

Britain, the United Nations and the Iranian Crisis of 1946

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Abstract: This article discusses the Iranian crisis from British perspectives in the period from July 1945 to May 1946. The Iranian crisis of 1946 was an Anglo-Soviet dispute over the Near East. It was the first international crisis referred to the Security Council of the United Nations (UN) for investigation. The three world powers, namely the United States, the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom, were deeply involved in this crisis. It was significant not only in shaping the future of world politics at the time; it also determined the fate and prestige of the United Nations in the context of the early phase of the Cold War. This was because the Iranian crisis reflected an open split between the three permanent members of the Security Council, rather than unity in settling international disputes. It is contended that the Iranian crisis of 1946 forced Britain to regard the UN not more than a political instrument to achieve their ultimate aim as a key player in international politics. The Iranian crisis was important to Britain because it was the first real test of the intentions of the former Soviet Union and it occurred in a region that had been of strategic and economic importance to the British since the nineteenth century. It mattered, too, because it was the first real test of the new organisation set up in San Francisco less than a year before – the UN.

Key words: United Nations • Iranian Crisis • Bevin • Cold War • Britain

INTRODUCTION

The main issue in the 1946 Iranian crisis was the refusal of the Soviet government to withdraw its troops from Iranian territory as it had agreed in the Tripartite Treaty of 1942. The British and Soviet armies jointly occupied Iran during the Second World War in order to assist the Soviet Union in defeating Germany. The Trans-Iranian railway and the road inland from the Persian Gulf via Azerbaijan were used to supply material and labour support to Soviet Union. In addition, the presence of the Allied troops was vital in protecting Iran's oil reserves from falling into the hands of the Allied enemies. The northern part of Iran was a Soviet zone of occupation with approximately 40,000 troops. The British,

with 19,000 troops controlled the Southern part of Iran [1]. Both the British and the Soviets had agreed to withdraw their troops six months after the Second World War was over.

Meanwhile, the presence of the American Army in Iran was based on an Anglo-American agreement of September 1942 [2]. Under this agreement, the American Army was charged with operating the southern section of the Trans-Iranian Railway to handle the delivery of war supplies to the Soviet Union. The presence of the American Army was approved by both the Soviet and the Iranian governments. When the war was over, the United States agreed to withdraw its army from Iranian territory in June 1945 and left Iran in January 1946, while British troops left on 2 March of the same year. However, the

Soviets refused to evacuate the northern parts of Iran when the allotted time arrived.

The Iranian government was keen to see foreign troops evacuating their country immediately as the Second World War was over. If the Allied powers left their country immediately, the potential for the intervention of foreign powers in the internal affairs of the Iranian government could be minimised. Article 5 of the Tripartite Treaty of 1942, said that:

The forces of the Allied Powers shall be withdrawn from Iranian territory not later than six months after all hostilities between the Allied Powers and Germany and her associates have been suspended by the conclusion of an armistice or on the conclusion of peace between them, whichever date is the earlier [3].

As soon as the Second World War was over, the Iranian government repeatedly requested the world's powers to reconsider the issue of Allied troops in Iran. For example, in conversation between M. Taqizadeh and the Assistant Under Secretary Mr. Howe, on 15 September 1945, the Iranian Ambassador requested that the British government raise the matter during the Foreign Minister's meeting in London. In addition, the Iranian Ambassador emphasised his worries about the Soviet Union's interference and political penetration in northern Iran. He also expressed his government's disappointment in getting a satisfactory reply from the Soviet authorities regarding the matter. Further, the Iranian government strongly believed that the Soviet Union had intensified their political propaganda in Iran by increasing the number of Soviet newspapers in circulation. The Iranian government hoped that Bevin would raise the matter with Molotov and inform them of the outcome of the discussion [4].

Another example is that of Hussein Ala, the Iranian Ambassador in Washington, who, in December 1945, requested the United States government to discuss the issue of the withdrawal of foreign troops from the Iranian soil. Hussein Ala repeatedly asked for support from the United States government in making an appeal to the United Nations as soon as possible [5]. The United States, however, advised the Iranian Ambassador to negotiate and discuss the matter directly with the Soviet Union. These two examples indicate the strong pressure and eagerness of the Iranians in the post-war world to free their country immediately from foreign domination.

To make matters worse, the Iranian government believed that the Soviet government supported the revolt

in the Iranian province of Azerbaijan on 18 November 1945. The Iranian government believed that the *Tudeh* party, a communist - dominated organisation, was responsible for encouraging the revolt, as it sought Azerbaijan's independence from Iran. The Iranian government attempted to intervene against the rebels. Soviet military forces in the north of Iran supported the uprising and refused to allow Iranian troops into the province. From the Iranian perspective, the behaviour of the Soviets was a clear indication of growing interference in the internal affairs of their country through the encouragement of separatist political movements.

For a member of the new world organisation such as Iran, the United Nations was the right channel through which to appeal in order to end the crisis urgently and restore her internal political stability. The Iranian government took its own initiative to bring the matter to the attention of the Security Council on 19 January 1946. The Security Council of the United Nations agreed to include the Iranian appeal in the Security Council agenda, despite the protest of the Soviet Union at the meeting on 25 January 1946 [6].

