

The Iranian Crisis of 1945-46 and the Cold War

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In its response to the Iranian crisis of November 1945 to June 1946, the United States reoriented its postwar policy toward the Soviet Union, shifting, in the terminology of the era, from "appeasement" to "getting tough." The crisis resulted from the Soviet Union's reluctance to withdraw troops from northern Iran and its encouragement of a separatist political movement in Azerbaijan. Urging the Iranian government to take a strong stand in the United Nations, and persistently supporting Iran in the fledgling international organization, the United States achieved its first diplomatic victory of the cold war. The Soviet Union withdrew its forces in the spring of 1946 and, by the end of the year, the Tehran government asserted its control over Azerbaijan.

Despite its significance, American policy during the Iranian crisis has not been fully studied. Early accounts of the incident, some of which were written by officials involved in decision-making in 1945-46, held that the United States acted appropriately in the face of a Soviet effort to dominate Iran.¹ Recent writings on the origins of

¹ Robert Rossow, Jr., "The Battle of Azerbaijan, 1946," *Middle East Journal*, 10 (1956), 17-32; Joseph M. Jones, *The Fifteen Weeks* (February 21-June 5,

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the cold war, however, underscore the complexity of the crisis. From the perspective of revisionist historians Gabriel and Joyce Kolko and Lloyd Gardner, the United States, beginning in World War II, aggressively sought to dominate Middle Eastern oil. The Soviet maneuvering in Iran represented a concern over its security, but the American pursuit of the "open door" refused to tolerate any Soviet influence and led to the vigorous pressures that forced the Russian retreat.² In a restatement of the orthodox interpretation of the cold war origins, the late Herbert Feis acknowledged some sound historical and political bases for Soviet policy in Iran, but he implicitly accepted the objectives of American policy. John Lewis Gaddis, in *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War 1941-1947*, stresses the influence of public opinion on Truman's "get tough" approach. By early 1946, Washington perceived its options toward the Soviet Union as limited between accommodation and firmness; contrary to the revisionist position, Gaddis argues that the United States realistically did not have the opportunity to follow a course more appreciative of Soviet interests and problems. The pressures of public opinion and partisan politics, as well as Truman's conviction that the policy of accommodation had failed, forced the change in American diplomacy.³

1947) (New York, 1955), 50-58; Nasrollah Saifpour Fatemi, *Oil Diplomacy: Powderkeg in Iran* (New York, 1954), preface by Wallace Murray, x-xi, *et passim*; George Lenczowski, *Russia and the West in Iran, 1918-1948; A Study in Big-Power Rivalry* (New York, 1948), foreword by George V. Allen and 263-315. Michael Kahl Sheehan, *Iran: The Impact of United States Interests and Policies, 1941-1954* (Brooklyn, N.Y., 1968), 27-32.

² Lloyd C. Gardner, *Architects of Illusion; Men and Ideas in American Foreign Policy, 1941-1949* (Chicago, 1970), 211-215; Joyce and Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power; The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1954* (New York, 1972), 235-42. Briefer revisionist accounts are offered by Barton J. Bernstein, "American Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Cold War," *Politics and Policies of the Truman Administration*, edited by Barton J. Bernstein (Chicago, 1970), 40-41, and by David Horowitz, *The Free World Colossus: A Critique of American Foreign Policy in the Cold War*, rev. ed. (New York, 1971), 83-84. D. F. Fleming, *The Cold War and Its Origins, 1917-1960*, Vol. II: 1950-60 (Garden City, N.Y., 1961), 340-48, is mostly critical of America's handling of the incident in the United Nations. A useful summary of the revisionist interpretation is provided by Justus D. Doenecke, "Revisionists, Oil, and Cold War Diplomacy," *Iranian Studies*, 3 (Winter 1970), 23-33. In "The United States, Iran, and the Cold War," *ibid.*, 2-22, Richard Cottam maintains that there is no evidence of oil interests constituting significant influence on United States policy prior to 1954. Cottam treats the 1945-46 crisis only briefly and sees American policy as reflecting what Washington perceived to be necessary defensive moves against the Soviet Union.

³ Herbert Feis, *From Trust to Terror; The Onset of the Cold War, 1945-1950*

Now that nearly all of the American documentary record of the crisis is available, the scholar can reexamine what the factors were that influenced American policy. It turns out that there is no "single factor" explanation that is satisfactory. Rather, it was a confluence of both national security and domestic considerations that caused the American government to take the "tough stand" that led to one of the first United States-Soviet conflicts of the cold war.

I

The crisis had its origins in Allied operations in Iran during World War II, with the first serious Russian-American differences occurring in late 1944. British and Russian forces invaded Iran in August 1941 to assure the use of Iranian facilities for Allied supply lines to the Soviet Union. In their occupation zone in the northern provinces, the Soviets curtailed the activities of the Iranian army and gendarmerie, interfered with Iranian administration, and cultivated the establishment of the Communist-led Tudeh Party.⁴ Although the American military presence was more restricted than that of the British and Russians, the United States established strong ties with the central government in Tehran. The Persian Gulf Command, numbering some 30,000 men, administered and developed Iranian transportation facilities, distributed Lend-Lease to Iran, and transhipped Lend-Lease supplies to the Soviet Union. At the invitation of the Iranian government, the United States sent several missions to assist the Iranians in various areas, including the training of the army and gendarmerie.⁵

In January 1943, the Iranian government appointed Arthur C. Millspaugh as director-general of finance and gave him wide authority to reorganize the nation's chaotic financial administration. Millspaugh, who had served in a similar capacity twenty years earlier, brought a staff of sixty Americans and initially made substantial progress despite conservative opposition in the Majlis (parliament). By early 1944, Millspaugh's plans were the source of difficulties with the Soviets and the Iranians. Millspaugh insisted

(New York, 1970), 63-70, 81-87; John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947* (New York, 1972), 309-23, 353-61.

⁴ George Kirk, *The Middle East in the War* (New York, 1952), 466-73; Lenczowski, *Russia and the West in Iran*, 193-215.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 271-79; J. C. Hurewitz, *Middle East Dilemmas; The Background of United States Policy* (New York, 1953), 21-24.

that an American whom he had appointed as director of finance of Soviet-occupied Khorassan should be permitted unrestricted travel, but Soviet officials limited his travel privileges. As Millspaugh tried to change the Russian decision, even the American chargé in Tehran reported to Washington that he appeared determined to seek trouble with the Russians. More importantly, Millspaugh's bullying tactics in dealing with recalcitrant Iranian officials led to strong criticism in the Majlis, press, and cabinet. The Shah, twenty-three-year-old Muhammad Riza, let American officials know of his interest in replacing Millspaugh. At length, the State Department informed the Iranians that it would not take exception to such action. After futile pleas for support from Washington and in the midst of continuing opposition in Tehran, Millspaugh finally resigned in February 1945.⁶

Millspaugh's failure, however, did not affect the general strengthening of American-Iranian ties. As early as 1943, the State Department had outlined ambitious American objectives in Iran which were supported by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Higher State Department officials endorsed a proposal of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs that American influence should be directed toward ending the half-century of British and Russian competition in Iran. Secretary of State Cordell Hull noted that more than ideals were involved: "Likewise from a more directly selfish point of view, it is to our interest that no great power be established on the Persian Gulf opposite the important American petroleum development in Saudi Arabia."⁷

⁶ Lenczowski, *Russia and the West in Iran*, 263-89; Chargé in Iran (Richard Ford) to Sec. State, Dec. 24, 1943, Dept. of State Decimal File 891.51A/961; Ford to Sec. State, Feb. 11, 1944, *ibid.*, 891.51A/1030; Memorandum, Division of Near Eastern Affairs, Feb. 7, 1944, *ibid.*, 891.51A/1000; Ford to Sec. State, March 8, 1944, *ibid.*, 891.51A/1043; Ford to Sec. State, Aug. 13, 1944, *ibid.*, 891.51A/81344; Ambassador in USSR (Harriman) to Sec. State, Dec. 11, 1944, *ibid.*, 891.00/12-1144; Memorandum, Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs to Sec. State, Dec. 14, 1944; *ibid.*, 891.00/12-1144; Ford to Sec. State, Feb. 7, 1945, *ibid.*, 891.51A/2-745; Minister in Iran (Dreyfus) to Sec. State, March 18, 1943, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1943*, Vol. IV: *The Near East and Africa* (Washington, 1964), 517-18; Dreyfus to Sec. State, Aug. 29, 1943, *ibid.*, 535-36; Dreyfus to Sec. State, Oct. 21, 1943, *ibid.*, 547; Ford to Sec. State, April 25, 1944, *FRUS 1944*, Vol. V: *The Near East, South Asia, and Africa; The Far East* (Washington, 1965), 397-99; Ford to Sec. State, May 22, 1944, *ibid.*, 405-06. (References to *Foreign Relations* volumes will be abbreviated as follows: *FRUS* followed by year of documents, volume number, page number, with volume titles and facts of publication included in first references to a given volume. The titles of officials will be noted only if their positions are not stated in the text.)

