

**The Iranian Crisis: A Study of British Perceptions and
the Genesis of the Cold War**

Mark Tseselsky

06/14/99

Professor Hasegawa, topic advisor

Professor Glickstein, seminar director

Professor Lindemann, reviewing faculty member

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Methodology	
Background	8
Historiography	17
Department of State Perceptions of American interests	21
American perceptions of the Soviet Union	23
Labour Left's	
Criticism of the United States	31
Perception of British interests in Iran	32
Perception of the USSR	32
The Nature of the Labour Party	33
Attlee's	
Perception of British interests in the Middle East	35
Perception of the Soviet Union	38
Bevin's	
Perception of British interests in Iran	40
Perception of the United States	41
Perception of the USSR	41
Foreign Office Perceptions of the Soviet Union	43
Conclusion	63

¹ In 1925 Reza Shah Pahlavi, Shah-in-Shah of Persia changed the official name of his country, Persia, to Iran. However, British Foreign Office continued to refer to the country as Persia to avoid collision with Iran.

Introduction

In August 1941, two allies during World War II, Britain and the USSR, jointly occupied Iran¹ to prevent the spread of German influence in the country. Iran became a vital supply route of Western aid to the Soviet Union during the most difficult years of their common struggle against Nazism. However, even wartime cooperation in Iran did not permanently alter traditional rivalry and suspicion between Britain and the USSR in this area. The tripartite treaty of 1942 signed by the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and Iran temporarily quieted mutual suspicions because it stipulated the eventual withdrawal of all foreign troops, while guaranteeing Iran's integrity and independence. However, the 1944 Soviet demand of an oil concession in northern Iran, made possible in part by the success of Russian armies at Stalingrad in 1943, signaled the renewal of traditional Anglo-Russian rivalry.

As German defeat became imminent, and differences amongst the Allies more prominent, Iran turned into an arena of conflicting national interests of the Big Three. The Soviet Union used its occupation of northern Iran to reestablish a sphere of influence that Imperial Russia had once enjoyed, and attempted to spread this influence further throughout Iran. Since Great Britain was determined to hold on to its oil and strategic interests in Iran, the country once again became a center of traditional Anglo-Russian rivalry in the region. In contrast to these powers, the United States did not have any previous interest in Iran. But having become involved in Iran because of lend-lease aid to

¹ In 1925 Reza Shah Pahlavi, Shah-in-Shah of Persia changed the official name of his country, Persia, to Iran. However, British Foreign Office continued to refer to the country as Persia to avoid confusion with Iraq.

Russia, the American government decided to use Iran as an example of the workability of the United Nations concept and to further its own oil interests.

The undercurrent of the competing national interests came to the foreground in March 1946 when the Soviet Union failed to withdraw troops from Iran by the agreed date. The United States and the USSR had minimal geo-political interests in conflict in Iran. However, the United States became convinced that ideological differences made cooperation with the Soviet Union impossible and decided to use the Iranian complaint against the Soviet Union as the first instance of containment. The dispute in the United Nations Security Council between the USSR and the United States over Iran served as the first open diplomatic confrontation of the Cold War. Because of this important American intervention, until recently the Iranian crisis of March 1946, like most of Cold War history, has been studied as a phenomenon of Soviet-American relations.

Aside from US-Soviet relations, however, there are other important factors to be considered. For example, it is important to consider how British policies in Iran affected the development of the Cold War. As a multitude of decisions and turning points, the development of British policies in Iran requires an extensive primary source study, which is beyond the scope of this paper. However, an examination of the British perceptions of the Soviet Union, British national interests, and the role of the United States in Iran behind the British policies will contribute to understanding of the British role in the Cold War development.

The Cold War happened because the way former allies perceived each other changed from positive to negative. What caused this change? Was it an aggressive Soviet foreign policy alone that provoked Western response and instituted the Cold War?

The Soviet Union's rough tactics definitely contributed to Western negative perceptions of the USSR. However, the most recent scholarship rejects the notion that Soviet aggressiveness alone caused the Cold War. What were other possible reasons for the change in wartime friendliness and cooperation? What role did ideological differences have in changing perceptions? What role did Britain's insistence on great power status play in the change?

Whereas ideological differences were very important in determining the United States policy vis-à-vis the USSR, in developing Britain's policy these differences were superceded by its insistence on maintaining a great power status. Naturally, Britain could not but notice a certain ideological component in Soviet anti-British propaganda. However, unlike the United States, Great Britain had a history of imperial rivalry with Russia over Iran and elsewhere. Therefore, in its policy towards the Soviet Union Britain preferred the imperial rather than the ideological approach. The terms imperial and ideological are extremely hard to define. For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to idealistic American policies based on Atlantic Charter principles, and later on the manichean view of communism and capitalism as ideological, and to British policies based on the preservation of economic and strategic interests in Iran as imperial.

Britain's approach toward Russia in Iran was based on the preservation of imperial interests "in all circumstances."² This did not mean that Britain was conciliatory

² Quoted in Great Britain Foreign Office Weekly Political Intelligence Summaries Kraus International Publications: Millwood NY London England, Schaan Liechtenstein 1983. Weekly Political Intelligence Summaries (WPIS) were issued by the Foreign Office. There was an attempt to keep each report short and concise, but on the other hand, there was a report for practically every British concern around the globe. The more important the topic, the wider was its coverage. As the events in Iran gradually escalated into a crisis, the reports on the country became longer, and sometimes mere reporting of events was supplemented with analysis.

toward the Soviet Union. There was an evolution of Britain's perceptions of the USSR. At the height of Allied understanding, 1941-44, Britain was willing to accommodate certain Soviet war aims because it meant more security for its own interests. However, as soon as Britain perceived danger to its imperial interests its policy became hawkish. This happened when the Soviets demanded an extensive oil concession in 1944, and requested to have a presence in the Mediterranean in the summer of 1945. Ideology, which Britain acknowledged as a Soviet tool in achieving its aims since the oil concession crisis in 1944, took the spotlight in British perceptions of the Soviet Union only in the wake of the March crisis.

At the same time, it is important to emphasize that British perceptions of national interests and of the USSR were not homogeneous. The Labour left and Prime Minister Clement Attlee emphasized a scale back of imperial commitments and cooperation with the Soviet Union via the United Nations. In contrast to the Premier, the Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin, the chiefs of staff, and the majority of the Foreign Office specialists believed it was vital to maintain exclusive British predominance in the Mediterranean and the Middle East regardless of the possible effect on the Anglo-Soviet relations. The fact that despite these disagreements a policy of strict preservation of traditional national interests was adopted illustrates the preference of imperial concerns over the impulses to cooperate with the Soviet Union. In this light, the aggressiveness of the Soviet post-war foreign policy is by itself an inadequate explanation of the genesis of the Cold War.

In WPIS # 297 13/6/45 Mr. Law, a Foreign Office representative, was quoted in answering a question in Parliament on policy in Iran, "...it was government's intention in all circumstances to safeguard our Imperial interests in South Persia and the Persian Gulf."

British perceptions of Soviet policies in Iran were formed on British perceptions of their national goals and the role of the United States in achieving those goals. Despite its socialist leanings, the Labour government remained committed to maintaining Britain's role as a great power, which in turn required maintaining British imperial interests all over the globe. The British did not want to cooperate with the Russians if such cooperation threatened their imperial position, which they deemed essential for British post-war recovery.³

Methodology

To verify my hypothesis I will examine the records of the Foreign Office officials, the Foreign Secretary, the Prime Minister, and the Labour left on three key issues: their perceptions of the Soviet Union, of British national interests, and of the role of the United States in Iran. Also, I will compare these perceptions with the American perceptions of the Soviet Union and of America's role in Iran to suggest a different basis for the British Foreign Office perceptions towards the USSR. The progress in change of British perceptions of the Soviet Union from October 1944 to April 1946 will illuminate these differences. The obsession of the most influential British policy-makers with the preservation of great power status will be shown through alternatives presented to the prevailing attitudes both from within and outside of the government. Certain analytical tools such as an imperial versus ideological basis for assessment will be useful in describing British perceptions of the Soviet Union.