On the following day, the Iranian representative presented their complaint against the Soviet Union. The Iranian's main grounds were that the Soviet Union had breached the Tripartite Treaty of 1942 and the Three Powers' declaration of December 1943. Moreover, the Soviet government had interfered in the internal affairs of the Iranian government. The refusal of the Soviet troops to allow the Iranian army to enter the province of Azerbaijan on 19 November 1945 was used as evidence to justify their arguments. On the other hand, the Soviet representative in the Security Council Andrei Vyshinsky contended that the time to evacuate the Iranian territory would be on 2 March 1946 and that it was not yet time to do so. Moreover, the Soviet government argued that they retained their troops in Iran under the Soviet-Iran treaty of 1921 [7]. Thus, the Iranian government had no grounds for complaint to the Security Council. With regard to the second charge, the Soviet representative denied the Iranian allegation that the Soviets had interfered in the internal affairs of the Iranian province in Azerbaijan. The Soviet government, he said, had no hand in organising the rebellion and he argued that the Azerbaijan rebellion represented popular aspirations. Consequently, on 30 January 1946, the Security Council adopted a resolution:

Considering that, both parties have affirmed their readiness to seek a solution to the matter at issue by

negotiations; and such negotiation will be resumed in the near future.

Requests the parties to inform the Council of any results achieved in such negotiation. The Council in the meanwhile retains the right at any time to request information on the progress of the negotiation [8].

It was clear that the resolution adopted by the Security Council on 30 January 1946 did not include the issue of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Iranian territory. In fact, this was the main element of the Iranian demand for the Security Council's investigation. The resolution only requested the Iranian government and the Soviet Union to inform the Security Council if there was any progress resulting from their negotiation. Thus, the time had come to test the credibility and effectiveness of the United Nations in fulfilling its task of maintaining peace and security.

The Iranian Crisis and the Foreign Office: One of the indicators that reflect the attitude of the high-ranking officials at the Foreign Office concerning the Soviet Union's political ambition in Iran is a letter written by R. Bullard, British Ambassador in Tehran. In January 1946, he wrote to Bevin concerning the Iranian government's decision to make an official appeal to the Security Council for investigation. He expressed his concern about the consequences if the Soviet Union refused to withdraw its troops from Iran after 2 March 1946. The United Kingdom, he felt, needed to re-evaluate its strategies in Iran urgently before the time came for withdrawing Allied troops in March. As he wrote in his letter:

I fear that if the matter is not discussed now the Soviet Union may overstep the limit of March 2nd and having broken the pledge given under the Treaty of 1942, they will remain on indefinitely or until Persia has been completely subjugated [9].

The British Charge' d' Affaires in Moscow, Frank Roberts, held similar views on the Soviet Union's political aspirations in Iran and Northern Tier. In his letter to the Foreign Office in January 1946, he expressed his concern about the importance of sustaining British power and prestige in Iran and the Middle East if Britain's status as one of the world's powers was to be preserved. As he wrote from Moscow to the Foreign Office:

Whereas in Europe and the Far East the Soviet Union can ensure her own security without damaging British or even American interests, this unfortunately is not the case on the southern borders of the Soviet Union. Throughout the Middle East prestige and security

considerations are closely intermingled. Even limited Soviet success in Persia and Turkey would presumably be interpreted as a severe setback to Britain throughout the Arab world and every concession even to legitimate Soviet aims must be carefully considered against this background [10].

Bevin attempted to settle the Iranian crisis before the Security Council in December 1945 after the Soviet Union had refused to evacuate Iran in March. Roberts once again reminded Bevin in March 1946 that the United Kingdom should always remain in control of the Iranian situation. This was because, according to Roberts:

The meeting of the Security Council thus became, owing to deliberate Soviet action, a forum for public Anglo-Soviet dispute and when the first session of the General Assembly broke up and the Security Council adjourned, there was little to show that the Soviet Union still regarded Britain under a Labour Government as an ally, or even a friend. Most disturbing of all, we gained no credit with the Soviet Government for our repeated attempts at conciliation e.g. our endeavour to prevent the Persian questions coming before the United Nations Organisation and our final compromise to save Soviet 'face' over Greece. These, like our earlier concessions in regard to Poland, Yugoslavia, Romania and Bulgaria, only served to sharpen the next Soviet attack [11].

Roberts later gave his impression of the Soviet Union's attitude towards the United Nations from the very beginning of its formation in June 1945. He explicitly expressed his impression that the Soviet Union:

Already at the San Francisco Conference last April, Molotov, when pledging Soviet support for the new organisation, gave a clear warning that while the Soviet Union wanted it to succeed, she had other strings to her bow and was quite prepared to turn to other methods for retaining and spreading Soviet influence in the world if the United Nations Organisation did not come up to Soviet expectations. It is evidently to be used as a forum in which Soviet representatives can cover up high-handed Soviet actions and embarrass other countries by irresponsible charges designed to curry favour with the so-called oppressed peoples. In fact, the Soviet conception of international negotiations, whether in United Nations Organisations, the Council of Foreign Ministers or between the Big Three, consists not so much of arriving at agreement as in reaching agreement exclusively on Soviet terms [12].

Minutes of meeting of the senior members of the Foreign Office also suggest that central to Foreign Office

political thought at the time was the tenet that the United Kingdom should sustain its power and prestige and should be the only power managing or administrating in the Middle East. One of the meetings was about the Soviet Union policy and British strategies towards it in March 1946 [13]. There was general agreement among the senior officials at the Foreign Office to the importance of the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean in terms of economic and strategic value. In other words, the Middle East should be solely under the British sphere of influence if Britain wanted to be one of the world's powers. In this regard, the Iranian crisis of 1946 was important to the Foreign Office, as British power and prestige would be jeopardised if other world powers particularly the Soviet Union, through the United Nations, succeeded in getting a political foothold in Iran as part of the Middle East. Thus, the Foreign Office in London and British diplomats in Tehran, Moscow, Washington and at the United Nations closely monitored the growing crisis. Their main concern was to thwart what they saw as the Soviet Union's political aspiration to establish a political base in Iran before extending its power and influence in the Middle East.

