lisagor and Marguerite Higgins, *Overtime In Heaven. Adventures in the Foreign Service*. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1964), 164-165. One historian of the Persian Gulf, Robert Palmer, has speculated that Soviet security lapses like this one and others were actually staged by the Soviets with a purpose: they wanted Rossow to see the quantity and quality of the Red Army build up in Azerbaijan. When he reported that back to Washington and the embassy in Tehran it might panic the Iranians into major concessions and convince the Americans to accept yet another *fait accompli*. If so, it would be an example of Soviet strategy cited by Churchill in his "Iron Curtain" speech namely that the Russians wanted not war but the fruits of war. [Winston Churchill, *Never Give In! The Best of Winston Churchill's Speeches*. (New York: Hyperion, 2003), 422; Michael Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*. (New York: Free Press, 1992), 33-34.]

barracks when he was intercepted by a couple of Russian sergeants. Captain Gagarine persuaded them not only to ignore the incident but enticed them to accompany him back to the American consulate for some refreshments. After a few drinks the Russians began to inadvertently reveal useful data about troop deployments, the arrival of new units etc. Gagarine returned to Tehran with a *cornucopia* of intelligence.⁹⁹

Rossow and Gagarine's investigations and observations provided Washington with confirmation of the Iranian fears that Stalin had ordered tanks and artillery across the border into Azerbaijan along with transport for large numbers of infantry. That Stalin had decided not to evacuate Azerbaijan was obvious; Soviet troops in Iran were *not* moving toward their border but away from it, deeper into Iran. The only question was how much farther did Stalin intend to go? Was Azerbaijan the limit of his objectives or the start? The evidence compiled by Rossow and Gagarine strongly suggested that Turkey, Iraq and the Persian Gulf ports were also on Stalin's menu. A success for the Soviets in northern Iran would make major concessions from Ankara and Tehran all but inevitable.

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Initially Rossow had believed that Soviet goals were limited to wrenching oil concessions from Tehran and then incorporating Azerbaijan province itself into the orbit through a gradual wearing down of the central government if not open to blackmail. The extent and secrecy behind the Soviet build up, however, convinced him that Stalin was playing for even higher stakes. "It had appeared that the seizure of Iranian Azerbaijan and northern Kurdistan and the extraction of various concessions from Iran were the primary Soviet goals. Now," he concluded in light of his findings in early March, "it seemed clear that these were only subordinate means toward a far larger end—the reduction of Turkey, the main bastion against Soviet advance into the entire Middle East."¹⁰⁰ Upon reflection Rossow began to realize that Soviet preparations for aggression in Azerbaijan had begun almost immediately after the end (or slow down since it never really ended) of the 1944 pre-crisis when, starting in January 1945 political commissar of Soviet Azerbaijan, Lt. General Atakshieff, began regular and secretive visits to northern Iran. Rossow suspected

⁹⁹ Peter Lisagor and Marguerite Higgins, *Overtime In Heaven. Adventures in the Foreign Service*. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1964), 164-165.

¹⁰⁰ Robert Rossow, "The Battle of Azerbaijan" *The Middle East Journal*. Winter 1956, volume 10; 21.

he had been laying the foundation for the pro-Soviet revolution that began in November. If Moscow was successful in Iran then Rossow believed intense pressure would be placed on Turkey and Iraq to join the Soviet orbit. Indeed, already in the first days of March, set against the background of the Red Army build up in Azerbaijan province, the Soviets were sending threatening notes to Turkey demanding military bases on the Bosphorus and Dardanelles followed by the annexation of two eastern provinces into the Armenian Socialist Soviet Republic and similar treatment for the Kurdish populated parts of Turkey.¹⁰¹ In preparation for the Potsdam conference of the Big Three, Molotov met with the Turkish ambassador and reiterated Soviet demands: termination of the 1936 Montreux Convention which allowed Turkey the option to bottle up the Soviet fleet in the Black Sea in time of war; Soviet bases on the Bosphorus and Dardanelles; Soviet annexation of the provinces of Kars, Ardahan and Turkish Armenia.¹⁰²

The Kurds in Iran, Rossow would discover, had been given the definite impression by the Soviets that they would be allowed to unite with their Turkish brethren in a common revolt against their national governments backed by Moscow's support. To add heft to their notes the Soviets concurrently deployed a Red Army tank army with air support throughout eastern Bulgaria to the Turkish border under the command of Marshal Tolbukhin.¹⁰³

It was easy to see these developments as part of a coordinated Soviet campaign to fill the power vacuum of the receding British Middle Eastern sphere before the United States did likewise. FDR had promoted the decline and fall of the British Empire even

¹⁰¹ Robert Gellately, *Stalin's Curse. Battling For Communism in War and Cold War*. (New York: Vintage, 2013), 151.

¹⁰² Robert Gellately, *Stalin's Curse. Battling For Communism in War and Cold War*, 151. Stalin had used ethnic cleansing as a brutal weapon of his foreign policy many times in the past and again in his campaign to stake out position in the region after World War Two. Thus in the spring of 1944 he ordered the deportation of a quarter million ethnic Turks from the Crimea and Georgia to Siberia, far away from the Turkish border region. Robert Gellately speculates that this move was designed to send a message to Ankara to cooperate with the USSR in the postwar era or expect even worse treatment to be leveled against Turkish peoples. [Robert Gellately, *Stalin's Curse. Battling For Communism in War and Cold War*, 151.] If so, then it would be further evidence for Rossow's analysis that Stalin's bid for a Middle Eastern sphere existed long before the Iran crisis of 1946. It was indeed a deliberate and considered strategy not improvisations at the end of WWII. Documents uncovered in Berlin at the end of the war between the Soviet and German foreign ministers during the life of the Hitler-Stalin pact would further confirm this suspicion.

¹⁰³ Peter Lisagor and Marguerite Higgins, *Overtime In Heaven. Adventures in the Foreign Service*. (Garden City, New York: Double and Co., 1964), 132-133. 144; Rossow, Robert. "The Battle of Azerbaijan" *The Middle East Journal*. Winter 1956, volume 10. p. 21.

suggesting to Stalin that India undergo a Bolshevik style revolution to usher in her post-colonial era.¹⁰⁴ FDR frequently entertained the idea that the Soviet Union and the United States shared a potential bond as non-imperial powers a postwar world likely to see a rising tide of anti-imperialism. The flawed assumptions behind that projection were becoming manifest at an uncomfortably rapid pace in March 1946. The Soviet's concept of anti-imperialism was radically different from America's (FDR's endorsement of a Stalinist Five Year plan for India notwithstanding) and could never be reconciled. For America the dismantling the old empires rested in free trade and political liberalization whereas Russia's guiding ideology prescribed social and economic revolution as the end product of decolonization combined with closed political and economic systems. This was on full display throughout World War Two had anyone in Washington cared to examine the Soviet administration of their occupation zone in Iran. The United States had little interest in sustaining the British Empire and had not, as so often asserted in America, waged war to preserve it, but its premature disintegration meant an opening for Soviet expansionism on a vast scale and not one anticipated by FDR who assumed Russia had abandoned ambitions not directly related to border security.

By this point the American news media was no longer ignoring developments in Iran. Reports in the newspapers began to reflect what Rossow had been submitting to Washington. On March 13, the *New York Times* headline read: **“HEAVY RUSSIAN COLUMNS MOVE INTO IRAN: TURKEY OR IRAQ MAY BE GOAL: U.S. SENDS NOTE: CONALLY ASKS BIG 3 MEET AND TALK BLUNTLY.”** On March 14, referring to Stalin's hostile reaction in *Pravda* to Churchill's "iron curtain" speech and linking it with Iran, the *Times* headline read: **“STALIN SAYS CHURCHILL STIRS WAR AND FLOUTS ANGLO-RUSSIAN PACT: SOVIET TANKS APPROACH TEHRAN.”**¹⁰⁵

Just as Gagarine was initially skeptical of Rossow's reports, many journalists had also questioned Rossow's judgment. A British correspondent in Baghdad filled a dispatch

¹⁰⁴ Charles Bohlen, *Witness to History*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973), 140-141. FDR's remarks were made to Stalin at the Eureka Summit. These were among many during the conference that FDR made to Stalin to draw a distinction between the USA and England on the colonial world.

¹⁰⁵ Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 323.

stating “The reports that the Red Army thus moved were based mainly on an American source and the United States Council in Tabriz, Robert Rossow, is believed to have let his immigration run wild.”¹⁰⁶ This sentiment reflected an assumption in London that Rossow was overreacting and in any case was too junior in standing and inexperienced to offer a credible opinion. London’s natural skepticism was fueled by the fact that they had not received any communications at all from their own consul in Tabriz. Byrnes was inclined to accept Rossow’s reports yet he could not ignore reasonable doubts from a close ally. Washington commended Rossow for his frequent reports and hard work but he was also ordered to seek the opinion of the more experienced British consul in Tabriz.¹⁰⁷ It was no doubt demeaning to have to pursue confirmation when the evidence was directly in front of him in Azerbaijan. Rossow was on good terms with the British consul, John Wall, and he inquired about his silence in the face of obvious and intense Soviet military activity. Wall it turned out agreed with Rossow’s observations but had not passed a similar alarm along to London because a tight budget restrained him from using the telegraph office as liberally as Rossow who was spending between \$10,000 and \$15,000 a month on telegraph services which, ironically, was providing a reliable revenue source for the Pishevari government in Tabriz. Wall, parsimonious by nature and in accord with cost cutting measures ordered by his embassy, was waiting for the infrequent mail service to pick up his dispatches in order to save money. Once properly informed by their man in Tabriz, the British Foreign Office privately apologized for questioning Rossow’s reporting. Slowly, diplomats from other Western countries also began to confirm Rossow’s reports.¹⁰⁸ Writing ten years after the crisis however, Rossow, somewhat bitterly, claimed that, although his reports were eventually verified by the British consul

¹⁰⁶ Peter Lisagor and Marguerite Higgins, *Overtime In Heaven. Adventures in the Foreign Service*. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1964), 135.

¹⁰⁷ James Byrnes (Secretary of State) to Robert Rossow (Vice-Consul in Tabriz), 3/15/1946, telegram # 851.24591/3-1546 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 359-360.

¹⁰⁸ Peter Lisagor, and Marguerite Higgins, *Overtime In Heaven. Adventures in the Foreign Service*. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1964), 136; 157; Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 324, fn. 50; Michael Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*. (New York: Free Press, 1992), 32-33. Wall's confirmation of Rossow's reports to Washington supplemented the verification provided by Gagarine. Observations by Wall and Gagarine (among others) rebutted the claims of Rossow's critics that his alarming reports to Washington were exaggerated and in the words of Victor Sebestyen, "never checked or verified" by Foggy Bottom or the embassy in Tehran. [Victor Sebestyen, *1946. The Making of the Modern World*. (New York: Pantheon, 2014), 191.] The evidence is overwhelming that Rossow's reports were in fact confirmed.

on the spot in Azerbaijan, the delay in Wall's reporting to London unfairly created "an element of doubt" that was "never entirely erased."¹⁰⁹

Rossow's judgment had been questioned on other occasions. In January 1946, his curiosity had gotten the better of him when he decided to contact Pischevari for an interview. He had hoped to determine Pischevari's intentions, size up the man of which very little was known in the West and determine how deep his connections with Russia ran. Rossow arranged a meeting with Pischevari but he did not ask his superiors for permission perhaps because he suspected they would say no, claiming such a meeting could be construed as American recognition of the separatist government. If that was his working assumption, he was not far off. Rossow tried to protect himself by informing the communist leader that his visit was purely personal and carried no hint of official recognition. Pischevari said he understood and agreed to keep their conversation confidential and the visit unofficial. Yet within twenty-four hours Radio Moscow and the official *Tass* news agency was broadcasting the meeting, praising Rossow's good judgment, falsely claiming the United States recognized the new Azerbaijan republic headquartered in Tabriz. The Russian reports concluded that Rossow had "promised to render all support to National Government of Iranian Azerbaijan."¹¹⁰ Rossow's superiors in Washington were not pleased. Ambassador Ala of Iran also weighed in on the matter, pressuring the State Department to discipline Rossow for creating an embarrassing misunderstanding. An official investigation concluded the Russian media had grossly distorted what had transpired. Rossow was characterized as careless and overzealous

¹⁰⁹ Robert Rossow, "The Battle of Azerbaijan" in *The Middle East Journal*. Winter 1956, volume 10; 17-32. Rossow was correct the element of doubt was never fully erased and in spite of the evidence confirming his reports, that element of doubt lives on today. In later years revisionist historians (e.g. Walter La Feber; Gabriel Kolko; Stephen McFarland; Victor Sebestyen; etc.) have registered disbelief about Rossow's observations and reports considering them unverified, unsubstantiated and based on rumors. Rossow is often cast as inexperienced and so gullible that he swallowed what his network of shady Iranian informers fed him because it was what he wanted to hear. Unlike the other critics of Rossow, McFarland does not treat Soviet armored reinforcements into Iran as a figment of the American vice-consul's immigration but questions the degree: "The Soviets advances certainly occurred but the reports of them were *probably* exaggerated." [Walter La Feber, *America, Russia and the Cold War*, pp. 34-35; Stephen McFarland, "The Iranian Crisis of 1946 and the Onset of the Cold War" in Melvyn Leffer, (ed.) *Origins of the Cold War. An International History*. (London: Routledge, 1994), 251-252; Michael Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*. (New York: Free Press, 1992), 32-33.] None of these critics, however, ever cite the confirming observations and reports of men like Archie Roosevelt Jr., British diplomat John Wall or Capt. Gagarine.

¹¹⁰ George Kennan (*Chargé in the Soviet Union*) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 1/8/1946, telegram # 891.00/1-846, in *FRUS*, Vol VII, p. 305.

resulting from inexperience and lack of guidance. Consequently no disciplinary action was taken although the State Department's displeasure was made known to him. Punishment of Rossow would have proven publicly embarrassing and Ambassador Murray in Tehran had also stood up for him telling Washington that the Russian media accounts that had got the vice-consul into hot water smacked of a "Soviet 'frame up.'" Moreover, the ambassador agreed with Rossow that it only made sense that he would attempt to discover and report as much as possible about Pischevari and that meant meeting the man in person. Further it was true that no guidelines existed at that point for Rossow to consult. Now, however, Rossow was issued a clear order from Washington: refrain from unauthorized or unofficial meetings with Pischevari or his government unless American lives and property were in jeopardy.¹¹¹

Rossow chaffed under the restraints. He believed Washington had overreacted and that his only offense was acting on his own initiative, outside of bureaucratic channels it was true and yet to great effect: he had learned important details about the rebel government that justified his action. He had discovered that the real power behind the throne was Mohammed Beria, the head of the Orwellian titled Ministry of Labor, Education and Propaganda. Mohammed Beria was not a blood relation with Stalin's dreaded henchman from Georgia, Levrenti Beria, but they had a very definite spiritual and professional relationship. The Azerbaijani Beria was also the head of Pischevari's political police and their semi-official auxiliary.¹¹² Beria got his start as a rising star on the left as a leader of the Tabriz street cleaners union.¹¹³ It was Beria, with whom Rossow had also spoken, that probably leaked the news of the Rossow-Pischevari meeting to Radio Moscow and *Tass*. It wasn't just a double cross of Rossow: Pischevari did not recognize the consequences of remaining silent but Beria did. Had he not informed the Kremlin of the meeting Beria undoubtedly realized his days in power and perhaps his life would be numbered.

¹¹¹ Wallace Murray (Ambassador in Iran) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State) 1/14/1946, telegram # 123 Rossow, Robert, Jr., in *FRUS*, Vol VII, pp. 302-303; Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 324, fn. 50.

¹¹² Society of Friends of Soviet Azerbaijan.

¹¹³ Robert Rossow, "The Battle of Azerbaijan" in *The Middle East Journal*. Winter 1956, volume 10; 17-32

Not easily intimidated by higher authority Rossow bent both the letter and spirit of his instructions seizing on a new opportunity to meet with Pischevari on February 4 when an Armenian merchant contacted him to protest the seizure by the Azerbaijani government of sausages he had contracted to sell to an American importer in the Bronx. Since American property was at issue, Rossow claimed he had good cause to visit Pischevari to deliver a protest over the sausages in conformity with his orders. His real motive was to gauge what might happen the next month when the deadline for Soviet withdrawal tolled. After the subterfuge of the sausages was over, Rossow told Pischevari that he had observed no evidence that the Red Army was preparing to leave as the departure date approached. As a man with an army background, Rossow said, his experience told him that evacuating a force as large as what the Russians had deployed in Azerbaijan province required a few months preparation yet Soviet troops seemed to preparing to stay not leave. Pischevari became peevisish: "Why don't you ask the Russians why they don't leave." In any case he said it was a matter for the Big Three to settle with Tehran and the Soviet troops on Azeri soil did not particularly bother him although he added they were not interfering in Iranian affairs.¹¹⁴ Previously Pischevari had told him that although his regime did not wish to separate from Iran they were being forced to because the central government was controlled by reactionaries and fascists. To Rossow, he seemed to swing wildly between a sincere desire to help his people out of abject poverty and ranting about fascist conspiracies in Tehran. When he asked Pischevari what his impressions were of the London session of the United Nations Security Council which had just considered the Iranian complaint against Soviet interference in her internal affairs, the Azerbaijani prime minister became incensed saying the Council should have consulted his and not the shah's government. Rossow attempted to explain that the United Nations could only consult a sovereign government but Pischevari insisted that he and his regime would have to be taken into consideration. "Regardless of what negotiations are being held there [London]," Pischevari asserted, "we know one thing for sure: The issue of Azerbaijan can be resolved not outside Azerbaijan, not by foreign states...by discussing this issue outside Iran the Tehran government has committed a

¹¹⁴ Rossow, Robert (*Vice-Consul in Tabriz*) to James Byrnes (*Secretary of State*) 2/4/1946, telegram # 891.00/2-446, in *FRUS*, Vol VII, pp. 328-330; Hasanli, Jamil. At *the Dawn of the Cold War*, p. 201.

crime against all Iranian people.”¹¹⁵ Bilateral talks between Moscow and Tehran without Tabriz as a full partner, he said, were like “parents arranging the marriage of a daughter” and he did not intend to be the bride. Rossow was also stumped on the sausage dispute—Pishevari would not help claiming, rather conveniently, that he could not interfere with a matter that concerned the government in Tehran. “The sausage casings were never released,” recalled Rossow, “but I felt that I had gone to the limit of diplomatic action in their behalf.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Pishevari quoted in Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis Over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 202.

¹¹⁶ Rossow and Pishevari quoted in Peter Lisagor and Marguerite Higgins, *Overtime In Heaven. Adventures in the Foreign Service*. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1964), 152-155; Rossow sent a full report to Washington detailing his meeting with Pishevari and so too did M.J. Baghirov, head of the Communist Party of Soviet-Azerbaijan, albeit his report went to Moscow. Baghirov, a dedicated and ruthless Stalinist, who was executed after Stalin died, reported to Stalin, his whole hearted approval of Pishevari’s responses to Rossow’s probing. [Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis Over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 202].

Chapter Five
"With Both Barrels"

Loy Henderson was one of America's founding Kremlinologists. Ironically, however, it was in several appointments in the Middle East and Asia that he achieved his highest official ranks culminating in a 1951 promotion to ambassador to Iran. Like the other founding Soviet experts in the State Department, he was critical of FDR's Soviet policy which he regarded as ill-informed if not dangerously naïve.¹ Yet, Henderson would never become as well known to the public as George Kennan or even Charles Bohlen in part because his career had been diverted by wartime political pressure from Moscow. The head of the State Department's Division of Eastern European Affairs, Henderson was sent on an inspection tour of Russia in 1942 and stayed on at the embassy for several months as a consultant. Vyacheslav Molotov and Maxim Litvinov, the Soviet ambassador in Washington, took an instant dislike to Henderson and informed Washington that they found him unacceptable. A less critical man they said would improve Soviet-American relations and implied he should be sacked. Washington took the hint and made an important gesture of cooperation to Moscow. Henderson was "kicked upstairs" with a promotion to the rank of ambassador. In this case, the top of the stairs was Iraq. It was an elevation in rank and status for Henderson with an assignment to an important country, yet far from Russia whose language he spoke and which he had spent his life studying. Moreover, Iraq at this time was almost exclusively a British concern.² Molotov and Litvinov did not care where he went as long as he out the mix of Soviet-American relations. When his exile in Iraq ended in 1945, Henderson was back in Washington as the head of the State Department's Near Eastern Affairs Division. With

¹ H. W. Brands, *Inside the Cold War. Loy Henderson and The Rise of The American Empire, 1918-1961.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 102-103.

² H. W. Brands, *Inside the Cold War. Loy Henderson and The Rise of The American Empire, 1918-1961.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 111. Removal of Henderson from the mix of Soviet-American relations under pressure from Moscow was similar to Soviet insistence that Bertel Kuniholm (Rossow's predecessor in Tabriz) be removed to appease Russian sensitivity. In reality, Kuniholm had been gathering evidence on Soviet interference in Iran's internal affairs. [Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 240, fn. 76.]

the situation in Iran becoming the first open confrontation between America and Russia since the end of the hot war, Henderson was, even if by a circuitous route, back in the middle of Soviet-American relations.

Like Kennan in Moscow, Henderson was determined not to miss an opportunity to impress upon foreign policy makers his views on the Soviet Union when given the chance that he had been frequently denied during the Roosevelt years. Prior to the Moscow CFM in December 1945, Henderson had tried to impress upon Byrnes the significance of Iran suggesting, for example, that he bring along the American ambassador in Tehran to emphasize to Stalin the importance Washington placed on Iran and to counter the expected Soviet denials of their malfeasance in Iran with first-hand accounts from Ambassador Murray. Henderson's prompting went unheeded by Byrnes and, although he sounded Stalin and Molotov out on the subject, as we have seen, Iran remained a low priority during the Moscow CFM. As in the past, the Iranian case suffered from America's refusal to present Stalin with a joint Anglo-American policy, a failure resulting from both the lingering effects of FDR's Soviet policy and disinterest by Byrnes.

Agreeing with Averell Harriman over the past year, Henderson emphasized that the Soviets only responded to hard bargaining and explicit, firm agreements; trusting Stalin to do the right thing, as FDR had, simply would not produce the results America wanted.³ With FDR gone, the question was if the emerging get-tough-with-Russia faction would register with the Truman administration? Hard-liners no doubt thought the first postwar test case would be in Europe yet ironically it was the foreign policy soft Edward Stettinius who years earlier believed it was Iran that would put the future of American relations with the USSR to the test. Henderson's fears extended beyond Iran and the Middle East to the future of the new United Nations. He predicted that if the Red Army was allowed to stay in Iran and meddle in her internal affairs with impunity any postwar peace and security organization with Russia as a member would be robbed of legitimacy in the eyes of the small nations that constituted the majority of the membership.⁴ To them

³ H. W. Brands, *Inside the Cold War. Loy Henderson and The Rise of The American Empire, 1918-1961.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 102.

⁴ H. W. Brands, *Inside the Cold War. Loy Henderson and The Rise of The American Empire, 1918-1961.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 139-141. It is not hard to see as well that the American public

the Security Council would appear to be exactly what Stalin had hoped it would be: a rubber stamp to endorse whatever actions (including expansion at the expense of the smaller nations) the great powers undertook.

Undaunted by Byrnes' lukewarm interest, Henderson sent Dean Acheson a memo at the end of December 1945 entitled "The Present Situation in the Near East: A Danger to World Peace." Henderson's biographer, H.W. Brands, has written this memo was to the Middle East what George Kennan's "Long Telegram" (which it anticipated by two months) was to Soviet-American relations in Europe.⁵

Henderson said that England was pursuing her traditional goals in Iran first and foremost by protecting her line of communication with India but the Soviet Union was attempting to establish what had not existed before the war: a Soviet sphere of interest in the Middle East with Iran as the staging ground. It was a traditional Russian goal but not one likely to have been realizable until the unique situation produced by the outcome of the war. Three barriers had existed to Russian expansion in the past: Germany in Europe, Japan in the Far East and England in the Near East. In the aftermath of the war two of those barriers had been eliminated and Russian expansion was proceeding unabated. The remaining question for the West, Henderson said, was if the third barrier—England—would be allowed to collapse and thus concede Soviet sphere into the Middle East.⁶ Given the erosion of Britain's over extended role in the Middle East during the war; her inability to compete economically with the USA; the sky high price of victory in Europe; and FDR's cold shoulder of the imperial powers (which was always far in excess of his objections to Stalinism) a Middle Eastern power vacuum seemed inevitable. Just as likely was that the USSR would rush to fill that power vacuum probably under the justification of Stalin's never ending pursuit of hyper-security. Stalin would seem to have agreed with the analysis since he was making his opening bid in Iran for position in the British

(which in the immediate postwar period was enthusiastic about the United Nations) would have lost confidence in that organization under those circumstances and of course not be inclined to support funding of the new world body from the American treasury. The high hopes most Americans entertained for the United Nations in the immediate postwar period are detailed in Stanly Meisler, *United Nations. The First Fifty Years*. (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1995), 2.

⁵ H. W. Brands, *Inside the Cold War. Loy Henderson and The Rise of The American Empire, 1918-1961*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 141.

⁶ H. W. Brands, *Inside the Cold War. Loy Henderson and The Rise of The American Empire, 1918-1961*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 141.

Middle Eastern sphere as it receded. "The Soviet Union," wrote Henderson at the time, "seems to be determined to break down the structure which Great Britain has maintained so that Russian power and influence can sweep unimpeded across Turkey and through the Dardanelles into the Mediterranean, and across Iran and through the Persian Gulf to the Indian Ocean."⁷ Henderson called England the "great dam" in the Middle East, holding Russia back and protecting the interests of England but also the Western democracies in general. Now the dam was being punctured by Russian probes and was likely to break into a flood without American support. The stakes were high; if the Soviets were allowed to expand into the Middle East the result would destabilize the global balance of power. Displacing the British in the region as the dominate power would have posed a threat to the flow of oil to the West. The spread of revolutionary ideology associated with the Soviets would have threatened the flow of Western liberal ideology into the East.

England was in an increasingly precarious position if it came to warding off simultaneous Soviet and communist pressure in Greece, Iran, Iraq and Turkey. Yet, it was a recipe for instability that the new world body was deigned to manage before it broke out into warfare among the great powers. Henderson, however, did not think the embryonic United Nations would be in a position to counteract Soviet expansion into the region (at England's expense) or manage a crisis of that magnitude for some time. Unlike Kennan in Moscow, Henderson was not skeptical about the new world body *per se* but he believed that it was too immature in the early postwar years to tackle a complex issue like multiple threats of aggression by one of the permanent members of the Security Council. Similar circumstances had helped to doom the League of Nations, and Henderson predicted the same fate for its successor if difficult cases were piled on the Council agenda before it was prepared to manage them.⁸ Undoubtedly, Henderson envisioned a more gradual transition from great power *realpolitik* strategies to the collective security of the United Nations than had FDR who in his post Yalta address to Congress had declared old school balance of power politics dead.⁹

⁷ H. W. Brands, *Inside the Cold War. Loy Henderson and The Rise of The American Empire, 1918-1961.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 141-142.

⁸ H. W. Brands, *Inside the Cold War. Loy Henderson and The Rise of The American Empire, 1918-1961.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 143.

⁹ See Chapter 2, pp. 118-119. Because he thought the Security Council too immature to handle the Iran case, Loy Henderson preferred a secretive great power conference to settle the issue.

Henderson's concerns exposed an important weakness of FDR's model for the United Nations: what to do if one of the aggressors that the new world body was meant to control and even punish was a permanent member of the Security Council? To paraphrase Juvenal, who policed the Four Policemen?¹⁰ Perhaps because he had not made his mind up about this or perhaps because he just wished to avoid the issue so that Stalin, already suspicious that his liberal capitalist allies were plotting to deny the USSR the fruits of victory, would not be scared away, FDR did not game this scenario. This was standard operating procedure for Roosevelt who preferred to avoid unpleasant issues until they could be avoided no longer and then allow facts on the ground to dictate the outcome. Of all the Big Three chiefs it is Stalin's thinking on the United Nations that we know the least about.¹¹ The reverse is the case with FDR; in spite of the fact that he, like Stalin, kept no diary and penned no *memoirs*, he is the leader whose views on the subject we know the most about.

FDR pitched two possible scenarios to Stalin that would trigger Security Council action. One was when a small country was embroiled in a civil war, revolution or a boarder clash. The president seemed to regard that as a misdemeanor that would be handled with some form of economic punishment. The other was a more serious, felonious scenario when a great power was engaged in aggression requiring military

¹⁰ FDR's initial conception of a new world body devoted to peace and security had at its core supreme executive power assigned exclusively to the Big Four wartime allies who would exercise police powers in their respective regions to settle disputes among smaller nations that threatened to draw the Great Powers into a wider conflict (e.g. the Great War *redux*) and to punish aggressors (e.g. WWII). Thus, the "four policemen": China, USA, USSR and England. Undoubtedly FDR was influenced in his selection of this model by his cousin Theodore Roosevelt who as president announced in 1904 (the "Roosevelt Corollary") that he was arrogating to America the role of policeman in Latin America and the Caribbean when a conflict existed there with a European power. Another explanation is this: it was a formula that would appeal to Stalin. FDR believed that a world body would be ineffective without the USSR and that America had made a mistake shining Russia after WWI. Yet it was also obvious that Russia's negative experience with the League of Nations had soured Stalin on international cooperation with the West. Moreover, although he came from a internationalist tradition founded by Marx and Lenin, Stalin was by inclination an isolationist a tendency exemplified by his policy of "socialism in one country" namely his own and by his liquidation of the Comintern. The formula of policemen laying down the law in their respective regions, FDR probably believed, would make the United Nations Organization more appealing to Stalin who would, after the war, be primarily concerned with managing the sphere of influence in Eastern Europe he was bound to inherit. As the war progressed FDR shifted away from the "four policemen" model to something more inspired by Wilson than TR. Yet, he never wavered from his insistence that the Big Four constitute the core of the executive of the United Nations and that they enjoy superior powers above other members.

¹¹ Mark Mazower, *Governing the World. The History of an Idea. 1815 to the Present*. (New York: Penguin, 2012), 204.

action by the Four Policemen.¹² Perhaps because of the prospect that foreign territory would fall under the control of the advancing Red Army as the war came to a close what might happen if one of the Four Policemen (ultimately the permanent members of the Security Council including the fifth cop on the beat, France) was an aggressor was left underdeveloped by FDR. The late president rarely wished to close off his options before decisions about a problem or potential problem could no longer be avoided. That is how working out the protocol for the Iran case landed in the lap of James Byrnes in 1946.