⁷ Hull to Roosevelt, Aug. 16, 1943, *FRUS 1943*, IV, 377-79; Memorandum, Division of Near Eastern Affairs, Jan. 23, 1943, *ibid.*, 331-36; Acting Sec. State

The first Big Three meeting brought Roosevelt to the Iranian capital. During the conference, he provided the initiative for the Declaration on Iran, by which the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union agreed to respect Iranian integrity and to assist Iran in alleviating its economic problems.⁸ Roosevelt quickly sought to breathe life into the latter pledge. After the conference, he wrote to Hull:

I was rather thrilled with the idea of using Iran as an example of what we could do by an unselfish American policy. We could not take on a more difficult nation than Iran. I would like, however, to take a try at it. The real difficulty is to get the right kind of American experts who would be loyal to their ideals, not fight among themselves and be absolutely honest financially.⁹

This program, however, met strong opposition in the State Department, especially from Assistant Secretary Dean Acheson who wrote that "this plan may easily turn out to be more than an innocent indulgence in messianic globaloney."¹⁰ The State Department assured the White House that the existing special missions provided the basis for achieving Roosevelt's objectives.¹¹

In terms of its influence on American-Soviet relations, the most important aspect of the American penetration of Iran was the State Department-backed bid by American companies for oil concessions. By early 1944, the American-owned Standard-Vacuum Company and Sinclair Oil Company, together with the British Shell Company, were negotiating with Iranian officials. Washington and London apparently failed to anticipate the mission to Tehran of a Soviet delegation headed by Sergei I. Kavtaradze, Assistant People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs. Arriving in September, the Kavtaradze delegation demanded five year petroleum exploratory rights in the five northern provinces.¹² On October 16, the Iranian government postponed all oil concession discussions until after the war. Kav-

(Welles) to Minister in Iran (Dreyfus), March 13, 1943, *ibid.*, 343; Dreyfus to Sec. State, April 14, 1943, *ibid.*, 355-59.

⁸ Declaration on Iran, *ibid.*, 413-14; William H. McNeill, *America, Britain, and Russia; Their Co-Operation and Conflict, 1941-1946* (London, 1953), 365-66.

⁹ Roosevelt to Hull, Jan. 12, 1944, Dept. of State Decimal File 891.00/3037.

¹⁰ Acheson to Under Secretary (Stettinius), Jan. 28, 1943, *ibid.*, 891.00/1-2844. Acheson's interference in the project was protested by Wallace Murray, Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs; Murray to Sec. State, Jan. 31, 1944, *ibid.*, 891.00/1-2844.

¹¹ Acting Sec. State (Stettinius) to Roosevelt, Feb. 18, 1944, *ibid.*, 891.00/3037.

¹² Kirk, 473-81; Lenczowski, 216-18; Hurewitz, 25.

taradze, the Soviet press, the Tudeh Party leaders and press criticized the Iranian policy, frequently blaming the United States and Britain for the decision. These Soviet criticisms of the Iranian action disturbed State Department officials who dispatched a mild protest to Moscow reminding the Soviet delegation of its pledge to respect Iranian sovereignty.¹³

During the oil controversy, the Soviets intensified their political activities in Azerbaijan. As noted in the reports of Samuel B. Ebling, the American consul at Tabriz, the Soviets took advantage of traditional separatist sentiment in Azerbaijan which had been reinforced by the Shah's recent effort to centralize commercial activities in the capital. Moreover, the Soviets skillfully managed to appear as reformers while avoiding antagonism of the landlords and business community.¹⁴

In the midst of these developments in Azerbaijan and appeals from the Iranian government for American support against the Soviets,¹⁵ George Kennan, the chargé in Moscow, analyzed Russian interests and goals. According to Kennan, the reason for the Kavtaradze mission was not an oil concession but rather apprehension of foreign penetration, coupled with concern over prestige. The Soviets were determined to prevent another power from exploiting northern Iran and, as Kennan observed, they might have thought that the United States opposed their political goals in northern Iran.¹⁶

In an effort to accommodate the Russians, President Roosevelt suggested that Ambassador Averell Harriman discuss with the Soviet leaders the establishment of an international trusteeship which would construct and administer a free port in Iran at the head of the Persian Gulf and a railway system from the port to the Soviet Union. Secretary of State Edward Stettinius and Wallace Murray, Director of the Division of Near Eastern and African Affairs in the State Department, opposed the scheme, arguing that it would appear imperialistic and would be the source of problems

¹³ Acting Sec. State (Stettinius) to Ambassador in USSR (Harriman), Oct. 30, 1944, *FRUS 1944*, V, 462-63; Lenczowski, 218-22.

¹⁴ Ebling to Sec. State, July 19, 1944, Dept. of State Decimal File, 891.00/7-1944; Ebling to Sec. State, Sept. 25, 1944, *ibid.*, 891.00/9-2544; Ebling to Sec. State, Oct. 9, 1944, *ibid.*, 891.00/10-944; Richard W. Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran* (Pittsburgh, 1964), 118-24.

¹⁵ Memorandum of Conversation by Under Secretary (Stettinius), Nov. 3, 1944, *FRUS 1944*, V, 466-67.

¹⁶ Kennan to Sec. State, Nov. 7, 1944, *ibid.*, 470-71.

with both Russia and Britain. When informed of these criticisms, Roosevelt dropped the plan.¹⁷

II

The desirability of an American-Russian understanding on Iran was accentuated in early 1945 as the Iranian government increasingly looked to the United States for support against the Soviet Union. In January, Mohammed Shayesteh, the Iranian minister in Washington, pressed with Stettinius and Murray his government's view that Soviet occupation policy warranted consideration at the forthcoming Yalta Conference. When the United States and Britain attempted at Yalta to raise the question of Allied troops withdrawals from Iran, the Soviets declined consideration.¹⁸ Frustrated at that level, the Iranian government in late February sought British and American approval of a plan to send Iranian troops into the Russian occupation zone to pursue Kurdish tribesmen who had been pillaging towns in southern Iran. The Iranian government was reluctant to request Russian permission to enter the occupation zone since that would appear to acknowledge Soviet political control. Ambassador Leland Morris warned Washington:

I suspect he [the Shah] is prepared to order them forward if given [the] slightest encouragement. He is reluctant to ask Russian permission and I suspect may be disposed to create [an] incident which would force British and Americans to take [a] stand with respect to Soviet interference with Iranian forces.¹⁹

As Morris suggested, the State Department shied from a confrontation and advised Iranian consultation with Soviet authorities, who permitted one Iranian infantry batallion to proceed from Tabriz to Mahabad but refused entry of Iranian troops from outside the Soviet zone.²⁰ The Iranian government continued to seek support from the

¹⁷ Roosevelt to Stettinius, Dec. 8, 1944, *ibid.*, 483; Stettinius to Roosevelt, Dec. 18, 1944, *ibid.*, 484-85; Memorandum, Murray to Sec. State, Dec. 19, 1944, *ibid.*, 485-86. (Hull resigned as Secretary of State on Nov. 27, 1944 and Roosevelt appointed Stettinius as his successor.)

¹⁸ Memorandum of Conversation by Stettinius, Jan. 18, 1945, *FRUS 1945*, Vol. VIII: *The Near East and Africa* (Washington, 1969), 360; Memorandum of Conversation by Murray, Jan. 18, 1945, *ibid.*, 361; Memorandum, Director, Office of European Affairs (Matthews), Feb. 27, 1945, *ibid.*, 362-63.

¹⁹ Morris to Sec. State, Feb. 22, 1945, *ibid.*, 361-62.

²⁰ Acting Sec. State to Morris, Feb. 27, 1945, *ibid.*, 363-64.