The Foreign Office officials also largely regarded the role of the United Nations as nothing more than a means to serve Britain's ultimate aim in Iran. Furthermore, it was an effective strategy to attract United States attention and draw it into participating actively in the crisis. The Foreign Office was not in a position to accept Attlee's internationalist view that Britain should share power and responsibility with the United Nations, the United States and the Soviets in supervising the Middle East. For instance, as the Iranian crisis was on the agenda of the Security Council in January 1946 for investigation, R. G. Howe, the Superintendent of the Eastern Department of the Foreign Office welcomed the Iranian government's appeal to the Security Council. In his minutes to Alexander Cadogan, the United Kingdom Ambassador at the United Nations, he explicitly stated that:

It seems desirable, now that the Persians have put the matter on the international plane by appealing to UNO, to avoid giving the other members of the Security Council the impression that the problem is an Anglo-Russian one and not a Perso-Russian at all [14].

To Howe, it was an effective step to correct the perception held at the time particularly by the members of the Security Council of the United Nations that the whole question was simply one of Anglo-Russian rivalry for supremacy in the Near East [15]. If this perception

continued, Howe argued that it would be disadvantageous for the United Kingdom to sustain its power and prestige in Iran as part of the Middle East. Moreover, the United States as one of the members of the Security Council would distance itself from the crisis. In order to correct the impression that the crisis was a Persian-Russian dispute and not an Anglo-Soviet conflict, he recommended that the United Kingdom should not put itself in a position to take the lead at the Security Council in investigating the crisis. This was because it would discourage the other permanent members of the Security Council as well as the other members of the United Nations from taking part in its resolution. Instead, he was hoping that the other permanent members of the Security Council particularly the United States would participate actively in terms of taking a diplomatic lead in settling the crisis.

In addition, five days before the Iranian government decided to make an official appeal for Security Council investigation, Bullard doubted that the move was timely. He preferred the Iranian government to file a complaint for Security Council investigation if the Soviet Union refused to evacuate Iran after 2 March 1946. This was because he felt that the Iranian government's move would probably embarrass the newly established world organisation without bringing Persia any satisfaction in the end. Nevertheless, a month later, he strongly believed that the Iranian government's step to file a complaint was right. In fact, he repeated his warning about the Soviet Union's desire to get a political foothold in Iran. In view of this, he recommended that the United Kingdom should support the Iranian complaint in order to resist the Soviet Union's ambition in Iran and the Middle East. As he wrote to Bevin:

Persians on the whole are much afraid of Russian political penetration behind the shield of exploitation of oil but have not the courage to hold out indefinitely without assistance. If the Persians have to negotiate an oil concession with Russia unaided they will undoubtedly be compelled to grant ...actual if not nominal control of exploitation of concession which would eventually establish the Russian in a dominating position first in the concession area and then in the country generally [16].

Meanwhile, the Foreign Office strongly recommended that the United Kingdom should work closely with the United States to resist Soviet ambitions. The United Kingdom needed to work together with the United States while seeking its support and within rather than outside the framework of the United Nations,

showing a supportive attitude in upholding the main principles embodied in the United Nations' Charter. Thus, the United States and members of the Security Council would have the impression that the United Kingdom was defending international security and the sovereignty of small states such as Iran. In fact, senior members of the Foreign Office felt that this was the only way to avoid the United States distancing itself from the Iranian crisis. In his letter of April 1946 concerning future British strategies and policy in Persia, Howe repeated his suggestion of the previous January to Bevin:

American support is essential in any line of policy aimed at sustaining Persian independence against Russian encroachment. So long as we work through the United Nations, we can be reasonably sure of this support [17].

All these historical developments indicated that generally, senior members at the Foreign Office were inclined to regard the United Nations as a means to serve British aims in Iran. The Foreign Office had little choice and needed to react to events in order to ensure that the Iranian crisis was under British control. The attitude of senior officials at the Foreign Office was consistent; they were committed to upholding British imperialist aims in Iran and the Northern Tier. In fact, they were the core supporters of the British Empire. Thus Bevin had no hesitation in pursuing his nationalist and imperialist aims in Iran, as he shared the view of the Foreign Office on the United Nations, the United States and the Soviet Union.

Bevin and the Iranian Question: As the Iranian crisis of 1946 was an Anglo-Soviet dispute over Iran in the Northern Tier, Bevin in his capacity as the Foreign Secretary of the Labour Government monitored Iranian affairs closely from London. This was because, to Bevin, Iran was strategically placed on the British line of communication between the Mediterranean and India and was rich with oil deposits. Further, the British saw Iran as a buffer state between the Soviet Union and the British sphere of influence in the Middle East and India. In addition, the Middle East had to be under British control in order to sustain Britain's prestige as a world power in the eyes of the Arab world in peacetime [18]. On all these practical grounds, the Iranian crisis of 1946 was important to Bevin in terms of recovering British power in the Northern Tier as well as in the Middle East. In fact, the issue of withdrawing foreign troops from Iranian territory had occupied Bevin's attention from the very beginning

of his tenure as Foreign Secretary to the Labour government.