As we shall see, Byrnes, like Henderson, believed that the pressures building from Soviet military penetration into foreign territory (that was not formerly pro-Axis) would be a critical challenge for the new world body, one that would make or break it.¹³ Yet, unlike Henderson, Byrnes did not believe those issues could be or should be deferred until the organization was more mature. If the Council, even in its infant stage, could not handle a case of blatant aggression by a great power it would never be able to do so no matter how much it matured.¹⁴ Whatever his other disagreements with Byrnes, Charles Bohlen agreed the future of the new world body had to be settled early on and the Iranian complaint, like it or not, provided an opportunity to do so that could not be deferred to some future graduation day. "If the test had not been met," wrote Bohlen, "the United Nations would have been a dead letter when it no more than started."¹⁵

Because he thought the United Nations not yet grown up enough for the job, Henderson believed the United States was the only candidate that could contain Soviet expansionism in the region by filling England's role minus the old school colonialism.¹⁶ Yet, Washington, in spite of all the evidence of Soviet intentions in Iran during the war, still shied away from any serious diplomatic or military commitment to that country.¹⁷

¹² Mark Mazower, *Governing the World. The History of an Idea. 1815 to the Present*. (New York: Penguin, 2012), 204.

¹³ James Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly*. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947), 304.

¹⁴ David Robertson, *Sly and Able. A Political Biography of James F. Byrnes*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), 471.

¹⁵ Charles Bohlen, *Witness to History*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973), 251.

¹⁶ Essentially the prescription advanced by Pat Hurlly during the war: If it came down to a choice between the USSR and England the Iranian people might not see much of a distinction but if the USA was involved in the mix then a non-imperial and non-communist alternative would be available to counter-act the Soviets and British.

¹⁷ As we saw in Chapter Two, Ambassadors Ala and Taqizadeh were both politely rebuffed by the Americans when approached before and during the London sessions of the Security Council for guarantees of American support if Iran pressed her case against the USSR.

Without a strong American presence in the region, starting with Iran, Henderson and Dean Acheson both concluded that London would probably seek a compromise with Moscow that would gradually cede her old Iranian sphere of influence to the Soviets if it allowed autonomy for an enclave surrounding the giant oil refinery at Abadan that fed the oil thirsty Royal Navy.¹⁸ This was exactly the scenario that many in Tehran feared and their concerns were not without foundation.¹⁹ American involvement was essential for another reason: a bilateral arrangement between London and Moscow that carved Iran up to suit their interests, Henderson thought, would be antithetical to the whole concept of collective security and the spirit of the Big Three embodied in the self-determination clause of the Atlantic Charter which was the inspiration for the United Nations.²⁰ Nor would it be effective; in a few weeks time Winston Churchill at Westminster College would remind the world that appeasement of aggressive dictators was not the end but only the beginning since it only encouraged new and more expansive aggression. Henderson harbored a considerable distrust of imperial England yet in his memo he agreed with Churchill that Stalin was no more open to being managed and controlled than Hitler had been.²¹

Henderson did not see intense Soviet pressure on Iran as a coincidence, an example of opportunism, or a bi-product of the wartime circumstances of occupation. Rather it was a premeditated manifestation of Moscow's strategic ambition that could have been easily predicted. He believed he had found substantial proof for this assessment in the wartime archives of the Third Reich. Indeed, it was Henderson who had played an important role in bringing the newly discovered secret negotiations between

¹⁸ David Robertson, *Sly and Able. A Political Biography of James F. Byrnes*. (New York: W.W Norton, 1994), 467.

¹⁹ In October 1944, Stalin and Churchill meeting without FDR, reached the "percentages agreement" which dived up the Balkans between them. This was the scenario many Iranians believed would be the model for the Persian Gulf if the matter remained one between Moscow and London. Churchill correctly recognized that FDR would not approve of this arrangement and the prime minister suggested to Stalin that they burn the paper the agreement was scribbled on. He was correct: FDR reacted negatively to the Balkans agreement between Stalin and Churchill and the Iranians intensified their goal of involving America in Iranian affairs to counteract any such Russian-British percentages arrangement in their country. [Mark Mazower, *Governing the World. The History of An Idea, 1815 to the Present*. (New York: Penguin, 2012), 207.]

²⁰ H. W. Brands, *Inside the Cold War. Loy Henderson and The Rise of The American Empire, 1918-1961*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 142.

²¹ H. W. Brands, *Inside the Cold War. Loy Henderson and The Rise of The American Empire, 1918-1961*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 142.

Hitler and Stalin about divvying up the Middle East between themselves to the attention of the White House and Byrnes. Henderson's memo highlighted Stalin's appetite, as revealed in the talks with Hitler (the Molotov-Ribbentrop discussions of November 1940), for Soviet control of Turkey, Iran and the Persian Gulf. The only sticking point in reaching an agreement between Moscow and Berlin at the time was Stalin's proposed Russian sphere of influence in Turkey. Otherwise Hitler was perfectly willing to concede Iran and the Persian Gulf to the Soviets which Stalin was prepared to accept. Only Stalin's insistence that Hitler sweeten the offer by including the Dardanelles in the Soviet sphere stopped the deal from being sealed. Hitler's offer of the Persian Gulf to Stalin was not a sudden attack of generosity on his part. He wanted the Soviets to thrust deep into the heart of the Middle East to challenge the British Empire and in effect settle the war in Western Europe for him via the back door. With her Empire fatally shattered, it was reasoned, England would have no choice but to accept what peace Berlin offered. Moreover, with the USSR driving into the heart of the Middle-East and perhaps beyond, Eastern Europe would be free for German invasion and colonization without running into the otherwise preoccupied Russian bear. Knowing he was being offered a strategic role in settling the war in favor of Germany was probably why Stalin overplayed his hand by upping his asking price to include a Turkish sphere. Yet, Hitler had cast his own eye on Turkey and was not about to concede it to Stalin.²² The Soviet counterproposal was killed with silence from Berlin and the USSR did not join the Axis.²³

Henderson packaged a summary ("Basic Aims of Soviet Policy in Eastern Europe 1939-1941") of the German-Soviet bargaining over the Near East prepared by Harry

²² Stalin's ambitions in the negotiations with Hitler revealed that Soviet objectives were far in excess of securing northern Iran as a buffer zone as maintained by scholars like Rashid Khalidi, Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov. Moreover these talks with Germany took place in 1940 thus long before the USA could be said to represent a security concern to the USSR from anywhere in the Middle East. Not surprisingly perhaps, the record of Stalin and Molotov's talks with Hitler and Ribbentrop are rarely cited by revisionist historians, their core thesis being that Soviet interests in northern Iran were to secure their border from third party threats not expand into the heart of the region. [Rashid Khalidi *Sowing Crisis. The Cold War and American Dominance in the Middle East*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009), 54-55; Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 45.]

²³ The ease with which the German Foreign Ministry was willing to abandon Iran to Stalin indicates how futile Reza Shah's romantic overtures toward Berlin had been. Even though the German Foreign Ministry had declared the Iranians to be a so-called pure Aryan people bound by race to the German people, in the cold calculus of *realpolitik* they were just pawns to be sacrificed to the highest bidder including Iran's arch enemy the atheistic Soviet Union.

Howard (State Department's Special Interrogation Mission) who had interrogated captured senior Nazi officials (e.g., Paul Schmidt, Hitler's personal interpreter) on the matter. The documents, Henderson advised Byrnes, were "well worth reading in its entirety for the light it throws on *current* Soviet policy in the Near East."²⁴ Henderson concluded Russian ambitions had not changed with the end of the Second World War and Stalin's stubborn refusal to evacuate his army from Iran seemed irrefutable confirmation of that assessment.²⁵ Byrnes agreed that the Molotov-Ribbentrop 1940 negotiations on the subject were an invaluable guide to what the Soviet objectives in 1946: "...Soviet ambitions still include the territory Molotov desired when he sent his message to Hitler. Some of those desires have been fulfilled. However, the flush of victory has encouraged the Soviet government to extend its ambitions."²⁶ If Stalin's menu was indeed the same as during his ill-fated bargaining with Germany then northern Iran was not the end but the beginning of a Soviet thrust to the Persian Gulf. Henderson concluded: "...once in possession of the new positions conceded to them by the British, [Stalin] would undoubtedly begin preparations for further attacks upon such barriers to their emergence into the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean as might remain."²⁷

The significance of reports like Rossow's detailing the Soviet escalation in northern Iran did not escape Henderson's attention but he feared they would escape that of his boss so he decided to impress Byrnes with a dramatic prop. Preparing to brief Byrnes on March 7, Henderson had an enlarged map of the region prepared. He then told his assistants Edwin Wright and Harold Minor to plot the Red Army troop movements as they became known. Three arrows emerged on the map serving as projections of three Red Army thrusts. Years later Wright recalled that "Mr. Byrnes asked

²⁴ Henderson quoted in Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 293).

²⁵ Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 292-294; Bruce Kuniholm, "US Policy in the Near East: the triumphs and tribulations of the Truman administration" in Michael Lacey, (ed.) *The Truman Presidency*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 301-302.

²⁶ James Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly*. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947), 292.

²⁷ H. W. Brands, *Inside the Cold War. Loy Henderson and The Rise of The American Empire, 1918-1961*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 142. On December 20, 1945 when Byrnes was attending the Moscow CFM, Dean Acheson in Washington was warned by Ambassador Ala that Stalin's ambitions were such that northern Iran would only be the beginning not the end of his Middle Eastern sphere. It was exactly the same conclusion that Henderson presented to Byrnes a few months later. [Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 285.]

the significance of each arrow and noted that they aimed at the Turkish border, [and] the Iraqi border. [A] third was headed due south (possibly indicating a thrust toward the oil fields) and [also possibly indicating] a drive toward the capital at Tehran."²⁸ Henderson wanted to impress upon Byrnes that the Soviets were not just making a bid for oil in northern Iran but to fill the power vacuum being created by the increasingly vulnerable British Empire. Iran would become, as the Bolsheviks had once called it, "the Suez Canal of the revolution" funneling the Red Army into the Persian Gulf and the eastern Mediterranean.²⁹ Just as the Polish corridor had become a conduit for Red Army deployment into Europe, Iran had the potential of becoming the Poland of the Middle East. Byrnes looked over the map and verified the points with Rossow's reports. The secretary of state agreed with Henderson's analysis and anxiety: "It now seemed clear," Byrnes concluded, "the USSR was adding military invasion to political subversion in Iran."³⁰

Rossow who initially thought Stalin's *appetite* was confined to Iran, now concluded that Soviet moves in that country "were only a subordinate means toward a *bigger end*—the reduction of Turkey, the main bastion against Soviet advance into the entire Middle East." Once Turkey and Iran were reduced and subjected to the Soviet will, Rossow continued, "the other nations in the Middle East were in no condition to offer any serious resistance."³¹ The PGC had left Iran by now and in any case it had been a logistical organization not equipped, staffed or organized for combat while the British occupation forces were in the process of leaving of Iran on schedule. That left Turkey as the only plausible military opposition to Russia in the region. Although Byrnes had been slow to accept the assessment of men like Henderson and Rossow, Truman had noted in his January 5 letter to Byrnes, that the Soviets were maneuvering to present the West with

²⁸ Wright quoted in David Robertson, *Sly and Able. A Political Biography of James F. Byrnes*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), 470.

²⁹ H. W. Brands, *Inside the Cold War. Loy Henderson and The Rise of The American Empire, 1918-1961*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 142; George Lenczowski, *Russia and the West in Iran*. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1949), 314.

³⁰ Byrnes quoted in memo ("Events Relevant to the Azerbaijan Issue—March 1946") prepared by Edwin Wright, special assistant to Loy Henderson in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 346-348.

³¹ Robert Rossow, "The Battle of Azerbaijan" in *The Middle East Journal*. p. 21. Although he was confident in his judgment of Soviet goals in the region during the crisis, Rossow did note that final judgment could not be made until the Soviet politburo archives are opened and fully examined. [Robert Rossow. "The Battle of Azerbaijan" in *The Middle East Journal*. Winter 1956, Vol. 10; 24.)

a *fait accompli* in Iran—as they had in Eastern Europe—and that Moscow intended “an invasion of Turkey and the seizure of the Black Sea Straits to the Mediterranean.”³² Reflecting on the situation in his *memoirs* Truman reiterated his assessment at the time that the Soviets were angling for a Middle Eastern sphere of influence: “It all seemed to add up to a planned move on the part of the Russians to get at least northern Iran under their control. Together with the threat of a Communist coup in Greece, this began to look like a giant pincers movement against the oil-rich areas of the Near East and the warm-water ports of the Mediterranean.”³³ Taking a cue from President Roosevelt, Byrnes had tried hard to avoid a public clash with Russia over Iran, pulling his punches at the London and Moscow sessions of the CFM and avoiding a united front with Britain to support the Iranian’s case for immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all foreign armies. At the London sessions of the Security Council he declined to offer the Iranians a guarantee of American support for their complaint against the USSR and allowed for the possibility that bilateral talks between Tehran and Moscow might work and avoid American or the Council's involvement even though the power disparities between Moscow and Tehran made fair negotiations problematic at best. Now Byrnes concluded Stalin would not be thwarted short of an uncompromising diplomatic stand by Washington. After Henderson's briefing, Byrnes reviewed the reports from Rossow and the map prepared by Edwin Wright. Beating his fist in his hand he vowed “Now we'll give it to them with both barrels.”³⁴

The next day, on March 8, Henderson and his colleagues gave a similar briefing to other important members of the State Department including Dean Acheson, Charles Bohlen, Benjamin Cohen and Alger Hiss. Acheson would eventually replace Byrnes as secretary of state while Hiss would soon come under suspicion as a Soviet espionage

³² Harry Truman, *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman. Year of Decisions*. (Garden City, New York: Double Day and Co., 1955), 551-552. Truman presented the January 5 letter in full in his *memoirs* probably to impress upon the public that he was ahead of the curve on issues of Soviet probes into the Middle East and in establishing a firm stand against the Soviet strategy in Iran. It amounted to an announcement that FDR's soft policy on the USSR was coming to an end.

³³ Harry Truman, *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman. Year of Decisions*. (Garden City, New York: Double Day and Co., 1955), 523.

³⁴ Byrnes quoted in memo (“Events Relevant to the Azerbaijan Issue—March 1946”) prepared by Edwin Wright, (special assistant to Loy Henderson) in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 346-347. In addition to Rossow's reports, Washington was receiving reports from Col. Schwarzkopf that the Tudeh party was planning coups in the other provinces of northern Iran. [David Robertson, *Sly and Able. A Political Biography of James F. Byrnes*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), 469.]

agent. Back in early 1944, Acheson, then an assistant secretary of state, and his aide Eugene Rostow, questioned the value of Iran to America and denigrated Patrick Hurley's efforts to promote a strong United States presence there, referring to his project of nation-building in Iran as "simplistic", "innocent", "indulgent" and "messianic globaloney." Characterizing him a neo-colonialist, they derided Hurley's advisor program as the classic device of a thinly disguised predatory imperialist penetration of an underdeveloped country.³⁵ Aside from their failure to grasp Iran's significance in the postwar world and the likelihood it would become an arena of Soviet-American conflict, Acheson and Rostow's casuistic attitude also reflected their deep resentment of the elevated status a citizen-diplomat like Hurley enjoyed in FDR's White House, men who bypassed Foggy Bottom and were answerable only to the president.³⁶

FDR eventually made it known that he endorsed Hurley's idea of an advisor program for Iran and did not consider it a vector for imperialist intervention but a genuine effort to promote Iranian independence and development with the added benefit of proving the United States was different from the her oil-centric, imperial ally England. Unappeased, Acheson and Rostow continued to maintain that a commitment to Iran was not in America's interests, conflicted with America's anti-imperialist values and in any case was beyond Washington's resources.³⁷ Their stubborn opposition also represented a strong Eurocentric streak that placed anything outside the Continent as remote from American concerns if not a side-show distraction. The Mid-East in particular was best left to England. Hurley and FDR envisioned advisors as a means to help prepare Iran for postwar independence as a modern nation state not just a big dumb gas station for the Royal Navy. It is possible that Acheson and Rostow's opposition to American involvement in Iran was over the concern that it would result in a stronger national Iranian government (FDR and Hurley's chief objective) that could not only better resist

³⁵ Rossow quoted in Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 170-171.

³⁶ Apprised of the sideline snipping at him over the advisor program Hurley blew up at Acheson for meddling in his bailiwick. He then buttonholed Rostow and demanded to know why he was not on active military service: "If you were a real man, you would have a uniform on now." [Hurley quoted in Robert Beisner, *Dean Acheson. A Life in the Cold War*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 17.] It was not the first or last time Hurley picked a fight with the State Department, probably one of the things FDR liked most about him.

³⁷ Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 170-171.

Soviet meddling in their country but also challenge the British presence as well. Acheson and Rostow naturally approved of the former objective but not necessarily the later. That explanation for their rejection of the advisor program would have confirmed what FDR and Hurley suspected: the State Department was instinctively pro-British and anti-Soviet.³⁸

Confronted with the evolution of events Acheson and Rostow adjusted quickly and by March 1946 they agreed that Iran was now at the top of the Soviet target list and given the rapid deterioration of American-Soviet relations, the future of Iran was an American concern especially since Turkey appeared to be next on Stalin's Near Eastern menu.³⁹ After that who could say? A civil war was raging in Greece between communist insurgents and royalists. The balance might have been tipped toward the former if Turkey was pressured into the Soviet camp as a consequence of Iran being co-opted by Moscow. While the fate of Eastern Europe might have been sealed by the end of Second World War in the immediate postwar months the future of the Northern Tier was still up for grabs.

There was considerable interest in Henderson's map as well as Rossow communications. A lively discussion ensued, recalled Edwin Wright, because the Soviets ignored the March 6 telegram expressing Washington's concern over the reports of heavy Soviet military reinforcements arriving in Azerbaijan. All present agreed that Stalin had undeniably violated the Tripartite Treaty of 1942 as well as the spirit of the 1943 Big Three Declaration on Iran.⁴⁰ Wright recalled the sense of the meeting using words strikingly similar to those of Truman in his January 5th letter to Byrnes: "Only one conclusion could be drawn—the USSR seemed to be determined to face Iran and the rest of the world with a *fait accompli*."⁴¹

³⁸ A key reason FDR had turned to special envoys as his personal representatives aboard was his distrust of career American diplomats whom he suspected did not sympathize with his New Deal policies and were too pro-British.

³⁹ Robert Beisner, *Dean Acheson. A Life in the Cold War*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 45.

⁴⁰ The 1921 Russian-Persian friendship treaty was also at issue; it too forbade interference in Iran's internal affairs.

⁴¹ Memo ("Events Relevant to the Azerbaijan Issue—March 1946") prepared by Edwin Wright, special assistant to Loy Henderson in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 346-348.

All but one present believed America had to respond; the only question was how intensely should Washington react? Here disagreement broke out even among those who were members of the get-tough-with-Russia faction. These critics of FDR's Soviet policy had been searching for an opportunity to issue a stern warning to Moscow that would, hopefully, sober up Stalin who in the wake of the war appeared drunk with victory. Now, the opportunity presented itself in the form of a blatant violation of not only the wartime agreements reached with the USSR but also the Atlantic Charter and United Nations Charter as well as personal assurances from Stalin given to two American presidents that the USSR would respect Iranian sovereignty. Yet, unlike everyone else present, Charles Bohlen proved to be surprisingly reluctant to challenge Stalin on the issue. Not an attorney by training, Bohlen was nonetheless concerned with a legal technicality: America was not a party to the Tri-Partite Treaty and thus did not have standing to challenge Russia over their ongoing occupation of northern Iran. The 1943 Big Three Declaration on Iran was not a treaty but a statement by Stalin, FDR and Churchill to which Iran was not a signatory nor had been asked to participate or even consulted.⁴² The PGC had been present in Iran at the invitation of the British occupiers not the Tehran government. Indeed, because of that it could be argued that America was interfering in Iran's affairs without any legal foundation precisely the charge that Washington intended to hurl at Moscow. Following Bohlen's logic it could have been anticipated that it might be asked by the Soviets "What of American advisors like Col. Schwarzkopf?" Unlike Soviet advisors in the north, the American advisors in Tehran were present in Iran at the request of the national government but could they also not be regarded as meddling in the internal affairs of Iran? All the more so if the Soviets amplified their campaign questioning the legitimacy of the shah's regime which they frequently linked to the defeated Axis. Acheson and Rostow themselves had initially believed the American advisor program to be an unwarranted intrusion into Iranian affairs. The implication of Bohlen's point was that London, who had actual legal standing as a signatory to the 1942 treaty, should be left to manage the Soviets in Iran as best they could. However, no one

⁴² Indeed, following FDR and Stalin, when Churchill, a man FDR thought a 19th century imperialist hopelessly lost in the modern age, was asked to sign the document he crossed out all references to Iran and wrote in "Persia". As part of his modernization campaign Reza Shah had changed the name of the country to Iran.

else in the meeting considered the issue of standing an obstacle to American diplomatic involvement.⁴³ The majority regarded the Big Three Declaration of 1943, the Atlantic Charter, and the United Nations Charter to be sufficient to establish American standing to engage the USSR over Iran's future without fear of accusations the USA was meddling in Iranian affairs.⁴⁴ Truman and Byrnes agreed with the majority.

Bohlen offered another objection this one based not on the technicalities of international law but on the calculus of *realpolitik*. An early critic of FDR's soft Soviet policy, Bohlen, a veteran Kremlinologist, held that in this case, unlike Europe, strong diplomatic action by America would be counterproductive. His argument was twofold: First, like Acheson and Rostow a year before, Bohlen believed that Iran was *not* a strategic concern to America.⁴⁵ Engaging Russia in a dispute over Iran, no matter the merits of the case, risked diverting America's limited strength from the main arena—Europe and the Atlantic—to the Persian Gulf which he thought a sideshow in the incipient Cold War. Second and more troubling to the realist minded Bohlen was that the United States simply had no means to challenge the Russians in Iran even if it wanted to. The PGC, which had never been a combat force in any case, had left the country and the Iranian military was in no condition to resist the Red Army. England's military was also almost completely out of Iran at this point. Iran's best hope was the *gendarmerie* advised by Col. Norman Schwarzkopf yet it was lightly armed, inexperienced and could not come close to matching the numbers the Russians could deploy. A showdown in Iran, even if warranted in theory, in practice would be the wrong showdown in the wrong place and at the wrong time. American credibility and prestige would be bet on a losing proposition. A firm stand by the United States would be construed by Stalin as a bluff, Bohlen insisted, and one they could easily call leaving Washington in a vulnerable political position as a result. That weakened position would undermine America's presence in

⁴³ Kuniholm, Bruce. *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*, p. 322.

⁴⁴ James Byrnes (Secretary of State) to Wallace Murray (Ambassador in Iran), 1/2/1946, telegram # 891.00/1-246 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, 292-293. Unlike Bohlen, Vyshinsky had shown no such concern for legal standing back in January when the Soviets filed complaints with the Security Council meeting in London against England on behalf of the Indonesian and Greek governments. The complaints were mirror images of the Iranian complaint charging interference in the internal affairs of a member state. The key difference was that neither the Greek nor the Indonesian governments had asked the Soviet Union (or anyone else) to file complaints on their behalf. (See Chapter Two, 126).

⁴⁵ Charles Bohlen, *Witness to History*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973), 251. In later years, Bohlen would change his mind about the significance of Iran to American strategic interests at the time.

what Bohlen regarded as the main arena: Europe. If Stalin called an American bluff in Iran the only alternative would be to up the ante by threatening to use A-Bombs, a consideration that would have been politically unacceptable and was never considered by the White House.⁴⁶ America's weakness would be on display for the world to see leaving Washington with the unsavory choice of either escalating the issue well beyond what was warranted leading to a total breakdown in relations with Moscow and possible alienation of American allies or an embarrassing rout. A realist, Bohlen believed credibility was a valuable asset to be put at serious risk only when vital interests were at stake and Iran did not meet that criteria.

Dean Acheson was a Eurocentric man as well who like Bohlen, initially feared involvement in Iran would divert slim resources from the center of American interests on the continent to the Middle East which was still regarded as primarily a British affair. The evolution of events in Iran convinced him otherwise. Now he attempted to strike a balance between the arguments for a firm American stand against Soviet intransigence in Iran on the one side and Bohlen's concerns about jeopardizing American credibility in a risky game with Moscow on the other. He proposed a new message to the Soviets that put the Kremlin on notice that Washington was aware of their activities in northern Iran and requested an explanation. The missive, however, should stop well short of an ultimatum or saber rattling.⁴⁷ According to Wright, Acheson had said that his goal was "to let the USSR know that we were aware of its moves but 'leave a 'graceful way out' if it desired to avoid a showdown."⁴⁸

Based on Acheson's suggestions, Alger Hiss quickly drafted a second communication from Byrnes to the Kremlin to be delivered by George Kennan in Moscow on March 9.⁴⁹ It was a short and firm message but avoided the colorful image of

⁴⁶ See Chapter 7, p. 240.

⁴⁷ Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 322; Thomas Hammond, (ed.) *The Anatomy of Communist Takeovers*. (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1976), 464. Rossow characterized the March 6 note as a "pro forma protest over the failure of the Soviet occupation troops to withdraw from Iran by March 2." It was not to be confused, he wrote, with the much stiffer note from Byrnes delivered to the Soviets by Kennan on March 9. [Robert Rossow, "The Battle of Azerbaijan" in *The Middle East Journal*. Winter 1956, Vol. 10. 21-22.]

⁴⁸ Dean Acheson quoted in ("Events Relevant to the Azerbaijan Issue—March 1946") prepared by Edwin Wright, special assistant to Loy Henderson in *FRUS*, Vol. VII; 346-348.

⁴⁹ Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 322.

Byrnes' smoking double barreled shotgun. It was according to Rossow, "...couched in far stiffer and more peremptory language than any previous communication to the Soviet government since recognition."⁵⁰ It stated that Washington was well aware that heavily armed Soviet forces were moving from the USSR into Azerbaijan province and then deployed outward to the Kurdish regions and other points in northern Iran. It did not, however, explicitly accuse Moscow of a three pronged attack aimed at the whole region, dramatically illustrated by Henderson and Wright, but the implication was obvious: the Red Army was preparing for offensive operations. Paralleling Rossow's warning that a "full scale combat deployment" was under way, it stated that Washington was receiving credible reports from the ground of "...considerable movements of Soviet combat forces and materials of war..." across the Soviet border into Iran.⁵¹ Following Acheson's example of a stern response but one that opened the door to a face saving exit by Stalin, the note was a diplomatically proper yet firm request to know why the Soviet Union was introducing combat equipped troops into Iran rather than leaving as promised unless, of course, the Soviets could prove the reports false.⁵² The American notes put the Kremlin on notice that Washington was finally paying attention to Iran and was generally aware of their military escalation in Azerbaijan province. This at least bought some time because Stalin could not now count on presenting the world with a *fait accompli* which had been his *modus operandi*. Now he would have to justify his actions in Iran first to his Big Three partners and possibly to the global community if America made an issue of it in the court of world opinion. Although an isolationist and xenophobe by nature Stalin, who generally did not care much what the world thought of his regime, had to consider the prospects for postwar reconstruction aid from the United States. Massive American loans to finance Soviet recovery were considered vital by the Kremlin particularly on term that preserved her closed and secretive economy. Had FDR lived (or had Henry Wallace followed him in office) it is probable that Stalin would have found a sympathetic ear in the White House. With an increasingly critical Truman, however, the Soviets could not

⁵⁰ Robert Rossow, "The Battle of Azerbaijan" in *The Middle East Journal*. Winter 1956, Vol. 10; 22.

⁵¹ H.W. Brands, *Inside the Cold War. Loy Henderson and The Rise of The American Empire, 1918-1961*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 144.

⁵² James Byrnes (Secretary of State) to George Kennan (*Chargé* in the Soviet Union), 3/8/1946, telegram # 861.24591/3-846, in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 292-293.

expect a loan if they were in the process of thrusting their armed forces into the Persian Gulf and beyond.

Cold War mythology holds that Truman attempted to compensate for Iranian and American inferiority on the ground by reintroducing the tactic of "atomic diplomacy" by engaging in atomic saber rattling. As we shall see, the Truman administration pursued the only realistic road available: a campaign of public diplomacy waged in the United Nations and other forums, in effect placing the Soviet Union under a giant spot light. Washington had few other options in any case. Even had they wished to forward a more muscular challenge to Stalin, the reality of the matter, as Charles Bohlen had observed, was that America, Iran or England could do little in conventional military terms to counteract the Red Army in Iran. Truman had said in his January 5 letter to James Byrnes, that "Only one language do they [the Soviets] understand--'*How many divisions have you?*'" If that were the case, then America would have to be characterized as speechless in the region. The dispatch of the *USS Missouri* to Istanbul was impressive and highly symbolic (it was the platform for the Japanese surrender ceremony) but it would not be effective in stopping a Red Army breakout Iran or a communist coup in Tehran. Indeed so weak was the possible American military response that Truman only consulted one serving military man and then just once during the high point of the crisis and that was Admiral Leahy who also acted as White House liaison with the Joint Chiefs.⁵³

In his "iron curtain" speech Churchill had asserted that the Soviets only understood the language of force, particularly armed force. It was a sentiment expressed by Truman in his January 5 letter to Byrnes. But neither country could in March 1946 was capable of speaking that language (at least in conventional terms) to the Soviets when it came to Iran. Indeed, Bevin had *insisted* that the British military be fully withdrawn from Iran by the official March 2 deadline no matter what the Russians did. He believed it would deprive Stalin of any excuse to linger in Azerbaijan. Yet, it

⁵³ John R O'neal, *Foreign Policy Making in Times of Crisis*. (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1982), 133.

probably did the opposite; by creating a power vacuum it encouraged the Soviets to exploit the situation.⁵⁴

FDR had once commented that Iran would provide an ideal testing ground to prove the sincerity of the American inspired Atlantic Charter, the United Nations and the other ideals that motivated the Allies. Now the new international body would appear to have been designed to help Iran as well, albeit in a manner that FDR did not anticipate yet the Truman administration intended to make good use of it.

⁵⁴ It is interesting to speculate what might have unfolded had Bevin unilaterally implemented the Eden plan floated at the Yalta summit for a phased withdrawal of all forces. In this case, England might have begun to withdraw her forces only when the Soviets did and in proportion to their retreat. In otherworld's, Bevin might have left the first move up to Stalin rather than exercising it himself. Of course, Stalin might have welcomed that move as the establishment of a *de facto* north-south split of the country between Russia and England. If the USA was added in the mix, however, with the PGC also remaining in place until the Soviets made the first move such a north-south split would have been precluded. To get the other foreign armies out Stalin would have been forced to begin his evacuation and thus *de facto* accept the Eden plan. Of course, for that strategy to have worked the USA would have had to be willing to jointly cooperate with England and present the Soviets with a united front. Still under the sway of FDR's Soviet policy, however, it is unlikely that Byrnes or even Truman would have backed such a maneuver by Bevin who in any case never proposed a unilateral implementation of the Eden plan.

