

US POLICY TOWARDS THE IRANIAN CRISIS OF 1945-1946

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Abstract

Since the last days of the World War II (1939-1945) Iran became a hotbed of the international diplomacy due to the Azerbaijan or Iranian crisis of 1945-1946. The crisis originated in the Soviet threat to Iran's national sovereignty and territorial integrity because of the Soviet delay in evacuation from Iranian territory. During World War II the Anglo-Soviet Allied powers occupied Iran on August 25, 1941, and since then the Soviet troops had been stationed in northern Iranian provinces while the British took control of southern Iran. The Anglo-Russian powers pledged to withdraw their forces from Iran six months after the end of the war. However, taking advantage of war-time and post-war time disorders in Iran the Soviet Union made efforts to instigate the people of Azerbaijan and Kurdistan to press demands for autonomy. Thus, Azerbaijan and Kurdistan became Soviet satellites. The Soviets then took firm position in these Iranian territories and they were quite unwilling to withdraw their troops from Iranian territory for economic, geo-strategic and military reasons. The Iranian government hastened to send its forces to restore control over those provinces, but failed due to Soviet threat. When this resulted in a crisis, Iran turned to the US to resolve it. The crisis was then resolved by the proactive US policy. The timely intervention of the US and an oil agreement between Tehran and Moscow put an end to the crisis. This article attempts to present a comprehensive analysis of the nature and course of this Iranian crisis of 1945-46 and the US policy towards it.

Key-words: Iran, Crisis, US, Azerbaijan, Cold War, the Soviet Union, UNSC.

Introduction

The Iranian crisis of 1945-1946, also known as the Azerbaijan crisis originated by the Soviet threat to Iran's national sovereignty and territorial integrity in the wake of the World War II (1939-1945) due to the Soviet

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delay in evacuation from Iranian territory, occupies an important place not only in modern Iranian history but also in the history of the Cold War.¹ During the World War II the Anglo-Soviet Allied powers occupied Iran on August 25, 1941, and since then the Soviet troops had been stationed in northern Iranian provinces while the British took control of southern Iran. The Soviet Union seized the opportunity of post-World War II disorders in Iran and made efforts to instigate the people of Azerbaijan and Kurdistan to press demand for autonomy. When the Iranian government hastened to send its forces to restore control over those provinces, Soviet troops prevented Iranian troops from entering. These finally led to the establishment of the Soviet backed Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan and the Kurdish People's Republic of Mahabad in December 1945. Iran, with US encouragement filed a complaint at the newly founded United Nations Security Council (hereafter UNSC) against the Soviet Union for its interference in Azerbaijan. In the subsequent meetings of the UNSC the United States put tremendous pressure on the Soviet Union in an attempt to force the Russians to evacuate their troops from northern Iran. Under US pressure and after an oil agreement between Tehran and Moscow the Soviet Union finally withdrew its troops from Iran. This article strives to present a comprehensive analysis of the nature and course of the Iranian crisis of 1945-46 and the US policy towards it. The article also looks into the Iranian attitude towards the US after the end of the crisis.

Background of the Iranian Crisis of 1945-1946: The Soviet Objectives in Iran

Historians are in agreement that the Iranian crisis of 1945-46 was the first real crisis of the Cold War.² The crisis began in 1945 with the Soviet-instigated rebellion of the Azeris and Kurds against the Iranian government with a view to establishing independent regimes for them in general, and to bringing the provinces of Azerbaijan and Kurdistan into the Soviet sphere of influence in particular. A scholar by the name of Kristen Blake has stated: "Armed by the Soviets, the Azeris and the Kurds rebelled against the Iranian government and established their own autonomous regimes inside Azerbaijan; this became known as the Iranian Crisis of 1945-46."³ The background of this episode, however, dates back to the Soviet occupation of much of north-western Iran in 1941 with other Allied partner Britain during the World War II and from that time the Soviet Union was one of the dominating forces in Iran. The Allied occupation of

Iran in 1941 followed by the Tripartite Treaty of Alliance in January 1942, which was concluded between Iran, Great Britain and the Soviet Union. Among the stipulations of this agreement was the foreign military forces would be pulled out from Iran six months after the end of the war. This was reconfirmed in the Tehran Conference of 1943, attended by Three-Bigs: Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of Great Britain, Joseph Stalin, Prime Minister of the Soviet Union and Franklin D. Roosevelt, the President of the United States of America.

However, once the victory in the World War II became clear, the Soviet Union showed no sign of withdrawing its troops from northern Iran. In fact, the Soviet Union had several objectives in mind regarding Iran. Since 1944, taking the advantage of the turmoil of the ongoing World War II, the Soviet Union began to pressure Iran for oil concessions in the Soviet-occupied territory to balance British oil concessions (that Iran granted in 1901) in the south. The Soviet pressure came following the Iranian gesture to invite American oil companies to involve its oil sector. Iran's Shah invited some American oil companies including Standard Oil of New Jersey, Sinclair, and Standard-Vacuum to Iran to grant oil concessions. The Royal Dutch-Shell sent two London representatives to Iran in November 1943 to seek the similar concession that US Standard was after. The Soviet Union got furious and demanded a concession from Iran by sending its Assistant Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Sergei Ivanovich Kavtaradze to Tehran in September 1944. At this point, the Iranian government with the open encouragement of the British and American governments refused even to discuss oil concessions with the Soviet delegate Kavtaradze.⁴ Apprehending a possible future crisis and in the face of nationalist opposition led by Majlis member Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq, the Iranian government announced on October 16, 1944, that it would not negotiate any concession with foreign powers during the war years. In an instant reaction, the US ambassador in Iran Leland B. Morris stated that the US government recognized the sovereign right of Iran to refuse the granting of oil concessions and did not reproach the Iranian government on that account.⁵ However, the Iranian action invited strong Soviet criticism.