There were several attempts on his part to raise the question of Allied troops in Iran between July and December 1945. For instance, Bevin raised the issue of withdrawing Allied troops during the Potsdam Conference [19]. The Allied leaders refused to deal with the question immediately, but agreed to place the question on the agenda of the Council of Foreign Ministers' meeting in September 1945 [20].

During the first meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers in London, Bevin tried to readdress the issue of Allied troops in Iran with the Soviet Union [21]. He suggested that the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union might need to reconsider the presence of Allied troops in Iran, since the war was over and the Japanese army had surrendered. Allied tasks in Iran had ended. In his letter to Molotov dated 19 September 1945, Bevin pointed out:

It seems to me, however, that since our respective forces in Persia have completed the wartime tasks for which they were sent to Persia, our Governments might well see if they could not do something to satisfy the Persian Government's natural desire to see as much of the territory as possible freed as soon as possible from the presence of foreign troops [22].

He suggested that the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union should agree to withdraw their respective troops from the whole of Persia by the middle of December 1945. Unfortunately, Molotov hesitated to agree to Bevin's suggestion and replied on the following day that:

As regards the complete withdrawal of Soviet troops in Iran, the Soviet Government, as you are aware, takes the view that this withdrawal of troops should be effected within the period laid down in the Anglo-Soviet-Iranian Treaty. The Soviet Government, accordingly, sees no need for this question to be discussed in the Council of Foreign Ministers [23].

The Soviet Union was uninterested in supporting Bevin's suggestion to withdraw their troops from Iranian soil, even though their military tasks were over. The Soviet government stood firmly with the Tripartite Treaty of 1942. Thus, on 22 September 1945, Bevin and Molotov told the Foreign Ministers' meeting that the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom had completely agreed to withdraw their troops from Iran on 2 March 1946. As a result, it was unnecessary for the present meeting of Foreign Ministers to consider the matter and the Iranian

question was removed from the Council's agenda. Bevin's suggestion that the Allied troops leave Iranian territory immediately the war was over ended in failure. Bevin, however, was at least satisfied that the Soviet Union agreed to compromise and withdrew their troops according to the Tripartite Treaty of 1942. His aim, to discontinue the division of Iran into two as practised during wartime could be achieved. He sent a letter to Molotov, pointing out that:

I am glad that we have reached so cordial an understanding on the question of the withdrawal of Allied troops from Persia, about which I wrote to you on 19th September and you replied on September 20th... My colleagues were pleased to learn from me of the complete agreement between us as to the date by which Allied troops should be withdrawn that is by March 2nd 1946. His Majesty's Government is issuing a direction to the British military authorities accordingly [24].

Nevertheless, the British delegation to the Foreign Minister's meeting, led by Bevin believed that the Soviet government had political ambitions in Iran as well as in the Mediterranean. Pierson Dixon made notes on 2 October 1945, the last day of the Foreign Ministers meeting, that:

The Secretary of State's conversation with Molotov on October 1st has throws further light on the Russian hidden objectives. But the new point which seems to me to emerge, although Molotov has touched on it before during the present meeting in London, is the intensity of Russian jealousy of our position in the Mediterranean now that France and Italy have ceased to be first-class powers. The Russians therefore see us as the unchallenged master of the Mediterranean and the possible leader of a group of countries stretching from Iraq to Egypt, along both shores of the Mediterranean and up the Atlantic seaboard to Scandinavia. Such a position of strength by one power would be a potential threat to Russian security and should therefore be sapped [25].

As time progressed, Bevin felt strongly that he might need to readdress the Iranian question, particularly the issue of retaining Allied troops during the Moscow Conference [26]. This was due to Soviet Union's political behaviour in November 1945. Bevin informed the House of Commons that Soviet troops were refusing to allow the Iranian government to enter their own province of Azerbaijan against the rebels [27]. The Soviet government contended that their forces in Azerbaijan were sufficient

to control the situation. If additional troops from the Iranian government were sent to the scene, it might lead to an increase in disorder and cause bloodshed [28].

Consequently, Bevin met Stalin on 19 December 1945 and asked for his clarification of recent Soviet political behaviour in Azerbaijan. In particular, Bevin was interested to know whether the Soviet government wanted to extend their political penetration of Iran as well as in the Mediterranean. Stalin replied that:

Frankly and honestly, he had no claims against Iran; that was to say, he had no idea of incorporating any part of Iran into the Soviet Union and no intention of impairing the sovereignty of Iran. There were many extreme nationalists in the Iranian Government who wished to damage the Baku oil industry and who had plans of long standing for the incorporation of Baku into Iran [29].

Nonetheless, Bevin was unconvinced by Stalin's explanations. He went further, proposing the formation of a special Commission. In this regard, the British and American delegation submitted, on 24 December 1945, a draft agreement for the establishment of an Anglo-American-Soviet Commission. The purpose of the Commission was to assist the Iranian government in re-establishing her internal stability. The Commission would also investigate and forward recommendations on the Allied troops in Iran. Moreover, Bevin pointed out that:

He felt and His Majesty felt, that the three Governments, having had this area placed at their disposal for the purpose of the war, it would be unfortunate if they had to come before the United Nations in order to clear up the situation. Nor did they wish it to give rise to any misunderstanding between our two Governments. He thought that the proposal now submitted offered a chance of clearing up the situation, safeguarding the integrity of Iran and removing difficulties between Russia and the United Kingdom [30].