Chapter Six

“What Is Russia Up to Now?”

The change of venue from London to the Bronx did not produce a change of heart on the part of the Soviet representatives. Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Andrei Gromyko, appointed by the Kremlin as the Soviet Union's permanent representative to the Security Council, again renewed the Russian objection on March 26 saying that the Iran case was “not fitting to be placed on the agenda” of the Council. He claimed, with his trade mark straight face, that the Red Army had begun to withdraw on schedule as promised but failed to mention that units that left were replaced with larger and more powerful troops. Still, he conceded that all Soviet troops would leave Iran within “five or six weeks” but added ominously, “unless unforeseen circumstances arise.”¹ Further, Gromyko said that the whole question of Iran-Soviet relations had become an international crisis not because of Soviet refusal to leave Iranian territory (which he denied was the case) or her support for revolutionary and separatist movements in Azerbaijan province (which he also denied) but because of reactionary elements who were attempting to “foment a new war.” That was undoubtedly a thinly veiled reference to Churchill's “iron curtain” speech which was coming under intense counter fire from Moscow. A little under forty-five years later, Gromyko had not revised his opinion claiming in his *memoirs* that the Security Council session held in the Bronx was sunk in a “murky wave of anti-Soviet feeling” created by Washington and London which inhibited resolution of the Iranian issue. Otherwise it would have been a non-issue if only they had let Tehran and Moscow independently settle the matter.² In any case, the Russian

¹ Andrei Gromyko, *Memoirs*. (London: Hutchinson, 1989), 237.

² Andrei Gromyko, *Memoirs*. (London: Hutchinson, 1989), 237. In his *memoir*, Gromyko retroactively adds to the Soviet brief when he said that the USSR felt it could not withdraw her troops from Iran (which he minimizes as small in number when in fact it was a large and heavily armed force) “...before a number of questions had been settled—principally the continued existence of British bases in Iraq and India, and the large number of US bases around the perimeter of our frontier, to say nothing of the British naval forces in the Persian Gulf. Therefore, the USSR declared it would keep its troops in Iran for the time being.” [Andrei Gromyko, *Memoirs*. (London: Hutchinson, 1989), 237]. Whether the ambassador was revealing what the Kremlin was really thinking behind closed doors or was himself confusing time periods is hard to say. It is impossible to take seriously the claim that America had by March 1946 established a “large number” of

ambassador said negotiations had taken place between Tehran and Moscow leading to an agreement. The bi-lateral negotiations between the parties that were proposed by the Soviet Union at the London meeting of the Security Council had thus achieved the desired “positive results.” Consequently there was no need for the Security Council to consider the matter any further: “...the [U.N.] resolution of the 30th of January has been carried out. The negotiations have taken place and a positive understanding has been reached.” It would be waste of time for the Council to consider a complaint that was no longer relevant since it had been resolved bi-laterally although the Soviets had never considered the complaint viable. Gromyko, however, did not disclose any conditions attached to this supposed resolution nor did he clarify what he meant by “unforeseen circumstances.”³ Indeed, he seemed to believe that formulation was a stroke of rhetorical genius; when asked by the American delegation what circumstances would be unforeseen Gromyko replied "Unforeseeable circumstances are unforeseeable precisely because you can't foresee them." He claimed the audience roared their approval at his combination of wit and logic.⁴

Byrnes arrived in New York to personally present the American brief supporting the Iranian complaint. He had hoped that his British counterpart, Ernest Bevin, would also attend and present a united Anglo-American front against Russia—something FDR had worked assiduously to avoid during the war.⁵ Taken together the two foreign

bases around the Soviet frontier. He may have been expressing Soviet fears at the time about the future of American military expansion (although the American military in early 1946 was in a state of rapid demobilization and never had an armed military presence in Iran other than military police) which were not expressed openly at the negotiating tables (indeed at the Moscow conference Stalin spoke of his fear of lone terrorists armed with matches sneaking over the Iranian border to sabotage oil production) although in the Soviet press fears of “fascists” and “reactionaries” were often expressed. If Gromyko was speaking of a projection of Soviet fears at the time about Iran becoming part of an American military encirclement the USSR in the future than the men in the Kremlin might well have been prescient but it also indicated in 1946 that the Soviet leadership was thinking of Iran in strategic terms which was contrary to what they were saying in public. And of course, if the Soviets intended to invoke (or re-invoke) the 1921 treaty of friendship between Iran and the Soviet Russia then they would have had to specify a third party threat in Iran to Soviet security and that could, in the Spring of 1946, have only been either England or America since no other foreign powers were present. Nor did the Soviets at the time openly claim that the British presence in India and Iraq was a cause for the Soviet Army remaining in Iran although of course, Gromyko was correct that the oil refineries in southern Iran were critical to the British naval presence in the Gulf.

³ *Department of State Bulletin*. No. 14, January to June, 1946. Volume XIV. No. 341, pp. 568-570.

⁴ Andrei Gromyko, *Memoirs*. (London: Hutchinson, 1989), 237.

⁵ *FRUS 1946*. Volume VII, p. 369, fn. 31. FDR's efforts in the end came to naught. No matter how good a show the president put on Stalin always believed that England and America would coalesce against the USSR once the common Axis enemy was defeated. It was only a question of when *not* if. FDR thought of

ministers would have made a powerful impression both on world opinion and the Soviets. It would have also singled an initial and public crack in Roosevelt's soft Soviet policy which at its core held that the Soviets should never have reason to believe there was a joint British and American approach to their country. Instead Ambassador Sir Alexander Cadogan represented the British, Bevin having decided to stay in London thus leaving Byrnes the highest ranking state official at the session. It was another early if symbolic example of America assuming responsibility for England's traditional Near Eastern sphere of influence. Both Byrnes and Cadogan countered Gromyko's claim of an Iranian-Soviet settlement pointing out that Tehran had not withdrawn their complaint. The secretary of state was clearly determined to press the Iranian complaint even if the Russians were now pledging before the Council to evacuate their army and end interference in the affairs of her neighbor because the issue had extended beyond the immediate cause of action in Iran and now involved the legitimacy of the new world body. Further, Byrnes was in no mood to give up his advantage over the Soviets; there had been few of them so far in the postwar environment and Byrnes, following Truman's January 5 instructions, intended to utilize American advantages when it appeared. American critics of FDR's foreign policy had been searching for some time to locate a pressure point on the Soviets who seemed immune to every other approach tried by Washington: friendship, cooperation, and accommodation under FDR; harsh language by Truman; atomic diplomacy by Byrnes—none had produced results favorable to America by substantially modifying Russia's expansionist ambitions. Truman told Assistant Secretary of State Adolph Berle that the Soviets "would carry on local aggression unless world opinion stopped them."⁶ Now the opportunity to mobilize world opinion against the Soviets was at hand.

The conflict over Iran allowed Byrnes to try a campaign of public diplomacy that appealed to world public opinion, a constituency Truman was anxious to enlist in a push back against Soviet expansionism. Moscow was, after all, in an embarrassing spot, caught

Stalin as a practical man like himself; in reality Stalin was loyal to Leninist ideology which dictated that the liberal democracies would eventually combine to attack the USSR (and any socialist state) to restore capitalism. That his intransigence on Iran had forced a reversal by Truman of FDR's soft Soviet policy would thus not have occurred to him.

⁶ Truman quoted in Stanley Meisler, *The United Nations. The First Fifty Years*. (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 1995), 29.

in the glare of world scrutiny in a clear case of aggression. To make matters worse for them, unlike Eastern Europe, where the Soviets could present a plausible argument for a buffer zone against a potentially resurgent Germany, no one outside of the Kremlin took a threat from Iran to Russian security seriously.⁷ Soviet expansion into Iran could only be seen as a grab for natural resources (oil) or the initial bid on a Middle Eastern sphere of influence (power) both of which added up to a revival of traditional Russian imperialism. Byrnes was not going to let the moment pass by letting the Russians off the hook as he had previously in private discussions during the CFMs in London and Moscow. Even though it made some hidebound professional diplomats like Trygve Lie uneasy, public speeches by Byrnes as well as keeping the media focused on the issue became an important American weapon for supporting the Iranians as well as exposing the Soviet Union as an aggressor.⁸ Byrnes was aiming at something more than a “gottcha” moment however; the future of the Security Council as a viable body was at also at stake in the Iran case.

In the first of the two most important public speeches during the Iran crisis, Byrnes spoke to the Overseas Press Club on February 28, in New York City. Without specifically referring to the growing Soviet-American tensions or the pending Iranian complaint in the Security Council, Byrnes left no one in doubt that he was speaking of both. Generalizing about the great powers but in reality reminding Moscow of her treaty obligations with Tehran, Byrnes stated “that no state has the right to maintain its troops on the territory of another independent state without its consent.”⁹ FDR had suggested to Stalin at one point that America probably would not be fully engaged in the world after the war; Byrnes now corrected that misimpression—American armed forces, he said, might be used to enforce the Charter of the United Nations.¹⁰ In words more reminiscent

⁷ Oddly, Robert Dallek agrees with the Soviets on this point: “But after the war ended in Europe, Moscow used Iranian threats to Russian security as a reason to delay a troop withdrawal.” [Robert Dallek, *The Lost Peace*. (New York: Harper, 2010), 157]. In reality any threat from Iran in 1946 to Soviet security existed only in Stalin's mind.

⁸ Byrnes' campaign of public diplomacy was somewhat anticipated by the Iranian ambassador in London (Seyyed Hassan Taqizadeh) during the time of the Moscow CFM. See Chapter Two, p. 99.

⁹ Byrnes quoted in David Robertson, *Sly and Able. A Political Biography of James F. Byrnes*. (New York: W.W. Norton), 472.

¹⁰ At the Yalta summit, FDR had told Stalin that American troops would be fully withdrawn from Europe within two years of V-E Day leaving it up to the Russian and British armed forces to maintain peace and security. At best, FDR said, the American military would play only an indirect supporting role in the air or

of Theodore than Franklin Roosevelt, Byrnes said that “If we are to be a great power we must act as a great power, not only to ensure our own security but in order to preserve the peace of the world.” In addition to the Kremlin, Byrnes was also aiming his remarks at domestic isolationists who hoped to derail the new internationalist and interventionist spirit in Washington. Ironically, like Moscow, the isolationists in America looked forward to regressing back to the days when the State Department’s primary concern was managing banana republics in Latin America. The 1942 Tri-Partite Treaty that the USSR was breaking could be only be construed as one such covenant that was now an American responsibility. “We [U.S.] have covenanted not to use force except in defense of law as embodied in the policies and principles of the [U.N.] Charter.” The new world body would not be the rubber stamp of approval for the great powers that Stalin had hoped for or a mere debating society but could rely on American influence and power to enforce its founding principles. The most important duty of the Security Council was to prevent war yet, said Byrnes, “unless the great powers are prepared to act in defense of law the United Nations cannot prevent war...the Charter [of the UN] forbids aggression, and we cannot allow aggression to be accomplished by coercion or pressure or by subterfuge such as political infiltration.”¹¹ Byrnes’ speech is not remembered to the same degree as Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” speech on March 5 or even Stalin’s “Election Day” speech yet it was significant both for the Iran case, the future of the United Nations and the trajectory of America’s postwar foreign policy.¹² The last point, for example, that the United States and the new world body could not tolerate aggression even if disguised as political infiltration was an anticipation of one of the key themes of the Truman Doctrine

on the seas. [Robin Edmonds, *The Big Three*. (New York: W.W. Norton and Co, 1991), 353; W. Averell Harriman, and Elie Abel, *Special Envoy to Churchill and Stalin*. (New York: Random House, 1975), 401]. Undoubtedly the careless words of FDR reinforced Stalin's assumption that the USA would lapse back into isolationism after the war. Truman's rapid withdrawal of the American PGC from Iran (effective by New Years Day 1946) was an example of his implementation of the spirit of FDR's words.

¹¹ Byrnes quoted in David Robertson, *Sly and Able. A Political Biography of James F. Byrnes*. (New York: W.W. Norton), 472.

¹² Byrnes biographer David Robertson claims that the secretary of state planned his public speeches during the Iran Crisis in "personal correlation" with Churchill who delivered his "Iron Curtain" speech on March 5. Robertson, however, offers no evidence of this planned coordination with Churchill's Fulton address. [David Robertson, *Sly and Able. A Political Biography of James F. Byrnes*. (New York: W.W. Norton), 471.]

to be announced in a years' time.¹³ Although Byrnes never mentioned the USSR by name the reporters were in doubt about to which he referred. Typical was the next day's headline in London's *Daily Mail*: "Russia Warned: You Have Gone Far Enough."¹⁴

Byrnes' second public speech related to the Iran crisis and the state of relations with the USSR came again in New York City on March 16 at the Society of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick. Just as some in the media said that Byrnes's speech to the Overseas Press Club had been influenced by the Senator Vandenberg's remarks on the previous day (February 27) so too did they now claim his speech to his fellow Irishmen was a clone of Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech delivered on March 5. Like his speech to the foreign reporters (but unlike Churchill's address in Fulton) Byrnes did not specifically mention Iran.¹⁵ Byrnes began by advertising America's tradition of peace and fear of permanent military establishments that would threaten democracy but said today's situation in the world ruled out any unilateral disarmament by America. One sided disarmament, he said, never works.¹⁶ There would be, it was implied, no more talk of sharing atomic research information with the USSR as there had at the Moscow CFM when the secretary of state had tried to revive FDR's soft treatment of Stalin. Byrnes was no too subtly reminding the Soviets that America enjoyed a monopoly on atomic weapons.¹⁷ There was in this a certain channeling of Churchill's claim at Westminster College that the Russians only respected armed force and disrespected military weakness. Reviewing the origins of the Second World War, Byrnes did pay tribute to the Churchill thesis. A soft policy on Germany, Japan and Italy in the 1930s had not avoided war, he said, but only made it more likely. Lack of military preparations for self-defense by the

¹³ On March 12, 1947, Truman would announce his doctrine that held that it was in American interests to "support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressure." [Truman quoted in Jerald Combs, *The History of American Foreign Policy*. (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1986), 330.]

¹⁴ David Robertson, *Sly and Able. A Political Biography of James F. Byrnes*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), 472. That the speech was covered by the British newspapers is an indication that the Soviet Foreign Ministry was also probably aware of the address and its implications.

¹⁵ Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech at Westminster College cited the crisis over Iran which he insisted (as he had during the Eureka summit) on calling Persia.

¹⁶ "United States Military Strength—Its Relation to the United Nations and World Peace" by the Secretary of State (James Byrnes) in *United States: Department of State Bulletin*. No. 14, January to June, 1946. Volume XIV. No. 341, pp. 481-483. Byrnes only specific recommendation was to extend the draft into peace time.

¹⁷ As we shall see, this is probably the closet the USA came to bracketing atomic weapons and the Iran crisis albeit only by implication.

democracies was not seen as an act of goodwill by the aggressive dictatorships but as weakness to be ruthlessly exploited. “We learned that the example of weakness set by the United States ... incited them [the Axis powers] to ever bolder aggressions... This tragic experience makes us realize that weakness invites aggression.” Words, he added, must be backed by strength.¹⁸

Endorsement of Churchill's anti-appeasement thesis, even as applied to the USSR and the concurrent Iran *imbroglio*, did not mean Byrnes bought Churchill's thesis *in toto*. When it came to applying the lessons of 1930s appeasement and the origins of the recently concluded war to the postwar world, Byrnes explicitly rejected an Anglo-American military alliance to contain the Soviet Union which had been the centerpiece of the former PM's address at Westminster College. “We do not propose to seek security,” Byrnes said, “in an alliance with the Soviet Union against Great Britain, or in an alliance with Great Britain against the Soviet Union.” Peace and security for America and the world was, as FDR had projected, to be found in a viable United Nations. “We must maintain our strength, therefore, for the primary purpose of preserving and using our influence in support of the Charter of the United Nations.”¹⁹ Thus between FDR's soft Soviet policy of maximum allowable accommodation and Churchill's proposal of an Anglo-American military and political alliance to counteract the Soviet Union, Byrnes choose the middle course: agreeing with Churchill and Truman (and against FDR) that aggressive dictators like Stalin did indeed only understand the language of force and respected strength but at the same time pledging to act with force only in the interests of the high ideals of the United Nations—FDR primary foreign policy legacy. Byrnes delivered the death blow to Roosevelt's Soviet policy but aimed to preserve the late president's greater postwar vision.

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¹⁸ “United States Military Strength—Its Relation to the United Nations and World Peace” by the Secretary of State (James Byrnes) in United States: *Department of State Bulletin*. No. 14, January to June, 1946. Volume XIV. No. 341; 481-483.

¹⁹ “United States Military Strength—Its Relation to the United Nations and World Peace” by the Secretary of State (James Byrnes) in United States: *Department of State Bulletin*. No. 14, January to June, 1946. Volume XIV. No. 341; 481-483.

Beginning on March 26, the agenda item on Iran was debated for the following two days with the discussion continually revolving around the competence of the Security Council to hear the matter now that Russia claimed the complaint was moot. Byrnes countered the Soviets by arguing that the immediate issue had expanded beyond the underlying charge concerning Soviet activities in Iran to include the legitimacy of the Council. For Byrnes, once a complaint had been registered with the Council and the dispute between nations accepted as likely to disturb the peace and security of the world community, it was no longer just a quarrel among the direct parties but a concern of the whole body as representative of the international community. If a complaint was not followed through to its logical conclusion by the Council then the complaining party (e.g. Iran) could be subject to intense pressure from the defendant (e.g. Russia) to withdraw the charges without having received any relief from their distress. Only collective Security Council protection for a small nation could prevent the great powers from utilizing that kind of pressure to avoid being called to account. This was hardly theoretical; that is exactly what was happening when the Soviets and the Tudeh applied intense pressure on Tehran to withdraw her complaint and engage only in bilateral talks were Iran would be at a distinct disadvantage. If this principle was not established and immediately, when the very first complaint was before the world body, Byrnes argued, the Security Council would simply become a rubber stamp of approval for the great powers which, although he could not say so openly, is exactly what Stalin had always wanted. Byrnes' biographer David Robertson put it this way: "...Jimmy Byrnes and the rest of the non-Soviet world waited to see if the United Nations would in truth become a world adjudication body or just another group of international well-wishers meeting inside a Bronx school gymnasium."²⁰

Taking a cue from his cousin Theodore Roosevelt, who had announced in 1904 that the United States would act as the only policeman in the Western Hemisphere when an international dispute was at issue, FDR initially spoke of the proposed United Nations as one managed by "four policemen" (America, China, Russia, and England); they would be the core of the Security Council with authorized police powers. "The smaller powers,"

²⁰ David. Robertson, *Sly and Able. A Political Biography of James F. Byrnes*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), 474.

FDR said at around this time (early 1943), “should have nothing more dangerous than rifles...the three powers should police Europe in general...”²¹ That was the kind of talk Stalin liked—great power hegemony—leaving the smaller nations, organized into regional blocs, to obey their big brothers who had control of things much more dangerous than rifles.²² Just as Vyshinsky had told Harriman that the American people should learn to obey their leaders so too the Soviets believed the smaller nations should learn to obey the superior powers. Under these circumstances Stalin probably thought jumping on the United Nations band wagon was a small price to pay to satisfy FDR and might even prove very useful to the Soviet Union. Such a formula would provide an “idealistic” cloak for the Machiavellian power politics he practiced and that was the only sort of world body that Stalin was interested in joining: a great power club of three (or four) policemen armed to the teeth. Peace and security meant, in that case, what the great powers said it did. Of course there were guiding principles of the new United Nations but Stalin was interested in the practical uses of power to meet Russian national interests. The implication of FDR's scheme, of course, was that small and medium nations with their quarrelling and maneuvering needed constant supervision from the great powers lest they drag the latter back into a third world war. World bodies were really only to coordinate those efforts and provide an air of legitimacy for the hegemons as they managed their respective spheres of influence and provide them up to some semblance of the United Nations Charter. Yet, as the war proceeded FDR spoke decreasingly of the “four policemen” formula and increasingly of a genuine Wilsonian collective security organization, with authentic and equal rights enjoyed by all nations superior and inferior. With that drift in FDR's thinking Stalin's enthusiasm for the

²¹ FDR quoted in Charles Williams, *The Last Great French: A Life of Charles de Gaulle*. (New York: Wiley, 1997), 218.

²² William Taubman notes the same: that in May 1942 when FDR first pitched his idea of the United Nations to the Soviets as that of the Big Three (or Four) acting as the world's policemen laying down the law to the smaller nations “...it was not so removed from Stalin's way of thinking.” FDR assured Molotov that this was the final word in his vision for the new world body and the Soviet Foreign Minister recorded that he was impressed by Roosevelt's realism. Of course, it was not the end point and as the war progressed Roosevelt began to lean away from the realism of Theodore Roosevelt that had pleased Molotov and lean towards the idealistic Woodrow Wilson with collective security and the rights of small nations as the essentials of the new world body. [William Taubman, *Stalin's American Policy*. (New York: Norton, 1982), 88].

project, which had never been great, rapidly deflated.²³ At the Yalta summit, Stalin ridiculed FDR's changing conception of the United Nations: "It is ridiculous to believe that Albania would have an equal *voice* with the three great powers that had won the war."²⁴ According to the American translators' transcript, the Soviet premier scoffed at the complaints of smaller nations who "were now scolding these great powers for failure to take into consideration the rights of these small nations."²⁵ For Stalin, it would have seemed the Big Three had fought and defeated the Axis with unprecedented spilling of blood and treasure spent and the smaller nations even if allies, should show their gratitude by gladly deferring to the victorious Big Three. Now in 1946, the Americans had in theory the sort of world organization FDR had bargained for yet in the face of Soviet obstructionism it was running the risk of lapsing into the body that FDR had initially projected and which had initially attracted Stalin as useful idealistic cover Russian national interests. If the Security Council could not act now to uphold the rights of small nations like Iran when could they? Stalin and Molotov hoped the answer would be never while Truman and Byrnes believed the time was ripe to establish the principle both in practice as well as in theory.

In any case, Byrnes noted that neither the United States nor the Security Council had received word from Tehran that bilateral negotiations had led to the "positive results" that Gromyko spoke of or that the Red Army had been effectively evacuating Iran. It would be recipe for abuse and manipulation if the Council relied solely on the word of the accused aggressor and acted without a hearing from the accuser. Under those circumstances, Byrnes said, "all that a government represented on the Council would have to do when a complaint was made against it would be to advise the Council that there had been an agreement and on the strength of that statement, to ask that the

²³ William Taubman, *Stalin's American Policy*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982), 88-89; Stephen Schlesinger, *Act of Creation. The Founding of the United Nations*. (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2003), 8.

²⁴ Stalin quoted in S.M. Plokhy, *Yalta. The Price of Peace*. (New York: Viking, 2010), 121. Note that Stalin says "voice" not equal vote (even FDR agreed on the Security Council the permanent members would wield veto powers they alone enjoyed) strongly implying he believed that the capacity of smaller nations to even present their cases before the new world body should be restricted as inferior to that of the rights of the great powers to stop them—exactly the position the Soviets took at the Security Council sessions on the Iran issue.

²⁵ Stalin quoted in S.M. Plokhy, *Yalta. The Price of Peace*, 121.

complaining Government should be denied the opportunity to have a hearing.”²⁶ To eschew that outcome, Byrnes said, Iran had to be given the chance to confirm or deny Gromyko’s claims of a settlement before the Security Council and that in turn required putting the matter on the agenda which the Soviet Union was strenuously resisting. “All that is contemplated now is the adoption of an agenda which would give the Iranian Government an opportunity to present facts which in the opinion of that Government constitute a threat to international peace.”²⁷ Byrnes realized that failure to act against aggression committed by member states against other member states would likely doom the United Nations from the start. The League of Nations had been ineffective in punishing aggression under similar circumstances and condemned itself to irrelevance as a result. Although the League had been able to manage some minor disputes within its jurisdiction, on the big issues of war and peace it had failed miserably. That sad judgment is verified by the fact that the war which gave birth to the League was repeated on an even more spectacular scale twenty years later. When Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931, China lodged a complaint with the League. Japan—the aggressor nation—was a permanent member of the Executive Council, and was in an analogous position to the Soviet Union in 1946. Japan vetoed a resolution for League intervention to protect the victim nation, China. When the League formally declared Japan an aggressor nation, Tokyo simply walked out of the world body and continued her offensive in China—what some, with good reason, believed might be the Soviets’ Plan B in 1946 if they could not keep Iran off the Council’s agenda.

The League protested German aggression as well, to little effect although at least Hitler had the good manners to resign from the League before launching his campaign of aggression. In 1935, Italy, still a League member, invaded another member state, Ethiopia. This time the League went beyond words of protest and issued sanctions which, however, were so weak and easily circumvented that they were little more than symbolic. When Stalin invaded fellow League member Finland in 1940, the world body expelled Russia, thus far a rare step for the League yet it was of no help to the victim nation. In

²⁶ *Statement by Secretary of State James Byrnes before the UNSC on March 26, 1946 in FRUS Volume VII, p, 383.*

²⁷ *FRUS Volume VII, 383.* A threat to world peace and security was the standard under which a complaint could be heard by the Security Council.

any event, by then the League was widely viewed as a colossal failure.²⁸ The League proved itself ineffective throughout an era of aggression, even committed by member states against member states. The League, among many other problems, simply had no effective enforcement capabilities to prevent or punish aggression and was often reluctant to use the few options they did have.²⁹ The power of the Security Council rests almost exclusively in its credibility—at least when the permanent members are involved (especially with a closed economy like the USSR which had been particularly immune to sanctions due to the very low levels of trade and communication outside of its sphere)—and yet that very factor would have been fatally damaged if the Soviets proposal to drop the complaint had been accepted. The small and medium sized nations would have understandably lost faith in the Council, the lofty principles of the United Nations and regarded them as no more than lip service by the Great Powers. Indeed, the next day on March 27, Byrnes repeated this point before the Council: if Gromyko's government—the accused aggressor—was allowed to be the only direct voice on the matter before the Security Council, then the effect would reach far beyond the specific case at hand. “If a small government... is denied even the right to present its case, then all confidence in the effectiveness of the Security Council will disappear... The United Nations will die in its infancy because of inefficiency and ineffectiveness.”³⁰ The United Nations would almost immediately suffer the same fate of the League of Nations experiencing an even greater loss in confidence than her predecessor. Byrnes' guiding assumption that the future of the Security Council was at stake during the Iran crisis was correct.

Byrnes's embrace of a firm diplomatic strategy toward the USSR combined with establishing the Security Council as something more than a green light of approval for the great powers was applauded by Truman but made Secretary-General Trygve Lie uncomfortable. Lie preferred to allow an ample amount of time for the matter to be settled discreetly and directly between Tehran and Moscow if at all possible. That would

²⁸ That Japan or Italy had not been expelled like the USSR fueled Stalin's suspicions that the USSR would be treated unequally in the new United Nations.

²⁹ Stephen Schlesinger, *Act of Creation. The Founding of the Nations*. (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2003), 25-27.

³⁰ “Remarks by the Secretary of State During Discussions on Motions” on March 26, 1946 at the UNSC in *Department of State Bulletin*. No. 14, January to June, 1946. Volume XIV. No. 341, pp. 570-571.

have made the Council a court of last resort—a supreme court not a trial court.³¹ Lie's criticisms, however, were misplaced. Byrnes, although tardy in recognizing the importance of the Iran complaint both to American-Soviet relations and the future of the United Nations, had nonetheless made efforts to settle the issue privately and quietly with Stalin and Molotov most recently during the Christmas CFM sessions in Moscow. Molotov had proven unreachable on the matter while Stalin had virtually laughed in Byrnes' face when the secretary of state threatened to support the Iranian complaint if it came before the Security Council. Ernest Bevin who was (like his predecessor Anthony Eden) armed with specific proposals to effect an orderly Allied exit from Iran ran into the same brick wall as did Byrnes at the Moscow sessions. Stalin's claims of anxiety over match box terrorists operating out of Iran into Soviet Baku were practically an insult to the secretary of state and British foreign minister. During the London session of the Security Council, Byrnes had been further willing to allow bilateral talks between Tehran and Moscow to proceed clearly in anticipation that they would settle the matter short of further United Nations involvement although both he and Bevin prudently insisted the matter stay on the Council agenda for future consideration if necessary. The result of the bilateral talks, however, had only been Stalinist brow beating and bullying of the Iranian prime minister. Byrnes had pursued Lie's preferred route without success owing to Soviet obstructionism not for lack of trying. To allow the kind of time that Lie seemed prepared to allow would have meant the Red Army would only have become even more entrenched in northern Iran and their separatist allies further emboldened. Further, Byrnes still relied on the possibilities of bi-lateral negotiations between Moscow and Tehran producing results albeit now within the context of Security Council interest. Given the

³¹ Trygve Lie, *In the Cause of Peace*. (New York: Macmillian, 1954), 75. Like Lie, Richard Freeland makes a similar error arguing that Byrnes was hostile toward a bi-lateral settlement between Iran and Russia from the start. For Freeland, Byrnes and Truman were itching to issue an ultimatum to Stalin to get out of Iran to appease the get-tough-with-Russia faction in Washington but bi-lateral talks between Tehran and Moscow got in the way. In reality, Byrnes always assumed that bi-lateral talks were essential and in no way opposed them. Indeed until the dressing down he received from Truman after the Moscow CFM, Byrnes had always assumed that the issue was one that only concerned the UK, Iran and the USSR. After the Qavam appearance in Moscow, however, he concluded bi-lateral talks would not be effective for Iran without the Security Council's involvement and the Security Council would lose all credibility if it allowed Iran to be bullied by a great power during bi-lateral talks. Freeland also claims the USA was implementing the first primitive example of the policy of containment of the USSR during the Iran crisis yet "roll back" was the more accurate policy comparison since the Soviets were being forced to give up territory they were in the process of transforming into a "friendly" state probably detached from Iran. [Richard Freeland, *The Truman Doctrine and the Origins of McCarthyism*. (New York: NYU Press, 1985). 53].

realities of the situation—the weakness of the United States military in the region and the vastly inferior forces Iran could put up against the Soviets—he had to count on some progress in Tehran-Moscow talks providing a fig leaf for Russian withdrawal. Still he had at least come to the conclusion that Red Army evacuation was the minimum the world community could accept.