When the Soviet pressure and demand for a oil concession proved unsuccessful the Soviets resorted to a ploy. They began to instigate unrest among ethnic groups in their occupied area in Iran. Even they prevented

the Iranian army from putting down the uprisings there. They then undertook efforts to undermine and subvert the pro-western Shah of Iran first by supporting the Tudeh party in the capital, and then by fostering the creation of republics in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan.⁶ Such Soviet attitude raises a simple question: what are the objectives of the Soviet Union in Iran for which it was behaving as unpredictable Allied partner during the World War II? According to a Cold War historian, the strategic importance of Azerbaijan led the Soviet Union to interfere in Iranian affair. Iran was surrounded most part of her territory (1200 miles of frontier) by the Soviet Union. Straddled by Turkey to the west and the Caspian Sea to the east, Azerbaijan's northern border is shared exclusively with the Soviet Union. In the past, this province always became a frontline victim of successive Turkish and Russian invasion of Iran. Apart from this strategic position, Azerbaijan was an important trade centre and immense source of agricultural products. Industrially the province was also significant. In 1941, the province alone had eighteen factories, including five textile mills. These agricultural and industrial facilities contributed a lot to the aggressive Soviet behavior in Iran during and after the World War II.⁷

Other scholars including James A. Bill and J. P. Miglietta argue that when the World War II came to an end, the Soviet Union showed its volt-face position on its earlier pledges of 1942 and 1943 and refused to withdraw its troops from Iran for the following reasons. First, at the end of the war the Soviet Union became anxious about the security of its oil fields in Baku on the Caspian Sea. Particularly, the country got increasingly alarmed at the unpredictable policies of the various unstable Iranian governments that seemed linked to the British and Americans. Second, the Soviet Union wanted to assist the communist groups and separatist movements within Iran and thus helped these forces to occupy central government from northern Iran. Third, the Soviet Union had desire to get a similar oil concession in the north to what the British received in the south. Fourth, the Soviet Union expected to use the leverage of the occupation in order to gain more general political and economic concession from Iran. Finally, the Soviet Union wanted to use Iran as a satellite or stepping stone to spread communism in the whole Middle East region.⁸ Other Soviet intentions in Iran were: a reversion to the Imperialist and expansionist Tsarist policy, the complete eradication of Anglo-US influence in Iran and the establishment of a “friendly” government in Tehran, closer proximity to British strategic positions in the Middle East in case of possible

contingencies and gaining a direct access to the much desired warm-water ports in the Persian Gulf.⁹



Kurdish Republic of Mahabad and Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan in 1945-1946

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran_crisis_of_1946

In view of these objectives, the Soviet army provided protection to the Tudeh party in Azerbaijan which was now renovated and renamed the Democratic party. The party demanded for autonomy in the region. By November the Democrats were in complete control and on December 12, 1945 the newly elected assembly in Tabriz proclaimed the Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan. Jafar Pishevari, a communist agent and an Iranian Bolshevik who had spent many years in the Soviet Union, was declared prime minister while a “people’s army” supplied by the Russian was formed and a police state began to operate. In line with the Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan, a Kurdish People’s Republic or ‘Kurdish People’s Government of Mahabad’ was set up with its capital at Mahabad on December 15, 1945 and Qazi Muhammad became its president.¹⁰ Thus the two Soviet satellite regimes came into being and with them the separation

of the whole province of Azerbaijan from the control of Tehran authorities seemed complete. This is how the Iranian or the Azerbaijan crisis began. In the opinion of a Cold War historian named Louise L'estrangere Fawcett, the Iranian crisis of 1945-46 was a reactionary development of the Soviet Union to the failure of its oil mission of 1944 in Iran. In his book entitled *Iran and the Cold War: The Azerbaijan Crisis of 1946* he aptly remarks that the oil crisis of 1944 had an important bearing on the Iranian crisis of 1945-46 since the Soviet failure to obtain an oil concession led it to use its position in Azerbaijan as a means of placing future pressure on the government in Iran.¹¹

Iran Turns to the US to Resolve the Crisis

Though Iran protested the Soviet actions, however, the new independent status of Azerbaijan and Mahabad (Kurdistan) was indeed an unwelcome development for the Iranian government. At one point it was feared that Iran might risk losing its territorial integrity. Apprehending the Azerbaijan crisis might engulf the whole Iran, the central government first placed Tehran under the martial law and then on November 19, 1945, it ordered Iranian forces to head to Azerbaijan to restore the central authority there. But the Soviet troops stopped the Iranian forces at Sharifabad, four miles east of Qazvin. Nay, the Soviet troops threatened the Iranian forces of dire consequences if they proceeded. In face of such Soviet threat turning to the US was the only way out for Iran. However, the point here is why Iran looked to the US at this critical juncture. After the World War II Britain emerged as an exhausted power, a power which was unable to meet the Soviet challenges. Britain remained content to let the US assume the leading role in world affairs. For this practical reason, this moment Iran's only hope lay with the US.¹² Additionally, given the century-old anti-British mentality of the Iranian authority they always looked to the US to involve the country in Iranian affairs. Following Anglo-Russian occupation of Iran in August 1941 the involvement of US in the Tehran conference increased the Iranian hope while in the Allied conferences from February of 1945 Iran pursued troops withdrawal issue with US assistance. Now, as the issue rose to a crisis point with the probability of separating Azerbaijan because of Soviet machinations, Iranian authority turned to the US for help and the American leaders became convinced of the need to back Iran's resistance. Thus the Iranian crisis fell to the US to solve.¹³