³ See John Kent "The British Empire and the Origins of the Cold War, 1944-49 in Anne Deighton (ed.) *Britain and the First Cold War* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1990) 165-183

Background

Since the middle of the nineteenth century Britain and Russia were rivals in Iran. The imperial rivalry was a result of "Russia's expansionist policies and her need for warm-water ports [which] clashed with Britain's need to maintain her line of communication in the Eastern Mediterranean and her desire to protect a vast area which stretched from the Persian Gulf to Tibet."⁴ As primarily a navy power, Britain could not compete with the strong geopolitical position of Russia in Persia. Therefore, in the decade prior to First World War the men who shaped British foreign policy recognized the limit of Britain's options in its competition against Russia. Since it was obvious Russia could annex northern Iran at any point, British policy should concentrate, it was reasoned, "on what is essential to us, which we can hold."⁵

Britain's opportune moment to negotiate with Russia arrived shortly after the turn of the century. Russia had to halt its expansionist drive because of the 1905 Revolution and its humiliating defeat in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-5. Also, both countries were concerned about German activities in Europe and in the Middle East. The conciliatory mood of 1907 presaged wartime cooperation against Germany. The Anglo-Russia Convention of 1907 divided Iran into spheres of political and economic influence: a northern sphere controlled by the Russians, a neutral sphere, and a southern sphere controlled by Britain.

However, cooperation with Britain could not be reconciled with Russian interests in Iran, so Russian expansion in the country continued despite the 1907 agreement. V.N.

⁴ Bruce Robellet Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East: Great Power Conflict and Diplomacy in Iran, Turkey, and Greece* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1980), 130. From now on cited as Kuniholm

⁵ Memorandum by Lord George Hamilton, Secretary of State for India, No. 338, April 3, 1900; *L.I.*, 70,

Lamsdorff, minister of foreign affairs under Czar Nicholas II, defined Russian aim in Iran as follows:

To preserve the integrity and the inviolability of the possessions of the Shah; without seeking territorial accretions for ourselves, without allowing the hegemony of a third power gradually to subject Persia to our dominant influence ... In other words, our task is to make Persia politically an obedient and useful, i.e. sufficiently powerful, instrument in our hands.⁶

Thus, it is not surprising that "by 1910 [Russia] felt confident enough to resume inroads into Iran, notwithstanding the 1907 convention." On the eve of World War I, "Iran had again become a virtual Russian protectorate."⁷

In their relations with Iran, the Bolsheviks, who took over the government of Russia after the October Revolution of 1917, balanced ideology with both immediate security and long-term traditional concerns. Entertaining the hopes of a world revolution, the Bolshevik leadership could not ignore the role of Iran as the key to the Middle East. As in other countries, the Bolsheviks appealed to Iranian workers and peasants to "throw off" the Shah, the "feudal vampires" and the "English robbers."⁸ In 1920 Soviet representatives even briefly took over the Gilan Soviet Republic in northern Iran. However, security concerns turned out to be more important than proselytizing

1899 quoted in Kazamzadeh 346-347.

⁶ "Instruction" "Tsarskaya Rossiia i Persiia v epokhu russko-iaponskoi voiny" (Tsarist Russia and Persia During the Russo-Japanese War), *Krasnyi Archiv*, 4 (53) (Moscow, 1932), 13-14 quoted in Kazamzadeh 460

⁷ Firuz Kazamzadeh, "Russia and the Middle East," in Ivo J. Lederer ed., *Russian Foreign Policy: Essays in Historical Perspective* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1962) 519-20 quoted in Alvin Z. Rubinstein *Soviet Policy Toward Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan: The Dynamics of Influence* (New York: Praeger, 1982) 59

⁸ "Soviet Appeal to Persian Workers and Peasants to Support the Soviet Revolution, August 30, 1919" USSR. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *Documenty vnesheii politiki SSSR* (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1958), II pp. 239-42. As translated and reprinted in Basil Dmytryshyn and Frederick Cox Chapter 3. *Soviet-Persian Relations, 1918-1985 The Soviet Union and the Middle East: a documentary record of Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, 1917-1985* (Princeton, New Jersey: Kingston Press, c1987), 250-255 From now on cited as Dmytryshyn and Cox

ideological prospects. Lenin insisted on withdrawing the Red Army from northern Iran both to avoid conflict with Britain, and more importantly, to gain favor with Iran. In Lenin's view favorable predisposition of the Iranian government to the Bolshevik government precluded the possibility of Iran becoming a British base for attack on socialist Russia. Therefore, as early as December 1917, Lenin nullified the 1907 Anglo-Russia agreement.⁹ Furthermore, Iran was relieved of all Tsarist imposed obligations.¹⁰ In 1921 Soviet Russia signed a treaty with Iran that renounced all claims to northern Iran. In exchange for Soviet renunciation of all Tsarist claims and for withdrawal of Soviet support from the Gilan Soviet republic, the Iranians undertook to allow no groups or organizations hostile to Russia to form on Iranian soil. Moreover, the Russians were allowed under Article 6 of the treaty to move troops into Iran against any hostile presence, if "after a warning from the Russian Soviet government, the Persian government [was] unable to avert this menace."¹¹ Tactically, the security of Russian border was more important than the strategic interests of the proletarian revolution in northern Iran.

Great Britain was left alone to exercise a sphere of influence in southern Iran. Since Britain's main interest in Iran was oil, British influence in Iran was exercised through the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, especially after the British government acquired a majority interest in 1914. Iranian oil became increasingly important to Britain after its navy switched to oil to fuel its warships. From 1921 to 1941, the powerful forces of

⁹ "Lenin's and Stalin's appeal to the Moslems of Russia and the East to Support Revolution, December 3, 1917" USSR. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *Documenty vneshnei politiki SSSR* (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1957), I pp. 34-5. Reprinted and translated in Dmytryshyn and Cox 5

¹⁰ "Soviet Renunciation of All Tsarist Claims on Persia and Appeal for Friendly Relations, June 26, 1919" *Documenty Vneshnei Politiki* as translated and reprinted in Dmytryshyn and Cox 246-249

¹¹ "Moscow treaty between the Russian Socialist Federated Republic and Persia, February 26, 1921" League of Nations. *treaty Series*, Vol. 9, No. 268 as reprinted in Dmytryshyn and Cox 260-271.

Iranian nationalism, British imperialism, and Soviet Communism were in a stage of "an armed armistice."¹²

The German threat in 1941 brought the two imperial rivals closer to cooperation in Iran as it had in 1907. Although it is questionable whether the threat of German domination of Iran was serious enough in 1941 to warrant the Allied concern, German influence was clearly visible;¹³ Germany was Iran's leading economic partner.¹⁴ In any case, Britain and Soviet Russia decided to take no chances, so both countries made presentations to the Iranian government requesting removal of most Germans from Iran and access to the Iranian railroad for passing of vital supplies to Russia. However, the Iranian ruler, Reza Shah Pahlavi, was reluctant to upset the neutrality of his country and to antagonize Germany, his important economic partner, and he was even more hesitant to allow foreign troops into his country. He also denied the Allied request to use the Iranian railroad as a supply route to Russia. However, the Shah's attempts to keep his country neutral were to no avail.

A new phase of cooperation between Great Britain and the Soviet Union began in August 1941 when the two countries jointly occupied and divided Iran into northern and southern zones of occupation. The British moved in 19,000 troops mainly as a way to protect the oilfields in the south. The Soviet Union moved in 30,000 to 40,000 troops into northern Iran. The two countries proceeded to shape the Iranian economy according to the needs of the Allied war effort, inflicting much hardship on the Iranian people in the

¹² Kuniholm 136

¹³ In his memoirs former British Ambassador wrote, "no final answer can be given whether the invasion of Persia was justified." Sir Reader Bullard, *The Camels Must Go* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961) 227

¹⁴ Louise L'Estrange Fawcett, *Iran and the Cold War: Azerbaijan crisis of 1946* (New York: Cambridge

process. The tripartite treaty of 1942 signed by Iran, Britain, and the USSR was undoubtedly an expression of cooperation between the Allies. For example, the Soviet and the British zones were divided along the lines similar to the spheres of influence of the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. However, certain provisions of the treaty pointed to the preoccupation of each side with imperial interests and the existence of mutual suspicion. For example, as if to dissuade either power from acquiring territory in Iran, the treaty obliged the Allied powers to respect "the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of Iran,"¹⁵ and to withdraw all Allied forces "not later than six months after all hostilities between the Allied Powers and Germany and her associates" have ended in an armistice.¹⁶

The story of conflict and cooperation among Britain, Russia and Iran became complicated by the appearance of a new player – the United States of America. The American involvement in Iran during World War II was unprecedented. The US Army Persian Gulf Command, which at its highest point of expansion numbered 30,000 troops, administrated the flow of aid to Russia, the Iranian railroad, and American airfields. Continuing its policy of involving a third party to offset the influence of rival Russian and British interests, the Iranian government appealed to the United States for help in running various aspects of its government and economy. The United States responded with a flood of advisors. America was a particularly attractive partner for Iran because of its renowned stance against imperialism. The ideals of self-determination and sovereignty for nations were particularly appealing to the Iranians, who had for years been pressured by their powerful neighbors, Britain and Russia. The Atlantic Charter

University Press, 1992), 144

¹⁵ Dmytryshyn and Cox 361

principles promulgated by President Roosevelt and accepted by Churchill and Stalin offered hope for small nations like Iran. In turn, the US gave Iran special significance because it was the sight of unprecedented cooperation between the Big Three. The American leadership saw the case of Iran as a test of post-war cooperation among the allies. The spirit of Allied cooperation and American idealism was embodied in the Declaration on Iran issued during the 1943 Tehran meeting of the Big Three. The three great powers guaranteed the independence and sovereignty of Iran. However, the idealism of the Tehran declaration did not last.