United States,²¹ but embassy officials in Tehran remained skeptical of Iran's objectives. On May 5, Morris reported that he found much accuracy in the Russian contention that the entry of Iranian forces would only provoke unnecessary trouble.²²

With the end of the European war, the Iranian government on May 19 requested that the Allies withdraw their forces within six months. By the terms of the 1942 Tripartite Agreement signed by Britain, Russia, and Iran, Allied occupation forces were to be withdrawn within six months of the ending of hostilities with Germany and her associates. The British and American governments questioned the Iranian interpretation of the treaty, but nonetheless began to withdraw.²³

Yet the Tehran government, beset with an internal crisis heightened by Russian and British political maneuvering in the Majlis, appealed to the United States to pressure for a quick Russian and British withdrawal. Wallace Murray, the new American Ambassador in Iran, was receptive to the appeals of the Prime Minister and the Shah who impressed Murray with his dedication to reform. Accordingly, Murray, whom Herbert Feis characterized as a "splenetic individual," seconded the Iranian requests for American support and for consideration of the Iranian situation at the Potsdam Conference. To prove American good faith and to eliminate any pretext for a continuation of the Russian occupation, Murray urged the immediate withdrawal of all American forces. A total Allied withdrawal, he believed, offered the best assurance against Soviet domination.²⁴

At the Potsdam Conference, President Harry S. Truman promised that the remaining American troops (some 5,000 men servicing military installations) would be withdrawn within sixty days. The British and Russian governments, however, committed themselves only to the immediate withdrawal of their units from Tehran and

²¹ Morris to Sec. State, March 19, 1945, *ibid.*, 366-67.

²² Morris to Sec. State, May 5, 1945, *ibid.*, 367-68.

²³ Feis, *From Trust to Terror*, 63; Memorandum, Acting Chief, Division of Middle Eastern Affairs (Minor) to Acting Sec. State, June 2, 1945, *FRUS 1945*, VIII, 375-76; Acting Sec. State to Ambassador in Iran (Murray), June 12, 1945, *ibid.*, 378.

²⁴ Feis, 65; Murray to Sec. State, June 19, 1945, *FRUS 1945*, VIII, 381-83; Murray to Sec. State, June 20, *ibid.*, 383; Murray to Sec. State, June 26, 1945, *ibid.*, 384-86; Memorandum, Acting Chief, Division of Middle Eastern Affairs (Minor), June 18, 1945, *ibid.*, 380-81; Murray to Sec. State, July 20, 1945, Dept. of State Decimal File 891.00/7-2045.

postponed further discussion until the foreign ministers' meeting in late September.²⁵

Before that conference, the war against Japan suddenly ended. In the following months, a number of questions, including the Allied occupation of Iran, became more pressing and undermined the war-time coalition. Indeed the lines of the American-Russian differences over Iran took more definite shape. The Soviets tightened their hold on northern Iran, denying Iranian requests to dispatch gendarmes into the Soviet zone and ignoring the ensuing Iranian complaints. As reports of these developments reached Washington,²⁶ American policy was being defined in such terms as to preclude any Soviet influence. In a memorandum of August 23, Loy Henderson, Director of the Office of Near Eastern Affairs, discussed the expansion of American economic influence, especially oil and aviation rights, expanded trade, and investment. An American, British, and Russian commission should be established, Henderson held, with the purpose of assuring Iranian sovereignty by eliminating foreign rivalries.²⁷

American officials regarded Soviet actions in Azerbaijan as a threat to these goals. A Soviet-sponsored "Democratic Party" of Azerbaijan was established and issued a call for the province's autonomy. In a September 17 analysis of the situation, Henderson maintained that any Soviet influence would seriously weaken Iran and urged renewed pressures on Britain and Russia to withdraw their forces.²⁸

Prior to the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers, British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin suggested that troop withdrawals be discussed at the conference. Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov replied that since the Soviet Union was committed to the 1942 tripartite agreement, no discussion was necessary. Bevin seized upon the Molotov note to remind the Soviets that it meant withdrawing by March 2, 1946, six months after the formal Japanese surrender. At the council meeting of September 22, the British, Russian, and American governments took note of the British and Russian pledge to leave before March 2.²⁹

²⁵ Feis, 64-65.

²⁶ Fatemi, 265-66; summary of messages from Ambassador to Iran (Murray), Aug. 19-Sept. 1, 1945, *FRUS 1945*, VIII, 400.

²⁷ Memorandum, by Henderson, Aug. 23, 1945, *ibid.*, 393-400.

²⁸ Memorandum, by Henderson, Sept. 17, 1945, *ibid.*, 410-411; Feis, 66.

²⁹ Bevin to Molotov, Sept. 19, 1945, *FRUS 1945*, VIII, 413-14; Molotov to Bevin, Sept. 20, 1945, *ibid.*, 414; Bevin to Molotov, undated, *ibid.*, 414-415; Molotov to Bevin, undated, *ibid.*, 415.

Despite these promises, Murray still pressed Washington to secure immediate withdrawals. In a message of September 25, he warned that Soviet dominance of the north, if unchecked, could result in the exclusion of American economic interests. Henderson in Washington and Kennan in Moscow both seconded Murray's analysis of Soviet objectives.⁸⁰

In early October, the tempo of the Azerbaijan autonomy movement intensified. The Tudeh Party formally dissolved itself, with its members joining the Democratic Party, which reiterated its demand for autonomy and spoke of Azerbaijan's hopes for Russian protection. At the head of the Democratic Party was a long-time communist leader, Sayed Jafar Peeshavari. During the next few weeks, reports circulated in Tehran of Soviet-inspired uprisings in Azerbaijan and of the Democratic Party's effort to seize control of the provincial government. Telegraphic and air communication between Tabriz and Tehran was curtailed.⁸¹ While American officials inclined to view the autonomy movement as the result of Soviet intrigue,⁸² Tabriz consul Ebling viewed the Democratic Party as representative of "liberal" influences. In a letter of November 16, Ebling reported that educated Azerbaijanis feared that a Russian withdrawal would be followed by the central government's suppression of the Democratic movement and the reestablishment of reactionary elements.⁸³

By mid-November the incidents in Azerbaijan became a matter of serious international concern. On November 19, an Iranian army unit destined for Tabriz was reportedly halted by a Soviet garrison at Qazvin. The Iranian government immediately protested to Moscow and sought American support. Its chargé in Washington averred that if the United States permitted Soviet infringement on Iranian sovereignty, no small nation would have confidence in the promises of the major powers.⁸⁴ Reviewing the situation in Tehran, Murray advised: "I should like to renew urgently my recommendation that [the] Russians (and British also) be asked to withdraw entirely from Iran at once. If Russians decline I think they should be

⁸⁰ Murray to Sec. State, Sept. 25, 1945, *ibid.*, 417-19; Henderson to Murray, Sept. 27, 1945, *ibid.*, 423-24; Kennan to Sec. State, Oct. 1, 1945, *ibid.*, 424.

⁸¹ Fatemi, 262-67; *New York Times*, Oct. 22-23, 1945.

⁸² Murray to Sec. State, Nov. 19, 1945, *FRUS 1945*, VIII, 431-33.

⁸³ Ebling to Sec. State, Nov. 16, 1945, Dept. of State Decimal File 891.00/11-1745.

⁸⁴ Memorandum of Conversation by Henderson, *FRUS 1945*, VIII, 435; *New York Times*, Nov. 20, 1945.

called upon in plainest terms to show cause for remaining in the absence of any military necessity."³⁵

The State Department requested accurate and thorough information from the Tehran Embassy, especially on the reported interference at Qazvin. Murray, however, was hard-pressed to determine events; in an effort to gain information, he requested Soviet permission to dispatch an embassy car to Tabriz, but Soviet authorities delayed acting on the matter. Yet, Murray could relay to Washington that high Iranian officials had confirmed that the Soviet military had halted Iranian troops at Qazvin.³⁶

That confirmation, coupled with Murray's calls for action, resulted in the decision to confront the Soviets. On November 23, Washington instructed Ambassador Averell Harriman to deliver a note to the Soviet government in which the United States explicitly denied that the Soviets had authority under the Tripartite Treaty to restrict the Iranian army and suggested that all Allied troops be withdrawn before January 1.³⁷

While awaiting the Russian reply, the State Department received discouraging reports from Murray. In a meeting with the American ambassador, the Russian chargé in Tehran defended the Soviet action at Qazvin on the grounds that the Iranian gendarmes would provoke unrest. Reliable sources in Tehran were predicting that Soviet pressures would lead to the fall of the government headed by Ibrahim Hakimi. On November 25, the British consul at Tabriz managed to get a flight to Tehran, carrying with him messages from Ebling. These reports confirmed Democratic Party control of most towns of Azerbaijan; moreover, the central committee of the party had constituted itself as the "National Congress" claiming a right to self-determination in the name of the Atlantic Charter and demanding a "national government" within the Iranian State. Having finally secured travel passes, Murray immediately dispatched emissaries to Tabriz who reported that the Democratic Party lacked substantial popular support and would collapse without Soviet support. Also Murray learned from Iranian officials of the Soviet bargaining position in the discussions between the two governments. In return for a military withdrawal, the Russians expected an oil concession in the northern provinces, internal air transportation rights, and a

³⁵ Murray to Sec. State, *FRUS* 1945, VII, 436-37.