US Goals and Initial Appeasement Policy in the Iranian Crisis

According to Louise L'estrangé Fawcett, oil, the desire for an Iranian concession and the defence of its oil interests in the region were key elements of the US in Iran and in the Iranian crisis. Though oil was vital in that policy making, but this issue was not a sufficient single explanation for the US decision to take on Iran during the Iranian crisis. The protection of existing and future commercial interests in the Middle East region was also another important consideration in US policy making in Iran. The US government wanted to end the Anglo-Soviet competition in Iran in an effort to expand US economic influence through seeking oil concession, trade and investment. In fact, in addition to oil concession, an awareness of Iran's strategic importance coupled with the US desire to maintain a balance of power in the region at a time when Britain's leadership was waning. Throughout the war period the US also seemed concern about other important issues including the growing US interests in Iran, upholding of Atlantic Charter principles there, intentions of its Allies and the evident weak and fragile government of Iran. Particularly, the US felt ardently that Iran was badly in need of protection from both Soviet and British imperialism. Due to war efforts the US paid little attention to the Soviet activities in northern Iran between 1941 and 1944 and it maintained a good relationship with its wartime ally as long as the war lasted. However, as the war was approaching to an end, the Soviet activities brought a qualitative change in the US thinking. The US started thinking about Iran and its future. The oil crisis of 1944 and subsequent events helped the US to redefine its position with regard to the Soviet Union. The US began to think that its main enemy in Iran was none but the Soviet Union. Finally, the US considered the Soviet actions in Azerbaijan as a threat to its goals¹⁴ and started to formulate future policies and actions to break communist influence in Iran with a view to defining Iran as key to its strategy of containment of the Soviet Union.¹⁵

As part of these policies, the US was seen to adopt appeasement policy towards the Soviet Union at the initial phase of the Iranian crisis.¹⁶ In response to the advice sought on November 20, 1945, by the Iranian attaché in Washington about the Soviet barring of Iranian forces near Qazvin, on November 23, 1945, the US government instructed its Ambassador Averell Harriman to deliver a note to the Soviet government in which the US explicitly denied that the Soviet Union had the right under

Tripartite Treaty to restrict the Iranian forces. On November 24, 1945, the US and British governments jointly also proposed to the Soviet Union that all Allied troops be withdrawn from Iran by January 1, 1946. The Soviet Union rejected the proposal and reiterated its intention of evacuating by March 2, 1946 in accordance with the tripartite treaty.¹⁷ Earlier, following the Japanese surrender on September 2, 1945, the Allied powers also agreed that their troops would be withdrawn from Iran before March 2, 1946. Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Byrnes met with the Soviet leader Stalin on December 19, 1945 to discuss the Iranian crisis. Byrnes first reminded Stalin of the Allied pledge to respect Iran's sovereignty which the Big Three made in 1943 and warned that if the crisis persisted then the Iranian government would file a complaint against the Soviet Union at the UNSC. Stalin argued that the Soviet Union was not interfering in Iranian affairs and the Soviet troops prevented Iranian forces for the reason that Iranian forces could cross over into Soviet Azerbaijan and sabotage the Balkan oil fields. He also said that the Russo-Persian Treaty of 1921 had given the Soviet Union the right to send its troops in Iran when the Soviet felt its security was threatened. Stalin finally concluded stating that it was up to the Soviet Union to decide when it would evacuate its troops from Iran.¹⁸

Despite this Soviet position, the US still hoped that the Soviet Union would respect the March 2, 1946 deadline. At the same time, the US noticed with great alarm that the Soviet Union was in no rush to evacuate its troops from Iran and showed a complete reluctance to discuss troop withdrawal at Allied conferences at Yalta in February 1945, Potsdam in July 1945, London in September 1945 and Moscow in December 1945. Noticing the Soviet reluctance to keep the promise of evacuating its troops from Iranian provinces of Azerbaijan and Kurdistan, the State Department on December 11, 1945 concluded that such division of Iran and Soviet influence would ultimately baffle the US economic and strategic aims in the area.¹⁹ Amidst this assessment of Soviet influence in Iran the US took the initiative and pulled out all its troops on January 1, 1946, however, the British and the Soviet Union showed no sign of evacuate their forces from Iran.

Under such circumstances, with US and British active encouragement the Iranian government lodged a formal complaint against the Soviet Union in the UNSC on January 19, 1946 for interfering in Azerbaijan.²⁰ Thus the Azerbaijan crisis was the first major instance of Soviet

obstruction of Iranian independence which the new world assembly encountered. The Iranian negotiating team led by Sayyid Hasan Taqizadeh attended the UN session and asked the Security Council to review Iran's case and recommend measures to settle it.²¹ The head of the Soviet negotiating team in the UNSC Andrei Vyshinsky not only rejected Iran's accusations but also argued that the Soviets had a right to maintain their troops on the Iranian soil according to the terms of the Russo-Persian Treaty of 1921 and the Tripartite Treaty of 1942. He stated that the Soviet troops were not involved with the ongoing crisis in Azerbaijan; rather the Soviet Union was facing negative propaganda from the Iranian government. The Security Council, after much heated debate, decided to refer the matter to Iran and the Soviet Union for direct negotiation and directed both parties to keep the council informed on the result. Meanwhile, the Iranian Prime Minister Qavam al-Saltana (Ahmad Qavam, hereinafter Qavam) met with the US ambassador to Iran Wallace Murray who promised him of US support for Iran and told him to remain strong and not to yield to any Soviet pressure. As the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union was taking a heated shape over the Iranian crisis, Qavam, a very keen diplomat and a far-sighted politician, went to Moscow on February 19, 1946 to make an agreement with the Russians. During his two weeks stay in Moscow he met with both Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov and Stalin himself. It soon became clear that the Soviets had no intention of withdrawing their troops from Iran by the agreed date on March 2 of 1946. The March 2 deadline came and went while Qavam was in Moscow, however, the Soviet troops remained on Iranian soil. Qavam only protested and returned to Tehran.