The presence of Soviet troops in northern Iran presented the USSR with an opportunity to fulfil traditional Russian objectives, which was bound to make a mockery of the Tehran declaration and to revive the traditional Anglo-Russian rivalry over Iran. Much like their imperial predecessors, the Bolsheviks wanted to be the dominant influence in the country without partitioning Iran. According to the latest research in Russian archival material, Soviet interests in Iran "centered on the prospect of gaining access to oil in northern Iran" and were "linked to considerations of Soviet state prestige vis-à-vis ... the United States and Great Britain."¹⁷ During the first few years of the war Russia could pay only scarce attention to Iran because of the struggle against Germany. However, after the success of the Russian armies at Stalingrad in 1943, "there was a distinctly aggressive note in Soviet policy as demonstrated by its behavior in the oil concession crisis."¹⁸

¹⁶ Dmytryshyn Cox 364

¹⁷ Nataliya I. Yegorova "The 'Iran Crisis' of 1945-46: A View from the Russian Archives" (Cold War International History Project - Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, May 1996) 2

¹⁸ Fawcett *Iran and Cold War* 85

Soviet behavior during the oil crisis put the Soviet Union at odds with the Iranians, Americans, and the British. In September 1944 Sergei I. Kavtaradze requested the Iranian government to grant the USSR a 150,000 square kilometers wide area for an oil concession in northern Iran. Determined not to let the Soviet Union use the presence of its troops to secure an unfavorable oil concession in the north, the Iranian government passed a law prohibiting any oil concession for as long as foreign troops were in Iran. This refusal of the Iranian government brought heavy pressure from the Soviet side. So harsh was the Soviet propaganda that the Iranian Prime Minister M. Said resigned in November to improve Soviet-Iranian relations. The pro-Soviet forces organized anti-government strikes and demonstrations. Finally, in blatant violation of the tripartite agreement, the Iranian government was not allowed to send troops to restore order in the north.

Ostensibly, Soviet allies did not mind an oil concession for the Soviet Union in northern Iran as long as the Iranians were willing to negotiate. However, both the United States and Britain were concerned about the political implications of granting the Soviet Union such a huge concession in the north. They were also concerned about the USSR's tactics. In November 1944, the Weekly Political Intelligence Summary of the British Foreign Office quoted a speech on the oil issue by Sumner Welles, former US Undersecretary of State, in which he expressed concern about Russian attitudes during the oil concession crisis.

Russia's attitude is most important, because it raises the vital question of the part the Soviet is going to play in the international organization ... the right of Russia to ask that neighboring Governments be friendly and co-operative should not be construed to mean that they must acquiesce in every advantage which the Russians seek.¹⁹

¹⁹ WPIS # 268 November 22, 1944 Great Britain Foreign Office Weekly Political Intelligence Summaries

Soviet tactics in Iran were influenced by ideological structures within the Soviet Union, which "took an active role in implementing Soviet plans in Iran." The ideological structures within the Soviet government -- the Department of International Information (DDI), later known as the Department of Foreign Policy (DFP) within the Central Committee of All-Union Communist Party (bolshevik) [AUCP(b)] -- were the inheritance of the disbanded Communist International.²⁰ They followed 'party diplomacy', which was distinguished from the diplomacy of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs (PCFA) by several important characteristics. The 'party diplomacy' was completely secret; and oriented towards the 'propagandizing of Marxist-Leninist ideology' and the promotion of Soviet interests in foreign countries using national communist and democratic movements.²¹

The Communist party of Iran, Tudeh, and later the Azerbaijan Democratic Party were used to promote the national interests of the Soviet Union. Since Tudeh's formation in 1941 its goal was to "prevent the widening of British political influence in Iran, while supporting, as a means to this end, the growth of American influence."²² It was the instigator of anti-government demonstrations and strikes during the oil concession crisis. In December 1944, the Iranian parliament, "an obedient weapon" in British hands, shut the door to future foreign oil concessions for as long as the Allied troops were on Iran's soil. In response, the 'party diplomacy' underground decided to use the Tudeh party to control the Majlis (Iranian Parliament). To this end the nationalistic Azerbaijan

Kraus International Publications: Millwood NY London England, Schaan Liechtenstein 1983.

²⁰ Nataliya I. Yegorova "The 'Iran Crisis' of 1945-46: A View from the Russian Archives" (Cold War International History Project - Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, May 1996) 3

²¹ Yegorova 5 (Note that the author was careful to point out that the DFP did not become a bureaucratic-

Democratic Party replaced the northern section of the communist Tudeh, and the Kurdish tribes of northern Iran were encouraged to cooperate with the Democrats. This move used grievances accumulated by the Azerbaijanis and the Kurds against the central government to further Soviet ends.²³ In response to the Majlis law prohibiting new elections while foreign troops were in Iran, the Democrats successfully took over the government of Azerbaijan in December 1945. The question of autonomy for Azerbaijan became an important bargaining tool in Soviet efforts to secure an oil concession.

As the Soviet Union stepped up its pressure on Iran, the United States and Britain became increasingly concerned about Soviet policy. The Anglo-Saxon powers realized that the presence of Soviet troops in Iran was crucial to the success of the Tudeh and the Democrat take-over of Azerbaijan. For example, the Red Army prevented Iranian troops from crushing the Tudeh opposition and the Azerbaijan rebels. Therefore, at various Allied meetings from September 1944 to December 1945, British and American representatives attempted to discuss troop withdrawal. However, the United States did not want to press the issue for fear of a breakdown in Soviet cooperation on other issues. And Britain was anxious to secure American help in preserving its interests in Iran. Moreover, aside from withdrawal from Tehran, Allied requests for troop withdrawal did not produce any results. The Soviet Union responded with a promise to abide by all the Soviet-signed agreements.

The Soviet Union failed to withdraw its troops by the agreed deadline of March 2, 1946. In response, the British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin sent a strong note of

party organ closely connected with the ideology and policy of the "Cold War" until mid-1946.)

²² RtsKhIDNI, f.17, op. 128, d. 11. 5-7 quoted in Yegorova 5

²³ A March 1945 letter from a secret agent of the AUCP(b) CC outlines the policy of using electoral success in the north to settle "our economic problems with Iran in the way that we want."; quoted in

protest to the Soviet government. The ambiguous nature of the American consul's report of Soviet troop movements in March brought further tension to the political atmosphere. The United States government stepped in and encouraged the Iranian government to present the existing situation as 'a dispute' to the United Nations Council. The first open diplomatic confrontation between the USSR and the United States thus ensued, presaging the coming of the Cold War. The Soviet troops were eventually withdrawn in May 1946, but the spirit of confrontation and coldness between the East and the West remained.

Historiography

Since the Iranian crisis was the first instance of open Soviet-American confrontation, the crisis has for the most part been studied from the point of view of Soviet-American relations. It seems as if the first generation of historians writing about the Cold War was prejudiced by anti-Communist hysteria. According to these authors, the ideologically motivated expansionism of the Soviet Union caused the Cold War because after a certain point, for example with the Iranian crisis, the West was no longer willing to appease the Soviets.²⁴ These authors overly relied on primary source documents from the American side, such as the reflections of US Department of State officials writing about their role in the early Cold War days. The memoirs of Secretary of State Dean Acheson in many ways exemplify these reflections. Specifically in regards to the Iranian crisis, Acheson wrote that the Soviet policy in Iran "followed the route of invasion by barbarians against

Yegorova 6

²⁴ Many of these early accounts were written by participants in the events. For a discussion of American role in the Iranian crisis see Robert Rossow, Jr., "The Battle of Azerbaijan, 1946" *Middle East Journal*, 10(1956), 17-32; Joseph M. Jones, *The Fifteen Weeks* (February 21-June 5, 1947) (New York, 1955), 50-58; Nasrollah Saifpour Fatemi, *Oil Diplomacy: Powderkeg in Iran* (New York, 1954); George Lenczowski, *Russia and the West in Iran, 1918-1948: A Study in Big-Power Rivalry* (New York, 1948) 263-315. Michael Kahl Sheenan, *Iran: The Impact of United States Interests and Policies, 1941-1954* (Brooklyn, N.Y., 1968), 27-32.