³⁶ Murray to Sec. State, Nov. 20, 1945, *ibid.*, 437-38; Murray to Sec. State, Nov. 22, 1945, *ibid.*, 442-43; Sec. State to Murray, Nov. 22, 1945, *ibid.*, 443-44.

³⁷ Sec. State to Harriman, Nov. 23, 1945, *ibid.*, 448-50; Feis, 65-66.

“special position” at the port of Pahlivi on the Caspian Sea. (The Russians had controlled that port until 1921.)³⁸

III

In Washington the new Iranian ambassador Hussein Ala warned Henderson on November 28 that a Soviet coup in Tehran appeared imminent and pressed for a show of American support of the Iranian government. While presenting his credentials to President Truman the next day, the ambassador took the occasion to reiterate his call for American support:

In this critical situation I earnestly beg you, Mr. President, to continue to stand up for the rights of Iran, whose independence and integrity are being trampled underfoot. Your country alone can save us, for you have always defended moral ideas and principles and your hands are clean. I know you will not shirk your responsibility to the world.³⁹

In Moscow on the 29th, Molotov delivered the Soviet reply to the American note. Maintaining that the events in northern Iran constituted an uprising against the central government, the Soviet government reaffirmed its dedication to the Tehran Declaration and the troop withdrawal policy established by the September British-Russian exchange of notes. On these grounds, the Soviets declined reconsideration of the withdrawal schedule.⁴⁰

During the next few days, the American government's fear of being presented with an autonomous Azerbaijan as a *fait accompli* seemed about to be realized. The Democratic Party made an open bid for power. The Democratic-dominated provincial Majlis, constituted on the basis of a November 28 election which the Tehran government considered illegal, convened on December 7 and established a provincial government with Peeshavari at its head.⁴¹

As the autonomy movement gathered momentum, State Department officials concluded that, despite the intransigence of the Soviet note of November 29, the Iranian issue had to be reopened at the Moscow meeting of the foreign ministers. Harold Minor, recently

³⁸ Murray to Sec. State, Nov. 23, 25, 26, 28, 1945, *FRUS 1945*, VIII, 445, 454-56, 465-66.

³⁹ Ala's remarks to Truman, *ibid.*, 461; Memorandum of conversation by Henderson, Nov. 28, 1945, *ibid.*, 461-62.

⁴⁰ Harriman to Sec. State, Nov. 30, 1945, *ibid.*, 468-69.

⁴¹ Fatemi, 269-75; Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: The History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-67* (New York, 1968), 426.

designated chief of the Middle Eastern Affairs office, traveled to Tehran; his reports reinforced the recommendations of Murray. Following a meeting with Hakimi on December 11, Minor cabled Washington that the Soviets planned an "unscrupulous aggression" intended, from the base in Azerbaijan, to influence the central government with the long-term objectives of encircling Turkey and penetrating throughout the Middle East. The next day Murray reported that Democratic control of virtually all of Azerbaijan had brought a "state of terror." Meanwhile in Washington, Henderson urged Byrnes, about to leave for Moscow, to raise the Iranian issue with Bevin and Molotov. Henderson based his argument largely on a point that became increasingly important in the shaping of American policy in Iran: Iran was a test of Big Power respect for the sovereignty of smaller nations.⁴²

Outside the White House and State Department, some voices were criticizing American policy and urging moderation. An editorial in the *New Republic* warned that the United States was being dragged into the traditional British and Russian rivalry in Iran. In *The Nation*, Freda Kirchwey argued that Soviet interests necessitated influence in northern Iran and indeed could provide Azerbaijan with necessary reform.⁴³ In a press conference on December 4, South Dakota congressman Karl Mundt challenged the American promise to withdraw its forces by January 1, observing that the military missions were to continue. Mundt commented: "It's reasonable to suppose that this is one reason for Russia's reluctance to withdraw from Iran."⁴⁴ While ignoring the latter point, the State Department acknowledged that, at Iran's request, the missions to assist the Iranian gendarmerie and army indeed would remain. Another *New Republic* editorial took up Mundt's criticisms and charged that the United States was acting aggressively and siding with reactionary elements.⁴⁵

Within the State Department, the only questions about the course of American policy were raised implicitly in the long-delayed letters of Ebling. The Tabriz consul's messages of November 26 and 27

⁴² Minor to Henderson, Dec. 11, 1945, Dept. of State Decimal File 891.00/12-1145; Henderson to Sec. State, Dec. 11, 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VIII, 488-90; Murray to Sec. State, Dec. 12, 1945, *ibid.*, 490-91.

⁴³ *New Republic*, Dec. 3, 1945, 731-32; *Nation*, Dec. 29, 1945, 725-26.

⁴⁴ *New York Times*, Dec. 4, 1945.

⁴⁵ Memorandum, Henderson to Under Sec. State (Acheson), Dec. 7, 1945, Dept. of State Decimal File 891.50/12-745; *New York Times*, Dec. 5, 1945; *New Republic*, Dec. 31, 1945, 887-88.

finally reached Washington on December 14. Recounting the events of mid-November which he labeled "one week of liberal aggression," Ebling underscored the complexity of developments: the apparent lack of coordination between Soviet authorities and Democratic party leaders; the inclination to blame the Democratic movement on the Soviets while ignoring the serious economic problems of the province; the widespread fears that the Tehran government would suppress the "liberals" and bring back the conservative leaders and policies; the imperative need for Tehran to adopt a benevolent and reformist policy in Azerbaijan.⁴⁶

This subtle appraisal, however, paled when contrasted with the urgent calls of Murray and Minor for American action. They warned that the only Iranian course would be appeasement unless the United States gave strong support.⁴⁷ Thus at the Moscow conference, the United States raised the Iranian issue. While Byrnes was concerned primarily with peace treaties for Bulgaria and Rumania, and the control of atomic energy, he attempted to discuss the Iranian matter with Molotov who bluntly denied Russian interference and reaffirmed that the withdrawal procedure had been resolved. Not satisfied with the foreign minister's position, Byrnes on December 19 pressed the question with Stalin who took an equally adamant stand; the Russian premier maintained that Soviet troops were being retained to protect the Baku oil fields which were threatened by the hostility of the Iranian government and the unstable conditions within Iran. Stalin further argued that the retention of troops was justified by the 1921 Russian-Iranian treaty permitting Russia to send troops into Iran should internal disturbances occur. At another meeting with Stalin on the 23rd, Byrnes warned of the likelihood that Iran would file a complaint against the Soviet government at an early meeting of the United Nations. Stalin reaffirmed the Soviet dedication to the Tehran Declaration, and took the occasion to label the Hakimi government hostile to the Soviet Union.⁴⁸

At that point, the British government, which viewed the Azerbaijan situation as a threat to its Middle Eastern interests but was

⁴⁶ Ebling to Sec. State, Nov. 26, 1945, Dept. of State Decimal File, 891.00/11-2645; Ebling to Sec. State, Nov. 27, 1945, *ibid.*, 891.00/11-2745.

⁴⁷ Murray to Sec. State, Dec. 15, 1945, *FRUS 1945*, VIII, 496-97; Minor to Henderson, Dec. 17, 1945, *ibid.*, 501.

⁴⁸ Gaddis, 276-81; Feis, 66-68; Ulam, 426; Harriman to Sec. State, Dec. 23, 1945, *FRUS 1945*, VIII, 510-11; Harriman to Sec. State, Dec. 28, 1945, *ibid.*, 517-19.

less inclined than the United States to seek immediate troop withdrawals, took the initiative. On the 24th, Bevin proposed the establishment of a Big Three commission to help the Iranian government, especially in implementing political and social reform. Byrnes and other American officials gave lukewarm support to the joint commission; rather the United States preferred direct Iranian assertion of its sovereignty. The Soviet response to the British position fluctuated between initial hints of a modified acceptance to an eventual virtual veto.⁴⁹

To many Americans, the Moscow Conference confirmed the impossibility of compromising with the Soviets. The peace treaties for Bulgaria and Rumania seemed to assure a continuation of Soviet domination in eastern Europe and thus violate the promise of the Yalta Declaration on Liberated Europe. The Soviet obstinacy on atomic energy and Iran signified more difficulties ahead. As the new year opened, American policy changed: this reorientation evidenced most immediately in Iran.⁵⁰

As the American army units left Iran January 1, 1946 and the British reaffirmed their promise to leave before March 2, the Iranian government made plans to file a complaint before the United Nations. Anticipating the American response to such a step, State Department officials adhered to the position stated by Acheson on December 24: the United States would support the Iranians in order to assure the preservation of the United Nations. The British, however, still hoped to salvage the Tripartite Commission which was certain to be sabotaged by any Iranian initiative in the United Nations. Accordingly the British sought American cooperation in attempting to dissuade the Iranians, but Byrnes, upon the advice of Henderson and Acheson, rejected the British suggestion. American leaders were concerned over British objectives; in a message of January 10, Murray suggested that the British opposed any United Nations investigation because they were anticipating the establishment of a British-supported autonomous Khuzistan.⁵¹

On January 19, Iran filed its complaint before the Security

⁴⁹ Feis, 67-69; Harriman to Sec. State, Dec. 28, 1945, *FRUS 1945*, VIII, 517-19; Kolko, 237

⁵⁰ Gaddis, 276-90; Feis, 54-55.