In Tehran Qavam met again with Murray met again on March 14, 1946. Murray strongly supported Iran's right to defend itself. He also warned Qavam of possible Tudeh coup in Iran that could subsequently lead to the occupation of Tehran by the Soviet forces. Later on, the Soviet charge d'affairs in Iran met with Qavam and warned him of serious consequences if Iran made any further complaint to the UNSC. As the Soviet pressure on Qavam mounted, he sent one of his advisers to Murray for further advice. Murray notified the Secretary of State Byrnes and sought advice. In response, Byrnes told Murray that Qavam had to file an appeal with the Security Council. However, he did not forget to reassure Qavam of continuous US support for Iran. The Soviet Union continued to put pressure on Iran. Ivan Sadchikov, the new Soviet ambassador to Iran

handed over three official letters to Iranian Prime Minister Qavam from his government on March 24, 1946, only a day before the Azerbaijan issue was scheduled to discuss in the UNSC. The first letter indicated that the Soviet forces would be withdrawn from Iranian territory within six weeks. Through the second letter the Soviet Union proposed the establishment of an Iranian-Soviet oil company, while through the third letter the Soviet government offered Iran to settle the Azerbaijan crisis through negotiations with Pishivari. The first two letters appeared acceptable to Qavam, but he rejected the third on the ground that the Azerbaijan crisis was an internal case of Iran and had to be settled by the Iranian government itself. However, Qavam waited for the outcome of the discussion of the UNSC that was to take place on March 1946.

US Moves towards Tough Policy

Meanwhile, with some hesitation the British followed the suit and evacuated its forces by March 2, 1946, but the Soviet Union did not. Qavam was in Moscow when the deadline of Allied troops withdrawal expired. The Soviets told Qavam that they would keep troops in the northwest of Iran until the situation there was clarified. The US protested this Soviet position and got alarmed at the news that Soviet tanks were stationed some twenty-five miles to the west of Tehran.²² In fact, when the Soviet Union did not withdraw its troops in March from Iran, it became clear to the US that the Soviet Union was working to create a permanent zone of influence there. It also did not take long to convince the US policy makers that the Iranian crisis was created by the Soviets. Therefore, initially the US saw the Soviet interference in Iran as a clear-cut case of post-war Communist expansion in the region and considered the Soviet refusal to troop withdrawal as the violation of an international agreement by the Soviet Union. As a consequence, the Soviet Union was open to attack in the UNSC by the world opinion then led by the US. Supported by Britain, the US viewed the Soviet action as a challenge and decided not to let it go unchallenged. Both Britain and the US issued formal protests to the Soviet Union against the retention of its troops in Iran respectively on March 4 and 8 of 1946. On March 6, 1946, the US Charge d'Affaires in Moscow harshly criticized the Soviet retention of its troops in Iran and declared that the US "cannot remain indifferent" to the Soviet decision.²³ The Soviet Union did not pay heed to these Anglo-US protests. Rather it poured new forces and military equipments in Iran and worked for a

communist-led coup in Tehran. During the Iranian New Year's holiday of March 21-27 a Soviet-backed Tudeh coup seemed imminent, although this never materialized due to the Soviet reluctance to take risk realizing the stiffening stance of the US and strong precautionary measures taken by Iranian Gendarmerie headed by American advisor Colonel Schwarzkopf.

As the US took strong stand for Iran in the UNSC, the Iranian ambassador in Washington Husen Ala in the meantime, on the advice of the Prime Minister Qavam, appealed for the second time to the UNSC. He accused the Soviet Union of keeping its troops in Iran despite the March 2 deadline for withdrawal was over. He also made accusation that the Soviet Union continued its interference in Iran through the medium of Soviet agents, officials and armed forces. These all caused a great anger of the Soviet representative Andrei Gromyko who finally walked out of the conference room as the Iranian issue was included on the Council agenda to discuss. George Lenczowski has stated: "During this debate the American government took upon itself the burden of defending the principles of international intercourse. Secretary Byrnes, who appeared in person before the Council, boldly led the American delegation and gave clear signs that United States assumed responsibility and leadership in international affairs."²⁴ Given this US position, the Soviet Union had no alternative but to engage into direct negotiations with Iran. The Soviet Union followed a go-slow policy in this regard and suspicious of the Soviet motive, the US continued its hard line policy on Iranian crisis. Backed by the US, Iranian ambassador to US Hussein Ala once again brought the Azerbaijan issue before the UN on March 18, 1946. He requested that it should be placed on the Security Council's agenda scheduled for March 25. On March 19, 1946, the Soviet representative to the UN Andrei Gromyko protested the Iranian move and asked the Council to postpone the meeting, as Iran and the Soviet Union were still on the process of negotiations. The US President Harry Truman was not satisfied with the Gromyko's arguments. Sympathetic to Iranian government he reaffirmed US support for Iran. Following this development, the US representative Edward Stettinius told the Security Council that he would place Iran's complaint at the top of the agenda during the forthcoming meeting and would expect both sides to report the results of their talks.

The Iranian issue was discussed once again at the UNSC meeting on March 25, 1946. Gromyko, who was critical of the move, argued that since

Iran and the Soviet Union had reached an agreement in relation to the withdrawal of the Soviet troops; Ala's letter of 18 March should not be included on the Security Council's agenda. Byrnes, the US Secretary of State replied that he knew nothing about this agreement. On this very ground he stated that the issue would have to be placed on the agenda. On March 26, 1946, Gromyko insisted on the postponement of the discussion of the Iranian issue until April 10, or else his government would abstain from participating in the negotiations. Despite the Soviet threat, upon US insistence, the Security Council placed Iran's case on its agenda on March 27. Gromyko rejected the decision and walked out in anger. Gromyko also refrained from presenting the cause of his country when the Security Council met on March 29 for the discussion of the Iranian issue.