Classical Greece and Rome and later of the Tsars" towards warm waters.²⁵ Unequivocal statements such as these partly explain why the orthodox school, concluded that the Cold War was a result of blatant Russian aggressiveness united with a communist-inspired desire to take over the world.

In the 1960s, a revisionist school emerged out of the soul-searching caused by the tragedy of Vietnam. The thrust of the revisionist school was that the Soviet Union alone should not be blamed for the development of the Cold War. Furthermore, since most of the revisionist historians were of Marxist background, they attributed the development of the Cold War to the expansion of American capitalist imperialism into new areas such as Iran. From this point of view, the private oil interests seeking concessions in Iran, and which were entrusted with the development of the United States Iranian policy, made an ill-considered request for an oil concession in 1943, prompting the Soviet leadership to demand northern oil concessions from Iran in 1944. The Soviet pressure on Iran that precipitated the Iranian crisis stemmed from the Iranian denial of the Soviet request. Gardner questioned, just as Millsbaugh, the head of the American advisory mission in Iran, had questioned, why such a "combustible enterprise in an unstable area [was launched] in the midst of a war?"²⁶ Moreover, why ignore the all-important three-power cooperation principle by failing to notify either the USSR or Britain about the request in advance. Gardner concluded that the outcome of the crisis, "[f]ar from justifying the

²⁵ Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation; My Years at the State Department* (New York: Norton, 1969),

²⁶⁷ Need to provide more authors here

²⁶ Louis Gardner *The Architects of Illusion: Men and Ideas in American Foreign Policy, 1941-49* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970), 210.

Truman Doctrine, ... revealed that it was possible to extend American interests even to the doorstep of the Soviet Union without an effective challenge."²⁷

The writing of both the orthodox and the revisionist schools tended to concentrate on the two superpowers involved in the Cold War. Meanwhile, the scholarship produced during the 1960s and 1970s on the British role in the Cold War concentrated on the theme of British decline.²⁸ It rightly pointed out that the British policy makers attempted to substitute American power where British power was beginning to wane, as was the case in Iran. But over-concentrating on the theme of British decline, this scholarship described Britain as more dependent on and thus more compliant to the United States than it really was.

A more recent development in Cold War historiography is the post-revisionist school, which extends the scope of its inquiry from the two major actors in the Cold War to a range of lesser, yet nonetheless significant actors in the conflict. In particular the role of Britain in the advent of the Cold War has received more attention. David Reynolds, an author of a recent book on the Cold War, persuasively argues that in order to understand how Britain helped to shape the Cold War, one must understand that in the 1940s Britain was still a great power. Of course, the long-term decline of the Empire was beginning to show. Some parts like India and Palestine even gained independence. The relationship with the colonies changed, but in some form the Empire continued. In fact during this period, the 'milking' of less developed parts of the Empire increased. With still relatively large pool of resources to tap into, Britain continued as Europe's leading manufacturing center and at the same time, a major center for world finance and

²⁷ Ibid., 215

commerce. To see evidence of this, one should only consider the existence of a strong Sterling Area until 1947. The United Kingdom was still firmly in control of all the trade within the vast British Empire. "Thus, globally, as in Europe, Britain remained a major force immediately after the war."²⁹

Though a major force in world politics, Britain still experienced loss of strength and prestige while its wartime allies, the Soviet Union and the United States, advanced to the status of super-powers. However, this weakness was considered a temporary phenomenon. Therefore, Britain's "overriding aim until 1949 was the reestablishment of Britain as a world power equal to and independent of both the United States and the Soviet Union."³⁰ Post-revisionist perspective points out the close link between Britain's attempt to maintain its empire and the start of the Cold War has generally been ignored in the Soviet-American centered historiography. Thus, Kent argues that "attempts to redefine Britain's global role were a prime cause of growing tension in 1945, and therefore an important element in the origins of the Cold War."³¹ And Fawcett argues that the persistence of imperial attitudes and ways of thinking contributed to the Cold War by encouraging the Soviets to be more aggressive in Iran. For example, the British did not protest the Soviet demand for oil enough, and in so doing invited the Soviet Union to renew the oil concession bid, which in turn "contributed to a more aggressive Soviet

²⁸ David Reynolds (ed.) *The Origins of the Cold War in Europe: International Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 78

²⁹ Reynolds 79

³⁰ This idea was frequently expounded by both Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin and the Permanent Undersecretary of the Foreign Office from early 1946, Sir Orme Sargent. See, for example, Sargent memo, July 11, 1945, FO 371/50912; Bevin to Attlee, September 16, 1947, FO 800/444' CAB 129/23 C.P. (48)6, January 4, 1948, CAB 129/23; CAB/128 C.M. (48)2, January 8, 1948, CAB 128; PRO quoted in John Kent "The Empire and the Origins of the Cold War" in *Britain and the First Cold War* ed. Anne Deighton (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 166

³¹ Kent "British Empire" 165

attitude towards Iran."³² At the same time British imperial attitudes enraged the Americans enough to commit to an independent policy. Thus, Britain in a way invited the two superpowers to collide over Iran in March 1946.³³

The persistence of Britain as a great power in the 1940s, paralleled by the persistence of British imperial attitudes and policies, suggests less cohesion in Anglo-American relations than previously supposed. As a great power in the 1940s, Britain was an important, but by no means complaint, ally of the United States. Since Britain was still strong, we must redefine our understanding of the 'special relationship' between the US and Britain. The US and Britain did have a great deal in common both in terms of culture and political ideology. However, the two Anglo-Saxon powers were 'allies of a kind'; and did not always act in agreement. In some cases Britain offered support for American policies and in others it presented an obstacle for America,³⁴ similarly was true for US policies vis-à-vis Britain. In the case of Iran, the two powers were not in full agreement.

US Department of State Perceptions of American Interests in Iran

While British interests in Iran even after the ascension of a Labour government were essentially imperialistic in nature, American interests in Iran were closely related to the Atlantic Charter principles. These principles, on which the United Nations would later be founded, were designed to prevent future wars and to ensure the world's peace and prosperity. The nineteenth century great power diplomacy of spheres of influence agreements did not and could not prevent the First World War because it denied national

³² Fawcett *Iran and Cold War* 158

³³ ³³ Louise L'Estrange Fawcett, "Invitation to the Cold War: British Policy in Iran, 1941-47" in Anne

self-determination to some, and equal terms access to the world's scarce raw materials to others. Therefore, the Atlantic Charter required all nations, but great powers especially, to give up old politics of territorial aggrandizement, and to endorse the principle of national self-determination, as well as to "further all states access, on equal terms, to the trade and raw materials of the world."³⁵ All of the three great powers endorsed the principles, but Britain and the USSR tended to look at these principles as a propaganda device targeting the Germans, not as a guide for actual policy. For example, in practical application of these principles, Britain carved out an exception for its Empire. Moreover, both Britain and the USSR preferred the trusted method of the spheres of influence agreements to maintain world peace. Using this method in 1944, Stalin and Churchill struck the famous percentage deal over Eastern Europe. Furthermore, they were suspicious of American motives in endorsing the charter principles since these so closely corresponded to American national interests. Practically untouched by the war, the United States was in a better position than its allies to win access to raw materials on 'equal terms' because of its advanced technologies.