Two diplomatic initiatives by Byrnes—his support for keeping the Iranian complaint on the Council's agenda and his own campaign of public diplomacy—eventually forced the Soviets to engage in new and this time genuine talks with Tehran that facilitated the Soviet exit with a minimum of pain to the Iranians. It is accurate, of course, to say that the policy of containment (until the nuclear arms race reached a peak) soon to be fully adopted by the United States did tend to preclude productive negotiations; if Kennan's thesis was operative, then what, after all would there be to negotiate about? Indeed, if Kennan's thesis presented in the long telegram was correct than negotiations were generally an error since they fostered the illusions on all levels—popular and elite—that productive arrangements were possible. Only constant counterforce, he and Churchill argued, would produce the result of keeping the Soviets confined to their own sphere.³² That was implied in the Iranian case but not fully formed. Only in the months followed would it all too clear that a pattern had been set of confrontations and walkouts, vetoes and boycotts. Truman and Byrnes still held out hope, albeit it tentative, that a firm, even though approach toward Moscow would yield Russian concessions and thaw the increasingly icy state of relations short of cold war.

One prominent historian of the Cold War, John Lewis Gaddis, has also criticized Byrnes' diplomacy during the crisis asserting that it stemmed *not* from an authentic concern about Iran, the future of the United Nations or even American national interests but an opportunistic career minded jump onto the get-tough-with-Russia bandwagon then on parade in Washington. This was all the more questionable, in Gaddis' judgment, since the Soviets had already indicated their intention to withdraw from Iran but that did not stop Byrnes from launching a public pressure campaign against Russia over what Gaddis

³² Melvyn Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power. National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 107-108.

claims was by then a done deal.³³ Thus, Byrnes was exploiting the dispute for personal political gains—job security—even if the price was needlessly exacerbating tensions with Moscow. In his 2012 biography of George Kennan, Gaddis reasserted his poor evaluation of Byrnes' motives calling him little more than a "weathervane" which blew with the prevailing right-ward wind in Washington. Truman insisted that Byrnes adopt a conformational line with the Soviets and as Gaddis notes, the president was practically concerned with the fate of Iran and Turkey both of which at that moment were under intense Russian pressure.³⁴ Thus, unconcerned with his old boss' legacy, Smith claims Byrnes obliged his new boss' demand for a counterattack on Russia. It is worth pausing at this point to ask: Was Byrnes a political hack who caved to the rising influence of the hard-liners in Washington or was he acting out of a principle that carried over from the FDR's efforts to launch a viable world body to preserve global peace and security? Did his resolve to confront the Soviets result from past experience dealing with the Russians at the conference table or the bandwagon effect of Washington hawks?

It is true that the January 5 letter authored by Truman put Byrnes on notice that policy was shifting quickly in the Truman administration and that his career as secretary of state might be dependent on his blowing with the prevailing wind.³⁵ Indeed, his performance during the Iran crisis received stellar reviews from the get-tough-with-Russia faction who believed they saw a marked difference between his posture at the Moscow CFM (which they characterized as too soft or even appeasement) and his approach to the Soviets during the Iran Crisis. Upon reading Byrnes' address to the Overseas Press Club, Truman who had been cool toward Byrnes when he returned from

³³ John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 312. Doubts about Byrnes by the hardliners in Washington went public when the January 1946 edition of *Fortune* magazine profiled the secretary of state: "Some of his close friends call him a fixer, a compromiser, an appeaser and worry that such a man should be the custodian of American foreign policy." [Victor Sebestyen, 1946. *The Making of the Modern World*. (New York: Pantheon, 2014), 193]. Note that the author said that "appeaser" is what Byrnes' close friends said of him!

³⁴ John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan. An American Life*. (New York: Penguin, 2011), 217. Byrnes always insisted that he had not been tongue lashed by Truman like an errant school boy being disciplined by the head master. "Of course," recalled Byrnes years later when he said he first heard of the January 5 letter marked unsent, "such a letter was never sent to me nor read to me." [Byrnes quoted in Robert Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis. The Presidency of Harry S. Truman. 1945-1948*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 160-161.] Byrnes' version seems more credible and Truman probably penned the letter as an *aide-memoire*.

³⁵ Indeed, at first Truman may have even been trying to provoke a resignation by Byrnes. Byrnes, however, it should be recalled claimed he knew nothing of the letter until a decade later.

Christmas in Moscow, now said of the speech “Jim, I’ve read it and like it.”³⁶ In the preceding weeks, first John Foster Dulles and then Senator Vandenberg publicly suggested that the Truman administration do more to challenge Russia. On the afternoon of February 27, a day before Byrnes delivered his speech to the foreign reporters in New York; Vandenberg at senate hearings in Washington asked “What is Russia up to now?” He said it was high time for the Truman administration to find out starting with Iran.³⁷ Truman agreed: “We might as well find out whether the Russians were bent on world conquest now as in five or ten years.”³⁸ Reading the speech Vandenberg and other hardliners concluded that Byrnes and Truman were turning in their direction and they were pleased by the change. Reviewing the speech, American foreign policy media guru Walter Lippmann also concluded Byrnes had delighted hardliners even casting him as a Republican Party puppet: “Secretary Byrnes has now said...all the things Senator Vandenberg wants to have said.”³⁹ Indeed, Vandenberg, told a gathering of his constituents later in the month that he endorsed the emerging get-tough-with-Russia policy in the administration, exhibited during the Iran crisis, “which was voiced in the recent courageous candor of our own Secretary of State Byrnes. I hope it is not too late. I applaud and sustain him in this new vigor.”⁴⁰

Historians (e.g. Gaddis) suspicious of the newly energized and less flexible approach in negotiating with the Soviets find Iran to have only been a convenient excuse for the secretary of state to score points with Washington hardliners ignore what was in Byrnes' own brief: Exhibit A was the Etheridge report which concluded that the Soviets were establishing police states in Bulgaria and Rumania and warned that Iran was next on Stalin's menu followed by Turkey; Exhibit B were the many reports on the ground from Rossow and confirmed by the British vice-consul; Exhibit C was the memo (“Basic Aims of Soviet Policy in Eastern Europe 1939-1941”) prepared for him by Henderson and

³⁶ Truman quoted in Robert Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis. The Presidency of Harry S. Truman. 1945-1948.* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 185.

³⁷ Vandenberg quoted in Robert Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis*, 185.

³⁸ Truman quoted in David Yergin, *Shattered Peace.* (New York: Penguin, 1990), 235.

³⁹ Walter Lippmann quoted in Messer, Robert. *The End of an Alliance*, pp.188-189. Some wits in the media agreed with Lippmann that the secretary of state was attempting to appease Vandenberg and dubbed his speech to the foreign press the “Second Vandenberg Concerto.” [Robert Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis. The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1945-1948.* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 185.]

⁴⁰ Arthur Vandenberg, jr. (ed.) *The Private Papers of Senator Vandenberg.* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1952), 251.

Howard which (based on recently discovered captured German documents) detailed the negotiations between Stalin-Molotov and Hitler to establish a Soviet sphere in the Middle-East starting with Iran and the Persian Gulf, as part of an Axis strategy to carve up the British Empire.⁴¹ In a shocking example of bad faith, neither Stalin nor Molotov had ever revealed to FDR (or Truman) or his inner circle that they had seriously bargained with Hitler for Iran and the Persian Gulf even when Iran was under direct discussion among the Big Three. Had they done so, FDR might have been inclined to pressure Stalin for a more detailed guarantee of their pledge to respect postwar Iranian sovereignty.⁴²

That Molotov had been discussing with Berlin incorporating Iran and the Persian Gulf region into the Soviet sphere six years in the past was shocking and Henderson and Howard believed it went a long way towards answering the question posed by Senator Vandenberg about Iran: "What is Russia up to now?" What Russia was up to in 1946 was what she had been back in 1940: expansion into the Middle East using Iran as a launching pad. The consequences would have been the same as in 1940: to displace England as the dominate power in the region and make Iran and the Persian Gulf part of the Soviet sphere. Howard and Henderson attempted to impress upon Byrnes that nothing had changed in six years.

The impact of the captured German documents, the interrogation of high ranking German officials about their negotiations with the Russians over Iran and the Howard and Henderson memo combined with the Ethridge report and the dire warnings from the ground in Tabriz helps to explain why Byrnes took up the Iran case with such vigor in

⁴¹ See Chapter Five, pp. 192-194. In a 1947 book, Byrnes reviewed the captured German documents he received from Henderson and Howard. Molotov's reply to Hitler's proposal came on November 25, 1940 delivered to the German ambassador in Moscow. Stalin and Molotov's price for joining the Tripartite Pact was: 1. No German troops in Finland; 2. Soviet military bases on the Dardanelles; 3. Japan abandon their claims for coal in north Sakhalin; 4. "that Soviet aspirations in the area south of Baku and Batum in the general direction of Iran and the Persian Gulf to be recognized." The Soviet's never received a reply from Germany until Berlin answered on June 22, 1941 when they declared war on the USSR. [James Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly*. (Harper and Brothers, 1947), 290].

⁴² Stalin and Molotov's failure to disclose even when the future of Iran was under direct discussion, is yet another example of a failing of FDR's Soviet policy which held that cooperation and goodwill on the part of the Americans would yield similar acts of cooperation and goodwill by Moscow.

March 1946.⁴³ Byrnes may have been trying to save his job during the Iran crisis by adopting a harder stance toward the USSR but he also had a sound basis rooted in documented evidence of Stalin's own actions in the recent past, to suspect that Soviet objectives in Iran were not limited to border security or a share in Iranian oil exploration but were the first act in a region wide expansion. He also good reason to believe, based on his own experience with the Kremlin, that only a firm position would dissuade the Soviets from taking in 1946 what they could not get from maneuvering with Hitler in 1940. The Near East had been a *proximate* cause for the end of Stalin's alliance with Hitler and it was not unreasonable to conclude, after studying the Henderson and Howard memos, that it would be the scene of the breakup of the Big Three if the United States supported Iran's quest to regain her sovereignty and independence.⁴⁴ Byrnes was not willing to conclude at that point that the Big Three was *kaput* but the Etheridge report and the Henderson and Howard memo were more than sufficient to explain why Byrnes enthusiastically took up the Iran case as a line in the sand.

Moreover, although the Soviets had indicated their willingness to evacuate Iran, as Gaddis says, they had *not* in fact begun to leave by late March or if it had it was at a snail's pace; Moscow had allowed one hard deadline (March 2) already to expire without compliance; greatly increased their strength in Iran instead of withdrawing; and the Council only had Gromyko's word that bilateral talks with Tehran had reached a successful conclusion. The logic of Gaddis's critique of Byrnes was that he should have relied *only* on the say so of the accused party (the USSR) and not proceeded with placing the complaint on the agenda of the Council. Gromyko had also added that Soviet army evacuation of Iran was conditioned on unknown circumstances not occurring upon which he would not elaborate—reason enough for Byrnes to insist the complaint remain alive. Faced with this record on Russia's part combined with the other cases in his brief,

⁴³ In his 1947 book *Speaking Frankly*, Byrnes reviewed the captured German documents from 1940 and advises his readers to consider them when they reflect on the previous year's Iran crisis and any future issues between Russia and Iran thus strongly implying they had a significant impact on him during the 1946 crisis. Not surprisingly perhaps, the captured German documents detailing the Soviet-German negotiations over the Persian Gulf are rarely ever mentioned by revisionist historians since they tend to undermine claims that Moscow was only after oil concessions and/or border security.

⁴⁴ Byrnes agreed that the failure of the USSR and Germany to reach agreement on this point in mid-November 1940 was the start of the end of their alliance and probably when, he speculates, Hitler decided war with Russia was next on his menu. [James Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly*. (Harper and Brothers, 1947), 289].

Byrnes' decision to pursue a campaign of public pressure on Moscow and to insist the matter remain before the Council was sound and not the politically opportunistic move that Gaddis and other critics have implied.

Even armed with evidence from these and other sources, Byrnes' campaign on behalf of Iran had yet another and loftier motive that vastly exceeded job security: establishing the legitimacy of the Security Council. The future of the United Nations and its Security Council as a credible, viable body—potentially FDR's primary foreign policy legacy—was at stake. Like many Americans, Byrnes was a believer in the new world organization as a guarantor of peace and security especially as it applied to smaller nations. He, like FDR, was aware that the clashes among the great powers that led to general war twice in the twentieth century had their *proximate* cause with rivalry over smaller, weaker nations. Byrnes was not offering a crude anti-Soviet attack purely for public consumption or to appease hard liners back in Washington; he was arguing that the legitimacy of the Council itself, the executive body of the United Nations, was at stake if rapid and decisive action was not taken when an obvious example of aggression was set before the body. Considering what possible arguments he could use to entice the reluctant Ernest Bevin to attend the Security Council session with him to present a united Anglo-American front, Byrnes did not appeal to their mutual anti-communism or growing suspicion of Moscow's intentions. Instead he told the British foreign minister in a telegram that the Iran case was vital because it could “affect whole future of United Nations.”⁴⁵ Indeed, during the Moscow CFM in the *previous* year, Byrnes had told Stalin that it was of critical importance that the great powers keep their pledges to the small nations if a postwar global peace and security organization was to have any legitimacy.⁴⁶ The Moscow CFM might have ended Byrnes' hopes to reboot FDR's soft Soviet policy but it did not inspire him to abandon efforts to make the United Nations workable and that meant, in part, reassuring the smaller nations of the world that the Council was not an idealistic cover for great power gamesmanship. If, in that process the Soviets were placed in an embarrassing position in a public forum and that redeemed himself with Washington hardliners that was a bonus for Byrnes but not his primary objective.

⁴⁵ Byrnes quoted in *FRUS 1946*. Volume VII, p. 369, fn. 31.

⁴⁶ James Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly*. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947), 120.

Byrnes' argument won the day: the Security Council followed the American lead and voted 7 to 2 to keep the Iranian complaint on the agenda with the Soviet Union and Poland voting no. Since it was a procedural issue majority rule prevailed and no permanent member could exercise a veto. Gromyko, however, was not prepared to concede defeat. Perhaps recognizing the gravity that Byrnes attributed to even tactical maneuvering on the Iran complaint, the Soviet ambassador insisted again that the matter be deferred until mid-April and reiterated his previously expressed opinion to Lie that his government would not be subject to a debate on the Iranian complaint. "In a word," Lie recalled, "Mr. Gromyko threatened to walk out unless he had his way." Lie attempted to convince Gromyko not to carry out his threat and warned of the folly of "boycott as a weapon" but the chief Soviet representative "had his instructions, and of course he stuck to them."⁴⁷ Dean Acheson thought something more serious than a walk out might be in the works: "...there was a distinct possibility that Russia would withdraw from these Security Council meetings and possibly from UN as a whole."⁴⁸ Stalin had promised Byrnes during his Christmas stay in Moscow that Russia would not blush if America took up Iran's case in the United Nations. Gromyko carried out his master's vow; he did not blush. Instead the Soviets set another precedent which, along with the capricious use of the veto, became a favorite Soviet tactic in the United Nations: the dramatic walkout.

When the vote went against the Soviets (and Poland) the *dour* Gromyko picked up his papers and stormed out of the gym in protest while the session was still underway. In his *memoirs*, this *protégé* of Molotov who had skyrocketed to the top ranks of the Soviet diplomatic corps at a young age painted himself as a hero who staged the walkout, accompanied to the enthusiastic applause of the approving audience assembled in the gym, to save the honor of the USSR.⁴⁹ Yet, negative media reaction to his tactic and widespread fears it might doom the United Nations to irrelevance at so early a stage cast serious doubt on this version of the audience reaction although it was undoubtedly what

⁴⁷ Trygve Lie, *In the Cause of Peace*. (New York: Macmillan, 1954), 77.

⁴⁸ James Byrnes (Secretary of State) to Dean Acheson (Acting Secretary of State), 3/26/1946, telegram # 501.BC/3-2646 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, p, 383.

⁴⁹ Andrei Gromyko, *Memoirs*, (London: Hutchinson, 1989), 237. Although Gromyko does not mention it, Stanley Meisler reports a Soviet general trailed behind the ambassador as he marched out of the gym. Who this was or why a Soviet general officer was present at a session of diplomats or was in or out of uniform is not detailed by Meisler [Stanley Meisler, *United Nations. The First Fifty Years*. (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 1995), 30].

Stalin would want to have been told.⁵⁰ Even individuals like Tyrge Lie who objected to Byrnes' concurrent campaign of public diplomacy and shared Soviet suspicions that the White House had been using the Iranian complaint for their own partisan reasons (e.g. curry favor with the get-tough-with-Russia faction) nonetheless took strong exception to Gromyko's tactic. "I made it clear then, as I was to state publically and repeatedly later," said Lie, "that I did not believe in the boycott as a weapon for dealing with political differences. But Mr. Gromyko had his instructions, and of course he stuck to them."⁵¹ As the Cold War evolved, Russian tantrums in the United Nations, ranging from choreographed walkouts to the shoe banging antics of Nikita Khrushchev, would become commonplace and even expected theatrics. In 1946, however, at the new United Nations in her host city and permanent home, it was a dramatic, even shocking moment. Many members of the Security Council believed the Soviets might use this moment to withdraw from the United Nations completely. Lie himself believed this a strong possibility.⁵² Indeed, the walkout not only placed the future of the United Nations itself into question it singled a further erosion in American-Soviet relations. How could the world body settle disputes among the great powers or between big and small nations if permanent members of the Council as well as parties to a dispute were free to just stalk off in an effort to shut down discussion?

Upon his return from the Yalta summit, FDR had publicly stated that the world body he had labored to bring into being was the best hope to avoid a third world war.⁵³ FDR had made several controversial concessions to Stalin (e.g., agreeing to multiple representation for the USSR in the General Assembly) in order to win Russian participation in the United Nations and to preserve cooperation among the victorious Allies.⁵⁴ As the founding conference in San Francisco neared, an apathetic Stalin had not

⁵⁰ Thus, James Reston in the *New York Times* wrote "In his exit Mr. Gromyko stirred the cold winds that swept through the minds of men in the terrible days of doubt and misunderstanding before the war." [Reston quoted in Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 330].

⁵¹ Lie quoted in Stanley Meisler, *United Nations. The First Fifty Years*. (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 1995), 30.

⁵² Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis Over Iranian-Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 247.

⁵³ Jean Edward Smith, *FDR*. (New York: Random House, 2008), 633.

⁵⁴ Initially Stalin had proposed that all sixteen Soviet republics have their own individual votes in the General Assembly. Stalin thought this little different from American influence on Latin American and

planned to send a high level delegation to the opening session exhibiting what Charles Bohlen recalled was "at best a mark of indifference" to the new world body. Indeed, once FDR's conception of the Security Council shifted from a world policed by the Big Four (the "Four Policemen") to a neo-Wilsonian collective security model with greater equality for smaller nations, Stalin's interest in the project diminished considerably. It was only after a personal appeal from Averell Harriman to honor the recently departed FDR that Stalin ordered his foreign minister to San Francisco.⁵⁵

Now with Gromyko's walk-out, the wisdom of FDR's expenditure of much needed energy to recruit the USSR to the United Nations was placed in question not by his Republican opponents, traditional isolationists or anti-communist hard liners, but by the Soviets themselves with the kind of petulant behavior that might doom the world body at its inception by undermining the essential ingredients of international public confidence and credibility. It was all the more troubling since the underlying issue—Iran—could not be said to be *vital* to Soviet national security. Vyshinsky's first use of the veto back at the London sessions in January had been, as Lie lamented, over a minor dispute in language not a matter of substance. Now, Gromyko's walk out was over a procedural issue (i.e. placing a matter on the agenda) and again not on the substance of the Iranian issue.⁵⁶

Caribbean nations or British sway over nations in her Emprise. In both cases, Stalin expected these smaller nations to follow the lead of their respective hegemons. FDR might have sympathized with his Russian counterpart on this issue but he also knew that Stalin's proposal would be a poison pill in the American Congress—an excuse to walk away from the United Nations project. A member of the Wilson administration, FDR feared a repetition of Wilson's fruitless battle for membership in the League of Nations that crippled the man and the prospects for American internationalism. In the end, Stalin compromised and accepted only two Soviet republics (Belarus and the Ukraine) would have General Assembly votes separate from the USSR. (See Dallek, Robert. *The Lost Peace*, pp. 51-52; Schlesinger, Stephen. *Act of Creation. The Founding of the Nations*, p. 127).

⁵⁵ Charles Bohlen, *Witness to History*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973), 208-210.

⁵⁶ Some at the State Department saw an opportunity presented by Gromyko's histrionics: if the Russians did not come back, rather than let the United Nations breakdown the United States should seize the opportunity and reconstitute the world body as one exclusively of "like thinking free governments," a kind of Western liberal version of the Comintern. [John R. O'neal, *Foreign Policy Making in Times of Crisis*, 123]. At no time had the League of Nations included all the Great Powers (the USA was never a full member) at once and that failing was an important explanation for its ignominious demise. FDR was well aware that if the successor body was to be any more viable then it would have to be all inclusive minus the defeated nations. What some at Foggy Bottom who regarded the possible Soviet withdrawal as an opportunity to reverse FDR's many concessions to the Soviets, were proposing would have been more like NATO--an alliance of the liberal capitalist democracies--than a new and improved League of Nations. NATO would of course, and contrary to FDR's best projections of Soviet-American cooperation in the postwar world, play a vital role in American foreign policy but that did not require a radical new version of the United Nations at the same time. Although not representing Byrnes' thinking at the time, the proposal

The tense Security Council session did have a lighter moment. When Gromyko, grim and determined (he would soon be dubbed "Grim Grom" by American reporters) marched out of the college gym he was met by Frank Begley, the chief of the United Nations security detail, who informed the Soviet ambassador that a gaggle of reporters and photographers had assembled at the bottom of the steps. "Are you willing to have your picture taken, Mr. Ambassador?" "Yes, of course," replied Gromyko, "but..." said Begley, pointing to the wide open zipper of Gromyko's trousers. Even the otherwise gloomy Soviet ambassador could not suppress a chuckle as he zipped his pants up with Begley shielding him from potentially embarrassing photos. Reporters that had been waiting for him pressed Gromyko to reveal what he and Begley had found so amusing but he ignored those questions.⁵⁷

Unlike the Red Army in Iran, Gromyko and the Soviet delegation had evacuated the Security Council but the Polish delegates remained to ensure Russia's opinions were expressed. The body proceeded to approve an Egyptian proposal to invite the Iranian ambassador to present his case. Hussein Ala took a seat at the table and flatly denied any reports—including Russian ones—that an agreement had been reached between Moscow and Tehran. Large numbers of Soviet troops and equipment remained in northern Iran, he said, well past the deadline for their removal and Soviet agents continued to interfere in Iran's internal affairs. Whereas Gromyko had attempted to portray the situation in Azerbaijan as peaceful and well ordered—thanks to the Soviet occupation—Ala said it was explosive and a threat to world peace and security as described in the Iranian complaint. However, although he made the substance of his case clear, whenever he did so the chairman of the Security Council directed Ala to confine his remarks to the procedural issues at hand. Confining himself to that point, Ala assured the Council that he had received no instructions from his government to agree to a postponement of the complaint and that no agreement had been reached between Tehran and Moscow. The

was another if extreme example of FDR's most basic assumptions' coming under fire. For the late president, a new world peace and security body could not hope to succeed without the full participation of the USSR. He was determined that an essential part of America's foreign policy would not be another shunning of the USSR as Wilson had done following the last world war.

⁵⁷ Trygve Lie, *In the Cause of Peace*. (New York: Macmillan, 1954), 79. Living up to his humorless reputation, Gromyko does not mention this detail in his *memoirs*.

Polish representative wanted to question Ala but the chairman cut off the discussion on account of the lateness of the day.⁵⁸

Listening on a short-wave radio in Tabriz, Rossow heard Gromyko address the Security Council as a prelude to his walkout. "Stalin has said," the Russian ambassador declaimed, "and I say again before this tribunal, that no new Soviet troops have been introduced into northern Iran since March 2!"⁵⁹ It was a blatant lie as Rossow could see with his own eyes: "At the moment that Gromyko was making his denial on that short-wave broadcast just before Gromyko picked up his papers and made that first dramatic walkout from the Security Council, I was at the consulate window in Tabriz counting a column of eighteen armored half-tracks that had just been unloaded and were proceeding to the tank park." However, within a few days Rossow concluded that the flow of Soviet materiel into Azerbaijan was slowing to a halt. The troops already there showed no signs of leaving; indeed, they appeared to preparing for a long stay but fewer and fewer of them were arriving and with less equipment.⁶⁰

Rossow's observation of a slowdown in Soviet armed forces arriving in Iran was partly reflected in an urgent order signed by Stalin and the Chief of the General Staff, General Antonov, to the commander of the Baku military district and the commander of the Soviet 4th Army headquarters in Baku and also partly deployed in Iran. Issued on March 24, the order was in four points: (1) "All units, offices, and ammunition depots of the 4th Army in Iran should be withdrawn from the country" to the Baku military district; (2) Withdrawal should commence on March 24 and be completed no later than May 10; (3) Withdrawal was ordered to take place in slow motion with no appearance of a bug out and commanders were to make sure to stage farewell parties in all the towns and villages on the way; (4) Daily detailed reports were required. The next day the Soviet news

⁵⁸ James Byrnes (Secretary of State) to Dean Acheson (Acting Secretary of State), 3/27/1946, telegram # 501.BC/3-2746 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 388-389.

⁵⁹ Robert. Rossow, "The Battle of Azerbaijan" *The Middle East Journal*. (Winter 1956, volume 10), 23.

⁶⁰ Rossow quoted in Peter Lisagor, and Marguerite Higgins. *Overtime In Heaven. Adventures in the Freon Service*. (Garden City, New York: Double Day and Co., 1964), 136; 167. Bruce Kuniholm estimates the total number of Soviet tanks that crossed into Iran as the withdrawal deadline approached and shortly thereafter as a *minimum* of 200. [Bruce Kuniholm, "U.S. policy in the Near East: the triumphs and tribulations of the Truman administration" in Michael Lacey, (ed.) *The Truman Presidency*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991). 307].

agency *Tass* reported the gist of the previous days order. A copy of the order was issued to the Communist Party leadership in Soviet Azerbaijan.⁶¹

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D.F. Fleming, a historian sympathetic to the Soviet version of events, expressed disappointment that the Security Council debate, although charged, never considered the substance of the issue. “All of the controversy turned on points of procedure,” bemoaned Fleming, and thus ignored the essence of the Soviet case. Had the Security Council done so, he wrote, it was possible that Byrnes and not Gromyko might have staged a walk out.⁶² There is some truth to Fleming’s point; the debate did center less on the underlying issues and more on the technicalities and details of Security Council procedure, if, for example, the Iranian complaint should even be on the agenda; what constituted the Council’s jurisdiction; when did the permanent members veto apply; etc. Yet, Fleming implies that was the preference of Byrnes and that is why the meat of the Russian case was not devoured by the Security Council.

The crisis certainly brought out the trial attorney in Byrnes who was at home in procedural issues and the minutia of the law. He indeed pressed his solid *prima facie* case based on the “technicalities” of the matter. Still, it is hard to see how the “substance” of the Soviet argument, which Fleming defines as oil and national security for the USSR, could have been convincingly put over by Gromyko which is probably why he did not even try. The strongest substantive argument he could have presented was that Russian security warranted a continuing military presence combined with a sympathetic government in Tabriz especially given the proximity of Soviet oil production in Baku. Indeed, Stalin at the Moscow CFM had spoken of his fear of saboteurs sneaking over from Iran to set ablaze Soviet oil production at Baku armed only with a book of matches.⁶³ Given the recently concluded war and the decisive role Russia played in it, much of the world community (including many Americans) were sensitive to Soviet

⁶¹ Full text of the Stalin order of March 24, 1946 in Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 243-244. That the Soviet-Azerbaijan Communist Party leadership headquartered in Baku is a further confirmation that Soviet activities in Iran were never strictly of military necessity as was officially claimed by Moscow but highly political as well.

⁶² D.F. Fleming, *The Cold War and Its Origins*. (Garden City, DoubleDay, 1961), 346.

⁶³ James Byrnes, *All In One Lifetime*. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), 333.

security concerns. Following the dismantling of the Comintern and the advent of Stalin's policy of "socialism in one country" FDR believed that the search for security, not promotion of revolutionary socialism, rested at the core of Soviet foreign affairs.⁶⁴ The question, however, was if Iran fell into the zone of arguably legitimate Soviet security concerns as did Poland. The latter had served as an invasion corridor into Russia twice in one century both times leading to near fatal results for Moscow leaving many in the West, starting with FDR, sympathetic to Soviet demands for a Russia friendly regime in Warsaw. Could Stalin forge a similar credible claim about northern Iran? Both Stalin and Molotov had unsuccessfully advanced such a claim before Byrnes at Moscow CFM; He had found it risible just as much of the world community would have had if Gromyko repeated his boss' fear of sabotage from Iran. Few others in the American camp took the claims of Soviet security concerns in northern Iran seriously. Ambassador Walter Smith heard the same from Stalin about Iranian saboteurs potentially sneaking across the border to torch Baku and like Byrnes found it laughable while Ambassador Murray in Tehran dismissed Soviet fears of Iranian based saboteurs as "cynical" and "absurd".⁶⁵ The Soviets had justified fears for the safety of their Baku oil when the Third Reich was in business but in the aftermath of the war and with the Iranian military in an even weaker state than before Operation Countenance, incapable of launching offensive operations even had they wished and with no third party threat present on Iranian soil, it was difficult to see how Moscow could have made their security claims believable. Yet, that is exactly the course Fleming argued they should have pursued or perhaps worse, were prevented from pursuing by a hyper-litigious Security Council under Byrnes' supposed undue influence. The United States definitely preferred to depart the country militarily speaking, leaving embryonic commercial interests and Col. Swarzkopf behind. England was, as she always had been, exclusively concerned with her oil interests in the south of Iran and probably willing to reach an accommodation with Russia that would have split the country into two spheres of influence if it came to that. Yet, the Soviet were stuck with the implied bogymen in Iran waiting to set Baku ablaze with a box of matches.

⁶⁴ John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 7.

⁶⁵ Wallace Murray (Ambassador in Iran) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 1/29/1946, telegram # 891.00-/2946 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 318-319; Walter Bedell Smith, *My Three Years In Moscow*. (Philadelphia: J.P. Lippincott, 1950), 52.