There is no doubt that the Soviet Union was embarrassed by the US over and over again in the UNSC. Having failed to cope with the US in the UNSC, the Soviet Union only put pressure on Iran. As the Soviet pressure increased, Qavam told US Ambassador Murray that he was ready to withdraw the Iranian complaint from the Security Council. Murray advised Qavam not to do so, because this would further weaken Iran. But Qavam seemed to give in to Soviet pressure and instructed his US ambassador Ala to withdraw Iran's complaint from the Security Council. When the US representative in the UNSC Edward Stettinius came to know that he told Ala not to withdraw the case and requested to stay strong despite his Prime Minister's instruction. Stettinius spoke in the Security Council in favor of Iran and stated that although Iran and the Soviet Union reached an agreement, the Security Council had no concrete proof that all Soviet troops had evacuated from northern Iran. He concluded that the Security Council would remove the Iran's case from its agenda on May 6, 1946, if it knew for sure that the Soviet troops were gone.²⁵ After a long period of waiting a frustrated and embarrassed Soviet Union finally engaged into a negotiation with Iran. On April 5, 1946 Iran's Prime Minister Qavam informed US Ambassador Murray that Iran and the Soviet governments had reached an agreement on several points.²⁶ In the agreement the Soviet pledged to withdraw its forces from Iran by May 6, 1946 or within six weeks from March 24, 1946. Two days later on April 6, 1946, Gromyko wrote a letter to the UNSC asking it to remove the Iranian case from its agenda. US Secretary of State Byrnes flatly rejected the request. However, the US policy makers knew that the Soviet Union was pressuring the Iranian Prime Minister to withdraw the case from UNSC. Qavam who wanted to placate

the Soviet Union now put pressure on Ala to withdraw the Iranian case from the Security Council's agenda. But the US again prevented from doing this.

The Security Council met on May 6, 1946 as planned but as the Soviet representative was absent, the council postponed its hearings until May 20, 1946. As this date was set Qavam and Ala was seen to argue over the settlement of the Iranian crisis. While Qavam wanted to placate the Soviets, Ala, with US assistance, wanted UN involvement in the matter. On May 20, 1946 when the Security Council met Ala informed the council that the Iranian government could not verify complete Soviet troop withdrawal from northern Iran. Pressed by the Soviet Union, on May 21, 1946, Qavam asked Ala to inform Security Council that the Soviet troops had withdrawn from Azerbaijan. Backed by the US representative in the UNSC Edward Stettinius, Ala refused Qavam's instruction which upset both Qavam and the Soviet Union. After this the US government was fully aware of Ala's position. So, the US embassy in Iran was instructed to communicate with Qavam which it did on May 28, 1946. The US embassy requested Qavam not to pressure Ala to withdraw the Iranian complaint from the Security Council. On the same day, the Security Council announced that it expected an official report from the Iranian government regarding the complete withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Iran. The Security Council fixed June 4 deadline for the submission of that report. At the turn of this development, a completely embarrassed Soviet Union had evacuated its troops from Iran by the end of May 1946.²⁷

End of the Crisis: Iran Takes Control of the Situation

The withdrawal of the Soviet troops from northern Iran does not mean the end of the crisis. It requires the Iranian government to take the control of the region again with US assistance. After successfully forcing the Soviets out of Iran, the US appointed a new Ambassador by the name of George V. Allen in Iran in April, 1946 who became the first US Ambassador to get directly involved in Iranian affairs.²⁸ Allen assured Qavam and other influential Iranians of US new foreign policy under President Harry S. Truman where there was no third alternative between Soviet communism and Western democracy, and in that great battle of ideologies there was no place of hesitant neutrality. Thus he emboldened the hope of the Iranians. The consequences of the energetic US support were felt in Iran immediately. Encouraged by the US, the Iranian Prime Minister Qavam sent up a "trial balloon" issuing arrest of a hundred

leading Tudeh members in Tehran and sending troops on November 27, 1946 to Azerbaijan to supervise parliamentary election. The Soviet ambassador to Tehran, being anxious of Iranian government's move, advised Qavam to abandon the plan. At this critical juncture, again Allen came to Qavam's succor. Supporting the Iran's stance, Allen made a statement to a British correspondent on December 4 reaffirming that the decision of Iran's government regarding the dispatch troops into Azerbaijan to ensure peaceful and fair elections was "quite normal and appropriate." His view was later endorsed by the US Under-Secretary of State Dean Acheson. Unquestionably, this position of the US was of great importance and helped Iran's Prime Minister to execute his plans. Iranian forces headed by the Shah himself entered Tabriz on December 12, 1946 and took full control of Azerbaijan.²⁹ The army then took Kurdistan. The two separatist regimes thus quickly collapsed and thus the Soviet influence in the country was neutralized. In this way, the Iranian government completed this uphill task clearly with the US support. Qavam himself was satisfied as the US had moved from its earlier position of non-interference or neutrality to an explicit commitment to uphold Iran's independence and sovereignty.³⁰