In turn, the American government was suspicious of its allies' imperial tendencies. It was vital for world peace that the Allies cooperate with each other and learn how "to work out among themselves an adjustment of ambitions, rights and interests which [would] be fair not only to the Great Powers ... but also to the small nations associated with [them.]" In other words, they needed to learn to operate under the principles of the Atlantic Charter. Given the history of Anglo-Russian rivalry and wartime Allied cooperation in Iran, the Department of State perceived the independence

Deighton (ed.) *Britain and the First Cold War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

³⁴ Reynolds 80

of Iran as a test of the ability of the Allies to adhere to the Atlantic Charter principles, which was a paramount American national interest.³⁶

Another reason that Iranian independence was a vital American national interest lay in Middle East oil. As a result of the American experience in the First World War, the United States government realized the great importance of an adequate supply of oil to national security. Therefore, the American oil interests began infiltration of the Middle East oil deposits. For example, in the 1930s Standard Oil and Texas Oil developed an important American oil concern in Saudi Arabia. After several unsuccessful attempts to negotiate an oil concession with Iran prior to World War II, the American oil interests approached the Iranian government in 1943 about an oil concession in southern Iran. The Iranian government used the country's rich oil resources to involve the United States in as an alternative to traditional Anglo-Russian rivalry. Such a policy made Iranian independence alluring to American oil interests. Moreover, according to the Department of State, it was in the interests of the United States to prevent any other great power from being "established on the Persian Gulf opposite the important American petroleum development in Saudi Arabia."³⁷

American Perceptions of the Soviet Union

Although Iran promised to be an important source of oil for the United States in the future, at the time of the Iranian crisis, American geopolitical interests in Iran were minimal. Therefore, the American perception of the Soviet Union focused on the

³⁵ For discussion of the Atlantic Charter principles see Kuniholm's footnote 80 on page 161

³⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers*, 1943, Volume IV: The Near East and Africa Division of the Near Eastern Affairs (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1969) 330-336 The memorandum on Iran by John Jernegan, the first Iranian desk officer in the Department of State, quoted in Kuniholm 157

³⁷ *FR*, 1943, IV: 377-379 quoted in Kuniholm 160

implementation and protection of the United Nations principles, and not on the furtherance of economic interests and strategic interests, as was the British perception.

Soviet tactics during the oil concession crisis of 1944 were disturbing to the State Department not because of any economic or strategic reasons, but because they threatened a key concept of the United Nations – the respect of greater powers to the sovereignty of smaller ones. Thus, the American government was not against a Soviet concession in the north as such. Loy Henderson, Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs of the State Department, expressed the US government's attitude towards the Russian claim to an oil concession as follows:

... we readily recognize the legitimate desire of Soviet Russia to obtain oil concessions outside its territory. Northern Iran is a logical area for the development of petroleum for exportation to the Soviet Union. Neither the American Government nor American commercial firms, as far as we are aware, have any interest in obtaining petroleum concessions in the northern part of Iran. If the Soviet authorities desire to enter into *friendly* negotiations with the Iranian Government for an oil concession, the American Government would view the discussions with all good will. (My emphasis)

But the Soviet methods used to secure Iranian oil were disturbing. Writing a year after the event, Henderson believed that the Soviet encouraging of anti-government demonstrations and demanding the ousting of Iranian Prime Minister to obtain a concession was "most unfortunate" because it was an infringement of Iranian sovereignty contrary to the United Nations principles.³⁸

Still, in 1944 Roosevelt would not have initiated the Cold War with Russia over Iran. He realized that the Soviet Union was a potential threat, but he also believed that he could alleviate the threat by cooperating with the Russians through the United Nations

³⁸ FR, 1945, VII:488 Memorandum by Loy Henderson to the Secretary of State, December 11, 1945

and in the case of Iran through an Allied trusteeship.³⁹ Also the considerations of 'higher politics' were in the picture. In other words, Soviet cooperation on other issues was more important.⁴⁰ Hence, American leadership was less willing than British to confront the Soviets about their actions for fear such representations would affect Soviet cooperation on other issues. Moreover, the United States leaders were very concerned not to give the Soviets the impression that they were 'ganging up' against them with their traditional imperial rivals, the British.

Despite Soviet aggressiveness in the oil concession crisis and the move towards cooperation with the British in the Middle East it helped to produce on the American side⁴¹, American leadership still perceived the USSR as just one of the *two* imperialists threatening future postwar cooperation in Iran. Thus, Henderson wrote in August 1945:

Iran may become a threat to allied solidarity and international security unless there can be achieved a reconciliation of British and Soviet interest and the stabilization of Iran's internal affairs. The United States will try to impress on the British and Soviet governments the multilateral nature of their obligation to Iran.⁴²

Because of American distrust of the imperial tendencies of both of its allies, American diplomats' perception of the Soviet interference in internal affairs of Iran was less alarmed than that of Iranian and British diplomats. For example, Ambassador Murray, while admitting that it was impossible not to be concerned about the "ruthlessness of

³⁹ Fawcett 121; Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East* 174

⁴⁰ FR 1944 V: 476-7 Memo of conversation between Deputy Director of the Office of the Near Eastern and African Affairs (Alling) with Michael Wright of the British embassy, November 24, 1944

⁴¹ American and British government officials agreed to cooperate on future oil policy in August 1944. However, this agreement was not ratified by the American side due to reluctance of the American oil companies.

⁴² SD 891.00, memorandum by Loy Henderson on US policy towards Iran, 23 August 1945 as quoted in Fawcett 121

Soviet tactics," characterized British Ambassador's "view that Soviets appear to be making great effort to achieve position of dominance over Iran" as alarmist.⁴³

Subsequent change in American attitudes towards Soviet policy in Iran, which was to surface in American diplomatic circles following the Potsdam conference, was partly explained by the January 1945 change of personnel in charge of American policy towards Iran. Joseph Grew, who had by then become a "staunch anti-Communist," helped to appoint Loy Henderson as the head of the Near Eastern Department, which oversaw American policy towards Iran; "Henderson agreed with Grew about the Soviets."⁴⁴ Along with Grew and Henderson, American Ambassadors in Iran, Leyland Morris and Wallace Murray, urged a more active policy in Iran.⁴⁵

Unlike the negative change in British perceptions, which came as a result of Britain's traditional imperial rivalry with the Soviet Union, the change in American attitudes over Soviet policy in Iran came as a result of new concerns over Soviet intentions in Eastern Europe. In an apparent disregard of Yalta Declaration on liberated Europe, the Soviet Union formed pro-Soviet governments in several East European countries, which the Western countries had to accept as a *fait accompli* at the Potsdam Conference. In the months following the conference, "Soviet control of Eastern Europe was seen by the United States ... as a clear indication of Soviet intentions to expand outside Eastern Europe."⁴⁶ Moreover, during the Potsdam conference in July-August and the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers in September the Soviet Union exhibited

⁴³ FR VII:387-88 Ambassador Murray to the secretary of state July 16th, 1945.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 237

⁴⁵ Fawcett *Iran and Cold War* 121

⁴⁶ Kuniholm 248

a reluctance to discuss the withdrawal of its troops from Iran. Such reluctance seemed to confirm the possibility of Soviet expansionist designs.

By September 1945, while still suspicious of British imperialism in Iran, the American diplomatic circles began to turn the finger on the Soviets as the "crux of the matter" in Iran. Thus, Ambassador Murray wrote to Secretary of State on September 25th, 1945:

Both powers [USSR and UK] are undoubtedly guilty of ... intervention [in Iran] at present but I believe British objectives are purely defensive to prevent further Soviet penetration in the south and that stability of Iran as being in their own interests. [Therefore], Soviet attitude is the crux of the matter.⁴⁷

Promotion of nationalist movements with the possibility of incorporation into the Soviet Union was one of the Soviet tactics being employed, in the developing American view. But Soviet "principal aim at present [was] establishment in power in Tehran of so-called 'popular' government, like the Groza regime in Rumania, which would be led by men under Soviet influence amenable to Russian demands and hostile to other foreign nations."⁴⁸ Because a leftist *coup d'état* sponsored by the Soviet Union would be detrimental to American interests and world peace, the Ambassador concluded that the "time has come for us to take positive stand against continuance of present Soviet activities."⁴⁹ The Azerbaijan revolution of December 1945 further served to convince American leadership of the need to pursue a more active policy against the Soviet Union in Iran.

However, the change in attitude did not translate into a change in policy until after the Moscow conference in December 1945. At the conference, according to architect of

⁴⁷ FR VII: 417-418 The Ambassador in Iran (Murray) to the Secretary of State September 25, 1945

⁴⁸ Ibid., 417-418

the policy of containment, George Kennan, Secretary of State James F. Byrnes wanted to achieve 'some kind of agreement' without due regard for 'Koreans, Rumanians, and Iranians about whom he ... [knew] nothing.'⁵⁰ In the aftermath of the conference President Truman sought to change the 'soft' policies of his Secretary of State because he was "tired of babying the Soviets." One of the changes he proposed was to "let our position on Iran be known in no uncertain terms."⁵¹ In January 1946, the United States supported the first Iranian appeal to the United Nations.