⁵¹ Acheson to Harriman, Dec. 24, 1945, *FRUS 1945*, VIII, 512-13; Memorandum of Conversation by Acheson, *FRUS 1946*, Vol. VII: *The Near East and Africa* (Washington, 1969), 293-94; Murray to Sec. State, Jan. 4, 1946, *ibid.*, 294-95; Murray to Sec. State, Jan. 10, 1946, *ibid.*, 299-301.

Council, charging Soviet interference in its internal affairs and calling for a United Nations investigation. In America, the Iranian appeal was immediately interpreted as a test of the United Nations; editorials in the *New York Times* and columnists Anne O'Hare McCormick and Joseph and Stewart Alsop strongly endorsed United Nations action.⁵²

Secretary-General Trygve Lie, however, believed the American-encouraged Iranian action was premature; in his memoir, Lie wrote:

So here we were right in the middle of a great-power war of maneuver and propaganda in the United Nations before the "cold war" had started, before that term had even been invented. I was greatly disturbed, feeling that the Iranian government should have given direct negotiations a longer trial. After all, Norway had had a very positive and satisfactory experience with the withdrawal of Soviet troops. A little more private prodding would probably bring results.⁵³

Indeed the prospects for negotiations improved on January 20 when Prime Minister Hakimi resigned. The Shah requested that Qavam Saltaneh head the new cabinet; Qavam, who took office on the 27th, was friendly toward the Soviet Union, purged many pro-British officials, and quickly suggested high-level direct negotiations.⁵⁴

IV

For the Soviet Union, the Iranian complaint cast it as a defendant in the first meeting of the Security Council and must have confirmed fears that the United Nations would operate under American direction.⁵⁵ On January 24, Andrei Vyshinsky, head of the Soviet delegation, formally responded to the Iranians; denying interference in Iran, Vyshinsky reiterated the Russian arguments that Soviet troops were permitted under the 1921 Soviet-Iran treaty and the 1942 Tripartite Treaty and, also, that the Azerbaijan movement represented popular aspirations.⁵⁶

Despite Russia's protests, the Security Council agreed to discuss the Iranian case. Behind the scenes, the Soviet government assured

⁵² *New York Times*, Jan. 21 and 23, 1946; *Washington Post*, Jan. 25, 1946.

⁵³ Trygve Lie, *In the Cause of Peace; Seven Years in the United Nations* (New York, 1954), 29-30.

⁵⁴ Ulam, 426-27; Lenczowski, 295.

⁵⁵ Kolko, 238.

⁵⁶ Vyshinsky to Security Council President, Jan. 24, 1946, *FRUS 1946*, VII, 309-11.

the United States that it was prepared to negotiate and suggested that the Security Council restrict itself to a statement approving of negotiations with the understanding that it would be informed of progress. Stettinius, head of the United States delegation opposed this approach, ". . . because it was of paramount importance at this moment to keep world confidence and world respect for the Security Council and I could not make any commitment that I would not insist upon some formal action. . . ." ⁵⁷ Accordingly the Russian approach was rejected and instead the United States introduced a resolution which retained the Iranian complaint on the agenda and called upon Iran and the Soviet Union to keep the Council informed of negotiations. As this resolution was adopted on January 30, it seemed to many observers that the United Nations had ". . . met successfully its first great test as the world's authority in international disputes." ⁵⁸

On February 19, Qavam arrived in Moscow at the head of the Iranian delegation to negotiate with the Soviets. During the following three weeks, Qavam met with Stalin twice and with Molotov four times, but progress was nil. The Soviets pressed for recognition of Azerbaijan's autonomy, a joint oil company for development of the northern provinces' resources, and retention of some troops for an indefinite period. ⁵⁹

In the meantime, the United States government waited anxiously to see if the Soviets would withdraw before March 2. During this interlude, several factors were shaping decisively the thinking of high American officials toward the Soviet Union. On February 9, Stalin delivered a forceful public address, stressing the incompatibility of communism and capitalism and implying the inevitability of future wars. Republican party criticism of Truman's "appeasement" policy mounted and was climaxed by Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg's February 27 speech vigorously demanding the adoption of a forthright, uncompromising policy. Finally, George Kennan's lengthy dispatch of February 22 analyzing Soviet postwar objectives provided an intellectual justification for such a policy. Following an appraisal of the Soviet government's belief in the innate antagonism between communism and capitalism, Kennan warned that

⁵⁷ Stettinius to Sec. State, Jan. 28, 1946, *ibid.*, 316-17.

⁵⁸ *New York Times*, Feb. 1, 1946; Memorandum of conversation by Charles B. Noyes (special assistant to Stettinius), ca. Jan. 30, 1946, *FRUS 1946*, VII, 322-24.

⁵⁹ Lenczowski, 295-96; *New York Times*, Feb. 9, 12, and 18, 1946; Feis, 81.

the Soviets constantly were seeking to increase their strength and influence. The chargé d'affaires wrote:

Whenever it is considered timely and promising, efforts will be made to advance official limits of Soviet power. For the moment, these efforts are restricted to certain neighboring points conceived of here as being of immediate strategic necessity, such as Northern Iran, Turkey, possibly Bornholm. However, other points may at any time come into question, if and as Soviet political power is extended to new areas. Thus a "friendly" Persian Government might be asked to grant Russia a port on the Persian Gulf.⁶⁰

Later in his dispatch, Kennan emphasized the Soviet use of local Communist parties, citing Iran as an example of where Communists were pressuring unfriendly governments. Finally, Kennan held that the success of the West depended on the cohesion and vigor it could muster against the Soviet challenge.⁶¹ The trend in American policy was evident in Byrnes' February 28 speech before the Overseas Press Club; having been reprimanded by Truman for his concessions at the Moscow Conference, Byrnes affirmed: ". . . we must make plain that the United States intends to defend the [United Nations] Charter. We will not and we cannot stand aloof if force or the threat of force is used contrary to the purposes and principles of the Charter."⁶²

Thus the United States was disinclined to accept any Soviet delay in withdrawing its forces. On March 2 *Izvestia* announced that troops were being withdrawn from northcentral and northeastern Iran, but other units would remain until the situation "clarified." Senator Tom Connally, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, set the tone of the American response: "I favor Russia's getting out of Iran with her army today, March 2. . . . We should take a position that we know is right and stand there. . . . We must meet the issues as they come and let the consequences be the result."⁶³

By March 5, a crisis situation prevailed. On that day, the United States protested to Moscow, holding that it could not remain indifferent to violations of the Tripartite Agreement and Declaration of Tehran, calling again for immediate troop withdrawals. The same day, Robert Rossow, who had replaced Ebling as the Consul at Tab-

⁶⁰ Kennan to Sec. State, Feb. 22, 1946, *FRUS 1946*, Vol. VI: *Eastern Europe, The Soviet Union* (Washington, 1969), 701-02; Gaddis, 290-304.

⁶¹ Kennan to Sec. State, Feb. 22, 1946, *FRUS 1946*, VI, 706-08.

⁶² *New York Times*, March 1, 1946.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, March 3, 1946; Feis, 81.

riz, sent an urgent cable to Washington reporting ominous Russian troop movements; some 500 trucks loaded with ammunition and supplies and twenty tanks were being deployed in the direction of Tehran, while two regiments of cavalry with batteries of artillery attached were moving toward the Turkish border. In addition, truck convoys loaded with Soviet troops had been arriving in Tabriz from the direction of the Soviet frontier.⁶⁴ Finally, it was also on March 5 that former Prime Minister Winston Churchill delivered his "iron curtain" address, which strongly influenced the development of American popular attitudes toward the Soviet Union. Churchill recounted the Soviet expansion of the previous year and warned that only military strength was respected by the Kremlin. The speech was generally regarded as representing the thinking of the Truman administration; indeed the president was aware in advance of the nature of Churchill's remarks and lent his tacit endorsement by introducing Churchill to the Fulton, Missouri, audience.⁶⁵

During the next few days, Byrnes and Murray prepared for a diplomatic showdown. As additional reports from Rossow indicated troop deployments toward Tehran and the Turkish and Iraqi frontiers, Byrnes carefully studied a map of Azerbaijan and concluded (according to the recollection of Henderson's assistant): "Now we'll have to give it to them with both barrels."⁶⁶ In a meeting on March 8 of high State Department officials, Acheson argued that while the United States should inform Moscow of its awareness of the troop movements, it should leave the Soviets the opportunity to withdraw gracefully. In accord with this approach, the Department sent another note to the Soviet government requesting an explanation of the troop deployments in northern Iran. But at the same time, Byrnes was determined to wage the issue publicly. Already the State Department had released the text of the March 5 protest to Moscow, and if the Soviets failed to respond satisfactorily to that note, Byrnes was prepared to raise the issue in the Security Council.⁶⁷

In Tehran, Murray encouraged the Shah and Qavam to renew

⁶⁴ Sec. State to Kennan, March 5, 1946, *FRUS 1946*, VII, 340-42; Rossow to Sec. State, March 5, 1946, *ibid.*, 340.