The Question of Truman's Ultimatum to Stalin

There is no denying the fact that the US had provided important diplomatic support for Iran within and outside the UNSC to overcome the Iranian crisis of 1945-46. The Truman administration which launched a major crusade against communism and Stalin's expansionist policies, developed a greater interest in Iran, and decided to provide strong diplomatic support for the country.³¹ In doing so, President Truman was said to have sent an ultimatum to the Soviet leader in a final bid to resolve the Iranian crisis.³² Reportedly, after the expiry of the March 2 deadline President Truman secretly warned Stalin that if the withdrawal was not completed within the stipulated time, he would move the US fleet into the Persian Gulf. In his memoirs President Truman wrote this issue.³³ In his blunt message to Stalin, Truman even warned the Moscow government that US military forces to be ready to deploy to Iran, including three combat divisions in Austria awaiting their return to the US. According to Kenneth M. Pollack, these moves have gotten the Soviet attention and on March 24, the Soviet Union announced that all its troops would be withdrawn soon.³⁴ To some, President Truman hinted for a tough stand on

the Iran issue which he confided to Averill Harriman: "We may be at war with the Soviet Union over Iran."³⁵ Later the President Truman disclosed it in a statement made on April 24, 1952. American historians (and the President himself) are of opinion that it was the US ultimatum that forced the Soviet Union to pull out of Iran in 1946. While other western historians and Iranian scholars held different view. They emphasized Iranian Prime Minister Qavam's wily and clever diplomacy regarding the Soviet withdrawal. However, Barry Rubin and Kenneth M. Pollack see the truth lies in the combination of the two. According to them, though there was no ultimatum from Truman to Stalin, but the US did make clear its position about Iranian crisis to the Soviet Union. This along with Qavam's negotiations resulted in the Soviet declaration of withdrawal from Iran. Hence it seems most likely that the Soviet withdrawal came as a combination of US threat and the prospect of gaining an oil concession in northern Iran.³⁶

How Far was the US Policy Responsible to End the Crisis?

There is a debate in the academic circle as to how far was the US policy responsible to end the Iranian crisis? Some historians claim that Iran's Prime Minister diplomatic maneuver and an oil agreement with the Soviet Union paved the way for Soviet evacuation from Iran. Peter Avery and other held the view that the Soviets did evacuate their forces from Iran only after having obtained oil concession and having left behind a revolutionary Communist regime in Azerbaijan apt to act as a powerful lever of pressure on Iran. To them, it was master-diplomacy of the Iranian Premier Qavam who successfully concluded an agreement with the Soviet Union that resulted in the Soviet withdrawal. Hence, the credit goes to Iran's Prime Minister Qavam, they argued.³⁷ Regarding Ala's refusal to withdraw complaint from the UNSC, another scholar George Lenczowski argued that Ala's decline was due to his patriotic intransigence.³⁸ But the reality was a different matter. It is common knowledge that from the outset of the crisis Iran was unable to withstand the Soviet pressure when the Iranian crisis was an important agenda of discussion in the UNSC. The US did not only support Iranian issue in the UNSC but it favoured for the retention of the Iranian case on the Security Council's agenda for several times in face of strong protest from the Soviet Union. This US position continued even after Prime Minister Qavam himself had ordered Ala to withdraw the case from the UNSC. An embarrassed and aggrieved Qavam

subsequently tried to recall Ala, but was prevented from doing so at the request of the US.³⁹ Thus the US took an unprecedented and unilateral position in the UNSC to retain the Azerbaijan issue in the list of the agenda of the UNSC.

Additionally, when Qavam engaged in talks with the Soviet government in early April, 1946 in Moscow, Iranian Ambassador in the US Hussein Ala paid frequent visits to Secretary of State Byrnes. Each time after his meeting with Byrnes, Ala, in a press conference made declaration such as "...in case Premier Ghavam [Qavam] yields to Russian demands he will be forced to resign after his return from Moscow" or "Secretary Byrnes has given me assurance that the United States will stand by Iran in case my country's integrity is jeopardized by Russia."⁴⁰ This he did, as some argue, clearly to influence Prime Minister Qavam's attitude towards the Soviet Union. Therefore, it was the strong US support for Iran which first prevented Ala from taking the Azerbaijan case out of the Security Council's agenda and then forced a totally embarrassed Soviet Union to engage into negotiations with Prime Minister Qavam. Credible evidence also shows that even after confirming Iran's oil through the agreement of April 5, 1946, the Soviet Union was still reluctant to complete its troops withdrawal from Iran.⁴¹ Rather it was putting pressure on Qavam to withdraw the case from the Security Council's agenda. But it was the US proactive policy in supporting Iran in the Council that helped retained Azerbaijan issue in the agenda. Under increasing diplomatic pressure in the UN Security Council and faced with the prospect of military confrontation in the wake of the World War II, the Soviet Union finally balked and on March 26, 1946 the Soviet representative Gromyko informed the UN Security Council that all Soviet troops would be evacuated from Iran within five or six weeks "if no unforeseen circumstances occur."⁴² The important point here is that even after this Soviet announcement, the US objected and on its insistence the UN Security Council passed a resolution calling for monitoring the Soviet withdrawal to insure that the Soviets were not imposing special condition on Iran.

There is no shadow of doubt that it was US that provided moral strength to Iranian leaders, particularly Qavam, who at one point seemed to give in to the Soviet pressure. The US support within and outside the UNSC must have done a great deal to boost Iranian morale. A close and

careful study of US policy during and immediately after the World War II, would show that how important moves had the US administration taken during the Iranian crisis of 1945-1946. Even after reaching an agreement with the Soviet Union, the US continued to insist that Iran should place its issue on the UNSC agenda. Iranian government felt unwanted pressure from the US in dealing with Azerbaijan issue with the Soviet Union. However, on April 16, the US unilaterally insisted on UNSC retention of the Iran issue which not only antagonized Gromyko but also embarrassed UN Secretary General Trygve-Lie.⁴³ According to one scholar, realizing the outcome of the US pressure and following Truman's blunt rejection of the Soviet intervention in Azerbaijan the Soviet Union began evacuating its troops from Iran on April 22 and completed it by May 10, 1946.⁴⁴ However, Kristen Blake has stated that the Soviet Union completed the process by the end of May 1946. Kristen Blake has also put: "There is no doubt that U.S. support for Iran was one of the key reasons why the Soviets decided to withdraw their troops from northern Iran."⁴⁵