Otherwise to justify their security claims they would have had to claim her wartime allies, England and America, as current enemies or at least growing threats to her security, the necessary ingredient to implement the 1921 treaty. By this point Stalin probably believed that, if had not all along, but saying so publicly would put Russia in the difficult and uncomfortable position both of proving it and appearing to be the instigators of new postwar great power rivalry. Gromyko could have groused about the American advisors working with Tehran, most obviously Col. Swarzkopf, yet when compared to the large number of Soviet advisors in Azerbaijan province, including NKVD agents, not to mention the giant Red Army presence, the point would have looked ridiculous. Moreover, presenting the substance of the Soviet case would have meant justifying the radical social transformation under way in Azerbaijan something Russia claimed she had nothing to do with but which could easily be contradicted in an open debate. They had pledged continually not to interfere with internal affairs in Iran and yet the evidence clearly established that they had. Many individuals who sympathized with a reform agenda in northern Iran (as did Robert Rossow himself) were alienated by them arriving at bayonet point from a foreign army. Indeed, had the Soviets presented the essence of their case as Fleming had wished, Byrnes would have had no difficulty making the Russians look even more culpable than they already did. It was not Byrnes who confined matters to procedure, although he had his separate motives for that, but the Soviets (and Lie) who correctly realized they had no credible brief to present on the substance.

The Soviets could have, as Fleming suggests, also presented a case for their activities in the Iranian north by claiming they were necessary tactics to leverage an oil deal from an otherwise unreceptive Tehran. Although already oil rich, Russia was by far the most battle scared of the Big Three and required as much energy as she could get to launch her recovery. A fellow revisionist historian, Walter LaFeber, offers a similar evaluation: "Stalin probably believed that, because of its wartime sacrifices and geographic location, Russia had as much right to Iranian oil and control of the Dardanelles as any other power."⁶⁶ Harold Evans put it even more succinctly; looking at established British and probable American oil interests in Iran the Soviets in 1946

⁶⁶ Walter La Feber, *America, Russia and the Cold War*. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1993), 37.

understandably said “Us too.”⁶⁷ Placing aside the question of the Dardanelles, there was no doubt that the Russian oil industry—like all Soviet industries—was severely damaged and strained during the war and in the immediate postwar years operated below capacity thus slowing Soviet reconstruction.⁶⁸ The problem was that Stalinist paranoia precluded the Soviets admitting that any such necessity in public let alone allowing any kind of objective assessment to verify war damage and determine Russia’s requirements. Throughout the war Russia refused to exchange information on oil requirements with her Big Three allies even when it could have benefited her.⁶⁹ An irrational suspicion of even her closest allies made it impossible for the Soviets to share vital information that they assumed, either because of Leninist ideology or pre-communist Russian culture would be used against her or would expose Russia as inferior in development to the leading Western capitalist states. Even the most routine information was a closely guarded secret in Stalin’s Russia and oil was no exception.

An admission of a thirst for foreign oil would have also undermined internal orthodoxy in the USSR which held that Russia wanted for nothing from abroad exemplified by the great lengths Moscow went to during the war to conceal the true origins of Lend-Lease assistance from America and instead present it as Soviet made.⁷⁰ In the near future recognition America's Soviet experts would recognize that a traditional Russian inferiority complex rested at the core of Soviet foreign policy but for the moment the American leadership was at a loss to comprehend Soviet diplomacy. Yet, had Moscow done so, she might have elicited support in the world community based on pursuing war reconstruction even if by bullying tactics assuming her energy needs were legitimate and based on damage inflicted by the Axis. Instead, at best, Russia appeared

⁶⁷ Harold Evans, *The American Century*, (New York: Knopf, 1998), 391.

⁶⁸ Daniel Yergin, *The Prize. The Epic Quest For Oil, Money & Power*. (New York: Touchstone, 1992), 421.

⁶⁹ Vail Motter, T.H. *United States Army in World War II. The Middle East Theatre. The Persian Corridor and Aid to Russia*, p. 284. For example, the Soviets often complained about the quality of the equipment they received under Lend-Lease but would never allow American advisors to observe their use of it to determine if the Russians were operating American supplies properly.

⁷⁰ American Lend-Lease supplies to the USSR—approximately 27% of which flowed through the Persian “Bridge to Victory” Corridor—were always striped by Soviet authorities of any markings that indicated their origins were outside of the USSR. Nor did Stalin ever thank the USA for Lend-Lease before the Russian people.

only to be a crass competitor with imperial Britain for Iran's riches based, on no better than a realist's argument: this is what great powers do.

The image of Moscow as an imperialist rival with the British Empire to ruthlessly exploit the natural recourses of an underdeveloped country was not one the Kremlin was anxious to project. Byrnes understood this and in his remarks to the Security Council following Gromyko's walkout he characterized the Soviet presence in Iran as imperialist.⁷¹ The label could alienate most of Russia's supporters around the world many of whom continued to idealize Stalin and and, like FDR, thought of the Soviets as an essential force to undermine old school imperialism represented by the British, French and Dutch. Non-communist friends of Russia, American foreign policy softs (e.g. Joe Davies and Henry Wallace) for example, who endorsed Soviet claims for security in countries like Poland and perhaps even Iran, could not readily accept the Soviets bullying Iran for oil and acting more like Czar Nicholas than Lenin who had renounced all Russian imperial interests in Iran and required only a secure border. Indeed, American softs like Hnery Wallace, would during the Iran crisis cite the Soviet anti-imperialist credentials as a reason for Washington to stay out of the matter and allow the Soviets to undermine the Britain's imperial interest in the region. It was he claimed, and not without justification, how FDR would have viewed the situation.⁷²

Nor could any of this explain the concurrent and intense pressure that Moscow was putting on Turkey to cede territory and avail the Dardanelles to Russian control—objectives that predated the Second World War and the destruction visited on the Soviet Union by Germany and had nothing to do with Soviet security concerns from Germany or Japan. They were the imperial objectives of Czarist Russia. Indeed, the release of the

⁷¹ Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 247.

⁷² For example, at the Teheran conference in 1943, FDR, partly to break the ice with Stalin and partly to advertise that the USA and England would not necessarily be on the same wave length after the war, announced to the Soviet dictator that he believed India should undergo a Bolshevik style revolution "from below" to achieve her independence and modernization. It was a comment calculated to woo Stalin and infuriate Churchill who had been a diehard anti-Bolshevik and was particularly sensitive on the subject of India which he, like many of his fellow imperialists, believed to be the crown jewel of the British Empire. Stalin, however, was not so easily charmed by FDR and recognized the *naïve* president's game. He politely brushed aside FDR's transparent attempt to curry favor with the leader of world communism; Stalin replied that what was appropriate for Russia probably would not be so for India which would have to find its own path into the modern world. [Charles Bohlen, *Witness to History*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973), 141-142.]

captured Nazi-Soviet discussions during the life of the non-aggression pact, that ceded Turkey, Iran and the general direction of India to Stalin, would have proved highly embarrassing to the Soviets at this point if exposed during the Security Council debate. They would have provided more evidence that Stalin's attempt to crack open the British sphere of influence in the Middle East predated the war and any security concerns from Germany or anyone else. Contrary to the assertions of Fleming, limiting the debate to procedural issues benefited the Soviets far more than the Americans and Iranians, who given the opportunity could have cast an even more glaring spotlight on Stalin had that been the turn the Security Council debate took. No matter what Molotov or Fleming asserted, on the substantive issues the Soviets lacked any credible defense and would have been in a far more awkward position than sticking to the dull technicalities of procedure and dry formalities of agenda items which they said inhibited the Soviets from a full throated defense. If forced to defend their case on the merits, even the stubborn Gromyko would have appeared more like Lord Curzon than Lenin.

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While Gromyko was preparing to stalk out of the Security Council in New York, the Soviet ambassador in Tehran, Ivan Sadchikov, was also busy. On March 20, he had met with Qavam and strongly implied that an oil deal would be a face saving means for Stalin to withdraw from Iran. Qavam replied that he could not violate the law passed by the Majlis on the oil issue. On March 22, Qavam met with Ambassador Murray. Like the meeting with the Soviet ambassador he asked it remain secret. The Soviets he explained to Murray had offered withdrawal but an oil deal in the north would be the price. He asked "What would you do in my place?" Speaking unofficially, Murray said that he feared that if the Soviets did not get their way in the upcoming Council session, Moscow might well violently lash out at Tehran and the United Nations could do little in practical terms to protect Iran. Murray advised Qavam that he accept a face saving concession to Stalin as the inevitable price to be paid under the circumstances to usher the Soviets out of the country assuming, of course, it was a concession Iran could live with.⁷³

⁷³ Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 238.

Against that background, Sadchikov called on Qavam three times on March 24 and presented him with three supposedly separate and independent notes from the Kremlin. The first, proposed Red Army withdrawal from Iran in five to six weeks “if nothing further happened,” a condition that Sadchikov, like Gromyko in New York, was not authorized to clarify; second, as Stalin and Molotov proposed to Qavam in Moscow, a joint Iranian-Soviet oil company with Moscow holding the controlling interest for at least fifty years (then renewable or open to Iranian purchase) and which covered nearly all of northern Iran; third, that Azerbaijan province be granted semi-independence from Iran.⁷⁴ The Soviet ambassador had delivered each note separately so that his government could technically claim they were not linked but of course all knew they were. The message from Stalin was obvious: agree to all or none yet he could publically deny that Red Army withdrawal and an oil deal were linked. The only good news for Tehran was that the notes indicated that Moscow was abandoning her larger objectives in the Persian Gulf and was now looking for a facing saving means to back out of the imbroglio. Qavam told the Soviet ambassador he would have to study the proposals to ensure they conformed to Iranian law.⁷⁵

Qavam told Murray that he was inclined toward a favorable response to the second note because he viewed, as he had when he was in Moscow, an oil deal with Russia was the inevitable price to be paid for a withdrawal of the Soviet army. The sticking point for Qavam was maneuvering around the Majlis law regulating oil deals with foreigners while Iranian territory was occupied.⁷⁶ The third note he thought difficult to swallow given

⁷⁴ Wallace Murray (Ambassador in Iran) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 3/25/1946, telegram # 861.24591/3-2456 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 379-380; Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 245. Bruce Kuniholm notes that in the coming days Sadchikov called on Qavam again to inform him that the condition about "no unforeseen circumstances" occurring applied to all three notes. Again, he would not elaborate the qualifying clause. [Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 328.] A slight concession was offered here by the Soviet ambassador. Qavam had concluded that the Majlis law did not apply to joint enterprises similar to what the Soviets were proposing. However, he also concluded it would be advisable for Iran to own the controlling interest. What was now being proposed gave the USSR a 51% share for the first half of the life of the company and then a 50-50 split for the balance of the life of the company. [Gholam, Reza Afkhami, *The Life and Times of the Shah*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 98.]

⁷⁵ Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 241; 245.

⁷⁶ Wallace Murray (Ambassador in Iran) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 3/25/1946, telegram # 861.24591/3-2456 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 379-380.

political opposition in Tehran to the leftist regime in Tabriz, but said he would try to reach some agreement with Pischevari if it was constitutionally possible and if the Soviets stayed out of the talks. He would not act, however, until all Russian troops left Iran as promised in the first note: "...Ala had been and would be instructed," Murray told Byrnes of his meeting with Qavam, "to see that matter remained of continuing concern to SC [Security Council] until last Russian soldier had left Iran."⁷⁷ Murray approved of the last point and advised Qavam not to simply accept Russian promises contained in the first note but to insist the matter remain on the Security Council agenda so that it remained within the jurisdiction of the United Nations. The Russians both wanted the complaint withdrawn and the off the Security Council agenda and that Qavam keep the second and third notes secret so that the linking conditions they represented were kept from the world body. According to treaty, agreements, public statements and the insistence of the host country of Iran, evacuation of foreign forces from Iran was to be without condition. It is understandable why Moscow wanted to keep their second and third notes quite but would Qavam cooperate? Murray wisely advised Qavam against keeping the *de facto* conditions secret; they would be inevitably revealed anyway, indeed implied partly already to the Security Council by Ala, and when that happened it would undermine his credibility and whatever agreement he eventually reached with the Kremlin. Qavam seemed to accept the first piece of advice but was reluctant to take the American up on the second. Murray suspected that the Soviets were pressuring Qavam to maintain secrecy.⁷⁸

Three days after Gromyko's walk out and without Soviet representatives present, the Security Council again took up the Iran question. Quo Tai Chi, chairman of the Council, had attempted to lure Gromyko back but unless the Iran complaint was off the agenda he refused to attend, a requirement he also relayed to Edward Stettinius.⁷⁹ This situation posed the question: could the Council function when one or more of its permanent members was in boycott mode? Alexander Cadogan, representing England, successfully argued the body could and should continue to meet in order to establish the

⁷⁷ Wallace Murray (Ambassador in Iran) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 3/29/1946, telegram # 861.24591/3-2946 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp 394-396.

⁷⁸ Wallace Murray (Ambassador in Iran) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 3/29/1946, telegram # 861.24591/3-2946 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, p. 387.

⁷⁹ Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 247

principle that no one members' boycott—even a permanent member— could shut down the body.⁸⁰ It would prove to be a highly consequential decision that went well behind the immediate issue of Iran. Like so many other aspects of the Iranian crisis actions taken at the moment established a precedent that guided the Council in future tense disputes between the permanent members. In this case, that the Council could not be unilaterally terminated by a permanent member conducting a boycott.⁸¹

Even with the Security Council functioning, albeit *sans* the Russian delegation, Qavam's official silence on the bilateral negotiations with the Soviets was yet another serious obstacle for Iran's supporters. They could not argue that the Iranian case should be heard because bilateral talks had not been fruitful when at the same time Qavam would not reveal what the status of those negotiations were. In the absence of a statement from the Iranian prime minister, the natural assumption among the other members of the United Nations was that the talks were as successful as Gromyko had asserted. Qavam's silence made the American and British support for pressing the Iranian complaint look self serving—pursued for some reason other than Iran's best interests or the peace and security of the world community, perhaps to provoke the Soviets as Moscow implied and Lie suspected or perhaps to advance Western oil interests at the expense of the Russians. Conversely it made the Soviets appear to be the honest party and perhaps even the victim. Dean Acheson's frustration with Qavam at this point was apparent in a telegram to Murray on March 28: "It is no longer possible for Iran to continue both to plead its case in the Council and at the same time to carry on secret bilateral negotiations regarding which it is unwilling to inform the Council. Iran is entitled to have its case considered by the Council, but Qavam should authorize Ala immediately to inform the Council

⁸⁰ Memorandum on Private Meeting of Members of the Security Council, March 28, 1946, 4:10 p.m. in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, p, 391.

⁸¹ Within a few years, the principle established at this time would have an even more dramatic impact. With the Soviets again boycotting the Security Council in protest (in this case over the failure to seat the People's Republic of China as the representative of China) the Council continued to function and considered military action to oppose North Korea's invasion of her southern neighbor. Without the Soviets present to cast a veto (which they surely would have done had they not been voluntarily absent) the Council approved United Nations military action against the Soviet's ally in Pyongyang. Because of the principle advanced by Cadogan and endorsed by the Americans during the Iran crisis, the Soviets were not able to switch off debates and Council action with a boycott. To have done otherwise in 1946 would have condemned the United Nations to the ignominious fate of the ineffective League of Nations.

regarding the status of negotiations.”⁸² The United States introduced a resolution that was passed at the next session of the Security Council which asked Tehran and Moscow *both* to report on the status of negotiations including any Russian conditions for their promised withdrawal.

Obviously suspicious of the Soviets, Byrnes reminded the Security Council that even Gromyko's loud assurances that the Red Army would soon leave Iran were not unqualified but dependent on no “unforeseen circumstances” arising, a condition he would not clarify claiming it was self-evident what he meant.⁸³ Byrnes warned that the very presence of Russian troops could be used to “coerce” or “influence” concessions from Tehran during negotiations and thus bilateral talks could not be genuine while the Red Army remained on Iranian soil. It was not a consideration that occurred to Byrnes during the London session when he seemed to endorse Tehran-Moscow talks while the Soviet army was camped in northern Iran but now, in light of Soviet stubbornness and escalation, it did. Of course, once Soviet forces were withdrawn from Iran and the coercive environment ended, there would be no imperative for Tehran to negotiate with Russia about oil or the future of Azerbaijan province, a point never lost on Stalin. As a safeguard Byrnes further proposed that Tehran provide the Council with detailed reports about negotiations with the Soviet Union which presumably would reveal any hidden concessions to Russia.⁸⁴

Ala resumed his seat at the table. With Qavam's endorsement, he flatly contradicted Gromyko's claim that a mutual agreement had been reached between Moscow and Tehran. He agreed with Byrnes that as long as Soviet troops were on Iranian soil, no talks on any other issue could be considered genuine. Tensions were on the rise in Iran due to Soviet activities, he said, and his country could not return to normal prewar status with a huge occupation army still in Azerbaijan.⁸⁵ Qavam was subsequently told by the Soviet ambassador in Tehran that if Ala in New York revealed the details of the three notes and what had transpired in Moscow to the Security Council, then all chances of a

⁸² Dean Acheson (Acting Secretary of State) to Wallace Murray (Ambassador in Iran), 3/28/1946, telegram # 861.24591/3-2746 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, p. 390.

⁸³ Andrei Gromyko, *Memoirs*. (London: Hutchison, 1980), 237.

⁸⁴ Edward Stettinius (The United States Representative to the United Nations) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 3/29/1946, telegram # 501.BC/3-2946 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, p. 396-398.

⁸⁵ *FRUS*, Vol. VII, 398.

settlement would be off. Qavam thus told Murray that if Byrnes insisted that Ala report to that body on the details of the talks, it would be best to have it forced on him by the majority if not all member states on the Council.⁸⁶

Byrnes suggested the Security Council defer consideration until the Soviets and Iran could report upon the progress of their talks and particularly if the Soviet withdrawal offer was unconditional. This was not likely to meet with Gromyko's approval and entice him back to the Council. Chairman Quo Tai Chi instead offered a compromise: the Soviet Union and Iran could report *separately* to Secretary-General Lie who in turn could report back to the Security Council for the parties. Thus, indirectly, the two parties could inform the Council of the status of the talks and yet the Russians could claim that they were not technically breaking their boycott and giving into the Americans or the British.⁸⁷ When they did report to Lie, the Soviets continued to maintain that an unconditional agreement had been freely reached and that Red Army withdrawal was proceeding apace. On this occasion Gromyko did not include the hitherto and ominous "unforeseen circumstances" condition, however, Ala again asserted that the bilateral talks had not achieved "positive results," the Red Army remained in Azerbaijan in strength and that "Soviet agents, officials and armed forces continued to interfere in the internal affairs of Iran." Asked by Byrnes what steps Iran would like to take, Ala replied: a withdrawal of Gromyko's "unforeseen circumstance" *proviso*; a guarantee that May 6 would be a hard deadline for complete and unconditional Red Army withdrawal; and that the matter remain on the Council agenda as an ongoing concern.⁸⁸

Faramarz Fatemi has noted that Qavam was peeved with Ala's performance at this point because he surpassed Qavam's objectives. The prime minister assumed that agreeing to some conditions like a joint oil company (and possibly autonomy for Azerbaijan) would in all probability be required to usher Russia out of Iran and thus something less than unconditional withdrawal would be necessary and realistic. He was prepared to make a deal for oil with Stalin if it did not break Iranian law (he believed he

⁸⁶ Wallace Murray (Ambassador in Iran) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 3/30/1946, telegram # 861.24591/3-3046 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 398-399.

⁸⁷ Edward Stettinius (The United States Representative to the United Nations) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 4/3/1946, telegram # 501.BC/4-346 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, p. 402-403.

⁸⁸ Edward Stettinius (The United States Representative to the United Nations) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 4/3/1946, telegram # 501.BC/4-346 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, p. 403.

had found a loophole in it) and did not wish to be committed to the all or nothing position being advanced by Ala in New York. Ala's firm statements demanding unconditional withdrawal without linkage to any other issue made the kind of compromise Qavam had in mind far more difficult. At the same time the realistic Qavam was probably not anxious to undermine the credibility of his ambassador in New York at a global forum that was attracting the attention of the world. Such a wound would have reflected as badly on Tehran and Qavam's government as on Ala. Stalin on the other hand must have realized that once his army was out of Iran his ability to leverage concessions from Tehran would have been substantially reduced.

Ambassador Sadchikov in Tehran asserted that in light of Ala's performance in New York that Qavam was not genuinely seeking a bilateral compromise but playing a double game, seeking an unconditional surrender by the Soviets in the Security Council while telling Moscow he favored a compromise solution in the two party talks. Individuals within Qavam's inner-circle, like Mozaffar Firouz who intensely distrusted Ala, and who had never favored taking up the matter with the Security Council to begin with, were now gaining much greater sway within the government. They demanded Ala's recall, a step which Qavam, notwithstanding his own reservations about Iran's representative at the United Nations rejected. He did, however, issue a statement on April 4 along with Sadchikov, that an agreement between Iran and the Soviet Union had been reached.⁸⁹ The implication was that he was considering withdrawing Iran's complaint before the Security Council.

Undoubtedly Sadchikov found it difficult to understand Qavam's dilemma over what to do about Ala. Had a Soviet diplomat exceeded his authority the standard practice under Stalin would have been to recall him to Moscow, arrest upon arrival followed by a stay in the basement of the Lubyanka where the best one could hope for was a lengthy term in a Gulag where his family would be waiting for him. Consequently cowed Soviet diplomats never acted on their own initiative, even on minor matters, and never made

⁸⁹ Faramarz Fatemi, *The USSR In Iran*. (New York: Barnes and Co., 1980), 117-118. Gromyko also said Ala was acting without his government's authority and Lie was suspicious of him as well. Both thought he should have been sacked by Qavam. [Brice Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980), 330.]

decisions without checking with higher authority.⁹⁰ Thus, Gromyko could not have staged his walk out spontaneously or on his own initiative. It is certainly the case he operated on the instructions of his superiors as Lie surmised. Sadchikov and his allies in Tehran were not successful at getting Ala sacked but the Soviet ambassador was not completely wrong in his assessment of the Iranian prime minister either namely that he was playing a double game. Qavam's strategy had been to pursue a Council hearing on Iran's complaint but not to exclude a two party settlement or the concessions necessary to make it possible, using the former to make the latter possible. In that sense he was on a similar flight path as Byrnes. The key difference was that now the future of the Council was at stake. That was a matter of greater concern for Byrnes than Qavam whose interest was only Iranian national survival with a minimum of pain. Given the virtually non-existent counterforce against the Red Army which the other members of the Security Council could or would deploy in defense of Iran, it is not difficult to see why Qavam might pursue such a maneuver. Murray more or less agreed: "Qavam feels, perhaps correctly, that some part of oil concession to Russia must and should be made eventually. If this is true it might as well come now, when it can help resolve extremely delicate international situation." Murray also characterized the probable trade off as a necessary but regrettable "bribe" to induce a Soviet pull out.⁹¹ What more beyond oil that he could concede was doubtful; certainly semi-independence for Azerbaijan (or the Kurdish zone) that would leave the province continually drifting into the Russian orbit was a Soviet demand that Qavam, owing to domestic opposition, would have found next to impossible to deliver even if he was inclined to try. However, he could grant the domestic communist movement greater freedom of action which he did and by August included three Tudeh members in his cabinet forming could have been called a "popular front" government.⁹² In spite of the rough treatment he had revived in Moscow, Qavam now

⁹⁰ For the USA, one advantage of this Stalinist *modus operandi* was that the Americans could safely assume that a Soviet diplomat was always speaking for "higher authority" and never acting on individual initiative.

⁹¹ Wallace Murray (Ambassador in Iran) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 3/23/1946, telegram # 861.24591/3-2346 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 373-375.

⁹² Bruce Kuniholm has noted there was a division in American diplomatic circles over this development. Robert Rossow saw this new move by the Iranian PM as a "popular front" government and a decided movement to the left by Qavam. Rossow said these developments mirrored the establishment of the Pishvari government in Tabriz, meaning the result of Soviet meddling in Iran's affairs via the Tudeh. However, the new American ambassador, George Allen, himself a hardliner and close to Ambassador Ala, thought the inclusion of the Tudeh members in government was a wise move by Qavam to better keep an

made good on his reputation as pro-Soviet, speaking in public of the USSR only to praise it. Newspapers known to be close to him and his party now began to harshly attack the USA along the lines that Moscow had established during the crisis: that Washington had prolonged resolution of the withdrawal of the Red Army to pump the growing headline faction. Iranians considered pro-American were labeled reactionary and pro-fascist, language more typical of the Tudeh press.⁹³

Qavam's tactics conflicted with that of Byrnes who by now was pursuing a goal beyond that of the immediate Iranian demand that Russia leave her country; instead he was seeking to establish the Security Council as a body with the jurisdiction to hear and decided grave issues even in the face of a permanent member's boycott. Although of secondary importance to Byrnes, if in the process the Soviets got a well-deserved black eye in the court of world public opinion, all the better. Qavam's plan to use the complaint before the Council to leverage a better deal in bilateral talks with Moscow collided with Byrnes' wider objectives in international relations. Byrnes never ruled out the efficacy of bilateral talks between Moscow and Tehran, and indeed given the relatively few options open to the United States to enforce any decisions from the Council, such negotiations were a necessary avenue to a solution. Byrnes, however, recognized for two party talks to be successful for the Iranians, it required they take place within the broader context of approval from the Council. Otherwise both Iran and more importantly the Council would lose, perhaps forever. Outside the glare of world publicity and public diplomacy, Byrnes correctly recognized the Soviets had no reason to compromise and had not been inclined to do so until the matter was a concern of the Council. Whether the complaining party—in this case Iran—wanted the complaint withdrawn was irrelevant; once on the Council agenda it was up to that body to determine if a positive resolution had been achieved less the complaining party be subject to bullying by a great power to withdraw the complaint.

eye on them. Allen also pointed out that for all his pro-Soviet rhetoric Qavam renewed Col Swarzkopf's mission to advise the *gendarmerie*, not an action likely to please the Tudeh or Moscow. Kuniholm concluded these two contradictory interpretations both by competent men on the scone says more about Qavam's style which also kept outsiders guessing about his direction. [Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 348.]

⁹³ Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 345-347; Nikki Keddie. *Modern Iran. Roots and Results of Revolution*. (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2006), 112.]

On the same day a resolution introduced by Byrnes was passed (9 to 0 with Australia abstaining) deferring Security Council action on the complaint and extending the deadline for Soviet military withdrawal from Iran until May 6—the five or six weeks Gromyko had spoken of—at which time it would be determined if an unconditional evacuation had taken place. Reports from all parties would be heard on May 6 and the matter would be an ongoing concern of the body until then. “The only sane method to follow,” said Byrnes, “was the withdrawal of troops without condition.”⁹⁴

At the same session, Ala had already attempted to break through the secrecy imposed by the Soviets on the bi-lateral talks, that is, expose any conditions had been attached by Moscow on her withdrawal offer. Restrained by Tehran from offering details, Ala did convey that the Soviets strongly implied conditions when they said that withdrawal would be completed “if satisfactory agreements were reached on other points.” Qavam was infuriated that Ala had even leaked this much, hinting, as Ala did, that the negotiated Red Army withdrawal was not cost free. Qavam told Murray in Tehran that Ala had exceeded his authority by implying specific conditions to the Soviet withdrawal plan, i.e. the second and third notes delivered separately by the Soviet ambassador, conditions that he had at least in part had discussed with Murray. He also officially informed Murray that an agreement had been reached with Moscow. For his part, Ala publicly praised Byrnes indirectly by thanking the Security Council for its “firmness and courage” which made it possible for small countries to challenge the great powers, precisely the outcome the secretary of state was aiming at with his persistent efforts to keep the matter before the world body even after Qavam wished the matter terminated.⁹⁵ Byrnes correctly recognized that a change of heart by a complaining party could not be taken at face value as long as their country was being military occupied by uninvited foreign powers.

By April 10 Qavam was entertaining doubts about pursuing the matter further within the Security Council. He was once again coming under intense Russian pressure most immediately from Ambassador Sadchikov, to formally withdraw the Iranian

⁹⁴ Edward Stettinius (The United States Representative to the United Nations) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 4/4/1946, telegram # 501.BC/4-446 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 407-409.

⁹⁵ Edward Stettinius (The United States Representative to the United Nations) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 4/4/1946, telegram # 501.BC/4-446 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 407-409.

complaint. He approached Murray hoping to work out some sort of compromise that would allow Iran to withdraw the complaint but still subject the matter to recall by the Council if the Soviets reneged on their promises of evacuation set down for May 6. Characterizing the prime minister as “dejected” following meetings with Sadchikov, Murray reported to Washington that “Qavam seems to be debating with himself as to how far he could trust Russians.”⁹⁶ The State Department replied that the Iranian prime minister’s attempt to appease the Soviets by possibly withdrawing the complaint even with the expectation it could be reinstated if he was double crossed by Stalin would undermine Iranian credibility perhaps once and for all. The members of the Council would begin to wonder how serious Iran had been in the first place. They would ask if the Council was simply a stalking horse for Tehran? The members easily might conclude that they had been used, that Tehran had never regarded the continued Soviet military presence on Iranian soil as a threat to intentional peace and security—the criteria that would concern the Security Council—but only claimed that to add weight to their side in bilateral talks with the Russians over the mix of oil and evacuation. Of course, there would be some truth to those suspicions: Qavam, although not in office when it was lodged, had allowed the complaint to stand as part of a strategy to force more favorable terms from Russia as the price for her evacuation of the north and as a back up if the talks failed. Unlike Byrnes, Qavam had not intended to use the issue to achieve the grander goal of establishing the Council's legitimacy. Byrnes was concerned that the future of the Security Council would be undermined if in its first complaint, it was only the unwitting tool of the complaining party (for narrow self interests) rather than considering the issues of peace and security. And, of course, there was a change of course underway in Washington to take into account. The January 5 letter from Truman virtually ordered the secretary of state to stop “babying” the Soviets and adopt a firm stand against Soviet aggression starting with Iran. Even if Byrnes had not been read the letter by Truman as the latter claimed, he was aware that the get-tough-with-Russia faction in Washington was on the ascent and that he was regarded with suspicion by them as too willing to

⁹⁶ Wallace Murray (Ambassador in Iran) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 4/10/1946, telegram # 86124501/4-1046 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 415-416.

compromise with Russia in a last ditch effort to save FDR's Soviet policy.⁹⁷ Stalin was now caught in an embarrassing position as the aggressor in Iran sponsoring separatist movements, throwing their substantial military might around a defenseless neighbor and maneuvering for a grubby oil deal at gun point. The international spotlight had caught the Russians in an unfavorable light and Byrnes was not about to let the spotlight move on too quickly.