British Perceptions

British perceptions of the Soviet Union were fundamentally different from the American perceptions in that they were rooted in their traditional imperial rivalry rather than in purely ideological fears. Given the existence of a century-long imperial rivalry, it is not surprising that British perceptions of the Soviet Union became more negative and were followed up with action earlier than American ones. But in contrast to the US, ideology did not become dominating determinant of policy for Britain until after the Iranian crisis. Preference for the imperial approach over the existing alternatives; a preference manifested both inside and outside the British government also made Britain's perceptions of the Soviet Union unique. The story of Britain's perception of the Soviet Union cannot be told without describing the diverse cast.

Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin, the Foreign Office officials, Prime Minister Clement Attlee, and the left wing of the Labour party each had a distinctive set of perceptions and varying degree of influence and control over British foreign policy. The

⁴⁹ Ibid., 418

⁵⁰ George Kennan, *Memoirs: 1925 to 1950* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969-1972) 187

structure of the British government to a large extent explains why certain perceptions more than others became expressed in actual policy. In the British parliamentary democracy, voters chose their representatives to the legislative body from several political parties. Political parties or party with the most votes chose the executive branch -- Cabinet of ministers -- from the Members of Parliament (MP). Thus, the most influential party leaders became heads of respective ministries and exercised a considerable degree of influence over domestic and foreign policies.

On the other hand, while the Labour MP's outside of government or 'back-benchers' exercised less influence over the day to day operation of government, they had the irrefutable right to question government policies. Since the left-wingers in the Labour party were for the most part 'back-benchers', they had limited ways of exercising control over foreign policy. Any aspect of policy foreign or domestic had two forums: a Cabinet committee and Parliamentary committee. There was no Cabinet committee on foreign affairs, and the Foreign Secretary was free to consult or not to consult with the Foreign Affairs Parliamentary Committee. Foreign Secretary Bevin chose not to consult with the committee partly because the committee consisted of left-wing critics of his policies and partly because consultation did not suit his dominant style of leadership. However, he still had to answer any questions on foreign policy posed by an MP on the floor of the House of Commons.

As the head of the executive branch responsible for implementing foreign policy, Prime Minister Attlee had a considerable degree of influence over foreign affairs. The assumption of previous scholarship that Attlee quietly endorsed his Foreign Secretary's

⁵¹ Truman, Harry *Memoirs: Years of Trial and Hope* (New York, 1961) p. 114 as quoted in Fawcett 124

conduct in the international arena has been effectively challenged in the most recent scholarship.⁵²

It remains true that the role of Foreign Secretary Bevin in British foreign policy was formidable. However, successful foreign policy depended on coordination between the elected political head of the Foreign Office, the Secretary, and the Foreign Office officialdom. The Foreign Secretary was an important party functionary subject to the winds of politics that got him his job in the first place. But the Office he led was comprised of appointed civil servants whose position did not depend on political success at the latest polls. The Foreign Office was manned by the civil servants recruited from the aristocracy and the middle class. It was a citadel of conservatism, whose main mission was to provide continuity in foreign policy based on national interests irrespective of political movements. The victory of a social democratic Labour party in the summer of 1945 elections ended almost two decades of consecutive Conservative party rule and promised radical reform in domestic as well as in foreign affairs. The fact that the basic outline of British foreign policy did not change is testimony to the remarkable degree of continuity in foreign policy provided in part by the institution of the Foreign Office.

The predominance of the traditional Foreign Office perceptions in formulating British foreign policy should be acknowledged. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the British perceptions of national interests, the United States, and the Soviet Union in the 1940s were not homogenous. The Labour left criticized government's foreign policy in general and in the Middle East in particular as not

⁵² For earlier assumptions about Attlee see Victor Rothwell, *Britain and the Cold War, 1941-47* London: Cape, 1982; Elizabeth Barker *The British between the superpowers, 1945-50* London: Macmillan, 1983; Bullock, Alan *Ernest Bevin, Foreign Secretary, 1945-1951* Heinemann: London, 1983
Raymond Smith and John Zametica reevaluate Attlee in "The Cold Warrior: Clement Attlee reconsidered,

'labour' enough. Attlee sharply disagreed with his Foreign Secretary and the chiefs of staff that it was necessary to maintain British prestige in the Middle East and remained concerned about the negative effects of the British Middle East commitment on the Anglo-Soviet relations. There were differences of opinion between Bevin and his senior officials on the possibility of future cooperation with the Soviets. The fact that despite these disagreements a policy of strict preservation of traditional national interests was adopted illustrates the British prioritization of imperial concerns over any impulses to cooperate and peacefully coexist with the Soviet Union. In this light, the aggressiveness of the Soviet post-war foreign policy fails as a sufficient explanation of the genesis of the Cold War.

Left-wing of the Labour Party

The Left-wing of the Labour Party offered radical views on the United States, British national interests, and cooperation with the Soviet Union. Their alternatives were not adopted because the Labour Party was dominated by conservative trade unions and structured in a way that prevented the left from reaching top governmental positions.

Criticism of the United States

Unlike the Foreign Office, which looked towards the US for support, the socialist left was highly skeptical of American support.⁵³ A major theme of the Labour left was that if the widening of the gap between West and East persisted, there was a danger that Britain would become a satellite of the United States. The socialists found this unacceptable

1945-7." (International Affairs, 1985)

⁵³ This goes equally for foreign and domestic policy. For socialist critique of American domestic help to Britain see Tomlinson, Jim "The Attlee Government and the Balance of Payments, 1945-1951" *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 2., No. 1, 1991 pp. 47-66

because in a world divided by ideology into capitalist and socialist, Britain would have to side with the United States and give up its own version of socialism.⁵⁴

Perception of British interests

In contrast to Foreign Office officials and Foreign Secretary Bevin, the socialists valued Big-Three cooperation over British imperial interests. The *New Statesman* represented the views of the socialist Labour left. According to the socialists, a Labour Foreign Secretary should remove the "legitimate causes of Russian suspicions." After all, the "clash [in the Middle East was] imperial not ideological." Despite Soviet behavior during the Iranian crisis, the periodical suggested that "the right reply for the British Government [was] still to work for genuine Big Three Cooperation."⁵⁵

Left-wing perception of the Soviet Union

The socialists perceived Soviet policy in two distinct stages. They held that up to the Potsdam Conference, Russia acted according to Stalin's doctrine that Communism must come to the world 'by the example not by bayonets'. However, after the Potsdam Conference Soviet policy changed, and the USSR began to exert pressure on the British Empire.⁵⁶

Socialist explanations for the change lay in Soviet defense anxiety. The Russians became convinced they were alone in the world. They were expecting the West to attack them. In that sense, the British policy of uniting Conservative Arab elements within the Arab League was dangerous. Moreover, in British socialist's view this policy was futile

⁵⁴ Ibid.,

⁵⁵ "The Clash in the Middle East" in *The New Statesman and the Nation* on February 16, 1946

⁵⁶ Editorial in *The New Statesman and the Nation* on March 9th, 1946.

since the Soviet Union's support for the poor Arab peasants and minorities countered any anti-Soviet propaganda. The Soviets perceived British meddling in the Arab League as an effort to organize the Middle East against the USSR. Perhaps, "believing that sooner or later Western capitalism will attack, the USSR [had] begun a policy of improving her position, especially oil reserves, where she believes she can do so without too much risk." The Soviet attack on the British interests in the Middle East served the purpose of securing oil reserves and was deemed relatively safe because the British Empire was weakened by the recent war and could not retaliate.⁵⁷

American diplomats viewed this attack on Britain, the weak link of the capitalist chain, together with the ideological makeover of the Eastern Europe as evidence of Soviet ideological expansionism. Specifically, in regard to Iran, the anti-Soviet policy of containment soon replaced the policy of Allied cooperation. But since British socialists, in contrast, perceived the Soviet actions as based on defense anxieties rather than aggressive Communist ideology, they continued to urge cooperation. They urged this even though they admitted that the Soviet policy towards Britain was aggressive and dangerous; even if provoked. Even after the Soviet Union failed to withdraw its forces from Iran the *New Statesman* editorial wrote on March 9th, 1946, "There is no future for Britain or the world unless a settlement with Russia is reached."