What would happen to Iran in the absence of such tough US policy towards the Iranian crisis? Cold War historian Louise L'estrange Fawcett has categorically but rightfully stated that without the US intervention, the division of Iran into Soviet and British sphere of influence might have become permanent.⁴⁶ Historically, for centuries Iran had been the pawn of the Anglo-Soviet powers. After the World War II Britain appeared as an exhausted power while the Soviet Union emerged as one of the two super powers along with the US. Iran was too weak to stand before this newly emerged superpower—the Soviet Union. It was the US tough policy and threat to the Soviet Union that resulted in the end of the Iranian crisis of 1945-1946. Thus it was US proactive policy which was instrumental in forcing out the Soviet troops from Iran which in turn resulted in the end of the Iranian crisis of 1945-1946. And this was recognized by the Shah himself when in a meeting with US Ambassador to Iran George V. Allen the Shah told 'that the crisis in Azerbaijan had ended due to the efficient conduct of the Iranian forces and U.S. support for the maintenance of Iran's sovereignty.'⁴⁷ Given this reality, Iran's independence owed much to the US support in the Iranian crisis of 1945-46.⁴⁸ According to John D. Stempel, the US forced the Soviet Union to withdraw from Iran in May 1946 by taking an uncompromising attitude within the United Nations which signaled the beginning of extremely close ties between Iran and US.⁴⁹

Conclusions

Iran was the first battlefield of the Cold War due to the Azerbaijan or Iranian crisis of 1945-1946. Following the World War II, two northern Iranian provinces, Azerbaijan and Kurdistan became a hotbed of international diplomacy due to the Iranian or Azerbaijan crisis. Azerbaijan was a first experiment in Soviet satellite tactics, however, it was baffled by the proactive US policy towards the crisis developed centering this Iranian province. The Soviets were quite unwilling to withdraw their troops from Iranian territory for economic, geo-strategic and military reasons. Moscow wanted to implement its objective either to occupy the Iranian territories, or pressuring Tehran government through pro-communist Tudeh Party. But the timely intervention of the newly created United Nations and the US brought into a peaceful solution to the crisis. From the very inception, the crisis fundamentally changed the US foreign policy of non-involvement to active involvement in Iranian affairs. In other words, in its response to the Iranian crisis, the US reoriented its foreign policy and got involved more in the Iranian affairs to prevent Soviet expansion. In an effort to do this the US shifted its policy from “appeasement” to “getting tough” toward the Soviet Union. Thus the way the Iranian crisis was handled is indeed an epitome of US forceful policy towards the crisis and its unilateral position in the UNSC to force the Soviets out of Iran. The forcefulness of the US (and the British) protests left the Soviet Union with no choice but to back down and remove its occupation forces from Iran's northern provinces.⁵⁰ True, in this way, the US achieved its first diplomatic victory over the Soviet Union in the first round of Cold War game; however, the US policy toward the Iranian crisis played a decisive role in safeguarding Iran's independence. That is, due to US assertive policy or more correctly, with US help, Iran got rid of two hundred years of foreign domination, achieved independence, and secured sovereignty. It is not deniable that in this crisis the US played a major role, a role foreshadowed past US involvement in Iranian affairs. The US offered full political and diplomatic support to Iran in its fight against the Soviet Union during the crisis. The US indispensable support for Iran in that crisis strengthened the Iran-US relations in the post-crisis period. Thus with US active support, the Azerbaijan or the Iranian crisis of 1945-1946 came to a peaceful end for which Iran owed much to the US and came out of the crisis of 1945-1946 completely pro-American. Scholars are in agreement that the Iranian crisis of 1945-1946 gave a new matrix to the Iran-US relations. The US

decision to take on the defence of Iran in its crisis thus opened a new chapter in the history of Iran-US relations that began to develop on the popular dictum: *A friend in need is a friend indeed*.⁵¹

Notes and References

1. The Cold War is a contest and world-wide struggle for supremacy between two opposing ways of life and systems of thought: one led by the White House (the US), the other by Moscow (the Soviet Union). Two systems found themselves colliding all over the globe since 1945 which ended in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union.
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3. Kristen Blake, *The U.S.-Soviet Confrontation in Iran 1945-1962: A Case in the Annals of the Cold War*, University Press of America, Inc., New York, Printed in the United States of America, 2009, p. 22
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5. George Lenczowski, *Russia and the West in Iran, 1918-1948: A Study in Big-Power Rivalry*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1949, p. 221.
6. Richard A. Stewart, "Soviet Military Intervention in Iran, 1920-46", *Parameters, Journal of the US Army War College*, Vol. XI, No. 4, December, 1981, p. 39. See also: Faramarz S. Fatemi, *The U.S.S.R. in Iran: The Background History of Russian and Anglo-American Conflict in Iran, Its Effects on Iranian Nationalism, and the Fall of the Shah*, A.S. Barnes and Company, London, 1980.
7. Fawcett, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.
8. James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations*, Yale University Press, USA, 1988, p. 32; John P. Miglietta, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
9. A. H. Hamzavi, *Persia and the Powers*, Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., London, (undated), pp. 37-38; Barry Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran*, Penguin Books, USA, 1981, pp. 26-32.
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11. Louise L'estrange Fawcett, *Iran and the Cold War*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1992, pp. 53, 156.
12. Louise L'estrange Fawcett, p. 159.
13. Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: ..., op. cit.*, p. 45. See also: Barry Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions: ..., op. cit.*, p. 32.
14. Gary R. Hess, *op. cit.*, p. 125. For US goals in Iran see also: T. H. Vail Motter, *The Persian Corridor and Aid to Russia*, Center of Military History United States Army, Washington D.C., USA, 1952, pp. 471-472.
15. Glenn Hastedt, *Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy*, Facts On File, Inc., USA, 2004, p. 243; Louise L'estrange Fawcett, pp. 119-129.
16. See: Barry Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions: ..., op. cit.*, p. 32.