The Americans further tried to impress upon Qavam that should he end up alienating Security Council members, making them appear mere pawns in Tehran's maneuvering with Moscow, it would be uncertain that Iran would receive a favorable response if she felt it necessary to recall the complaint (if that was even possible) should the Soviets later renege on the bilateral agreement, that is, if they reversed course and stopped withdrawal or reentered Iran after an evacuation. In other words there would probably be no do-overs. If she withdrew her complaint now but wished to keep her options open and even resubmit it if things went sideways with the Russians, Tehran would be isolated in the diplomatic community as the country that "cried wolf"—the opposite of her current position when world opinion was moving rapidly to her side as the victim of Soviet bullying. It is yet another precedent for the Council Byrnes was attempting to establish: in for a penny in for a pound. If the Council was not to be a mere rubber stamp for the great powers it was also not to be a pawn for the smaller nations to use in leveraging better deals from their powerful neighbors.

The man who had drafted the Tehran Declaration of the Big Three for Pat Hurley back in November 1943, John Jernegan, called on Qavam on April 11 where he also found the prime minister "dejected." Jernegan soon found out why: Sadchikov had just preceded the American by an hour. The Soviet ambassador forcefully told Qavam that the acceptance of the three notes meant that the Iran complaint must be terminated immediately. Failure to do so Sadchikov said, could only be interpreted as an intolerable "insult" to the USSR and exhibit a lack of confidence in the Soviet Union that would

⁹⁷ David Robertson, *Sly and Able. A Political Biography of James F. Byrnes*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), 458. Robertson also speculates that Admiral Leahy was leaking the many reports emerging in the media following the Moscow CFM that implied Truman was increasingly under the influence of the hardliners, was disappointed in Byrnes performance and regarded him as too soft on Moscow.

"strain relations" between the two countries perhaps forever.⁹⁸ Jernegan, however, had been dispatched by Ambassador Murray not to provide psycho-therapy to a man clearly on the brink but to convey Byrnes' recommendations. Jernegan said that it had taken a strenuous effort to place the Iranian case before the Security Council and Tehran should not lightly assume that struggle would be repeated if the complaint was now withdrawn. Byrnes was even blunter telling Murray to relay to Tehran that the Council members—perhaps including the United States—would not likely take a future renewed Iranian appeal over the same issue seriously if the complaint were now withdrawn *before* the Red Army left Iran.⁹⁹ Withdrawal of the complaint before they fully evacuated Iran was, of course a demand presented by the Soviet ambassador in Tehran. Jernegan did his best to dissuade the prime minister from withdrawing the complaint, arguing that resisting Russian pressure to do so and trusting in the Council was the safest course for Iran. He reiterated Byrnes warning that Iran might not get a second chance to impress the Council or the United States and could end up facing the Soviets alone. "The prime minister," Jernegan reported, "admitted these arguments but insisted he could not refuse the Soviet demand that he change Ala's instructions. Qavam said that 'under intense pressure' from Sadchikov he had agreed to telegraph Ala to withdraw the complaint."¹⁰⁰ Ambassador Murray reported back to Foggy Bottom that Qavam believed dealing with the Russians was a delicate matter and the he could not snub Moscow's demand to withdraw the complaint before complete Red Army evacuation. "He [Qavam] remarked that when dealing with a lion you must cajole it and feed it, not attempt to match your claws against it. He felt position was extremely difficult. If he antagonized Soviets now he might loss all he had gained."¹⁰¹ In particular, Qavam was concerned that even when the Red Army left Iran, the Soviets would retain substantial leverage in the form of their puppet government in Tabriz which could be ordered to resist a settlement with Tehran and remain an armed communist bastion on Iranian soil. A distraught Ala called on Stettinius

⁹⁸ Sadchikov quoted in Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 274.

⁹⁹ James Byrnes (Secretary of State) to Wallace Murray (Ambassador in Iran), 4/12/1946, telegram # 86124591/4-1146 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 419-420.

¹⁰⁰ Jernegan quoted in Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 274.

¹⁰¹ Wallace Murray (Ambassador in Iran) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 4/11/1946, telegram # 86124591/4-1146 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, 419-420.

in New York and said that he had also informed Qavam that once removed from the Security Council agenda recalling the Iranian complaint would be very difficult. Like Murray, Byrnes and Jernegan, Ala told his prime minister that Iran's only safe and reliable course was to trust the Security Council and leave the complaint before that body while all waited the promised complete Red Army evacuation. He told Stettinius that if he were ordered by Qavam to terminate the complaint before definite Soviet compliance he would resign first.¹⁰² Qavam worried and yet hopeful that trusting Stalin would work this time, asked in an April 14 communication to have the complaint withdrawn from further Council consideration.¹⁰³

Qavam had reason to worry. Throughout April, Robert Rossow reported back to Washington that, although the pace of direct Red Army intervention had slowed to a halt, the Soviets were training communist militia in Azerbaijan province, attempting to whip them into a regular army to form the pro-Soviet armed bastion on Iranian soil that Qavam had feared. Several hundred militia officers (including a few defectors from the Iranian Army) had been sent across the border into the Soviet Union for military training while the men they would command back in Iran were now being issued Red Army uniforms—minus the insignia—and brandishing Czech made submachine guns. Further, Red Army and Azerbaijani militias were staging joint maneuvers and the head of the Azerbaijani military was a former Soviet officer. If forced to withdraw under American organized international pressure or tricked by Qavam's diplomacy (or both), which now seemed highly likely, the Red Army was determined to leave behind a surrogate force of heavily armed Azerbaijani and Kurds, both indebted to the USSR and capable of disturbing Iranian affairs. Indeed from the Kremlin's point of view it made more sense now for Azerbaijan province to remain part of Iran rather than seek total independence since as a renegade province it could cause far more havoc in the country as a whole.

The Russians had also embedded civilian advisors in the Pishvari government and agents loyal to Moscow would covertly remain on Iranian territory.¹⁰⁴ Stalin's

¹⁰² Wallace Murray (Ambassador in Iran) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 4/11/1946, telegram # 86124591/4-1146 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, 417-418.

¹⁰³ *Department of State Bulletin*. (No. 14, January to June, 1946. Volume XIV. No. 341), 716.

¹⁰⁴ Peter Lisagor and Marguerite Higgins, *Overtime In Heaven. Adventures in the Foreign Service*. (Garden City, NY; Double Day and Co., 1964), 168-169.

persistent efforts to establish a Soviet presence in Azerbaijan province strongly implied that his objectives exceeded that of mere oil ventures as some historians sympathetic to the Soviets on this point have claimed.¹⁰⁵ The price he set for Red Army withdrawal included leaving behind a Moscow friendly regime in Tabriz capable of defying the central government. Unless one accepts Stalin's claims that Soviet national security was at stake in Azerbaijan (and only a few did at the time or since)¹⁰⁶ the only explanation was that he was preparing Tabriz as a base for future operations, probing into both Iran and Turkey and perhaps beyond. Rossow, however, noted that the local militias were far less disciplined than the regular Soviet army which was supervising them and thus far more unpredictable.¹⁰⁷ Ironically, if and when the Red Army withdrew, the situation could become more explosive in Azerbaijan as armed, undisciplined and basically leaderless militia men would be roaming the province.¹⁰⁸

Qavam's communication to the Security Council claiming the matter was closed delighted Moscow but at the expense of irritating Washington. Truman had made it clear in his January 5 letter that he was anxious to take a stand on Iran that put the Soviets on notice that a new policy of firmness was replacing FDR's old Soviet policy of softness. Byrnes was anxious to use the case of Iran to cement FDR's broader foreign policy objectives by establishing early on the legitimacy and credibility of the Council as a peace and security body capable of managing global conflicts.

The shifting direction of American foreign policy and domestic politics were not the only factors at work in America's endorsement of Iran's complaint before the Security Council. The United States had at the same time, stretching back to the 1943 Tehran summit when the United States was pursuing FDR's policy of maximum allowable cooperation with the USSR, had shown great sympathy for the rapid and full restoration

¹⁰⁵ For example: Walter La Feber and Harold Evans. [Walter La Feber, *America, Russia and the Cold War*. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1993), 34-35.]

¹⁰⁶ As we have seen, Rashid Khalidi is a rare example of a contemporary historian who credits Soviet security fears regarding Iran in 1946.

¹⁰⁷ *FRUS*, Vol. VII, p. 405, fn 71.

¹⁰⁸ Although much less dependent on Soviet assistance than the Tabriz government, the Kurds in Iran received support from Kurdish guerillas in Turkey. Perhaps because they (unlike their counterparts in Azerbaijan province) were outside Red Army control, the Kurdish fighters were far less reluctant to pull the trigger. Thus, on April 24, they ambushed an Iranian army column killing two dozen and capturing forty. [William Eagleton, *The Kurdish Republic of 1946*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 82].

of Iran's sovereignty after the war based on the principle of self-determination resting at the core of the United Nations and the Atlantic charters. At this time the America had no significant economic interests in Iran or her oil and was on good terms with her then Soviet ally. Thus, neither self-interest nor anti-communism could be seen as the motive behind the foundation of America's war time involvement in Iran's future: the Big Three Declaration on Iran. Indeed, Byrnes was concerned enough in maintaining America's image as a unselfish in this case that when Qavam suggested to the Americans that their oil companies could also seek an oil deal as the Soviets had, on April 8 Byrnes instructed Murphy to allow no such discussions until after Russian troops had fully left Iran; Iranian laws had been satisfied; and the matter was no longer before the Council: "As stated in Deptel 238, we are anxious that an impression should not be obtained that we have been influenced in our recent actions before the Security Council by a selfish interest in Iranian petroleum.... We do not wish any discussions with regard to the possibility of America obtaining oil rights in Iran carried on by representatives of this government or American oil companies, at least until Soviet troops have evacuated Iran or until a law prohibiting such negotiations is no longer effective. Please make our position clear to representatives in Iran of American oil interests in Iran."¹⁰⁹ For the Americans, when the Iranians withdrew their complaint *prior* to a full Red Army evacuation and full disclosure of any conditions imposed by the Russians to affect that withdrawal, it was an embarrassment to those who had spent diplomatic capital to support Iran. Byrnes and Truman were not only deprived of the push back they were hoping to deliver on the Soviets, it appeared as if the Iranians had manipulated the Americans and worse yet that the Russians had benefited from staging a boycott of the Security Council.

The Soviets ended their boycott and were back at the conference table in New York. Gromyko, in a classic example of *chutzpah*, protested the continuation of Council consideration of the Iranian complaint in his absence, as if his truancy had not been voluntary.¹¹⁰ In any case, he maintained that the matter was now closed and that the Iranian complaint should be dropped from the Council's agenda for good.

¹⁰⁹ Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 278.

¹¹⁰ *Department of State Bulletin*. (No. 14, January to June, 1946. Volume XIV. No. 341), 708.

The American representative at the April 15 session, Edward Stettinius, persisted by arguing against an early termination of the matter before the May 6 date previously agreed upon as the maximum deadline for Red Army withdrawal. Acting contrary to his reputation as an intellectual lightweight and soft headed when it came to the Soviets, Stettinius effectively argued that to end the matter, even on the request of the Iranian government, would set a negative precedent and undermine the credibility and legitimacy of the Security Council.¹¹¹ Once a complaint is lodged it must be followed through to final resolution even if the complaining party had a change of heart. Otherwise it would be very difficult to determine if the complaining party was being coerced into withdrawing the accusation by the alleged aggressor. Accordingly, not until the Red Army completely left northern Iran and stopped interfering in Iran's internal affairs could the Council relinquish its interest in the matter. Announcement of an agreement to evacuate was necessary but not sufficient especially if the conditions (if any) were not disclosed to the Council. Making the same point Byrnes had previously, Stettinius was acting in part to preserve the future of the Security Council; if a complaining party had the final say about the disposition of a complaint than it would in all likelihood be subject to intense pressure or even an ultimatum from an aggressor to withdraw the matter or face even more unpleasant consequences. Washington believed that is exactly what lay behind Qavam's decision to terminate the complaint: bullying from the Kremlin. Byrnes and Stettinius argued the final judgment about the status of a complaint had to rest with the Security Council which was charged with maintaining global peace and security. If it was to be an independent body, not open to manipulation by any of the direct parties and especially the consequences of bullying by the accused aggressor, then the decision to remove Iran from the agenda had to rest with the Council *not* the complaining party. If the Council dropped the complaint from her agenda at this juncture, the United Nations would have, as Byrnes had warned, have *de facto* adopted Stalin's model of a Security Council that was a mere mouth piece for the actions of the great powers.¹¹² Ambassador Van Kleffens of the Netherlands put the point succinctly: "Who is master of the Council's agenda, the

¹¹¹ Stettinius did not, however, defect to the get-tough-with-Russia faction. He remained a partisan of FDR's Soviet policy and in 1950 published (*Roosevelt and the Russians*) a spirited defense of his old boss' performance at Yalta which by then was coming under intense criticism from Republicans.

¹¹² Of course in all fairness to Stalin, as we have seen, his concept of an executive body of a world body and FDR's "four policemen" formula were similar models.

Council, or States who are parties to a dispute or situation?" His answer—only the Security Council had authority to dispose of a complaint—agreed with the position staked out by Byrnes and Stettinius.¹¹³ In addition to Van Kleffens, Stettinius was joined by Ambassadors Alexander Cadogan (Britain); Pedro Velyoso (Brazil); Hojson (Australia); etc.¹¹⁴

It was a broad and independent authority for the Security Council that Byrnes was seeking to establish, now and in the future, whereas the Soviets (joined by Poland), Qavam and Secretary-General Lie's own position strongly implied limited and dependent power for the body, leaving it at the mercy of the immediate parties to a complaint. Indeed, Lie had already advanced the position that he believed the Council should only be a court of last resort, an argument he lost when the body scheduled a hearing on the Iranian complaint prior to the exhaustion of the bilateral talks. In an unmistakable rejoinder to Lie, the American representative reminded the Council it was Russia's persistent refusal to leave Iran on schedule combined with extensive interference in Iranian internal affairs and Tehran's own complaint that had brought the matter before the Security Council not anything the United States had done or initiated. Contrary to Lie's suspicions, the United States had only reluctantly reacted to the situation not created it. Thus it was unfair to depict Washington as the obstacle to closing the matter as Lie seemed to believe.¹¹⁵ Gromyko let it be known that he found the otherwise Soviet friendly Stettinius was becoming a "headache" yet it was the Soviet ambassador who was starting to lash out. When Ambassador Velyoso ran into Gromyko at the snack bar during a recess he attempted to break the ice by telling the Soviet he was learning the Russian language to which Grim Grom replied "No! No! You are only learning how to vote against Russia."¹¹⁶ On April 24 a frustrated Gromyko announced that although he would not stage a walk out again he was going to give the Council the silent treatment on Iran: He would not speak on the subject again. The French representative attempted to defuse the heated session and potential implosion of the body by suggesting a compromise: the

¹¹³ Faramarz Fatemi, *The USSR In Iran*. (New York: Barnes and Co., 1980), 125.

¹¹⁴ Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 280.

¹¹⁵ *Department of State Bulletin*. (No. 14, January to June, 1946. Volume XIV. No. 341), 706-709.

¹¹⁶ Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 280.

matter be referred to a “committee of experts” for a recommendation about who was in control of the complaint, the direct parties (including the aggrieved party) or the Council. His proposal was accepted and the issue referred to a committee of experts. The “experts” that constituted the committee, however, were nearly always the legal consuls hired by each of the member nations of the Security Council. Since the delegations represented on the Council had made their positions clear already it was not surprising that the expert opinion arrived at by their legal staffs closely reflected that of their respective employers.¹¹⁷

In so far as the proposed Iranian-Soviet oil company was concerned, Byrnes reiterated that America did not now (or in the past) have any objections to an Iranian-Soviet venture provided it was not a condition of the Russian military withdrawal. Both the 1942 treaty and, more importantly from Byrnes’ perspective, the Big Three Declaration on Iran, provided no conditions for withdrawal once the world war was terminated the only outstanding question being if that meant the defeat of Germany or all the Axis powers including Japan. This coincided with what Murray had told Qavam just before the Security Council debate: what Iran did with her oil was her business but Red Army withdrawal must be unconditional if they expected support from America although it is true that privately Murray believed that some manner of an oil deal would be the price Iran would have to pay to usher the Russians out of their country.¹¹⁸ In that sense, Byrnes idealism was closer to the sentiment in the Majlis, represented by their law which forbade oil wheeling and dealing while foreign troops were occupying Iran, than Qavam himself. Qavam was closer to a realist position that recognized some concessions were necessary to provide the Soviets with a face saving way out. The Soviets won a tactical victory when Qavam, against America’s strenuous objections, asked the Iranian complaint be withdrawn. Strategically, however, he lost; Byrnes arguments that the Council required expansive authority and considerable discretion to hear and supervise complaints—even if the complainant wanted the action terminated—carried the day and thwarted the Soviets demands to clear Iran from the agenda. The stakes had risen well above the immediate issue of the occupation of Iran and even her oil but once again

¹¹⁷ Stanley Meisler, *United Nations: The First Fifty Years*. (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 1995), 33.

¹¹⁸ Wallace Murray (Ambassador in Iran) to James Byrnes (Secretary of State), 3/23/1946, telegram # 86124591/3-2346 in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 373-375.

concerned the future of the United Nations. Qavam's was tightly focused on Soviet troops in his country whereas Byrnes also had to consider preserving the world body as a viable instrument for global peace and security.

On April 23 the committee of experts earlier suggested by the French ambassador reported to the Council. The majority report supported Byrnes opinion that only the Security Council and not the immediate parties to a dispute, not even the aggrieved party, should decide what matters with which it was seized. The Soviets attempted to exploit the less than unanimous decision of the committee and Lie's own dissent which had agreed with the minority report that the complainant had the power to terminate their complaint and Council considerations. Stettinius argued that the majority report settled the question yet the French representative called for a compromise again, this time handing off a decision to the General Assembly. Why that body would be any more productive on the matter than a panel of experts which had not reached a unanimous decision was not explained by the French ambassador although the Soviets would have a decided advantage in that arena since they enjoyed extra votes and could exploit the resentment many in that branch of the United Nations felt toward the elitist Security Council executive body from which they were excluded at least as veto wielding permanent members. The French proposal was defeated with only Poland and the USSR supporting the French. A defeated and bitter Gromyko said his government would no longer discuss the matter at all.¹¹⁹

On May 6, Ambassador Ala reported to the Security Council that he could corroborate the Soviet's claim to have evacuated their occupation zone in most of northern Iran still his government had not been able to verify Soviet assertions of withdrawal from the province in the center of the storm: Azerbaijan. He repeated that Tehran had not been able to exercise authority in the province since November 7, 1945 owing to Soviet interference in her internal affairs and thus could not confirm the Russian claim of total compliance. Moreover, unlike elsewhere in northern Iran, a government hostile to Tehran was in place in Tabriz and Mahabad both of whom were unwilling to allow the Iranian national government to inspect the progress of Red Army

¹¹⁹ Faramarz Fatemi, *The USSR In Iran*. (New York: Barnes and Co., 1980), 125-126.

withdrawal.¹²⁰ When the Council took up the issue again on May 8 Ala stated again that he could not report a withdrawal of Russian forces. In fact the Soviets were leaving Azerbaijan. As Ala reported, the Russians had been withdrawing their army from most of northern Iran between late March and early April except for Tabriz.¹²¹ Unwisely Russia had not allowed England, the United States, Tehran or the United Nations to observe their long awaited retreat thus allowing ambiguity to hang over the situation for several more weeks. Indeed even on May 20 Ala reported again to Lie that the true state of affairs in Azerbaijan could not be determined but he could say for sure that Tehran was not exercising authority in that province because of ongoing Russian interference and the obstinacy of the Pischevari government.¹²² “As soon as the Iranian government is able to ascertain through its official representative the true state of affairs in the Province of Azerbaijan,” Ala concluded, “the facts will be reported promptly to the Council.”¹²³ With Gromyko continuing his campaign of silence on the matter no formal response was forthcoming nor a counter report offered from the Soviet side. With no Soviet representative to cross examine, Stettinius, requested the matter be put off until the “true state of affairs” was determined.

The next day Ala revised his previous assertion and said that in the interim Qavam had sent word that he had dispatched a commission to determine the facts in Azerbaijan. “The telegraphic reports [of the commission] are to the effect that no trace whatever of Soviet troops, equipment, or means of transport was found, and that according to trustworthy local people... Soviet troops evacuated Azerbaijan on 6 May.”¹²⁴ Stettinius proposed and it was accepted by the Security Council (with Russia absent) to postpone a final report until May 20. The report from Qavam’s commission and the Tehran government was that the Red Army had indeed left Azerbaijan. Yet, Ala refused to let the matter drop. He argued before the Security Council that the Iranian complaint had two facets: one was the question of Red Army withdrawal; second was the issue of Soviet inference in the internal affairs of Iran which had been the proximate cause of the Iranian

¹²⁰ *Department of State Bulletin*. No. 14, January to June, 1946. Volume XIV. No. 341, p. 854.

¹²¹ Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 255.

¹²² *Department of State Bulletin*. No. 14, January to June, 1946. Volume XIV. No. 341, p. 941.

¹²³ Faramarz Fatemi, *The USSR In Iran*. (New York: Barnes and Co., 1980), 127.

¹²⁴ *Department of State Bulletin*. No. 14, January to June, 1946. Volume XIV. No. 341, p. 942.

complaint in the first place. While the first *might* have taken place—he still would not completely concede that point even in the face of explicit confirmation by his own government—the second remained an open question made self evident by the fact that a Soviet installed government with the stated objective of semi-independence remained alive and well in Tabriz. The Polish representative, acting as a surrogate for the Soviets, grilled Ala on that point, arguing as the Russians had, that the Pischevari government was a genuine and legitimate expression of the Azerbaijani people not the product of Soviet interference. Ala would hardly concede that point either and countered that Tabriz government was installed from without—by Moscow—survived as a result of Red Army occupation and constituted a continuing intrusion of the Soviet Union in Iran’s internal affairs. The Soviet army may have left yet their comrades remained: a regime and militia armed and trained by the Soviets that was violently opposed to the sovereign government in Tehran and which was pursuing a radical social program, which no matter what one thought of it, was at variance with that of the rest of country but was compatible with Soviet society, thus implying a drift into the Russian orbit even if took longer than either Tabriz or Moscow initially calculated. At a minimum, Pischevari’s government was forcibly keeping the central government police and military out of Azerbaijan almost certainly with the approval of the Soviets.¹²⁵ Qavam clearly wanted the matter closed as far as the United Nations was concerned while the Iranian ambassador was doing everything he could, short of rank insubordination, to keep the complaint alive and on the Council agenda. Technically, Ala was correct stopping just short of defiance of his government; the initial complaint had hinged on Russian interference in Iran’s domestic affairs and that had not been addressed in Qavam’s instructions to terminate the complaint which only affirmed the evacuation of the Red Army. On May 22 Stettinius supported Ala’s interpretation against Qavam’s obvious intention to end Security Council consideration of the issue; he proposed that the body continue to keep Iran on the agenda because among other things, the total withdrawal of Soviet troops—now confirmed by Tehran— was only one of several issues contained in the complaint. Russian meddling in Iranian domestic affairs had also been central to the complaint, as Qavam had asserted, and in addition, Stettinius reminded his colleagues that it had yet to be determined if the

¹²⁵ Faramarz Fatemi, *The USSR In Iran*. (New York: Barnes and Co., 1980), 127.

Soviet withdrawal was cost free or conditioned on concessions to Russia by Iran.¹²⁶ A motion by the Dutch representative that the Council “adjourn the discussion of the Iranian question until a date in the near future, the Council to be called together at the request of any member,” was passed 9 to 1.¹²⁷

Gromyko, Stalin, and Qavam undoubtedly were exasperated that the Iranian complaint theoretically remained on the agenda yet for all practical purposes the matter was closed and the Security Council would not consider it again. The Soviet army had formally left Iran and the question of indirect interference by Moscow, if it continued, was one for Tehran to solve either by cracking down on the Tudeh or removing the Pishvari government in Tabriz or both. As long as the direct intimidation from Moscow was over and the Red Army did not directly cross the border back into Iran, the world body was satisfied no matter that technically the Iranian complaint had cited Soviet interference in their internal affairs. Addressing the murky area of quasi-aggression in the form of subversion was a topic that the Security Council, Washington, London, Tehran, and Moscow preferred to avoid although its consequences for the future of the Cold War would be enormous: within a year Truman would announce a doctrine that expanded American interests to include combating internal armed subversion in foreign lands and from outside pressure. These were themes that had been partially debuted in Byrnes’ speech to the Overseas Press Club—a further indication that the Iran crisis was an experimental laboratory for America’s postwar foreign policy. Once again the immediate inspiration for the Truman Doctrine would be the Near East and great power sponsorship of armed subversion of the *status quo* in the region. The Security Council declined the role of accepting responsibility for internal subversions, even if armed by outsiders, leaving that task to the great powers. It would be up to Tehran to reassert central government authority in Azerbaijan province, possibly with the help of Washington or London but not under United Nations auspices. That level of intervention would be in the future on the Korean peninsula.

Both Gromyko and Lie cast suspicion on Ambassador Ala and questioned if he represented his government views. Indeed, they implied he might have been taking his

¹²⁶ *Department of State Bulletin*. No. 14, January to June, 1946. Volume XIV. No. 341, p. 987.

¹²⁷ Faramarz Fatemi, *The USSR In Iran*. (New York: Barnes and Co., 1980), 128.

orders from some source other than the government in Iran.¹²⁸ Stephen McFarland appears to endorse this assessment when he characterizes Ala as a perpetual *agent provocateur* during the crisis, disobeying his superiors in Tehran to pursue a board anti-Soviet agenda which coincidentally is what the hardliners in Washington wanted to hear.¹²⁹ His claim that Ala was basically bandwagoned by the American get-tough-with-Russia faction may have been true yet the ambassador's resistance to withdrawing the Iranian complainant even after Qavam communicated a resolution of the dispute was technically correct. The Iranian complaint was, as Ala asserted, based on charges of Soviet interference in Iran's internal affairs (the obstruction of the army column on November 19-20, 1945, being the prime example) at the time the complaint was first lodged at the London sessions. Although Soviet army occupation was the background issue, the proximate cause of the complaint was interference in Iranian internal affairs. Even with Qavam's announcement that an agreement had finally been reached for withdrawal of the Soviet Army (with *de facto* conditions he did not reveal to the Council) it was undeniable that the Kremlin continued to interfere in Iran's domestic affairs by sponsoring the Pishvari government (armed as they were with a military force separate from the Iranian army) which Ala regarded exclusively as Soviet construct completely imposed on Iran-Azerbaijan from without.¹³⁰ Consequently he could successfully argue that the complaint had not been laid to rest even if Qavam had maneuvered the Red Army

¹²⁸ James Byrnes also suspected Ala was under the influence of Washington hardliners. George Allen (the deputy director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs at the State Department) a member of the get-tough-with-Russia faction, was a political advisor to the American delegation during the Security Council sessions considering the Iran case. Byrnes assumed Allen helped Ala to write his speeches and coached him on debating points. In fact, Byrnes started referring to Ala as "Ala Allen" although Allen denied such collaboration existed. [Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 343.] Once in Tehran as Murray's replacement, Allen lived up to his reputation as a fierce anti-communist and grew close to the shah becoming his regular tennis partner and weekend guest. He advised the shah to continue pursuing a strong anti-Soviet position. He expressed strong reservations to a receptive shah about Qavam's policy of filtering with the Tudeh (including communist ministers in his cabinet). He told the shah frankly that America would probably not go to war with Russia to save Iran should the Soviets attack. But he added Moscow did not know that; Iran, he advised, should use that uncertainty in Moscow to her advantage. Thus he advised Qavam should not be concerned about appeasing Stalin or coddling the Tudeh. If he moved against Pishvari the Kremlin could not be sure that America would not back Tehran up with armed force. It was advice that the shah passed along to Qavam. [Gholam Reza Afkhami, *The Life and Times of the Shah*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 100.]

¹²⁹ Stephen McFarland, "The Iranian Crisis of 1946 and the Onset of the Cold War" in Melvyn Leffler (ed.) *Origins the Cold War. An International History*. (London: Routledge, 1994), 250-251.

¹³⁰ Stephen McFarland, "The Iranian Crisis of 1946 and the Onset of the Cold War" in Melvyn Leffler (ed.) *Origins the Cold War. An International History*, 251.

out of Iran. Although this may have been unrealistically stubborn (the Council considered the matter closed once it was confirmed that Soviet armed forces left Iran) and perhaps pedantic it hardly made Ala the villain of the piece that McFarland claims.

Nevertheless, Qavam wanted to cashier Ala for having violated instructions drop the complaint when the prime minister confirmed Russian troops had left Azerbaijan. Although he had resisted such a move in the past, now Qavam was also under intense pressure from the Kremlin via Sadchikov in Tehran who wanted Ala punished for his zealous representation of the Iranian case.¹³¹

Stalin had a well deserved reputation for never letting any offense (real or imagined) go unanswered. Yet, there was more than just petty revenge behind Moscow's insistence that Ala be punished. The Soviets probably feared Ala's stubborn refusal in the Council to let Moscow off the hook, anti-communism often in excess of government policy in Tehran and all perhaps in collaboration with hardliners in Washington, would set a bad precedent (from their perspective) if Qavam did not make an example of him. They were hardly anxious to see diplomats from Eastern European nations under Soviet direction to enjoy the freedom of action Ala had arrogated to himself during the Iran crisis. Nor did they wish to see diplomats from the emerging Soviet bloc become chummy with Americans as Ala had.

The United States would not follow Ala in pursuing the complaint in the Council to include the question of reversing Soviet sponsored armed subversion and separatism in Azerbaijan province is another example of America's relationship with Ala.¹³² Although he agreed that now the complaint should be dropped based on confirmation of a full Red Army withdrawal from Iranian territory, Byrnes was sympathetic toward Ala and

¹³¹ Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 340.