⁶⁵ Gaddis, *U.S. and Origins of the Cold War*, 307-09; Louis J. Halle, *The Cold War as History* (New York, 1967), 102-03.

⁶⁶ Memorandum on Events Relative to Azerbaijan Issue, March 1946, prepared by Edwin M. Wright, August 1965, *FRUS 1946*, VII, 346-48; Rossow to Sec. State, *ibid.*, 344-45.

⁶⁷ Sec. State to Kennan, March 8, 1946, *ibid.*, 348; *New York Times*, March 6, 1946.

their grievance in the Security Council. Having just returned from his fruitless negotiations in Moscow, Qavam met Murray on March 11 and reported that while the Soviets had defended the retention of troops and denied involvement in Azerbaijan politics, they had pressed most forcefully for the joint oil company. In response, the prime minister had maintained that a new Majlis would have to be elected before foreign oil negotiations could take place, but that elections were impossible as long as Soviet troops remained. Murray urged Qavam to stand firm and all but promised strong American support. During a meeting with Qavam on the 14th, Murray emphasized the necessity for Iran to speak in its own defense as long as it was free to act independently. Murray shared the fears of many observers in Tehran that a Soviet-inspired coup would soon be attempted. He warned Qavam that the Russians might occupy Tehran and drew parallels between rumored Soviet actions and Hitler's method of seizing power in European countries.⁶⁸

The American press reflected the official concern. A *New York Times* editorial posed the question asked by much of the American public: "What does Russia want?" After reviewing the increase of Soviet influence after the war, the editorial pointedly asked: "Where does the search for security end and where does expansion begin?"⁶⁹ Walter Lippmann had been endeavoring to resolve that question. During the early weeks of 1946, Lippmann called for a moderate approach toward the Soviet Union in the Middle East, based on a balance of power in the area, recognizing Russia's "legitimate" (but not exclusive) interests in the Balkans, Turkey, and Iran. Stalin's February 9 speech and the tensions in Iran, however, eroded Lippmann's hopes of Russian-American understanding. His March 12 article, titled "Black Week," warned that America and Russia had reached the point where it "may be easier to fail than succeed."⁷⁰

Yet to a government and public to whom "negotiations" had become synonymous with "appeasement," Lippmann's warnings had negligible influence. American officials were determined to force the Iranian issue in the Security Council. When Qavam expressed reluctance to file a complaint that would be regarded by the Soviets as an

⁶⁸ Murray to Sec. State, March 11, 1946, *FRUS 1946*, VII, 350-54; Murray to Sec. State, March 14, 1946, *ibid.*, 354-56; Lenczowski, 297-98.

⁶⁹ *New York Times*, March 14, 1946.

⁷⁰ *Toledo Blade*, March 12, 1946; Barton J. Bernstein, "Walter Lippmann and the Early Cold War," *Cold War Critics, Alternatives to American Foreign Policy in the Truman Years*, edited by Thomas G. Paterson (Chicago, 1971), 31-32.

unfriendly act, Murray again counseled that Iran's case would be weakened if it failed to stand on its own.⁷¹ On March 16, Byrnes delivered another forceful public address, which included a clear warning to the Soviets on the Iranian issue: "The United States is committed to support the Charter of the United Nations. Should the occasion arise, our military strength will be used to support the purposes and principles of the Charter."⁷² The next day Kennan cabled Washington, adding his opinion that the Soviets were preparing to force Iran within their sphere of influence:

. . . I consider it almost a foregone conclusion that Soviets must make some effort in immediate future to bring into power in Iran a regime prepared to accede to major Soviet demands, particularly continued maintenance of Soviet armed forces in Iran and granting of oil concessions. This effort will be made of course through subservient Iranian elements without direct responsibility of Soviet aid. Soviet forces in Iran will serve this scheme by sheer force of intimidation and if necessary by preventing any forceful interference with its execution.⁷³

On March 18, Ambassador Ala requested that the Iranian item be placed on the Security Council agenda when the council convened in New York a week later. Again, Secretary-General Lie believed that efforts at direct negotiation should be continued; he recalled:

I was disturbed by the inexcusable delay in the Soviet troop withdrawal. Nevertheless, I thought that a debate in the Security Council now would probably intensify rather than ease the dispute. Moreover, I felt that the U.S.S.R. could be persuaded to evacuate Iran, as it had evacuated Norway and the Danish island of Bornholm, if it could do so without too much embarrassment. Cynical as Soviet policy might be, it was unwise to assume that considerations of prestige, of "face," meant nothing to Moscow. If the Russians were hauled before the Security Council, I felt, they would strive to prove to the world that it was not their side that was in the wrong; rather than withdrawing, they might bend their energies to show they were justified in staying. On the other hand, there was a good chance of inducing them to evacuate, through sustained and serious private negotiation.⁷⁴

On March 19, Gromyko requested that the Security Council meeting be postponed from March 25 to April 10, on the grounds

⁷¹ Murray to Sec. State, March 15, 1946, *FRUS 1946*, VII, 356-58; Sec. State to Murray, March 15, 1946; *ibid.*, 360.

⁷² Jones, 54-55.

⁷³ Kennan to Sec. State, March 17, 1946, *FRUS 1946*, VII, 362-63.

⁷⁴ Lie, 74-75.

that negotiations were already in progress. A new Soviet ambassador, Ivan Sadchikov, had just arrived in Tehran and had begun discussions with Qavam. Both the American and British governments feared that the requested delay would only enable the Russians to achieve their goals in Iran. Thus Byrnes immediately informed Lie that when the Security Council convened, the United States would move that the Iranian matter be placed at the head of the agenda. On the 21st, newspapers reported Truman's firm opposition to Gromyko's request. This vigorous diplomacy was welcomed in the press, which continued to look upon the American position as saving the United Nations and as an overdue response to Russian aggressiveness.⁷⁵

As the United States was preparing for the Security Council showdown, the Iranian government again hesitated. By March 22, Sadchikov and Qavam appeared on the verge of a negotiated settlement, based on a Russian withdrawal in return for joint Iranian-Soviet exploitation of the northern oil resources. The earlier Soviet claim that it could retain troops indefinitely was now dropped; withdrawal would result almost certainly in the collapse of the Azerbaijan separatist movement. In a conversation with Murray, Qavam hinted at his inclination to accept this settlement; the Iranians still feared, he noted, the consequences of embarrassing the Soviets in the United Nations. Moreover, he was prepared to accept the legitimacy of the Soviet claim that Iran had discriminated against Russia in making its earlier foreign oil concessions. Qavam sought to allay American concerns by offering the United States a similar oil concession in Baluchistan. This resolution of the crisis satisfied Murray. As he cabled Washington, an Iranian-Soviet *quid pro quo* would reflect at least a partial United Nations victory since the Soviets would probably have pushed their earlier demands had not the United States stood firm in the United Nations.⁷⁶

On the 25th, the day the Security Council convened in New York, Tass announced that by agreement with the Iranian government, all Soviet troops would be withdrawn within five or six weeks, provided nothing unforeseen occurred. The "unforeseen" in the communiqué probably referred to Security Council consideration of the Iranian complaint. Indeed, the next day Gromyko requested that, in view of the accord, the issue be withdrawn from the agenda. And that same

⁷⁵ *New York Times*, March 18-22, 1946; *Washington Star*, March 21, 1946.

⁷⁶ Murray to Sec. State, March 22, 1946, *FRUS 1946*, VII, 369-71; Murray to Sec. State, March 23, 1946, *ibid.*, 373-75.

day, United Press correspondents received assurances from Stalin that an agreement had been reached.