The Nature of the Labour Party

Why did the Labour party, which radicalized domestic policies in Britain, not change British foreign policy to the same degree? Part of the explanation lies in the fact that the party itself was not homogeneously socialist or radical. From its conception the Labour

⁵⁷Editorial in *The New Statesman and the Nation* February 16th 1991 pp. 47-66

party consisted of an amalgamation of currents within the Labour movement. The Trade Union Council represented the trade unions, while the Independent Labour Party represented the middle-class socialists. Even though the trade unions were suspicious of socialism, Clause 4, commitment to common ownership of the means of production, was incorporated into the constitution of the Labour party. However, the presence of Clause 4 did not mean that the Labour Party was a socialist party. Clause 4 was agreeable to trade unionists because it was both only socialist enough to distinguish Labour from its former Liberal allies, and at the same time vague enough to accommodate various interpretations of socialism within the party. The trade union understanding of socialism was much less radical than that of the Independent Labour Party in domestic as well as in foreign affairs.

Political power is measured in electoral success. The Parliamentary Labour Party transcended various components of the labour movement since it was established specifically to facilitate Labour electoral success. For the Labour party electoral success depended on contributions from the trade unions, the financial backbone of the party. The people with real power in the Labour party had to be moderates like Attlee or trade union bosses like Bevin. They were the party leaders when in July of 1945 it became clear that Labour would form a government. What role did the more radical currents within the Labour party play in the formation of the first Labour government since the mid-1920s? Through the National Labour Congresses various components of the labour movement elected the National Executive Council. But the leader of the Executive Council was not necessarily the leader of the Party. The spirit of 1933 party conference called for the election of new Parliamentary Labour Party leaders before forming the government. However, the conference resolution did not specify that such an election

should take place. Therefore, when the King offered Clement Attlee, the Party's leader since 1935, a premier's commission, he accepted without delay. Moreover, he chose his cabinet without consultation with the National Executive Council. Thus, even though the party allowed various interpretations of socialism within its platform, the actual power remained with the trade unions, which partly helps to explain why the foreign policy of the Labour party was not as radical.

Attlee's perception of British interests

As a result of the nature of the Labour party Prime Minister Clement Attlee, and Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin (former trade union boss) were practically in charge of the Labour party foreign policy.⁵⁸ Orthodox historians believed that Prime Minister Attlee left the foreign policy entirely in the able hands of his Foreign Secretary. Bevin's role in British Foreign policy was formidable, but it is important to highlight Attlee's disagreements with Bevin on some important policy issues, including the British role in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. While it is true that Attlee preferred to allow Bevin to deal with foreign policy, it is not true that he and Bevin never disagreed.

One important difference between Bevin's and Attlee's perceptions of British interests regarded that the role the United Nations should play in Britain's policies toward the Soviet Union in general, and in the Middle East in particular. Edward Stettinius, the US chief representative to the United Nations Organization, perceived the difference between Bevin's and Attlee's assessment of the UN. By the end of 1945 Bevin thought that the emphasis would be more on power politics in the immediate future than on

⁵⁸ In the entire time Labour was in power from 1945 to 1951, the Labour left succeeded in changing government foreign policy only once. In 1947 Parliament passed an amendment on the government's

anything else. On the other hand, Attlee "had his heart in the UNO."⁵⁹ Attlee's view on British foreign policy in the Middle East was based on the idea of a "supranational body which would not only review disputes, but would also have an effective force to deter or stop potential aggressors."⁶⁰ In March 1945 Attlee recommended that other nations, particularly the United States, have a responsibility to defend the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. Attlee looked at the continuance of the British role in the Middle East from the point of view of British resources. In his disagreement with the Foreign Office and the Chief of Staffs, Attlee reiterated in September 1945 that

The British Empire can only be defended by its membership of the United Nations Organization. If we do not accept this, we had better say so ... If the new organization is a reality, it does not matter who holds Cyrenaica or Somalia or who controls the Suez Canal.⁶¹

But to Eden and the established Foreign Office policy-makers, the possibility of another nation, or a group of nations, controlling the 'life line' of the British Empire was a heresy. They did not believe that a successful world organization was possible and they feared that Russia might gain a foothold in the Mediterranean using the world organization as a back door. In April of 1945, the Foreign Secretary Eden reiterated the strategic importance of the Middle East.

It is an area the defense of which is a matter of life and death to the British Empire since, as the present war and the war of 1914-1918 have proved, it is there that the Empire can be cut in half ... We cannot afford to resign our special position in the area ... and allow our position to be dependent on arrangements of an international character.⁶²

conscription policies..

⁵⁹ Raymond Smith and John Zametica, "The Cold Warrior: Clement Attlee reconsidered, 1945-47" *International Affairs*, 1985 244-45

⁶⁰ Smith and Zametica 239

⁶¹ Smith and Zametica 243

⁶² Cab 66/65, WP (45) 256, April 13, 1945, 'Defense of the Middle East' quoted in Smith and Zametica 240

The strategic importance allocated to the Middle East by the Foreign Office officials was similar to Bevin's view of the region.

On the other hand, Attlee was not convinced that it was vital for Britain to stay in the Middle East given the limitation of British resources. A Joint Intelligence Report of February 22, 1946 claimed that Russia did not want war, at least not until 1950, but it also recommended that "no potentially hostile power should flank Britain's sea or air communications through the Mediterranean and the Red Sea."⁶³ Attlee believed that the focus on the security of sea routes was outdated. Attlee's response was to remind the Chief of Staffs that "we must not for sentimental reasons based on the past, give hostages to the future."⁶⁴ As early as the Potsdam conference he spoke of the "danger of our getting into a position where we and the Russians confront each other as rival great powers at a number of points of strategic importance."⁶⁵ By July 1946 he was forced to observe that 'it was becoming difficult to justify our staying in the Middle East for any reason other than to be prepared for a war against Russia.'⁶⁶ He found highly objectionable the argument of the Chiefs of Staff that the Middle East air bases were the only deterrence against a possible attack by Soviet Union. He pointed out the high cost of maintaining British presence in the Middle East and the possible repercussions on Anglo-Soviet relations. He concluded that it was futile to try to intimidate/deter the Russians in the Middle East because they had a much better strategic position there anyhow. Attlee drew a grim conclusion in his memorandum to Bevin in January 1947.

For these reasons set out above I regard the strategy [Chief of Staff and Foreign

⁶³ JIC (46) 1 (0) referred to in DO 35/ 1604; quoted in Smith and Zametica 246

⁶⁴ CAB 131/2, DO (46) 27, Mar. 21 1946 quoted in Smith and Zametica

⁶⁵ Documents on British policy overseas, series 1, vol. 1 *The Potsdam Conference* pp. 352-4; quoted in Smith and Zametica 241

⁶⁶ Smith and Zametica 247

Office] ... as a strategy of despair. I have the greatest doubts as to its efficacy. The deterrent does not seem sufficiently strong. I apprehend that the pursuit of this policy is far from preventing may precipitate hostilities.⁶⁷

Attlee's perception of Soviet Union

Orthodox historians paint Prime Minister Attlee as a Cold War warrior *par excellence*, implacably hostile to communism and determined to defend British political and strategic interests against Soviet encroachments.⁶⁸ However, Attlee's perceptions of the Soviet Union were surprisingly similar to the British left wing perceptions of the Soviet Union. Both the left and the Prime Minister urged cooperation.

To begin with, Attlee attempted to look at the issue from the Russian point of view. He recognized that the Russians had a legitimate concern about the Mediterranean. As a land-locked country, Russia was dependent for access to the world oceans on whichever power controlled the Straits. In cooperation with the French and other nations Britain asserted its control over the Straits after the First World War. Russia, a weak power at this point was not consulted. The British argument that Britain occupied these areas as trustees for the rest of the world was not likely to be accepted.⁶⁹

Much like the socialists, Attlee believed that the solution to the Middle East problems was cooperation.

Unless, we are persuaded that the USSR is irrevocably committed to policy of world domination and that there is no possibility of her alteration, I think that before being committed to this strategy [containment] we should seek to come to an agreement with the USSR...⁷⁰

⁶⁷ FO 800/476, ME/47/1 5 Jan. 1947 as quoted in Smith and Zametica 249

⁶⁸ See Harris, *Attlee* p. 292 as quoted in Smith and Zametica in *International Affairs*, 1985 p.237

⁶⁹ *Ibid* 242.

⁷⁰ FO 800/476, ME/47/1 5 Jan. 1947 as quoted in Smith and Zametica 249

Of course, the success of the negotiations depended on answers to the following questions. How far were the Soviet rulers committed to the world revolution? Could the Soviets be convinced that the West had no hostile intentions? Did they believe a war with the US to be inevitable, and could they be persuaded to the contrary? Attlee believed that depending on the answers to these questions the points of friction could easily be dealt with. For example, was it not possible to settle the Dardanelles on principles applicable to all international waterways? Could there be an agreement on oil concessions in Iran? Attlee saw the Iranian crisis as an example of conflicting but negotiable national interests, not an irreversible trend toward world ideological conflict.