¹³² No matter what the Soviets or Lie thought of him, Qavam earned high praise in American diplomatic circles as a courageous diplomat and sincere patriot. Harold Minor, for example, the chief of staff of the State Department's Near Eastern Division, heaped praise on Ala saying that the Security Council would probably have never insisted on unconditional and total Red Army withdrawal without Ala's persistence. Minor noted that Ala did so at the risk to his family and property in northern Iran which could have been confiscated as punishment. [Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), fn. 110, 340]. The American media joined the State Department's applause for Ala. On December 5, 1946 *Time* magazine reflecting back on the Iran crisis and the first test of the Security Council, called Ala the first hero produced by the United Nations. [Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 379.]

instructed the new American ambassador in Tehran, George Allen, to use the influence of the embassy to persuade Qavam to give Ala a pass. "We feel that recall or repudiation of Ala at this time," Byrnes said, "would impair ability of Council to give aid to Iran and hope Qavam will refrain from taking precipitous action against Ala under Soviet pressure. Ala had told us that, while he may have gone beyond specific instructions in certain instances, he feels he has properly interpreted Qavam's factual cables and has taken action which Qavam would instruct, if Iran were not under Soviet pressure." Under the circumstances, Byrnes argued, Ala must be granted a considerable degree of leeway but he also emphasized to Allen that in no way did the State Department encourage Ala to exceed or ignore his instructions from Qavam. Byrnes emphasized that Ala had acted in what he believed to be the best interests of his country and the future of the United Nations.¹³³ Although Qavam was furious with Ala and inclined to agree with Sadchikov that he should be fired, he succumbed to Byrnes' defense of the Iranian ambassador delivered by Allen and limited his punishment to an explicit public declaration that Ala would make no more statements on Soviet-Iranian relations and to withdraw from the official record any statements he made to the Security Council which exceeded his instructions at the time. Ala's diplomatic credentials, however, would not be withdrawn and he would not be recalled.¹³⁴

Considering the Iran crisis had exacerbated the fault lines within the Big Three to the breaking point and given that the dispute allowed the get-tough-with-Russia faction to make a persuasive case for a shift in America's Soviet policy from soft to hard and emerge as the dominate force among foreign policy makers, it was a high price for the Soviets to pay for a minimal payoff: a puppet government in Tabriz and the promise of a joint oil company while the question of formal Azerbaijani autonomy remained unanswered. A calculating man, Stalin normally considered the risk of a move in proportion to the gain thus making it all but certain that he was, as Truman, Rossow and Henderson suspected, playing for far higher stakes all along: an expansive Soviet sphere of influence in the Middle East with Azerbaijan province as a launching pad. Had he succeed, the whole of Iran would have fallen into the Soviet orbit while Turkey, and

¹³³ Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 340.

¹³⁴ Faramarz Fatemi, *The USSR In Iran*. (New York: Barnes and Co., 1980), 128-129.

probably Iraq as well would have been under an irresistible pressure to fall in line with the Kremlin. Truman had sensed as much in his January 5 letter to Byrnes when he linked Iran and Turkey as primary objectives of the Soviet Union which could only be thwarted with a firm response from Washington. One need only consider the role each of these countries played in the postwar world to realize how differently the Cold War would have looked had that been the outcome: the United States would have been at a strategic disadvantage. Had the Soviet prevailed not only the United Nations would have turned out differently, the shape of the Cold War would have probably been different with the Middle East and not Europe being the primary arena of confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Conclusion

Although it generated headlines at the time, indeed labeled by the American news media as the "first battle of the Cold War," the Iran crisis rapidly faded from memory after 1946. Today, it is hardly recalled at all. For Americans and Britons it was quickly overshadowed by new confrontations between the superpowers, some that threatened war (e.g. the Berlin airlift) and others that resulted in war (i.e. Korea). For the Soviets there had never been a crisis so there was nothing to recall except one more provocation by a growing hard-line faction in America and England they claimed were bent on war with the USSR.¹ Moscow had assumed since the death of FDR that the new administration had been maneuvering to deprive the USSR of the fruits of victory and Iran was cast as one more example. They were at least partly correct; FDR's soft Soviet policy did breathe its' last breath during the Iran crisis. For Truman and the get-tough-with-Russia faction, the Iran crisis was conclusive proof that FDR's Soviet policy had failed; the Soviets were not becoming more but less cooperative in the postwar period. Yet, the Iran issue was not manufactured by Truman or Byrnes or anyone else in the American government to gain advantage over Russia. As we have seen, a reluctant secretary of state finally embraced the issue but not as an anti-Soviet vehicle but as a means to establish legitimacy for the Security Council thus saving the United Nations from the irrelevance that befell the League of Nations.² Had the Soviet model for the United Nations prevailed that is probably what would have transpired leaving the Council as little more than a giant rubber stamp of approval for great power pursuits of their own interests. Thus, Byrnes rescued Roosevelt's chief foreign policy objective, the establishment of a viable international peace and security body, albeit at the expense of his old boss' soft Soviet

¹ Ambassador Gromyko briefly mentions the Iran crisis in his *memoirs* but avoided calling it that. Indeed, his citation of the matter is largely only to opportunistically cast himself as a hero who stood up to the rising tide of anti-Soviet hostility in the West of which this was yet another example. [Andrei Gromyko, *Memoirs*. (London: Hutchison, 1989), 236-237.]

² As we have seen, and unlike the Soviet version (which is also shared by many revisionist historians in the West) Byrnes faced resistance within the foreign establishment and even among some hard-liners (e.g. Henderson and Bohlen) who thought Iran was not an appropriate arena to challenge Soviet aggression or that the United Nations was the right forum at least at that moment.

policy. Both objectives, a legitimate and viable Security Council and the preservation of a soft Soviet policy of maximum allowable accommodation of Moscow, were not compatible as the Iran case made perfectly clear.³

In Iran, the 1953 CIA sponsored *coup* that overthrew Prime Minister Mossadegh and not the 1946 crisis became the dominate narrative of her relations with the superpowers thus casting the United States in as negative a light as the Soviet Union, if not worse. Indeed, today nearly all contemporary discourse on the history of Iranian-American relations begins in 1953 and not 1946. Ironically, Qavam's own nimble but oblique maneuvering probably contributed to degrading the importance of the crisis in Iran. Bruce Kuniholm has noted that one of the greatest difficulties for historians when considering the crisis is evaluating Qavam's role in its resolution.⁴ As previously noted, both Rossow and Allen's radically different interpretations about Qavam reflected the prime minister's efforts to keep outsiders guessing about his objectives and tactics. What we can be sure of is that by November the prime minister abandoned his romance of Moscow and the Tudeh (their ministers were already out of the cabinet on October 20) by sending national troops into Azerbaijan province. By mid December they were in Tabriz, the Pischevari government was forcibly overthrown and Iranian sovereignty restored. Pischevari went into exile in the USSR one step ahead of a firing squad.⁵ With the

³ It would be the leader of the New Deal left, secretary of commerce and former vice-president Henry Wallace, who recognized the same problem as Byrnes: FDR's Soviet policy and establishing the Security Council as a legitimate and effective body were not compatible. His solution, however, was the reverse of Byrnes. Wallace's position amounted to jettisoning the United Nations project in favor of the preservation FDR's soft Soviet policy. A spheres of influence man, Wallace favored conceding a security sphere for the USSR and in so doing making the Security Council exactly what Stalin aimed for: a rubber stamp for the great powers to rule their spheres of influence. During the crisis Wallace told Truman that there was a parallel between Russia's quest for a security belt in Eastern Europe and her attempt to include northern Iran in her sphere. It was a pitch that his old boss probably would have found appealing but his new boss did not. Like Byrnes and Ambassador Smith et al, Truman (as exhibited in his January 5 letter to Byrnes) never took Soviet senility threats from Iran seriously. [Barton Bernstein and Allen Matusow (eds) *The Truman Administration: A Documentary History*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 238-243.]

⁴ Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 342.

⁵ Some of his comrades like Beria (no relation to Levrenti Beria) were not so fortunate; he and other Azerbaijani communists were executed in Tabriz by vengeful mobs. The Kurdish autonomous government suffered the same violent end as their fellow rebels in Tabriz. [Nikki Keddie, *Modern Iran. Roots and Results of Revolution*. (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2006), 113.]

prospects of the joint oil company agreed to by Qavam as the *de facto* price for Soviet evacuation, Stalin did not interfere with Tehran's suppression of his comrades in Tabriz.⁶

As promised, once Soviet troops left Iran the joint Soviet-Iranian oil company was presented by Qavam's government to the Majlis for approval and it was rejected. As we have seen, this had always been a dilemma for Stalin. To keep his army in Azerbaijan province would have provided the Soviet friendly Pishvari government with the necessary succor to survive yet that would have meant the oil deal could not be approved by the Majlis which would not consider any new oil negotiations until all foreign armies left Iran. The realist in Stalin won out over the Leninist ideologue and his comrades were abandoned in favor of the oil deal. Yet, without his army present in Iran the Majlis had no incentive to approve the deal which they had not otherwise been inclined to do.⁷ It was a gamble that he lost.⁸ Qavam's recognition that the laws passed by the Majlis precluded oil concession by not negotiations for a joint stock company constituted his contribution to the resolution of the crisis. In that sense his was more of a successful tactical win over the Majlis than Stalin. The former had left an opening which he exploited *after* Stalin offered a modification of the Kavtaradze mission by replacing oil concession like those enjoyed by the British with a joint stock company.⁹ It was thus Stalin who presented Qavam with a way out for *both* of them.

No doubt the decline in Byrnes' political fortunes which led to his resignation in the next year also diminished memories of the crisis since it had been he (in spite of Truman's efforts in later years to insert himself into the narrative) who played the central

⁶ With the prospects of carving up the Balkans between Russia and England in the offing, the Kremlin had also remained silent when the British army intervened in the Greek civil war and put down the Greek communist in Athens in 1944. That precedent may have fed Tehran's confidence that Stalin would stand aside while the Pishvari government was crushed. Another factor, it will be recalled, was Ambassador Allen's prediction that Moscow could not be sure what the American reaction would be if the Soviet's reentered Iran. He recommended Qavam and the shah exploit that uncertainty.

⁷ Soviet oil concessions or even a joint Soviet-Iran oil company would have meant the development of an environment in the north of Iran similar to that of the British in the south: a large and meddlesome presence of foreigners who would establish a state within a state. It was an experience few Iranians were anxious to repeat.

⁸ Keddie credits the behind the scene lobbying of Ambassador Allen with the Majlis rejection of the joint oil company deal with Moscow. [Nikki Keddie, *Modern Iran. Roots and Results of Revolution*. (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2006), 113-114.]

⁹ How much Stalin and the Soviet leaders may have known about the details of the Majlis oil law is an interesting question. Had they also spotted the "loophole" in the law and thus was the motive for proposing a joint stock company instead of oil concessions demanded in 1944 by Kavtaradze mission?

role in the Security Council's consideration of the Iran case. It had been Byrnes who presented the Iran case and the case for a viable United Nations with a legitimate executive or Security Council to the American public. Although he went to the governor of South Carolina that he was not part of national politics again in part meant his close association with the Iran Crisis diminished the latter in the public's memory.

Still another (and perhaps ironic) reason for the rapid fading of the Iran crisis was that its very success undermined its' fame. Diplomacy had worked so well at resolving the dispute with a minimum of pain for Iran and a maximum payoff for hardliners in Washington that some in the West questioned if there had been a crisis at all.¹⁰ Of course, as we have seen, there had been a crisis, one that placed not only Iran but the future of the Security Council at stake. Here again we see another possible explanation for the fading of the 1946 crisis in popular memory in America: the United Nations. As the Cold War progressed and the postcolonial world emerged as a new force on the world stage, the United Nations became a forum for the expression of hostility toward the USA. The world body became less relevant in American foreign policy and the American people had lost much of their emotional attachment to the body that had initially exhibited at its founding. Consequently events like the 1946 crisis that was played out in the Security Council simply did not seem as important by the mid 1970s as they had thirty years prior. In other words, the way the United Nations turned out had probably led many Americans to care less and less about how it had started.

The Iran crisis, however, remained vivid in Truman's mind both in his last years in office and in his retirement. In his January 5 letter to Byrnes, Truman placed the situation in Iran at the heart of a new policy of firmness toward the Soviet Union and although he played a background role during the crisis that episode loomed large in his recollections of his early years as president. Yet, what stood out in Truman's memory was not Byrnes' diplomacy but his own role which he claimed forced Stalin to withdraw his army from Iran. Perhaps because of the rapid acceleration of the global conflict with

¹⁰ David Roberson, *Sly and Able. A Political Biography of James F. Byrnes*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 607-609. A recent example of the reduction in status of the Iran crisis is found in Kenneth Weisbrode's book *The Year of Indecision, 1946*. Although Weisbrode is a diplomatic historian, the Iran crisis rates only one short paragraph in a study devoted exclusively to the year 1946. [Kenneth Weisbrode, *The Year of Indecision, 1946*. (New York: Viking, 2016), 102.]

Russia; the Korean war; under pressure from domestic critics who claimed he had not acted soon enough or hard enough to challenge Moscow; always anxious to live down the reputation of an "accidental president" inferior to the master politician that preceded him; and stung by media reports that more experienced men like Byrnes had made the "real" decisions during the crisis, Truman began to distort the truth about how his administration managed the Iran crisis starting with elevating his own role from that of producer to director. Worse yet, he began to militarize the outcome of the crisis in his memory and convey that to the public as fact. The result was the establishment of a myth that became embedded in the public's mind. To the extent that the public recalled the Iran crisis of 1946 it was the one in which Stalin retreated in the face of an atomic ultimatum issued by Truman.

Starting on April 24, 1952, Truman advanced an overwrought interpretation of the events in 1946 when he claimed at a press conference that he had faced Stalin down over Azerbaijan province by issuing "an *ultimatum* to the head of the Soviet Union to get out of Persia." Truman continued that Russia quickly obeyed: "they got out because we were in a position to meet a situation of that kind."¹¹ Given America's relative state of conventional military demobilization and given that the PGC had been evacuated long before the case of Iran became a test of wills in the Security Council, one could only assume that Truman meant the America was relying on her atomic monopoly "to meet a situation of that kind." For Truman it had been an implied threat to use American armed force to produce a Soviet army exit from Iran that had worked. However, although the public came to accept it as fact, it was a claim not supported in the historical record except when and where Truman said it.¹²

¹¹ Truman quoted in David Roberson, *Sly and Able. A Political Biography of James F. Byrnes*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 470.

¹² The April 24, 1952 press conference was the beginning of a long series of assertions by Truman of a saber rattling version of events: he issued an ultimatum to Stalin to exit Iran or else American military power would be used to force Russia out. Indeed, Truman persistently inflated his own role in the Iran crisis whenever the topic emerged after he left office and the role he cast for himself as that of an old West sheriff laying down the law to the outlaw Stalin. Worse yet, he persistently militarized the height of the crisis when the resolution was actually being decided on conference tables. In spite of the Tubby correction Truman would explicitly use the word "ultimatum" once more after he left the White House and always strongly implied that an ultimatum had been issued by him to Stalin over Iran and that it was backed up by threats of armed force.

In his *memoirs* published in 1955 and 1956 Truman did not explicitly use the word "ultimatum" as he had at the April 24 press conference but he strongly implied it. Here, he recorded that having tried and failed at all the diplomatic niceties, he ordered Byrnes to send a "blunt message to Premier Stalin.;" Soviet compliance with her legal obligations to withdraw from Iran, followed immediately [Harry Truman, *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman. Years of Trial and Hope*. (Garden City, New York: Double Day and Co., 1956), 94-95.] Truman strongly implied that his alleged "blunt message" caused Stalin to evacuate his army from Iran. Truman, however, did not offer any proof of the "blunt message" sent to Stalin on his order, how it was transmitted, or even a sample of its contents to gauge its severity, this is, if "blunt" meant a *de facto* ultimatum. Truman, however, left little room for doubt about what he believed the relationship between cause and effect. Indeed, in preparation for the writing of his account of his years in the White House, Truman in an interview stated that he told Byrnes to "send a message to Stalin if he doesn't get out well move in." Truman added that Admiral Leahy was present when he so instructed Byrnes to send this *de facto* ultimatum. Yet, in his diary, Leahy never reordered any such "ultimatum" instruction, "blunt message" or anything like it had been given to Byrnes, something a hard liner like Leahy (one of the founders of the get-tough-with-Russia faction) was not likely to forget. [J. Philipp Rosenberg, "The Cheshire Ultimatum: Truman's Message to Stalin in the 1946 Azerbaijan Crisis." in *Journal of Politics*, Volume 41, August 1979, p. 936.] It is the case that on March 4, 1946 Truman had met with Byrnes to consider the Iran situation in view of the failure of the Red Army to fully evacuate. The next day Byrnes followed Truman's instructions and sent a firm but proper protest to the Russians that was delivered to the Kremlin by George Kennan on March 6. That message put the Kremlin on notice that Washington was aware of aggressive moves into Azerbaijan province by the Red Army and that Truman expected Stalin to live up to his treaty obligations with Iran and England and past pledges to himself and to FDR to fully restore Iranian sovereignty and evacuate all armed forces. Yet it could hardly be called an ultimatum and the closest it got to being "blunt: was the language that America "could not remain indifferent" to the situation in northern Iran. In his *memoirs*, however, Truman did not characterize this letter as the alleged "blunt message". Indeed, he wrote, that because the diplomatically correct missives like that dated March 4 were not producing results he had to issue a harsher letter to Stalin which he had previously called a "blunt message". [Harry Truman, *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman. Years of Trial and Hope*. (Garden City, New York: Double Day and Co., 1956), 94-95]. Yet, neither Byrnes nor Kennan could recall ever receiving or delivering the second, "blunt" message to Stalin demanding withdrawal which Truman implied produced the immediate results just as Leahy, whom Truman said had direct knowledge, never mentioned it in his *memoirs*. Kennan was the *charge d'affaires* in Moscow, in all likelihood would have been the man chosen to deliver an "ultimatum" or "blunt" message to Stalin, just as he had definitely delivered the March 4 note to the Kremlin. He attributed Truman's faulty recollections to the political and psychological pressures on the president to "get tough" with Russia: "It is my impression that Mr. Truman (whom in general I much admired) had an *unfortunate tendency to exaggerate*, in later years, certain aspects of the role that he played when in office in relations with the Soviet Union. His claim that he sent an 'ultimatum' to Stalin seems to me to fall in nicely with this pattern. I strongly doubt, in short, that any communication that would properly answer to this description ever went forward." [Kennan quoted in Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 321].

It is also possible that Truman was confusing in his mind the January 5 letter that he claimed to have read aloud to Byrnes following the Moscow CFM sessions, thus conflating it with the firm but proper and verifiable diplomatic notes sent during the Iran crisis. The January letter was indeed blunt, concluding that Truman was tired of "babying the Soviets" and venting his pent up anger and frustration at the way Stalin was bullying their mutual wartime ally Iran and pressuring Turkey. He had written that it was time to protest as loudly as possible Soviet activities in Iran and said that Stalin only understood the language of force—all elements one would expect to see in an ultimatum or "blunt message". Yet, that letter was never sent to Byrnes or anyone else, let alone Stalin, and may not have even been read aloud to Byrnes as Truman maintained (but Byrnes denied) although it did mark a crucial evolution away from FDR's Soviet policy on the part of the new president.

Other foreign policy leaders have never reported anything approximating an ultimatum (or "blunt message") or threats of military force—conventional or atomic—by Truman during the Iran crisis. Future secretary of state and then assistant chief of the Division of International Security Affairs, Dean Rusk, categorically rejected any claims of military threats or ultimatums by Truman. Rusk helped to write Byrnes' speeches on Iran and worked with Dean Acheson to fashion American positions during the crisis.

Rusk said he had never heard about an ultimatum, a final warning, or a blunt message to Russia about Iran nor saw any evidence of such in the years after the crisis. Rusk cast strong doubt upon Truman's claims of American saber rattling—including use of the A-bomb to force the Red Army to leave Iran—for several good reasons: he assumed Truman would not be so capricious in the use (or threatened use) of A-bombs especially given how fresh the memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was in the world of 1946; America's inventory of A-bombs was very small at the time, making any ultimatum less than credible especially given that the Soviets likely knew of this American limitation from extensive espionage and Washington probably knew that they knew because the degree of Russian spying in America was now becoming undeniable; and Rusk knew of no one in the foreign policy bureaucracy that had heard of an ultimatum or threats to use conventional forces or atomic weapons. [Dean Rusk, *As I Saw It*. (New York: Penguin, 1991), 126.] Loy Henderson, another important State Department bureaucrat in a well-placed position as head of Near Eastern Affairs told historian Herbert Feis that he knew of no "admonitory" message issued by Truman or Byrnes to Stalin during the Iran crisis. Historians compiling documents for the State Department could find no corroboration in the records of the State Department or the Defense Department (the renamed War Department) of assertions about an ultimatum or blunt warning and noted no important figure in government—except President Truman—claimed knowledge of such an ominous warning to Stalin and the Soviet Union. [*Editorial Note* in *FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 348-349; Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 321.] Indeed, no important foreign policy leader or presidential advisor (e.g. Byrnes, Harriman, Kennan, Bohlen, Leahy, Henderson, Rusk, Dean Acheson, Walter Smith) has ever revealed knowledge of an ultimatum or a "blunt message" being sent from Truman to the Soviets or threats of armed force by the White House over Iran. For Truman to issue such a message without consulting or at least informing these persons would have been contrary to his anti-Roosevelt style that required seeking advice from and fully informing cabinet members and consulting advisors, a practice that won praise from Kennan, Bohlen and others who had been frequently ignored by FDR.

Even when long out of office, Truman persisted insisting that threats of force of arms by him upon Stalin were the key to causing a Russian withdrawal. In the August 25, 1957 edition of the *New York Times*, Truman again claimed he had gone *mano a mano* with Stalin and won. "For example," Truman said, "shortly after the end of World War II, Stalin and Molotov brazenly refused to keep their agreement to withdraw from Iran. They persisted in keeping their troops in Azerbaijan in northern Iran... The Soviet Union persisted in its occupation until I personally saw to it that Stalin was informed that I had given orders to our military chiefs to prepare for the movement of our ground, sea, and air forces. Stalin then did what I knew he would do. He moved his troops out." [Truman quoted in Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 242.] (Note that Truman speaks of Stalin and Molotov as if it were a partnership!) Truman, however, offered no indication of where this order to the USA military chiefs was, how it was delivered, why no military leader had ever revealed such an order (even many years later) or how it was delivered to Stalin and by whom. Kennan and the new USA ambassador to the USSR, Walter Smith, never revealed any such bellicose message to Stalin. It is possible that Smith, General Eisenhower's gruff former chief of staff, might have at first believed he was held to a standard of secrecy but once Truman began speaking of the supposed communiqué in public and often such an assumption by Smith (if he ever entertained one) would no longer be operative. In Kennan's case, the man most likely to have been assigned to deliver an important message to the Soviet leaders, lived to see the end of the Cold War and wrote extensively of his service in government. No such assumption of secrecy would have made him reluctant to reveal this alleged message if it had existed. The only reasonable explanation why so many men in critical positions never spoke of a 1946 ultimatum or anything approximating one (except to deny knowledge of it) let alone preparations for military action, or publicly attempted to corroborate what Truman was often saying in public to that effect, was that there had not been one.

Because Truman persisted in advertising his version of events which ignored the diplomatic strategy fashioned by Byrnes, the claim that an American ultimatum backed up the armed forces caused Stalin to retreat from Iran became a myth in the popular version of the Cold War. In 1960 during a question and answer session with students at Columbia University, Truman reasserted that he had issued "blunt message" accompanied by military threats during the Iran crisis: "When Stalin refused to move out of Iran

Roger Tubby, assistant press secretary at the White House, was immediately besieged by reporters looking for details about Truman's previously untold version of the Iranian crisis. Instead he found it necessary to modify the impression his boss had left on the journalists. After examining Truman's assertion against the available evidence, Tubby concluded that America and the Security Council had pursued a firm and forceful diplomatic course to force the Red Army from northern Iran but had not issued an ultimatum or final warning that the time for talk was over and backed up by a implied threat of armed force. "I went over to the State Department," recalled Tubby, "and found the letter in question. It was certainly a strong letter telling Stalin to keep his hands off Azerbaijan Province in Iran, but it was *not* an ultimatum. We had to issue a correction." The correction stated that Truman meant an "ultimatum" in a "non-technical" sense and what he really was referring to was America's leadership role in the Security Council and the world community.¹³ Although the correction engaged in double talk to avoid

at the time agreed, I sent him word I would move the fleet as far as the Persian Gulf. He got out." Truman continued that this *de facto* ultimatum was "all part of the foreign policy to save the Free World." [Harry Truman, *Truman Speaks*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 71.] In a 1962 interview with historian Herbert Druks, Truman embroidered his comments at Columbia University and elsewhere with an even more specific assertion of an ultimatum combined with military threats, saying that he had warned Stalin *in writing*, that "... unless their [Soviet] withdrawal did commence within a week's time and was completed within six, he would move the fleet as far as the Persian Gulf and he would send American troops back into Iran." [Herbert Feis, *From Trust To Terror. The Onset of the Cold War*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970), p. 84; Robert Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman*. (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 426-427]. No copy of the document Truman spoke of has ever been found. Yet, Truman continued to maintain that he had "laid down an ultimatum" to Stalin about Iran until his death, never retracting or modifying his claims or amplifying them with verifiable details or providing evidence beyond his own memory. It is true that at the height of the crisis, on March 8, 1946, Truman announced the dispatch of the USS *Missouri* to Turkey in two weeks time ostensibly to carry the body of the recently deceased Turkish ambassador to the USA back to his homeland. [Robert Rossow, "The Battle of Azerbaijan," *The Middle East Journal*. (Winter 1956, Vol. 10), 22]. Deployment of the famed battleship upon which the surrender of the Japanese was signed was thick with symbolism which Truman no doubt intended since the U.S. Navy would normally not be called upon to be a floating hearse and even they were there were plenty of inferior ships that would have served the purpose. Clearly it was meant to make an impression on Turkey by reassuring Ankara of American support. Stalin was not likely to be impressed by a naval display especially a symbolic one and if he was no evidence has emerged of it. In any case the Soviet withdrawal from Iran was underway by the time the *Missouri* arrived in Turkey so even had it been designed to impress Stalin it played no role in ushering the Soviet army out of Azerbaijan province.

What concerns us here is less the construction in Truman's mind that he forced the Soviets out of Iran with an ultimatum or blunt message backed up threats of armed force, but that he conveyed it to the public on several occasions as fact. Consequently the public was left with the misimpression that diplomacy played little or no role in resolving the dispute on Iranian terms and that saber rattling (if it even occurred) counted for everything.

¹³ Tubby quoted in Robert Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman*. (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 426; *Editorial Note in FRUS*, Vol. VII, pp. 348-349. What letter in question Tubby was citing is open to

embarrassing Truman, it was accurate in emphasizing that it was a firm use of diplomacy and determined political leadership by Washington that ushered Stalin out of northern Iran not saber rattling, atomic or conventional. Ultimatums or blunt messages were not the weapons that worked but Byrnes firm stand to see the Iran case to its conclusion did even in the face of resistance from the complaining party.

Looking back on the crisis a decade later, Rossow claimed a "major war scare" flared up in Washington in March 1946.¹⁴ If so, it would add weight to Truman's claims that a threat of military action backed Stalin out of Iran. Yet no war preparations were ever evident in Washington during the Iran crisis which certainly would have been the case had Truman issued an ultimatum to Stalin and threatened to support it with armed force. It is true that Truman told Harriman "I want you to go to England. There is a very dangerous situation developing in Iran." He explained to Harriman that as the withdrawal deadline expired the Soviets would not evacuate the Red Army from Iran and to the contrary, evidence was mounting of offensive operations. "*This may lead to war. I must have a man in London who knows the British, a man I can trust.*"¹⁵ Consequently, Harriman agreed to accept the post of ambassador to England although when he arrived in London in April the crisis was already cooling down. Truman's words to Harriman are the only examples *during* the crisis that he believed war with Russia was a real possibility. What he said to Harriman was an extension of his opinion in the unsent January 5 letter to Byrnes that if Russia was not meet with a firm hand in Iran and Turkey a new war was in the making. Yet, was Truman's war alert to Harriman reflective of what he really thought was likely to transpire or was it a pitch to persuade the world weary ambassador, who had not even unpacked following his wartime years in London and Moscow, to take on yet another taxing assignment abroad?¹⁶ The most likely answer is

question. Bruce Kuniholm believed it was in all probability the March 9 note to the USSR. [Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 321.]

¹⁴ Robert Rossow, "The Battle of Azerbaijan" in *Middle East Journal*. (Winter 1956, Vol. 10), 22.

¹⁵ Truman quoted in Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 367; Rudy Abramson, *Spanning the Century: The Life of W. Averell Harriman*, (New York: William Morrison, 1992), 408-409. Emphasis added.

¹⁶ Undoubtedly Harriman was also still smarting from being passed up for the post of secretary of state—a job he made clear he wanted—which went to Byrnes, a man Harriman thought far less qualified in the arena of foreign policy. Truman undoubtedly knew this and again over dramatized the situation with a war alert to further induce the slightly bitter Harriman back into public service. (Truman partly made amends

yes. Of course, that Truman would even speak of a possible war with the USSR over Iran and wanted a highly experienced man like Harriman (familiar with both Stalin and the British leadership) in London indicates he was taking events in Iran seriously and was more involved than many at the time credited.

If Truman did think war with Russia over Iran was a distinct possibility then his conduct at the time diverged from the standard he set for himself when he assumed office. He had said he did *not* wish to emulate FDR's one man band presidency that made Roosevelt his own secretary of state and best advisor on foreign affairs. Consequently had Truman believed war was a genuine possibility he would have consulted leaders of the military and yet he did not with the possible exception of Admiral Leahy.¹⁷ Truman had also been critical of the way FDR ran roughshod over the Congress. A man of the senate, the new president had committed to consult with the Congressional leadership about matters of importance. Yet, Truman did not consult with any members of the legislature to sound a war alert regarding Iran and the USSR. Truman's failure to consult or even inform the military and congressional leaders about a possible war with the USSR over Iran are strong indications he did not actually believe a war was in the making. This is a further indication that his war alert to Harriman was indeed a hook to recruit him to take on yet another thankless overseas assignment.¹⁸ In addition, as we have seen, the new ambassador to Iran, the hardliner George Allen, told the shah that in his opinion America would not go to war over Iran although he also advised the shah that the Kremlin did not know this. The Iranians, Allen advised, should use that ignorance on the part of the Kremlin to deter the Soviet army from reentering Iran.

for picking Byrnes over Harriman by supporting the latter as the 1956 Democratic presidential nominee against the eventual winner, Adlai Stevenson.)

¹⁷ Jamil Hasanli claims that as the deadline for Soviet withdrawal passed without effect on the Red Army occupiers in Iran, Truman issued "top secret" orders to bring the USA army, air force, and navy to state of "combat readiness." If true it would be convincing evidence to support Truman's claims that his saber rattling was a fact and perhaps forced Stalin to back out of Iran. Unfortunately Hasanli's source is Truman himself, who, as we have seen, had a record of greatly embellishing his actions during the crisis and has proven to be unreliable in that respect. Indeed, Truman never offered any document to support such a claim nor did any direct participant recall such orders. [Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 231.]

¹⁸ In addition, Harriman was known to be sore about being passed over for the post of secretary of state (which went to Byrnes) and thus probably required extra ego massaging from Truman with an appeal that with a war looming only a man of experience like Harriman could be called on.