But in the Security Council, Secretary Byrnes, heading the American delegation and thus dramatizing the importance which the United States attached to this issue, demanded that Gromyko present evidence of Iranian acceptance of an agreement with the Soviet Union. On the 27th, the Council voted, nine to two, to accept the Iranian item, whereupon Gromyko walked out of the Council chamber.⁷⁷

While forcing the question, Byrnes must have been aware that the Iranians had not accepted all of the Soviet terms. On March 25, Murray cabled Washington that Qavam informed him that Sadchikov had just presented three notes, promising troop withdrawals within six weeks "if nothing happens," proposing a joint oil company to develop the northern reserves, and offering intercession between the Tehran government and Azerbaijan. Qavam indicated his willingness to accept the first two notes although with some modifications. But the Prime Minister insisted on dealing directly with the Azerbaijan government. Two days later as the Security Council was denying the Russian postponement request, Murray cabled that Qavam was requesting: (1) that the Soviets eliminate the conditions on withdrawing their forces; (2) that the oil company be constituted on an equal basis (rather than the fifty-one percent Russian controlling interest proposed by Sadchikov); (3) that the area of the company's exploitation not include areas contiguous to Iraq and Turkey; (4) that land would constitute the Iranian share of the capital, with the Soviets providing technical personnel and equipment.⁷⁸ While a settlement had not been reached as the Soviets claimed, likewise the two governments were close to agreement. Most important, the Soviets had publicly committed themselves to withdrawal, which even though conditional would have been difficult, in light of world attention, to reverse. The Western indignation in the United Nations had likely been instrumental in the Soviet decision.⁷⁹

Given these developments, the American determination to insist on further public diplomacy seems unnecessary. To the American

⁷⁷ Kennan to Sec. State, March 25, 1946, *ibid.*, 378-79; Statement by Byrnes before Security Council, March 26, 1946, *ibid.*, 382-83; Feis, 83-84; Kolko, 240; Gaddis, 311-12.

⁷⁸ Murray to Sec. State, March 25, 1946, *FRUS 1946*, VII, 379-80; Murray to Sec. State, March 27, 1946, *ibid.*, 385-87.

⁷⁹ Ulam, 427.

leaders, however, the issues in Iran had become blurred with the need to sustain the United Nations; while justifying his position in the Security Council on the 27th, Byrnes wrote to Acheson of his fear that "the United Nations will die in its infancy of inefficiency and ineffectiveness."⁸⁰ The American press enthusiastically endorsed the American support of Iran's case in the United Nations.⁸¹

On March 29, the Security Council, with Gromyko still absent, adopted Byrnes' proposal calling on Iran and the Soviet Union to report by April 3 on the progress of negotiations. Although the resolution was denounced in the Soviet press, the Soviet government on April 3 informed the Council that negotiations had produced an understanding on troop withdrawals. Ala's report, however, maintained that the negotiations had not yet produced positive results. Accordingly, the Security Council adopted an American resolution which accepted the Soviet assurances on withdrawal and planned to review the case on May 6.⁸²

While the Council thus retained its cognizance of the issue, that same day Qavam and Sadchikov reached agreement by which: (1) the Soviets promised unconditionally to withdraw all troops by May 6; (2) a joint Irano-Soviet oil company, with the Soviets holding a majority interest, would be established, subject to approval of the Majlis; (3) Azerbaijan was recognized as an internal Iranian affair, with the Iranian government responsible for reaching peaceful accord with Azerbaijan and implementing necessary reform. On balance, the agreement represented a reasonable compromise, with the Soviets achieving their oil objective and the Iranians gaining their demands on withdrawal and Azerbaijan.⁸³

Also on April 4, Walter Bedell Smith, the new ambassador to Moscow, met with Stalin and Molotov, thus providing a rare opportunity to discuss the situation with the top Soviet leaders. Reflecting the dominant American mood, Smith began the conversation by asking bluntly: What did the Soviets want? How far were the Soviets going? In a lengthy reply, Stalin spoke specifically about Iran. The premier candidly acknowledged that pressure had been exerted to force the removal of Hakimi, who had been un-

⁸⁰ Byrnes to Acheson, March 27, 1946, *FRUS 1946*, VII, 389-90.

⁸¹ *New York Times*, March 26-April 1, 1946.

⁸² *Ibid.*, March 30, 1946; Feis, 85.

⁸³ *New York Times*, April 5, 1946; Lenczowski, 299-300; Feis, 85-86; Murray to Sec. State, April 4, 1946, *FRUS 1946*, VII, 405-07; Stettinius to Sec. State, April 4, 1946, *ibid.*, 407-09.

friendly to the Soviet Union, especially Russian oil interests. Stalin was bitter over the American opposition to the Soviet request for a United Nations postponement. Yet Stalin assured Smith that the promise to withdraw would be fulfilled.⁸⁴

Given the Soviet resentment over the United Nations actions, it was not surprising that Gromyko, in a letter of April 6 to the Security Council president, requested that the Iranian item be withdrawn from the agenda. Byrnes, however, took the lead against the Russian request, and the Council again supported the American position.⁸⁵

This determination to retain the issue resulted in part from fear that the Soviets still planned to remain in northern Iran. From Tabriz, Rossow informed the State Department that withdrawal had not yet begun; moreover, he questioned whether the Soviets intended to leave before May 6. Aside from these considerations, the hard line in the United Nations was still paying important domestic political benefits. Throughout the first week of April, editorials consistently praised the American position as vindicating the United Nations; the title of one *New York Times* editorial summarized public sentiment: "This was the Purpose." In the Senate, Connally, Warren Austin, and others spoke of the triumph of United Nations principles. Senator Claude Pepper of Florida expressed the only criticisms, arguing that the United States was becoming the guarantor of British imperialism. Pepper questioned why Byrnes was not also demanding the withdrawal of British troops from other Middle Eastern countries and the recognition of Indonesia's self-determination.⁸⁶

The Iranian government, however, threatened to undercut the American stand. On April 11, Qavam informed Murray that, under pressure from Sadchikov, he was prepared to request also that the Iranian item be withdrawn from the Security Council agenda. In response, Washington urged Tehran to stand firm, arguing that withdrawal of the item would retard the development of the United Nations into a strong peacekeeping agency. Reluctant to antagonize either the Americans or Russians, Qavam at first temporized. But on April 15, the day Gromyko renewed his demands in the Security

⁸⁴ Smith to Sec. State, April 5, 1946, *FRUS 1946*, VI, 732-76; Walter Bedell Smith, *My Three Years in Moscow* (Philadelphia, 1950), 50-54.

⁸⁵ *New York Times*, April 7-9, 1946; Stettinius to Sec. State, April 8, 1946, *FRUS 1946*, VII, 410-11.

⁸⁶ Rossow to Sec. State, April 4, 1946, *ibid.*, 404-05; *New York Times*, April 4-9, 1946.

Council, Qavam, under renewed pressure from Sadchikov, finally agreed to request removal of the item from the Council's agenda.⁸⁷

Despite the Iranian request, the United States insisted on Security Council retention of the issue. On the 16th, Stettinius argued that the Council had power to continue the question since the principal factor in the Iranian complaint was the presence of Soviet forces still in northern Iran. Indeed that military presence, Stettinius suggested, influenced the Iranian withdrawal request. The American position antagonized not only Gromyko, but Lie as well. While acknowledging that Gromyko's criticisms of the Security Council action had frequently been unfair, Lie believed that the Council was obliged to remove the complaint; should further difficulties ensue, Lie reasoned, the issue could be raised again.⁸⁸

In the following days, Soviet units withdrew from most of northern Iran. On May 6, the Tabriz consul cabled that reliable sources indicated a withdrawal from Azerbaijan except for a couple of frontier towns. In accord with the April 3 resolution, Ala informed Lie that the Soviets had withdrawn from all provinces except Azerbaijan on which the information was incomplete. Stettinius proposed that the Council continue the issue until May 20 when the Iranian government should present a formal report on the withdrawal; with Gromyko absent, the Council quickly accepted this recommendation.⁸⁹

During the interim, Qavam and Ala followed independent courses, as the premier sought to avoid further antagonism of the Russians while the ambassador, with American encouragement, worked for United Nations support against Soviet interference. In a letter to the Security Council president, Ala on May 20 charged that the Soviets were interfering in Iran's internal affairs and that it had been impossible for Tehran authorities to determine whether the Russians had evacuated Azerbaijan. The next day, however, Qavam instructed Ala to report that a government inspection commission

⁸⁷ Murray to Sec. State, April 11, 1946, *FRUS 1946*, VII, 417; Sec. State to Murray, April 12, 1946, *ibid.*, 419-20; Murray to Sec. State, April 16, 1946, *ibid.*, 426-27.

⁸⁸ Stettinius to Sec. State, April 16, 1946, *ibid.*, 427-31; *New York Times*, April 17-20, 1946; Lie, 79-86; Andrew W. Cordier and Walter Foote (eds.), *Public Papers of the Secretaries-General of the United Nations: Trygve Lie, 1946-1953* (New York, 1969), 39-43.