The Soviet government however, reacted negatively. Molotov did not consider that the draft agreement proposed by the United Kingdom and the United States had any value, due to the fact that it was subject to the approval of the Iranian Government [31] In other words, Molotov thought the document would remain a scrap of paper unless the concurrence of the Iranian government was secured [32].

Bevin and United Nations' Involvement: The involvement of the Security Council of the United Nations in the

Iranian crisis was largely due to the political competition between the parties involved in the Iranian crisis, namely the United Kingdom, the United States, the Soviet Union and the Iranian government. In this context, it is worth exploring the reasons behind Bevin's decision to bring the United Nations into the crisis.

It should be noted that Bevin had little choice in bringing the United Nations into the picture. Bevin's commitment demonstrates the complexity of the Iranian crisis and reveals how he, as a prominent foreign policy maker, was forced to react to events beyond his ability. In bringing the United Nations into the crisis, Bevin's motive was to achieve British national ends rather than to ease the conflict or to accept the United Nations as one of Britain's partners in managing Iran as well as the Middle East. To put it another way, the United Nations was needed to serve Britain's ultimate aim. In this regard, his desire was to gain greater American sympathy in order to present a united front with the United States against Soviet ambitions in the Northern Tier [33]. Initially, Bevin was committed to limiting United Nations involvement in the crisis. In December 1945 for instance, he refused to support the Iranian government's efforts to present the issue of withdrawing foreign troops before the Security Council for investigation. Bevin was committed to his proposal of forming a Tripartite Commission in Moscow to accelerate the process of withdrawing foreign forces from Iran. Thus, he instructed the British Ambassador in Iran, Reader Bullard to persuade the Iranian government to reconsider their decision to bring the matter to the Security Council. Bevin emphasised in his letter that:

It seems to me that this action of the Persian Government is likely to kill our Moscow proposals for the appointment of a tripartite commission... Please approach the Persian Government accordingly and ask them to reconsider their decision [34].

Reader Bullard replied to Bevin's letter on 9 January 1946, telling him that the Iranian government was uninterested in the British proposal to form the commission. There was strong opposition, particularly from the *Tudeh* party and the extreme nationalists [35]. Bullard told Bevin that he had tried his best to persuade the Iranian government to accept his proposal. As he wrote in his letter to Bevin:

I shall attempt to bring the Persian government nearer to our proposal, but if there is no agreement, I assume that they will wish to appeal to the Security Council. It should be a point to the good that Great Britain and the Americans and Persia have made this strenuous attempt

to settle the cause of their differences by direct negotiation [36].

Nevertheless, the Iranian government proceeded with their decision to refer the matter to the Security Council in January 1946. In this regard, Bevin's attempt to limit United Nations participation in the crisis failed.

Further instances of Bevin's attitude in limiting United Nations involvement in the Iranian crisis was his attempt to gain American support in discouraging the Iranian government from taking the matter before the Security Council. Bevin's attempts to secure Byrnes' agreement in this also failed. In fact, the United States government had instructed their Ambassador in Iran, Murray to urgently deny the press report that the United States had recommended that the Iranian government not take the Iranian question to the United Nations [37]. This was because the United States was sceptical about British objectives in retaining their power in the Northern Tier as well as in the Middle East. The United States was not in a position to support the old systems balance of power and power politics for the benefits of the British Empire in the Northern Tier and the Middle East.

Under these circumstances, Bevin had a delicate task in order to retain British power in the Northern Tier. As a realist, he needed to change the means, rather than his nationalist and imperialist aim of recovering British power in Iran. In fact, at the time of growing tension in the Iranian dispute from January to May 1946, Bevin's first priority was to limit Soviet political encroachment and their efforts to gain a foothold on Iranian soil. The oil factor was only second to the effort of deterring Soviet influence in Iran. He told the Commons that:

As far as we can see it does impinge upon oil supplies from Persia... We are desirous of making further contracts with the Persian Government, but we have been aware that the question should not be re-opened before the withdrawal of foreign troops in accordance with the Treaty of 1942 has been completed. His Majesty's Government have strictly respected this [38].

The reason was that he believed that Iran was the gateway through which the Soviet Union could penetrate the Middle East. If the Iranian territory were completely under the Soviet Union's political control, Bevin believed that the British would have difficulties in sustaining a sphere of influence in the Middle East. According to Pierson Dixon's notes on 24 January 1946, Bevin told Vandenberg and Foster Dulles that:

Coming to the present Soviet policy towards Persia, the Secretary of State explained that in his view, after

undermining the Persian province of Azerbaijan the Russians hoped to be able to penetrate through Kurdistan and so further wrap the arm of the bear round the eastern end of Turkey as well as imperilling the oilfields in Mosul. The Secretary of State said that the moral was that over the Persian issue it was vital to stand up to Russia [39].

Bevin's new strategy was to support the Iranian complaints in the Security Council in January 1946. It must be stressed that Bevin declined to take the Iranian issue to the Security Council on behalf of the Iranian government. The main grounds for his refusal were to avoid the misinterpretation that the issue was an Anglo-Soviet split rather than a Soviet-Iranian dispute. Nevertheless, Bevin was in a position to support the Iranian demand if the issue was on the agenda of the Security Council. He pointed out his assurance in his letter to Reader Bullard on 16 January 1946. Bevin said:

I made it clear that it was for the Persians alone to decide whether to go to the General Assembly or to the Security Council. I could make no recommendation on this, but I assured the Ambassador that I would support it being put on the agenda of either the Assembly or the Security Council, whichever way they decided [40].