17. John Marlowe, *Iran: A Short Political Guide*, Frederick A. Praeger Publisher, Great Britain, 1963, pp. 78-79; Gary R. Hess, "The Iranian Crisis of 1945-46 and the Cold War", *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 89, No. 1, March 1974, p. 127.
18. Kristen Blake, *op., cit.*, pp.33- 34
19. Richard T. Sale, "America in Iran", *SAIS Review*, Vol. 3, Nos. 1/2, Winter, 1981-1982, pp. 31-32.
20. A. H. Hamzavi, *Persia and the Powers, op., cit.*, p. 47; Peter Avery et. al., *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 7, p. 438. A full complaint letter is available in *Persia and the Powers*, p. 82.
21. A. H. Hamzavi, *Persia and the Powers, op., cit.*, p. .
22. George. Lenczowski, *Russia and the West in Iran, 1918-1948:..., op., cit.*, p. 298; Peter Avery, *Modern Iran*, Ernest Benn Limited, London, 1965, p. 392.
23. A. H. Hamzavi, *Persia and the Powers, op., cit.*, p. 60.
24. George. Lenczowski, *Russia and the West in Iran, 1918-1948:..., op., cit.*, p. 298.
25. Kristen Blake, *op., cit.*, p. 37.
26. Under the agreement Tehran agreed to recommend to the Majlis the establishment of a joint Iran-Russian oil company to exploit the oil resources of northern Iran in return for Moscow's promise for pull out. The 25-year proposed oil agreement promised 51% of the stock to the Soviet Union. Iran's Prime Minister Qavam also agreed to grant three cabinet posts to pro-Communist Tudeh party members and to withdraw Iran's complaint against Moscow before the UN. Thus, the agreement permitted the Soviet Union to leave Iran without losing face.
27. Kristen Blake, *op., cit.*, p. 38. However, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi in his *Mission for My Country* states that by May 9, 1946 the Soviet troops were all gone. This view has been supported by George Lenczowski and John Marlowe.
28. Kristen Blake, *op., cit.*, p. 39; T. H. Vail Motter, *op., cit.*, p. 479.
29. Peter Avery et. al., *The Cambridge History of Iran, op., cit.*, p. 249.
30. Louise L'estrangé Fawcett, p. 173.
31. Kristen Blake, *op., cit.*, pp. 20-21
32. *For more on the US ultimatum issue, see: Kuross A. Samii, Involvement by Invitation: American Strategies of Containment in Iran, pp. 69-94; James A. Thorpe, 'Truman's Ultimatum to Stalin on the 1946 Azerbaijan Crisis: the Making of a Myth', The Journal of Politics, Vol. 40, No. 1, February, 1978, pp. 188-195; Hossein Fardoust, The Rise and Fall of Pahlavi Dynasty, Hadis Publishing House, Tehran, 1995, pp. 109-110.*
33. *J. Philipp Rosenberg, 'The Cheshire Ultimatum: Truman's Message to Stalin in the 1946 Azerbaijan Crisis', The Journal of Politics, Vol. 41, No. 3, August 1979, p. 935.*
34. Kenneth M. Pollack, *op., cit.*, p. 46.
35. Richard A. Stewart, *op., cit.*, p. 30.
36. Barry Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions:..., op., cit.*, p. 33; Pollack, Kenneth M. *The Persian Puzzle: ..., op., cit.*, p. 47.
37. Peter Avery, *Modern Iran, op., cit.*, p. 394.
38. Lenczowski, *Op. Cit.*, p. 299
39. Fawcett, *Op. Cit.*, p.131.
40. Reza Shahshahani, 'The Background of the Iranian Affair,' *op., cit.*, p. 130.

41. Interestingly enough, the Soviet concession required the approval of the Iranian Majlis. So elections to the Fifteenth Majlis were to begin on December 7, 1946. But with the US support Qavam made it clear that election would not be held until and unless the government was in a position to supervise them all over the country including Azerbaijan. The Soviet Union was in a weak position because its troops' withdrawal had completed by this time, but its oil concession required ratification by the new and elected Majlis. The new Iranian Majlis turned down the oil concession with the Soviet Union on October 22, 1947, by a vote of 102 to 2. The Majlis did it taking the advantage of continued US support for Iran and the growing Iran-US relations.
42. The Soviet Union clearly wanted to avoid a conflict with the US and Britain over Iran immediately after the World War II ostensibly for two reasons. Firstly, until then the US held the monopolistic position of nuclear power. Secondly, US and Britain had total control of the seas and superior air force.
43. Hess, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 141-142.
44. Richard A. Stewart, *op., cit.*, p. 31.
45. Kristen Blake, *op., cit.*, p. 38
46. Louise L'estrangé Fawcett, p. 53
47. Kristen Blake, *op., cit.*, p. 43.
48. Louise L'estrangé Fawcett, p. 175.
49. John D. Stempel, *Inside the Iranian Revolution*, Indiana University Press, Manufactured in the United States of America, 1981, p. 4.
50. Fred H. Lawson, 'The Iranian Crisis of 1945-1946 and the Spiral Model of International Conflict', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 21, 1989, pp. 307-326.
51. Md. Abul Kalam Azad, "Iran-US (United States) Relations Since 1945", Ph.D. Thesis, p. 28.