⁸⁹ Rossow to Sec. State, May 6, 1946, *FRUS 1946*, VII, 449, footnote 18; Stettinius to Sec. State, *ibid.*, 450-51; Acheson to Stettinius, May 7, 1946, *ibid.*, 452-53.

confirmed the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Azerbaijan.⁹⁰ Ala and Stettinius, however, declined to accept the report from Tehran. The American ambassador termed the report incomplete and recommended that the Council not drop the issue. In an impassioned speech before the Council, Ala pleaded for recognition of Soviet interference. His performance impressed Stettinius, who wrote that ". . . Ala had made up his mind before the meeting that this was his last chance to speak out and that he could serve his country by speaking today. . . . Ala has intentionally taken his political life in his hands by speaking out so courageously today."⁹¹ Ala's action violated his instructions and resulted in Soviet protests to Qavam, who ordered Ala to withdraw his May 20 letter. The new ambassador to Iran, George V. Allen, urged that the United States drop the question in view of the lack of substantive evidence of Soviet interference and Qavam's unwillingness to pursue the issue.⁹²

Following the withdrawal of Soviet troops and of the Iranian complaint, the public phase of the Iranian crisis ended. Its legacy, however, affected two developments which enabled the United States to solidify its position in Iran.

First, the Iranian government, with strong American backing, finally asserted its dominance over Azerbaijan. For several months after the troop withdrawal, Qavam followed a conciliatory policy which seemed to invite continued Soviet influence in Azerbaijan. In June, an agreement between the Tehran government and Peeshavari granted far-reaching concessions to the autonomy movement. In August, Qavam added Tudeh party members to his cabinet. Communist-inspired strikes and riots disrupted the operations of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company.⁹³

Throughout this period, American officials were concerned that Iran might still fall under Soviet influence. Allen encouraged the Shah to stand firm and warned Qavam of adverse American reaction to his pro-Russian policy. In Washington, Ala continued his independent course; he told Byrnes that Qavam would be unable to resist Soviet pressures. Rossow reported from Tabriz that Soviet agents were effectively controlling Azerbaijan's politics.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Ambassador in Iran (Allen) to Sec. State, May 21, 1946, *ibid.*, 469; *New York Times*, May 21-23, 1946.

⁹¹ Stettinius to Sec. State, May 22, 1946, *FRUS 1946*, VII, 476, note 45; Sec. State to Stettinius, May 21, 1946, *ibid.*, 471-72.

⁹² Allen to Sec. State, May 25, 1946, *ibid.*, 484-86.

⁹³ Lenczowski, 300-06.

⁹⁴ Memorandum of Conversation prepared by office of Sec. State, June 1, 1946,

By late September, Qavam, facing strong criticisms at home, inclined toward a firm policy. He now sought assurances of American financial and military assistance. Byrnes quickly accepted a Near Eastern Affairs Division proposal to provide a development loan through the Export-Import Bank and military equipment necessary for the preservation of internal stability. At the same time, the United States urged Qavam to delay the holding of parliamentary elections until the government exercised full control of all Iran; since the Soviet oil concession could be confirmed only by a newly elected Majlis, this tactic would force Moscow to decide between continued support of Azerbaijan and its oil interests. An analysis by the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the strategic importance of Iran reinforced the State Department's position. According to the Joint Chiefs, the oil resources of Iran would be vital to the Soviets in any major war; moreover, Soviet domination of any part of Iran could threaten the Western oil interests in Saudi Arabia and Iraq. With this backing of Washington, Qavam decided, by early November, to occupy Azerbaijan, by force if necessary. Allen encouraged this step, bringing to Qavam's attention the findings of the American Embassy that the people of Azerbaijan, disillusioned by the Peeshavari government, would welcome Iranian control.⁹⁵

As Qavam prepared to dispatch an Iranian army unit into Azerbaijan, the Soviet Union repeatedly warned that this would be considered an unfriendly act. Again Allen, on instructions from Washington, urged Qavam to carry through and to inform the Security Council of Iran's intention to assert its sovereignty in Azerbaijan.⁹⁶ On December 11, an Iranian force entered Tabriz and the Peeshavari government quickly collapsed. Indeed the Iranians were enthusiastically welcomed by the people of Azerbaijan, who strongly preferred domination by Tehran rather than by Moscow. The Soviet willingness to forego its influence in Azerbaijan probably resulted from several factors, including the realization that the sentiment for autonomy had been exaggerated and that the oil concession remained the more desirable long-term Soviet objective.⁹⁷ But Ameri-

FRUS 1946, VII, 491-93; Rossow to Sec. State, June 5, 1946, *ibid.*, 494-95; Allen to Sec. State, June 10, 1946, *ibid.*, 496-97.

⁹⁵ Allen to Sec. State, Nov. 8, 1946, *ibid.*, 545; Sec. State to Acheson, Oct. 3, 1946; *ibid.*, 521; Memorandum by Henderson to Acheson, Oct. 18, 1946, *ibid.*, 533-36; Memorandum by Coordinating Committee of State, War, Navy Departments to Maj. Gen. John Hilldring, Oct. 12, 1946, *ibid.*, 529-32.

⁹⁶ Acheson to Allen, Dec. 2, 1946, *ibid.*, 551-52; Allen to Sec. State, Dec. 11, 1946, *ibid.*, 559-60.

⁹⁷ Consul at Tabriz (Sutton) to Sec. State, Dec. 12, 1946, *ibid.*, 661-62; Cottam,

can officials were equally correct when they attributed the Soviet decision to an unwillingness to confront again strong opposition in the United Nations. Ambassador Smith wrote from Moscow on the 27th: "Had the issue been solely between [the] U.S.S.R. and Iran, [the] Soviet Army might now be in Zenjan. But because of Qavam's appeal [the] issue threatened to become [the] concern of the United Nations with [the] U.S.A. actively interested in it. It was these considerations which presumably gave [the] Kremlin pause. Iran is no stronger than [the] U.N. and [the] U.N., in the last analysis, is no stronger than [the] U.S.A."⁹⁸

The second postcrisis development resulted from the Iranian assertion of authority in Azerbaijan. With the way now cleared for elections, the Majlis convened in July 1947. As it considered the Soviet-Iranian oil agreement, the United States gave its support to those opposing ratification. In a speech before the Irano-American Cultural Relations Society, Allen promised American support should rejection result in difficulties with the Soviet Union:

The United States has no proper concern with proposals of a commercial or any other nature made to Iran by any foreign government as long as those proposals are advanced solely on their merits, to stand or fall on their value to Iran. We and every other nation of the world, however, do become concerned when such proposals are accompanied by threats of bitter enmity or by a statement that it would be dangerous for Iran to refuse. . . . Patriotic Iranians, when considering matters affecting their national interest, may therefore rest assured that the American people will support fully their freedom to make their own choice.⁹⁹

Allen's initiative proved important, if not decisive, in the Majlis' decision to reject the oil agreement.¹⁰⁰ Thus the basic Soviet objective in Iran since the 1944 oil controversy had been lost. In the struggle for power in Iran, the United States was victorious.

The success of the United States during the Iranian crisis and its aftermath emboldened its leaders to enforce the "get tough" line elsewhere. The essentials of the "containment" policy, formally enunciated in the spring of 1947, had certainly crystallized during the Iranian showdown. As Lippmann predicted early in the crisis,

126-29; Christopher Sykes, "Russia and Azerbaijan," *Soundings* (Feb., 1947), 47-52. Sykes was a British correspondent who accompanied Iranian forces into Azerbaijan.

⁹⁸ Smith to Sec. State, *FRUS* 1946, VII, 566-67.

⁹⁹ *New York Times*, Sept. 12, 1947.

¹⁰⁰ Lenczowski, 311.

the two powers had indeed reached the point where it was easier to fail than to succeed.¹⁰¹

This study underscores the complexities of the motivations behind the American and Soviet positions in one of the first major conflicts of the cold war. While Russian policy reflected traditional objectives, it failed to comprehend the American response to bullying the Tehran government and leaving troops in northern Iran. While the importance of commercial and economic objectives cannot be discounted, the dominant factor shaping American policy was that Soviet actions were seen against the background of a vivid memory of Munich. Americans thus regarded their position on Iran as a test of Western firmness and especially as a means of demonstrating the workability of the international peace-keeping system centered in the United Nations. Obviously coincidence was an important element in the shaping of American policy: the Iranian situation intensified just at the moment that disenchantment with the Soviet Union became part of the American consensus and when the convening of the United Nations presented an opportunity to prove the effectiveness of collective action to prevent war.

¹⁰¹ *Toledo Blade*, March 12, 1946.