The Iranian government's hopes of seeing foreign troops evacuate Iranian soil immediately the war was over were similar to Bevin's policy in Iran. Bevin wasted no time in supporting the Iranian appeal to the Security Council. As the Iranian question was on the Council's agenda, Bevin told the Cabinet on 22 January 1946 that he would resist any attempts from the Soviet Union or her satellite states to remove the Iranian issue from debate and investigation by the Security Council [41].

Later, Bevin remained adamant that the Iranian matter should not be taken off the Security Council agenda. In his speech to the Security Council in late January 1946, he said explicitly that:

We stand for the integrity of Iran without interference in her sovereignty, for the removal of troops from her territory as quickly as we can. I sincerely hope we shall not be put in the position of being asked at this stage to take the question [Iran] off the agenda and so, leave a small power negotiating in what we shall regard as the most adverse circumstances [42].

All these historical developments denote that Bevin tried to mobilise the United Nations and world community to the opinion that the Soviet Union was largely responsible in sparking the Iranian crisis as they were breaching the principles of the United Nations; Soviet behaviour could endanger international security and

action should be taken inside the framework of the United Nations in the interests of international peace. Eventually, as Soviet troops failed to evacuate Iranian territory on 2 March 1946, Bevin committed himself to internationalising the Iranian crisis. The idea was to let the world know what was actually happening in the Iranian crisis in order to damage the Soviet Union's prestige as one of the world's great powers. He told Halifax on 15 March 1946 that the United Kingdom:

Should let the Persian Government know that we feel it is right for them to bring before the Security Council the question of the Soviet failure to withdraw their troops from Persia by 2 March as a dispute... It would also make a deep impression on world opinion, to which the Soviet Government seem to be to some extent susceptible, if the victim's case were put forward by the victim himself in all its stark directness. ... It might also be useful if the knowledge that the Soviet Government was bringing pressure to bear on the Persian Government to prevent the case coming before the UNO were to be allowed to reach the press. It would seem best that this should be done in Tehran [43].

Another of Bevin's strategies was to seek political support from other permanent members of the Security Council. In this regard, he thought that he might need to work shoulder to shoulder with the United States government. Bevin based his political calculation on the fact that the United States was one of the signatories with the Iranian government's of the Tehran Declaration of 1943. In addition, even though the United States preferred direct Iranian assertion of its sovereignty, the Americans did show interest in Bevin's proposal of establishing the 'Big Three' Commission in December 1945 [44]. Next, the United States committed to removing its troops from Iran in January 1946. Finally and importantly, the United States government voted in favour of the United Kingdom's military tasks in countries such as in Greece and Indonesia when the issues were raised in the Security Council in February 1946.

On all of these grounds, Bevin felt that cooperation and alliance with the United States was essential to create political pressure against the Soviet Union in order to retain British power in the Northern Tier. The difficulty for a nationalist and imperialist such as Bevin at the time was how to secure United States' sympathy in order to retain British power and influence in Iran as well as in the Northern Tier as a whole. Certainly, the United States was not interested in offering help to the United Kingdom in maintaining the balance of power in the Northern Tier in peacetime [45]. This meant that the United States had a

clear policy of supporting the principles of the United Nations rather than the British Empire.

Bevin and United States' Involvement: As the Iranian crisis of 1946 largely reflected the world powers' confrontation in the Near East, it is also worth exploring the United States' attitude and role in the crisis. In fact, the number of scholarly studies concerning the Iranian question from the American perspective outnumbers the studies from either the British or the Soviet Union's perspectives. Hence, the examination of the part of the United States is vital in acquiring a clearer picture of the Iranian dispute.

One of the basic questions is how the United States became involved in the crisis. The United States was reluctant and hesitated to participate directly in the Iranian crisis to December 1945. This was because it was committed to a non-involvement policy, regarding the Iranian question as part of European affairs and considered the Anglo-Soviet rivalry in the Northern Tier irrelevant to American policy. The United States also recognised the British sphere of influence in the Northern Tier [46]. The United States had agreed to withdraw its troops from Iranian territory earlier than had the United Kingdom or the Soviet Union. On 1 June 1945 for instance, Brigadier General Donald P. Booth, the Commanding General and Persian Gulf Commander, announced publicly that United States forces had been in the process of withdrawing from Iran that month [47]. The practical grounds for American troops to leave Iran were to reduce the danger of Allied friction over Iran and to accelerate the process of restoring the power of the Iranian government [48]. In addition, the United States declined to give full support to Bevin's proposal to establish a Tripartite Commission in Moscow in December 1945 to deal with the Iranian question [49]. The United States preferred bilateral negotiation between the Iranian government and the Soviet Union on the matter of withdrawing its troops from Iranian territory. However, the United States shifted its policy from January 1946 onwards. At a time of growing tension over the Iranian question, the United States took the lead in the diplomatic struggle against Soviet ambitions in Iran and in the Northern Tier.

It should be noted that there is no single explanation for how the United States entered the picture in 1946. There were, however, interrelated events in bringing it into the crisis. These events include the United States' attitude of honouring the Tehran Declaration of December 1943, its support of the principles of the United Nations,

fear of the Soviet Union's political behaviour in expending its influence in the Northern Tier, defending its national interests and the Iranian desire for its participation in ending the crisis. Of all these events, it is argued that the United States' attitude of upholding the principles of the United Nations in the interests of international security was the key event in bringing the United States into the crisis. In other words, the effectiveness, success and prestige of the United Nations in years to come was the major American concern in justifying its involvement in the crisis.