Further indications about Truman's thinking during the crisis can be inferred from his choice of General Walter Bedell Smith to be the new ambassador to the USSR. Appointment of the stern, no non-sense, ex-chief of staff for General Eisenhower, a man who had laid down the law to personalities as difficult as George Patton and Bernard Montgomery, would imply that Truman was indeed trying to impress upon Stalin that a new and harder Soviet policy was being formulated in the White House.¹⁹ Yet, as he departed for his new assignment in Moscow on March 23, 1946, Truman told Smith to deliver a verbal message to Stalin: "Told him to tell Stalin I had always held him to be a man to keep his word. Troop[s] in Iran after Mar.2 upset that theory. Also told him to urge Stalin to come to USA."²⁰ The message reveals a man who is frustrated with Stalin but not one who had or was about to issue an ultimatum let alone threaten military action (conventional or atomic) or who was anticipating the possibility of war with the USSR.²¹

¹⁹ Other factors that influenced Truman's choice of Smith were the assumption that Stalin preferred straight talking military men over mealy mouthed professional diplomats; that Smith, like Stalin, was self-educated; and perhaps most importantly, as Eisenhower's chief of staff during the war, Smith was on familiar terms with many of the Soviet commanders like Marshall Zhukov. [David Mayers, *The Ambassadors and America's Soviet Policy*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 166]. Of course, Truman did not realize that with the war over men like Zhukov who were rivals to Stalin for fame and popular affection were being systematically sidelined to the hinterlands of the USSR.

²⁰ Truman quoted in O'neal, John R. *Foreign Policy Making in Times of Crisis*. (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1982), 105.

²¹ One scholar, however, has seen more to Truman's message to Stalin than is apparent to everyone else. Political scientist J. Philipp Rosenberg posits that Truman issued a verbal "ultimatum" during his farewell meeting with Ambassador Smith and ordered him to relay it to the Stalin as soon as he reached Moscow. Rosenberg notes that the meeting between Truman and Smith was held "off the record," a somewhat unusual occurrence, and since no one else was present, that would explain why no other senior government official could ever recall an ultimatum—Truman excluded them. Moreover, if it was a verbal message as Rosenberg claims, that would explain why no written evidence has ever emerged. After all, an ultimatum may be verbal and Rosenberg cites past examples of oral presidential ultimatums. Further, Truman's meeting with Ambassador Smith took place at about the time that Truman variously said he issued the alleged ultimatum (or "blunt message") to Stalin: between March 21 and 23. [J. Philipp Rosenberg, "The Cheshire Ultimatum: Truman's Message to Stalin in the 1946 Azerbaijan Crisis." *Journal of Politics*, Volume 41, August 1979, pp, 933-940.] Rosenberg makes a valiant effort to resolve the many difficulties in Truman's version events but ultimately his speculation is just that. He provides no evidence to support his hypothesis. To exclude every one of his advisors and cabinet members from the supposed ultimatum Truman entrusted to Smith to deliver would have been completely outside the non-Rooseveltian way of doing business that Truman was attempting to establish. Moreover, Rosenberg's argument hinges in the alleged ultimatum being verbal and thus the explanation why no record of it has ever turned up although that would still not explain why no participant other than Truman ever recalled even hearing of such a thing at the time. Smith never mentioned any such ultimatum in his *memoir*. Of course, Smith had no trouble following orders and if Truman had told him to keep quite he would have obeyed. On the other hand, Smith lived to 1961, long after Truman had made many public claims of an ultimatum and thus no reason for Smith to remain silent (owing to national security) about it if it ever occurred. Contrary to Rosenberg's title, Truman had always maintained the ultimatum or "blunt message" was explicit and that others (e.g. Admiral Leahy, James Byrnes, etc.) could verify it. Yet Rosenberg says that no one besides Truman and

Indeed, when Smith meet with Stalin on April 4, he emphasized that the United States had no aggressive intentions against Russia and that, if Stalin did not wish to take his word for it, he need only look at the rapid demobilization of the American military which indeed bordered on near collapse. Smith insisted that the USA was not anxious to rearm but was anxious to peacefully settle disputes with the USSR at the negotiating table.²² Smith did, however, tell Stalin that “If the people of the United States were ever to become convinced that we are faced with a wave of progressive aggression on the part of any powerful nation or group of nations, we would react exactly as we have in the past.”²³ Yet, this was hardly sufficiently threatening or explicit to constitute a “blunt message” let alone an ultimatum. (Besides Stalin could have interpreted the words “as we have in the past” to mean America would sink into isolationism when confronted with a new gathering storm.)²⁴ Even had Ambassador Smith delivered an ultimatum or a “blunt message” from Truman implying or directly threatening armed action to force the

Smith could verify it because everyone else was cut out. Also Truman on occasion (e.g. his 1962 interview with Druks) insisted his alleged ultimatum was in writing not verbal.

²² William Taubman, *Stalin's American Policy*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982), 141; David Mayers, *The Ambassadors and America's Soviet Policy*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 166. When Ambassador Smith delivered Truman's invitation to visit the USA it was politely declined because of, Stalin said, his doctor's orders to rest. [David Mayers, *The Ambassadors and America's Soviet Policy*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 166]. Nor was this the first invitation by Truman to Stalin to visit the USA. Following the intense international reaction to Churchill's “iron curtain” speech, Truman invited Stalin to Fulton to rebut Churchill. He offered to send the USS *Missouri* to the USSR to pick up the *generalissimo*. Of course, that this battleship was the platform for the surrender of the Japanese armed forces was no doubt a not so subtle dig on Truman's part. Still, Truman's two invitations for Stalin to journey to the USA are further indications of Truman's state of mind: one does not issue invitations to the leader of a great power to drop in for a visit and at this same time issue ultimatums and rattle sabers. As for Stalin, as we have seen, doctor's orders or not, he would never have placed himself so far from his power base in Moscow or the protection of his massive security force. Truman, like many Americans, was anxious for Stalin to return the gestures made by FDR and himself to always accept the summit conferences venues acceptable to Stalin with a visit to American. That was never realistic. Yet, had Stalin accepted the second invitation Westminster College in Fulton would have been the big winner, having hosted two of the Century's most important and influential figures accompanied by the American president each time. It would have been a rare score for any college let alone an obscure one like Westminster.

²³ Smith quoted in David Mayers, *The Ambassadors and America's Soviet Policy*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, 166-167.

²⁴ For his part, Stalin counterattacked Smith saying that America was attempting to exclude Russia from a share in Iranian oil; the USA and the UK were colluding against the USSR (further evidence that FDR's many efforts to disabuse Stalin of supposed Anglo-American joint plan against his country was in vain); he objected to the negative depiction of Soviet activities in the Balkans as contained, for example, in the Etheridge report; Churchill's “iron curtain” speech; etc. Stalin did affirm his allegiance to the U.N. Charter. Smith lodged objections to the agitation campaign of the Italian and French Communist Parties. He conceded, as would most Americans, the Soviets had a legitimate security interests in closing the Polish Corridor but that could hardly be applied to Iran. [David Mayers, *The Ambassadors and America's Soviet Policy*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, 167].

Red Army out of Iran, the new ambassador was not received by Stalin until April 4, after the point that Rossow began to note Soviet military moves into Iran was slowing to a halt and after Stalin had issued secret orders for a slow motion evacuation of his army. Thus, an ultimatum even if it existed could not be deemed to have been the cause that led Stalin to withdraw as Truman repeatedly claimed and which became embedded in the public's mind.

The closest that can be said to constitute a threat of armed action by Washington during the crisis were Byrnes' speeches to the Overseas Press Club and the Society of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick. Taken together, Byrnes warned that the policy of appeasement of aggressor nations would not be repeated by the western democracies; that the USA would not unilaterally disarm; and America would use its armed forces, if necessary, to uphold the United Nations Charter which outlawed aggression. Byrnes, however, only implied references to the situation in Iran and mentioned the USSR directly only to reassure Moscow there was no Anglo-American military alliance to against Russia as had been proposed by Churchill at Fulton. Thus, Byrnes' public speeches during the crisis could not be said to constitute an American ultimatum or blunt message to the USSR. However, Byrnes' biographer David Robertson has asserted that Byrnes' public speeches during the Iran Crisis were "planned in personal coordination with Winston Churchill's own "Iron Curtain" speech of March 5."²⁵ The Soviets regarded Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech as a virtual declaration of Cold War.²⁶ If Robertson is correct, then Byrnes' speeches are to be taken in conjunction with Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech than they did constitute a formidable warning to the Kremlin. Byrnes could thus be seen as joining the Churchill-Kennan-Truman thesis that the Soviets were only responsive to the logic of force. Byrnes did indeed include the possibility of American amend force albeit to implement the United Nations Charter.²⁷ (On this point,

²⁵ David Robertson, *Sly and Able. A Political Biography of James F. Byrnes*. (New York: W.W. Norton), 471.

²⁶ Charles Mee, *Meeting at Potsdam*. (New York: M. Evans and Co., 1975), 245; conversely, some American leaders considered Stalin's "Election Day Speech" in similar terms. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, for example, called it the "Declaration of World War Three." [John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War*. (New York: Columbia University, 1972), 300-301.]

²⁷ The American ambassador in Tehran, George Allen, recalled that the shah and other Iranian leaders were aware of Byrnes public diplomacy and his vow to use American power to enforce the Charter of the United Nations and the will of the Security Council. They, reported Allen, all believed that Byrnes' commitment to

he was of the same mind as Truman but not Kennan or Churchill who held serious reservations about the new world body.) Thus, Byrnes' public diplomacy was a critical pressure point on the Kremlin to withdraw from Iran.²⁸

How much Byrnes' campaign of public diplomacy counted in Stalin's calculations is difficult to determine. According to Harriman, Stalin followed the Security Council debate on the Iran compliant and was very bitter over Byrnes' performance.²⁹ Jamil Hasanli, who has researched the Iran crisis in the Soviet archives, has written that after the fall of the USSR, "Truman's nuclear threats toward the Soviet Union in March 1946 [during the crisis in Iranian Azerbaijan] were mentioned in books published in Moscow in recent years. It is noted in those books that according to some sources, in March 1946 during discussions with Soviet Ambassador in the United States A. Gromyko, President H. Truman threatened that the United States would hit the USSR with a nuclear bomb if Moscow refused to withdraw its troops from Iran."³⁰ If so, it would be stunning confirmation of Truman's version. However, Hasanli, who seems to endorse these Russian claims, cites no evidence to support them and ironically neither did Gromyko. The Soviet ambassador did not mention this meeting or any atomic threats by Truman in his *memoirs*. It seems unlikely Gromyko would have forgotten such a momentous development particularly in light of the fact that he had to invent American security threats to the USSR—he claimed his country was ringed by American military bases in

back up the U.N. was decisive in backing the Soviets out of Iran and keeping them from supporting their Azerbaijani comrades afterwards. [Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 396.] If so, then at least the impression that Byrnes wanted to create was effective making his campaign of public diplomacy the critical factor in resolving the crisis on Iranian and American terms.

²⁸ One historian, however, has been willing to at least claim that if not an ultimatum or "blunt message" Truman did at least "...put private pressure on Stalin for a withdrawal" from Iran. This historian, Robert Dallek, believes this alleged private pressure on Stalin was the deceive factor in forcing the Soviet withdrawal and that Truman has been unfairly deprived of the credit for doing so because Byrnes stole the spot light with his public campaign to achieve the same end. Truman, he concludes, just could not catch a break in the public arena and this was prime example of the president playing a crucial role and yet Byrnes was treated as the "real president" by the media. Even if true, Dallek does not say an ultimatum or "blunt message" was issued by Truman and although a relatively new book, he provides no new evidence of what constituted private pressure. [Robert Dallek, *Harry S. Truman*. (New York: Times Book, 2008), 45]. Still it is undoubtedly the case that Truman was highly sensitive to his image as an "accidental president" and the reputation of Byrnes as the man FDR really wanted to succeed him. This bitter resentment probably fueled his exaggerated claims as he left office of having backed Stalin down in 1946 over Iran with ultimatums.

²⁹ David Robertson, *Sly and Able, A Political Biography of James F Byrnes*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), 475.

³⁰ Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War. The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian-Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), fn 49; 254.

1946—to justify the Red Army over staying its welcome in Iran. On the other hand, if the Soviets believed that threat of American armed force was real (even though not evidenced by anything Truman said) the effect would have been the same. In that case, it would have been a confirmation of Allen's assessment that the Kremlin was probably uncertain about America's willingness to use armed force against her over Azerbaijani province which Qavam could use to Iran's advantage.³¹

Truman's many claims of an ultimatum, blunt message or armed force should be dismissed as unsupported by the historical record yet thanks to Byrnes, Stalin had to calculate the cost of further eroding relations with America against the benefits of his agenda in Iran. The Soviet *modus operandi* was, as Truman noted in his January 5 letter to Byrnes, to present the world with a *fait accompli* and then expect the other powers to adjust to the changed circumstances. That was not possible once, largely as a consequence of Rossow's initiative, Washington told the Kremlin that they had taken notice that Stalin was creating facts on the ground in Iran that announced major and secretive military operations. The international spotlight turned on the Soviet occupation of Azerbaijan province by Byrnes proved uncomfortable to Moscow particularly since it appeared, in spite of Stalin's efforts concoct a border security issue, to be little more than a return to Czarist imperialism.³²

³¹ Henry Kissinger has advanced a similar assessment. "In the spring of 1946, Truman began to resolve this question when he launched a 'get-tough-policy' successfully, fully demanding the Soviet evacuation of Azerbaijan...Stalin was not willing to test if his nightmare was real. Whenever confronted with the *possibility* of a military conflict with America, Stalin invariably recoiled. He had done so when Truman demanded that Soviet troops leave Iranian Azerbaijan in 1946..." [Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 446-447; 495. Emphasis added.] The possibility that Kissinger refers to is not dissimilar to Allen's uncertainty that he believed existed in the Kremlin about American military action that, if used properly, would allow Qavam to act against Pishavari's government or even reject the oil deal with a minimum risk of a new Soviet invasion. As we have seen, however, it was Byrnes not Truman (in his campaign of public diplomacy) who implied American military action to enforce the will the United Nations Charter that was only remotely close to a threat of a "military conflict" with America.

³² Although this might not appear to be an impediment to the ambitions of a man like Stalin it is important to recall that he was the head an international communist movement that was dedicated to anti-imperialism or what Robert Gellately has called "Stalin's curse." Of course, officially anti-imperialism and the interests of the USSR were not seen as at odds. The point is illustrated in a May 8, 1946 letter by Stalin to his Azerbaijani comrades explaining why the Red Army withdrew from Iran leaving them in the lurch. Not surprisingly, he avoided admitting that withdrawal of his army was the price he was willing to pay for an oil deal with Tehran. He told the Azerbaijani communists that withdrawal was necessary because otherwise the "imperialist and colonial" powers would use the Soviet presence in Azerbaijan province as an excuse to linger in Greece, Indonesia, Algeria, Syria, etc. The Soviets would thus inadvertently be aiding the imperialists. Under those circumstances, he said, the USSR could not promote anti-imperialism and

A more detailed and firmer Big Three Declaration on Iran (1943) as proposed by the Iranians and Pat Hurley might have dissuaded Stalin from exploiting Russia's wartime occupation of Azerbaijan province as a launching pad to bid for a Middle Eastern sphere, an ambition clearly outlined during the Kremlin's negotiations with Berlin during the life of the Hitler-Stalin pact. The American failure to insist on a tighter declaration (that would be less open to exploitation) was yet another indication of the weakness in FDR's Soviet policy that became all too obvious in postwar Iran. Yet, inadequate as it was it the declaration proved a sufficient basis to form an American interest in the restoration of Iranian sovereignty.

The big winner during the Iran crisis, however, was not (as the revisionist school claims) the hard-line "get-tough-with-Russia" faction in Washington nor was it (as the orthodox school maintains) Iran; rather, it was the Security Council. Byrnes had committed the United States to enforcing the United Nations Charter with armed force which had the added benefit of announcing that America would not again sink into the postwar isolationism that Stalin had counted on. Relentlessly pressing the case that only the Council should control its own agenda and that all member states, small nations or great powers, had a right to be heard by the Council, that body acquired a legitimacy it would not have had otherwise. It was a delicate situation in early 1946. Most Americans wanted the United Nations to work and that required the participation of the USSR lest the world be faced with a League of Nations *redux*. Yet, because the defendant in the Iranian complaint was a permanent member of the Council many smaller nations, like Iran, assumed there would be no fair treatment of their case. They had reason to worry; the Soviet model as we have seen would have reduced the Council to a tool of the great powers in which the smaller nations must learn to obey their big bothers.

Byrnes' tactic to achieve the goal of a legitimate Security Council ran the risk the Soviets might leave the project permanently. Gromyko's walk out had been a warning. The alternative of an enfeebled Security Council, however, made the risk a necessary one

"national liberation" with any legitimacy. The Soviets would appear to be on the same level as the imperialist powers they frequently denounced. Thus, it was implied, the Azerbaijanis communists had to be placed in jeopardy by removing the shield of the Red Army for the greater good of the anti-imperialist movement which if it hurt England or France then it helped Soviet security. [Stalin quoted in Vladislav Zubok, and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 45.]

even though Byrnes met with arguments to play it safe from men like Loy Henderson who, it will be recalled, recommended this first international crisis and public falling out between the USSR and the USA in the postwar period be settled not by the Council but a secretive great power conference. That, FDR had told the Congress upon his return from Yalta, was what the new world body was designed to avoid. By pressing the Iranian case, however, even against the will of the government in Tehran on the one hand and Russia on the other, Byrnes sacrificed what was left of FDR's soft Soviet policy of maximum allowable cooperation with the Kremlin.³³ The Soviets could not be accommodated on

³³ The death blow to FDR's Soviet policy during the Iran crisis also made a casualty of its chief remaining advocate in the administration: Henry Wallace. Dubbed the "American Dreamer" by his friends (and a crackpot by his enemies) the former vice-president was the unofficial philosopher-in-residence of the New Deal during the FDR years. As a man with a mystical (in later years it would have been called "New Age") bent he was the guru of the left-wing of the Democratic Party. After touring the USSR in 1944 he publically proclaimed a parallel existed between the New Deal and Stalin's Five Year Plan. Somewhat inclined toward the conspiratorial, throughout the war Wallace warned FDR that conservatives in America were working to sabotage good relations with Russia and even create the conditions for a war between the USA and the USSR. It was a suspicion he shared with the Kremlin. Refusal to share the A-bomb with Russia was one such example of why, Wallace claimed, the Soviets were justifiably leery of American intentions. When the get-tough-with-Russia faction emerged in Washington in the latter stages of the war he believed his suspicions had been confirmed that dark forces were not just working to sour relations with Russia but provoke a total breakup of the wartime alliance and perhaps even war itself. He urged Truman to repudiate Churchill's "iron curtain" speech which was becoming gospel among the hardliners. According to Daniel Yergin, Wallace saw world affairs exclusively from Moscow's point of view.

The new president detested Wallace (called him a "parlor pink") but allowed him to remain as commerce secretary to act as the voice of FDR's Soviet policy in the cabinet. As Truman and Byrnes distanced themselves from Roosevelt's soft-line, Wallace became increasingly vocal in his advocacy of his old boss' approach to Russia starting with Iran. (Although he was a die-hard partisan of FDR's Soviet policy Wallace had never been completely in sympathy with the evolution of Roosevelt's version of the U.N. Leader of the New Deal left wing at home, Wallace was a *realpolitik*, spheres-of-influence man in foreign affairs who was closer to Stalin's model for the Security Council. In this model each of the great powers or "Four Policemen" would police their own sphere and seek some kind of *pro forma* approval from version of a global executive body. For Wallace, Iran naturally belonged in the Soviet sphere and was thus not in America's interest to challenge the Russian presence there anymore than Moscow should interfere with America's natural sphere in Latin America and the Caribbean. Ironically this put Wallace in the same camp as Kennan and indeed they often put the matter in the same words: "On our part," Wallace had said, "we should recognize that we have no more business in the *political* affairs of Eastern Europe than Russia has in the *political* affairs of Latin America, Western Europe, and the United States." Wallace also agreed with the conservative Kennan that Russia was paranoid and anxiety ridden but drew the opposite conclusion about how that should factor in America's Soviet policy. Rather than the basis for a hard line policy of containment and isolation, Wallace—like his old boss— saw it as a reason for a soft line of accommodation and compromise to ease Russia's entry into the club of great powers.) [Wallace quoted in Barton Bernstein and Allen Matusow, (eds.), *The Truman Administration: A Documentary History*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 243-247.]

In the case of Iran, Wallace argued that Russia had as much right to Iranian oil as England did and that her security concerns required Russian access to the warm water ports of the Gulf. FDR had already once told Stalin that he would back up Soviet demands for access to Persian Gulf ports via the Trans-Iranian railway that served as the "Bridge to Victory" during the war. Wallace now urged Truman to reiterate that proposal. He also applauded the "reforms" undertaken by the Pishevari government in

Azerbaijan something Rossow himself believed were long overdue. The Shah's regime in Teheran was reactionary, backward and totally subservient to British imperialism. America should not fight to save it. Just as FDR had once told Stalin that India would benefit from a Bolshevik style revolution so too his *acolyte* now implied Iran could also stand the Bolshevik treatment.

Out of step with the developments in the Truman administration Wallace found support among the left leaning publications like the *Nation* and the *New Republic* both of which applauded Wallace's opinions about the Iran case and endorsed his attempt to head off what they claimed to be an unnecessary confrontation with Moscow driven by anti-communist reactionaries in Washington and British imperialists in London.

As he had with other softs like Eleanor Roosevelt and Joe Davies, Truman allowed Wallace to vent his pro-Soviet opinions. Truman politely listened even as the Iran crisis ripened he came to regard the softs as dangerously *naïve*. However, on September 12 before a large audience at Madison Square Garden, Wallace went too far and worse yet did so in a public speech. Reflecting on the Iran crisis, he accused the Truman administration, of which he was still a member, of pursuing a hostile policy against the USSR and imperialistic goals in the Middle East, specifically by attempting to rescue the crumbling British Empire, Iran being exhibit A. Wallace concluded that the only goal in propping up England in Iran and the Middle East in general was to reestablishing a check on Russia in the region that dated back a century and thus was the opposite of the foreign policy of FDR which had looked forward to an era of decolonization in the underdeveloped world and American partnership with the USSR. Truman and Byrnes had thus abandoned the idealistic inclinations of FDR and adopted the British practice of *realpolitik* which the late president had supposedly buried at the Yalta summit or so he reported to Congress. It was a tricky point for Wallace to make since he, unlike FDR, was a spheres of influence man who advocated formally recognizing a legitimate Russian orbit similar to that of America's in Latin America and the Caribbean. It was Truman and Byrnes who had turned to FDR's cherished United Nations during the Iran crisis while Wallace recommended old school bi-lateral state to state negotiations between Tehran and Moscow making Wallace the deviant from FDR's foreign policy although a loyalist to his Soviet policy! It was an odd fit that Wallace chose not to explain except in the common suspicions of imperial England that he shared with Roosevelt. "We must not," he told his audience, "let British balance-of-power manipulations determine whether and when the United States gets into war..." For Wallace it was England and not Russia that threatened to destabilize the Middle East and rip apart the Big Three: "Make no mistake about it—the British imperialistic policy in the Near East alone, combined with Russian *retaliation*, would lead the United States straight to war unless we have a clearly defined and *realistic* policy of our own." Concluding a "policy of our own" strongly implied that Truman's policy was the British policy. Russia and America could peacefully settle their differences, starting with Iran, Wallace said, once Washington convinced Moscow that America's objective in the Persian Gulf was not to rescue the British Empire. Wallace further alleged that Byrnes had not taken a principled or idealistic stand for Iran during the crisis but was only interested in promoting Anglo-American business and oil interests: "...purchasing oil in the Near East with the lives of American soldiers," as he put it. Peace and cooperation with Russia, he claimed, depended upon an American policy devoid of imperialistic overtones and by implication and non-cooperation with England particularly in the Middle East. By placing the onus of convicting Stalin that America was not fronting for British imperialism in the region on Washington, Wallace strongly implied the crisis was America's fault and that Russia was an innocent victim defending herself against predatory oil thirsty imperialists. In Iran Wallace took Stalin's security fears seriously and said the Soviets needed a buffer zone in Azerbaijan province just as they did in East Europe. [Wallace quoted in Barton Bernstein, and Allen Matusow (eds) *The Truman Administration: A Documentary History*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 244-245.]

Wallace said that Byrnes had not taken a principled or idealistic stand for Iranian independence, the rights of small nations in the United Nations or the legitimacy of the Security Council but was only interested in promoting Anglo-American business and oil interests: "...purchasing oil in the Near East with the lives of American soldiers," as he put it, believing as he had said that America would be dragged into a ground war in Iran to defend British oil interest in the Gulf. : "I realize that the danger of war is *much less* from Communism than it is from imperialism." Only if America repudiated British imperialism could Soviet anxiety be relived resulting in a return to the halcyon days of Soviet-American relations at the Eureka Summit. [Wallace quoted in Barton Bernstein, and Allen Matusow (eds) *The Truman Administration: A Documentary History*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 244-245; 515.]

the future of the Security Council while at the same time establishing a legitimate Security Council. Byrnes chose the latter course. Thus, at the cost of his Soviet policy

Wallace's Madison Square Garden speech represented FDR's soft Soviet policy in its purest form. In many ways it was the soft line response to Churchill's "iron curtain" speech and Kennan's "long telegram." Both had concluded that Russia only understood the language of force. Wallace said the opposite: "The tougher we get the tougher the Russians will get..." And in a not too subtle reference to Churchill: "We must not let our policy be guided or influenced by those inside or outside the United States who want war with Russia." [Wallace quoted in Robert Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis. The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1945-1948*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 223.]

Much of what Wallace said on September 12 he had already expressed in cabinet meetings and a letter to Truman on July 23, 1946. Now, however, he was expressing his dissent in public. Truman could now say that Wallace was not representing the administration views on world affairs and confusing people about who spoke for the administration on foreign policy: Wallace or Byrnes. Wallace told reporters that his speech had been vetted by Truman and approved. There was some limited truth to Wallace's claim: he was saying nothing he had not said many times in the past to Truman and the president did tell reporters he endorsed what Wallace had said at the Garden although in truth he had not read the speech. Yet, that was in private; now Wallace was conducting his rear guard defense of FDR's Soviet policy in public. Worse yet he had impugned Byrnes' conduct during the Iran crisis claiming he was shilling for British oil companies and American big business not acting out of idealism or principle. Ironically it was Byrnes who was trying to make Roosevelt's United Nations project work even though it came at the expense of the former president's Soviet policy. Other cabinet members resented that Wallace was acting like he was an alternate secretary of state and Byrnes complained he was undermining his authority on the world stage. Above all, the hardliners in Congress insisted Truman explain if Wallace's view represented those of the administration. The media was having a field day taunting Truman with the question: who is the real foreign minister in his administration? The pressure was such that Truman asked for and got Wallace's resignation. Truman was probably reluctant to usher Wallace out of his cabinet before this point in part because the commerce secret was the favorite of the left-wing of the New Dealers and indeed in 1948 Wallace launched a third party bid for the presidency from the left—a scenario Truman no doubt wanted to avoid.

Wallace's exit made him yet another casualty of the Iran crisis making Russia's defeat complete: Wallace was the last true believer of FDR's Soviet policy in the senior levels of government and now he was gone. On the other hand, Wallace might have had the last laugh on his hard line opponents; his views formed the basis of the influential revisionist school's interpretation of the Iran crisis. The question for historians was this: who represented FDR's foreign policy legacy? The Soviet friendly Wallace who backed a spheres-of-influence outcome of the war with Russia getting her fair share or the internationalist Byrnes who used the Iran crisis to promote the Security Council as something more than the "Four Policemen" but rather a legitimate peace and security body?

[Barton Bernstein, and Allen Matusow (eds.) *The Truman Administration: A Documentary History*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 238-247; James Chase, "The Presidency of Henry Wallace" in Robert Cowley (ed.), *What If? 2, Eminent Historians Imagine What Might Have Been*. (New York: Putnam and Sons, 2001), 387-389; Richard Crockatt, *The Fifty Years War*. (New York: Routledge, 1995), 61; Robert Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis. The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1945-1948*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 222-225; Gary Hess, "The Iranian Crisis of 1945-46 and the Cold War", *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 89, March 1974, p. 129; David McCullough, *Truman*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 514-517; Robert Messer, *The End of an Alliance. James F. Byrnes, Roosevelt, Truman and the Origins of the Cold War*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1982), 206-207; James Patterson, *Grand Expectations. The United States, 1945-1974*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 125; Arthur Schlesinger jr., *The Cycles of American History*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), 171; Robert Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, (New York: Enigma, 2001), 852; William Taubman, *Stalin's American Policy*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982), 120; David Yergin, *Shattered Peace. The Origins of the Cold War*. (New York: Penguin, 1990), 247-248.]

Roosevelt's greater foreign policy legacy of a viable global peace and security body was realized.

APPENDIX
Declaration of the Three Powers Regarding Iran
(Eureka Conference)

The President of the United States, the Premier of the U.S.S.R., and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, having consulted with each other and the with the Prime Minister of Iran, desire to declare the mutual agreement of their three Governments regarding their relations with Iran.

The Governments of the United States, the U.S.S.R., and the United Kingdom, having consulted each other recognize the assistance which Iran has government in the prosecution of the war against the common enemy, particularly by facilitating the transportation of supplies from overseas to the Soviet Union.

The three Governments realize that the war has caused special economic difficulties for Iran, and they are agreed that they will continue to make available to the Government of Iran such economic assistance as may be possible, having regard to the heavy demands made upon them by their world-wide military operations and to the world-wide shortage of transport, raw materials, and supplies for civilian consumption.

With respect to the post-war period, the Governments of the United States, the U.S.S.R., and the United Kingdom are in accord with the Government of Iran that any economic problems confronting Iran at the close of hostilities should receive full consideration, along with those other members of the United Nations, by conferences or international agencies held or created to deal with economic matters.

The Government of the United States, the U.S.S.R., and the United Kingdom are at one with the Government of Iran in their desire for the maintenance of the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iran. They count upon the participation of Iran, together with all other peace-loving nations, in the establishment of international peace, security, and prosperity after the war, in accordance with the principles of the Atlantic Charter, to which all four Governments have subscribed.

(Signed) Winston S. Churchill

J. Stalin

Franklin D. Roosevelt

[Source: Alan Axelrod and Charles Phillips, (eds.) *Encyclopedia of Historical Treaties and Alliances*. (New York: Facts on File, 2001), 671-672.]

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