Telegram from the Foreign Office to British Embassy to Iran, 9 June 1946

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From Foreign Office to Tehran

9 June, 1946

SECRET

[1.] We have been giving much thought lately to the possibility that the Soviet Government may shortly achieve their object of making Persia entirely subservient to them and we feel that the time has come for general discussion with the State Department of the issues involved. I give below our appreciation of the possible developments in the situation and shall be grateful if you will discuss this together with the suggested remedies, with the State Department and let us know their wishes.

2. Obviously the Persian Prime Minister is already very inclined to that his orders from Moscow. He has undertaken to submit the Soviet-Persian Oil Agreement to a new Parliament by the 24th October and has bound himself to deal with Azerbaijan only by peaceful means. He wants to have the Persian case withdrawn from the Security Council. He has arrested several Persian politicians whose only offence against the Persian State appears to have been that they wish to preserve it from being overthrown by the Soviet Union and their local agents. We had hoped that now that there are no longer Soviet Army units in Persia and that Russian soldiers are therefore not available to escort and protect Tudeh demonstrators[[1]](#footnote-1), Qavām would pluck up courage, and it is to some extent encouraging that he has sent the Azerbaijan Delegation back to Tabriz without having given way to their demands. But reports which reach us from all parts of Persia show that the authorities are afraid to take a firm hand with Tudeh lawlessness. This is particularly so in South-West Persia where the Tudeh party have become suddenly very strong and appear to be entirely beyond the control of the Persian authorities.

3. In any case Qavām is bound to be under great pressure to hold elections soon and to hold them in such a way that a majority for the Soviet-Persian Oil Agreement is assured. In order to secure this end the Russians will obviously threaten him that if he does not produce the results required the worst will happen (which might be either a Tudeh *coup d’etat* or the re-entry of the Red Army into Northern Persia).

4. There is no reason to suppose that if left to himself he will not do his best to secure the subservient majority which the Russians will require of him. He has already appointed a Committee to supervise the elections which will give him the means to ensure that policy of manipulation is carried out. Apart from this all he has to do is to acquiesce in acts of terrorism by Tudeh party gangs and fear of beating up will effectively discourage opposition to Government candidates.

5. The first object of this packed Parliament would of course be to secure the passage of the Soviet-Persian Oil Agreement but having obtained this weapon there is no reason why the Russians should use it for this one purpose alone. Indeed, it seems clear that once Qavām has succeeded in securing the election of a subservient majority, even were he himself to wish to pursue an independent policy, he would be prevented from doing so by the majority which he has created. The independence of Persia will thus be for all practical purposes finished since the impetus behind important Governmental decisions will come not from Tehran by from Moscow[[2]](#footnote-2).

6. Neither we nor the United States Government can view this prospect with indifference. We have both been pursuing a policy of supporting Persian independence through the United Nations. We are both prepared to respect the independence of Persia and we both have a right to expect others to do the same. The reduction of Persia to the status of satellite would mark the end of Persia’s independence and would leave British and American policy in the air. Moreover, since this result would come about under the very eyes of the Security Council, which still has before it a Persian complaint about Soviet interference, world confidence in the United Nations Organisation as the protector of the weak against the strong would hardly be enhanced.

7. The danger to British and American material interests is equally obvious. We both had great oil resources in the Middle East. Neither of us wish these to be at the mercy of the Soviet Union acting either through satellite Governments or through subversive agents. The first and obvious target for the Russians in their campaign of weakening what they regard as the Anglo-American combine, is the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in Persia. That they are already at work can be seen from the present Tudeh agitation against the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. But we need not suppose that they intend to stop there. Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain (with a Persian claim to the two last named places conveniently available) and Saudi Arabia will obviously all be tackled in turn. The only way of checking this threat is, if possible, to prevent Persia from being turned into a base from which the Russians can pursue their policy of upsetting British and American interests in the Middle East.

[TNA, CAB 121/657]

Keywords: Iran, inter-allied relations

1. The Tudeh Party was formed in 1941 as the heir of the Iranian Communist Party. The Foreign Office, recognising Tudeh’s strength and organisational ability, considered it to be an instrument of Soviet influence in Iran and a force undermining the British position in the country; it accused Qavām’s Government of being cowed into taking insufficient action against it through fear of Moscow’s response. See: From FO to Tehran, 09/06/1946 // TNA, CAB 121/657; C.P. (46) 280, Memo by Bevin, 17/07/1946 // TNA, CAB 129/11. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. British diplomats overstated the susceptibility of Qavām’s Government to Soviet pressure. In the final score, as is well-known, Qavām, with Anglo-American support, managed to successfully withstand this pressure and refuse Moscow its oil concession as well as crush the pro-Soviet enclave in Iranian Azerbaijan. (Hasanli, J. *At the Dawn of the Cold War*, ch.16; Stalin’s telegram dated 30 September 1946 and Dekonozov’s telegram to Stalin dated 1 October 1946). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)