Concerning the United States' attitude in upholding the Tehran Declaration of December 1943, this was parallel with its primary policy at the time of maintaining the sovereignty and independence of Iran during wartime as well as in peacetime [50]. In relation to the Iranian crisis of 1946, the Americans believed that the Soviet Union breached the Tehran Declaration of December 1943. As one of the signatories of the treaty, the United States felt that it was its responsibility to intervene in order to ensure that small states including Iran maintain sovereignty and independence. Thus, the United States had no alternative but become involved and resist Soviet attempts to gain control in Iran.

At the time of the growing Iranian crisis from January to May 1946, the United States needed to ensure and safeguard its economic and strategic interests in the Northern Tier. An independent Iran was essential as a buffer state to protect the United States' national interests in the Northern Tier as well as in the Middle East. In fact, according to the 'Weekly Political Report' of February 1946 from Lord Halifax, British Ambassador to the United States, there was a strong argument in the United States that the US needed to realise *the importance of Iran to the United States not only for oil, trade and airports, but as the stage on which its world leadership is being tested* [51]. Thus, according to Lord Halifax's report, it was suggested by Dr. Millspaugh, the former Head of the American Financial Mission to Persia that the United States could *not run away from realities as well as responsibilities*. If this were to happen, the United States' attitude would only give political advantage to *Russia's thinly camouflaged programme of absorption and domination* [52].

In addition, the Superintending Under Secretary, Eastern Department of Foreign Office, R.G. Howe, argued that the United States could not isolate itself from involvement in the Iranian question, as it would jeopardise its national interests in the region. In his own notes to Bevin on 16 April 1946, he wrote:

Moreover, their [the United States] material interests are already threatened by the Russian drive in the Middle East, since they have oil interests in Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, which could not longer unaffected if a Russian puppet government acquired control of the whole of Persia [53].

Furthermore, the Iranian peoples themselves were looking for greater United States involvement in the latest Anglo-Soviet rivalry in Iran. The Iranians wanted the United States to act as buffer and counter balance to the Anglo-Soviet threat [54]. The Iranian government trusted in the United States' attitude of honouring the principles embodied in the Atlantic Charter of 1941. There were several attempts from the Iranian side to attract the United States in wartime as well as in peacetime. The Iranian strategies included welcoming more private American companies such as Standard Oil of New Jersey and Sinclair to invest in oil fields in Iran, urging the United States to take over the Trans-Iranian railway entirely, employing an American adviser to reform the Iranian army and to run the Iranian economic administration and offering their opium crop for medical use in America [55]. From the Iranian point of view, since the United States had significant national interests in Iran, it had no alternative but to intervene if its interests were threatened. Thus, the Anglo-Soviet crisis of 1946 in Iran was a blessing for the Iranians as the United States was willing to intervene in order to defend its national interests in Iran as well as in the Northern Tier.

Under all these interrelated circumstances, the Iranian crisis was important to the United States. Not only was Iran's independence and sovereignty at stake, but also its economic and strategic interests would be jeopardised. The United States could not distance itself from the Iranian crisis of 1946. Instead, it had to react to events if it was committed to defending the independence of small states such as Iran, as well as ensuring the effectiveness and prestige of the United Nations in future. Eventually, the United States entered the picture and its direct involvement was even clearer from January to May 1946.

The United States began to respond actively in light of the failure of the Tripartite Commission initiated by Bevin in Moscow in December 1945 to accelerate the process of foreign troop withdrawals from Iran. Instead of encouraging bilateral negotiation between the Iranian government and the Soviet Union, the United States urged the Iranian government to stand firm with its complaint for a Security Council investigation in January 1946. The Secretary of State, J. Byrnes, insisted that the United States, however, did not take responsibility for

putting the Iranian question forward for Security Council investigation on behalf of the Iranian government [56]. Instead, the Iranian government themselves had to do so. According to Byrnes, the United States wanted to maintain a harmonious relationship with the Soviet Union and Iran, as well as with the United Nations. Byrnes, however, assured support to the Iranian government and that 'the United States intend to carry out the commitments which it made when it signed the charter of the United Nations and that it intends fully support the principles of the Charter [57]. This meant that the United States manifested its support for the Iranian government through the United Nations in the interests of international security and peace.

Meanwhile, the date for the Soviet Union troops to evacuate Iran was 2 March 1946. The Soviet government however, retained their troops in Iran instead of leaving the country. On 18 March 1946, the Iranian government informed the Security Council that there was no progress from the Soviet side in evacuating their country [58]. In other words, the Soviets not only disregard the Security Council resolution adopted on 30 January 1946, but also breached the Tripartite Treaty of 1942. The Soviet representative contended that the Soviet troops did act to evacuate Iranian territory and there was progress and a positive result from negotiation between the two parties in relation to the Council's resolution on 30 January 1946. He mentioned that Soviet troops had started to evacuate Iranian territory on 2 March 1946. He suggested that the Security Council had no grounds, therefore, for hearing Iran's appeal and therefore proposed that the issue should be removed from the Council's agenda. Nevertheless, the Soviet proposal was defeated, with nine votes in favour and two votes against retaining the Iranian issue on the Security Council agenda.

Even though their proposal was defeated, the Soviet government tried to play for time. This time they proposed to postpone the Iranian issue for the Council's agenda on 10 April 1946. Once again, the Security Council rejected the Soviet proposal, as it had received only two out of ten votes. As their efforts to remove and postpone the Iranian matter ended in failure, the Soviet representative refused to participate in the Council's debate and walked out. The Soviet representative did not turn up for the next three meetings on 28, 29 and 30 March 1946 to discuss the Iranian issue [59]. The Security Council however, proceeded with the discussion even though the Soviet delegate was absent. The Security Council adopted another resolution on 4 April 1946 that:

The Council defer further proceeding on the Iranian appeal until 6 May, at which the Soviet government and the Iranian government are requested to report to the Council whether the withdrawal of all Soviet troops from the whole of Iran has been completed and at which time the council should consider what if any, further proceedings on the Iranian appeal are required [60].

The United States reacted to the March 1946 Soviet announcement that it intended to retain its troops in Iran by sending official protest notices to Moscow. In Byrnes' letter of March 1946 to Molotov, for instance, he mentioned that the Soviet Union had breached the Tehran Declaration of 1943 by retaining troops in Iran. In addition, the Soviet government's action was contrary to the Charter of the United Nations. Byrnes insisted that the United States 'appreciates the heavy responsibility resting upon the world powers under the Charter to observe their obligations and to respect the sovereign rights of other states' [61]. Byrnes consequently urged the Soviet Union to withdraw all Soviet forces immediately from Iranian territory in the interests of international security and 'peaceful progress among the peoples of all nations' [62]. Lord Halifax reported to the Foreign Office from Washington in his 'Weekly Political Summary' that the official United States protest to Moscow about Persia *which was published on March 7th has been accepted everywhere with approval and Left Wingers merely stress with satisfaction that it is not couched in terms of an ultimatum* [63]. All these historical developments in the Iranian crisis indicate that the United States' involvement in the crisis was largely due to its attitude in upholding the principles embodied in the Charter of the United Nations. The United States was not in a position to support the British effort in retaining its sphere of influence in the Northern Tier as a whole. Consequently, the United States took the lead in the diplomatic struggle to limit Soviet ambition in Iran.

In addition, it must be emphasised that under the pressure of world powers, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom rather than the UN itself, the Soviet Union finally agreed to evacuate Iran. On 6 May 1946, the Iranian representative reported to the Security Council that the Soviet troops had completely evacuated the provinces of Khorassan, Gorgan, Mazanderan and Gilan. Nevertheless, on 22 May 1946, the Security Council decided that the Iranian issue should be retained on the Council's agenda and reopened for discussion if requested by any member of the United Nations in the coming years.

In terms of Bevin's wider ambition to bring in the United States as a way of helping to limit the power of the Soviet Union, the American decision to intervene in the Iranian crisis under the aegis of the UN was a most welcome development. In this regard, Bevin's motive in bringing the United States and the United Nations into the crisis differed significantly from that of Attlee in terms of sharing power and responsibility in administering the Northern Tier. Instead, to Bevin, British power and prestige were to be retained in the Northern Tier. American involvement also meant that the United Kingdom was not alone in combating the Soviet ambitions in the Northern Tier. Both countries were uniting against Soviet ambitions in the region. As a result, Bevin instructed Alexander Cadogan, British Ambassador to the United Nations, not to go beyond the United States' actions in the Security Council in pressing Soviet Union forces to leave Iran. Instead, the United Kingdom's policy was to let the United States take the lead. In his letter to Cadogan on 2 April 1946, Bevin emphasised that:

It would be better for tactical reasons to let Mr. Byrnes take the lead... We have up to now borne the main burden of resisting Russian penetration of Persia and it is obviously in the interest both of ourselves and of the United Nations as a whole that the United States should now bring her full influence to bear in defence of the Charter. ...I think that your role should be broadly to back up Mr. Byrnes and fill in any gaps in his arguments, emphasising particularly our special position as a direct party to the Tripartite Treaty of 1942, which has been violated [64].

It is clear that Bevin was a tactical opportunist in directing both the United Nations and the United States' involvement through the United Nations, to ensure the survival of British power and prestige in the Iran and the Northern Tier. In short, the United States served Bevin's imperialist aim in Iran well.

CONCLUSION

The Iranian crisis revealed that the Security Council of the United Nations had not been an effective instrument for solving the crisis. In addition, Britain under Bevin leadership had tried to limit UN involvement before January 1946 and had pursued a bilateral diplomacy designed to get Iran and the Soviet Union to agree on a withdrawal date for Russian troops. Bevin's eyes were firmly fixed on the strategic importance to Britain of the 'Northern Tier', from Istanbul to the Persian Gulf. He wished to keep the Soviet from penetrating any further

southwards. Bevin had tried, through the formation of a Tripartite Commission, to solve the problem without the UN becoming involved and he had advised the Iranians against going to it. Unfortunately, only the United States had shown any interest in this idea. When the Iranians took the dispute to the UN in January 1946, Bevin adapted his diplomacy accordingly. Bevin hoped that through the medium of the UN, he could realise his wider aim of bring the United States in to help prevent Russian expansion in Iran. In this, Bevin was a tactical opportunist. He knew that the Americans would not support British imperial aims in the Persian Gulf, but by dressing them up in the rhetoric of the UN, he hoped to achieve his objective. Bevin was successful, in so far as the crisis in Iran tightened cooperation between Britain and America. The latter justified its involvement in terms of international security and the need to uphold the Charter of the UN.

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