On the other hand, the Iranian crisis confirmed for the imperialists like "Bevin, Churchill, and those who thought like them ... that Stalin was not interested in pacification but in expanding the Soviet power."⁷¹ While Attlee believed that the Russians "should be [approached] with the requirements of a world organization for peace, not with the needs of the defense of the British Empire."⁷² Bevin and the Foreign Office emphasized the preservation of the British imperial position, which in turned shaped British attitudes on Anglo-Soviet cooperation in 1945. "Their attitudes were based not on fears that cooperation with the Soviet Union would be difficult or impossible, but on fears that cooperation would compromise Britain's position in the Middle East and Africa."⁷³ As a result of this imperial approach, Anglo-Soviet cooperation was regarded at least in the short term, as undesirable.

⁷¹ Alan Bullock *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary, 1945-51* (London: Heinemann, 1983) 237

⁷² Raymond Smith "Ernest Bevin, British Officials and British Soviet Policy, 1945-47" in Anne Deighton (ed.) *Britain and the First Cold War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990) 34

⁷³ Kent "British Empire" 166

Bevin's perceptions of British imperial interests in Iran

Bevin's perception of British imperial interests in Iran was based primarily on the strategic importance of the Middle East, but also on Labour principles in regard to imperial issues. The Labour Party's attitude toward the Empire was that the colonial relationship on which the British Empire had been based must be redefined as a voluntary association of states based on mutual benefits. As Bevin told the House of Commons on 21st February, 1946, he was not prepared to "sacrifice the British Empire" because "if the British Empire fell, the greatest collection of free nations would go into the limbo of the past ..."⁷⁴ Bevin wanted to extend the concept of the new empire from the formal to the 'informal empire' as well. He wanted to create in the Middle East, "a common basis of partnership" involving joint cooperation in defense, economical and technical development.⁷⁵ The core of this common interest was raising the standard of living in the less developed countries, and the opening up of resources in the interests of both.⁷⁶ But even sweetened by the Labour call for the improvement in the living conditions of the 'common man', his perception of the Middle East in relation to the United Kingdom was squarely imperialistic. It was essential to maintain Britain's predominance in the Middle East in order to recover former imperial strength. Thus, even after Bevin's policies in the Middle East suffered setbacks, he still believed in 1949 that

[i]n peace and war, the Middle East is an area of cardinal importance to the U.K., second only to the UK itself. Strategically the Middle East is a focal point of communications, a source of oil, a shield to Africa, and to the Indian Ocean, and an irreplaceable offensive base. Economically it is, owing to oil and cotton, essential to UK recovery.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Bullock, 234

⁷⁵ November 11 1945 speech as quoted in Bullock 114

⁷⁶ Bullock 115

Bevin's perceptions of American policies in Iran

Rivalry and the need for American support perplexed Bevin's perceptions of American policies in Iran. American policy objectives in Iran were contrary to Britain's interests. For one thing, the United States and Britain were in competition over possible future oil concessions in Iran. Moreover, the American government made no secret about its intention to assist in the dismantling of British imperial possessions (Fawcett 166). The Russian threat was a major unifying factor. Britain was prepared to allow the Americans a share in the future oil concessions because it was so concerned about a possible Soviet expansion and realized that only the United States was in a position to offer active resistance. Thus, Bevin's goal was to use American might to secure British interests in the region.⁷⁸ Therefore, Bevin was concerned about American softness on Russia. For example, he complained of the 'equivocal, rather low-key policy' of the Secretary of State James F. Byrnes during the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers at the end of 1945.⁷⁹

Bevin's perceptions of the Soviet Union

Bevin's perceptions of the Soviet Union can best be described as cautious. As a trade unionist he once helped to prevent the shipment of supplies that was intended to help Poland invade young socialist Russia. However, as a trade unionist he also opposed Communist penetration of trade unions. He certainly did not have the same soft spot for Russia as many of his Labour colleagues did. "Far from regarding the Soviet Union as close to the ideals of the British Labour Movement, because it called itself socialist,

⁷⁷ Bullock 113

⁷⁸ See CAB 134/82, a record of a conversation at the American ambassador's residence, Moscow, 17 Dec. 1945; quoted in Smith and Zametica 245

⁷⁹ Fawcett 124

Bevin thought it was a denial of everything Labour stood for and a travesty of socialism."⁸⁰ As early as 1944, in regard to Soviet Russia, he warned some of the more pro-Russian delegates of the Labour Conference "we can not govern this world by emotionalism."⁸¹ He also supported government's policy of putting down leftist Greek revolt as "a necessary part of maintaining Britain's position in the Mediterranean."⁸²

A trade unionist suspicious of the communist infiltrators and desirous of the preservation of Britain's imperial position, Bevin as the new Foreign Secretary faced Soviet demands for a presence in the Mediterranean during the September 1945 Council of Foreign Ministers in London. Earlier in the summer of 1945 the Soviet Union argued for a revision of the 1936 Montreux Convention, which governed passage through the Dardanelles Straits, and for Soviet military bases near the Straits. The Soviet Union also asked for a ten-year Soviet trusteeship over a former Italian colony of Cyrenaica in North Africa. These proposals would have threatened British imperial communications in the Mediterranean. Therefore, the Foreign Office line adopted by Bevin at the CFM in September was one of no cooperation with the Soviet Union. According to Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav M. Molotov, Britain's position in the Mediterranean was an issue of power politics on which Bevin "did not want to come to terms with anybody about anything"; but "was it not possible for the Foreign Secretary to meet him in something?" he demanded. Bevin, true to the policy of no concessions, stood firm, and replied that the Soviet Union had not met him in anything and that Britain did not want an inch of territory.⁸³

⁸⁰ Bullock 106.

⁸¹ Bullock 121

⁸² Kent "British empire" 170

⁸³ FO 371/50920 Note of conversation between Bevin and Molotov October 1st, 1945

But it was not until after the March 1946 crisis that Bevin's perceptions of the Soviet Union began to emphasize ideological undertones. The assessment of Soviet intentions that Bevin prepared for Attlee prior to the April-May 1946 meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers was blunt.

The Russians ... have decided upon an aggressive policy based upon militant Communism and Russian chauvinism ... and seem determined to stick at nothing, short of war, to obtain her objectives. At the present time [Russia's] aggressive policy is clearly directed to challenging this country everywhere, partly because H.M.G. are the leaders of the Social Democracy in Europe and partly, no doubt, because we appear the less formidable of Russia's only two rivals as Great Powers.⁸⁴

Foreign Office Perceptions of the Soviet policy in Iran

British perceptions of Russia were complicated by many years of imperial rivalry. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, Britain was trying to prevent Russian expansion towards the Persian Gulf and India. It endeavored to keep as many buffer states between its Empire and Russia as possible. Iran had been a strategic buffer state since Russian expansion into Asia in the middle of the nineteenth century threatened India. Lord Curzon, late nineteenth century British statesman, dreamt of a strong and independent Iran as a buffer to the India route. When Russian influence in Iran waned temporarily after the Bolshevik revolution, he felt close to realization of his dreams. As Prime Minister he proposed the Anglo-Persian agreement of 1919, which sought to embrace Iran as a client state of the British Empire. Even though the government of Reza Shah Pahlavi refused, Britain continued to exercise a great deal of influence in Iran and to regard Iranian independence as an important British goal. In the twentieth century, British influence in Iran was exercised mainly through the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company

(AIOC). Through the instigation of a young Winston Churchill, the British government acquired a majority interest in AIOC to ensure oil for the British navy. The history of Iran's strategic and economic importance to Britain give some credence to the claim of Sir Reader Bullard, the British Ambassador to Iran in the 1940s, that the British, unlike the Russians, did their best to 'respect the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of Iran' during the wartime occupation.⁸⁵

If British were more respectful of Iranian independence than the Russians were it was not out regard or respect for the Iranian people. A good example of British officials' attitude towards Iran is Sir Bullard, who served in the country for a number of years. He described the Iranian elite as 'selfish and slothful' and 'impervious to change'; in Iranian national character he found no 'civil virtues'.⁸⁶ Bullard found "frivolty and irresponsibility of the Persian character ... exemplified in the Deputies of the Iranian Parliament and also in the Shah."⁸⁷ Contemptuous of Iranian democracy, he portrayed the elections of one of the ten wartime prime ministers, as a 'sad comedy', in which 'the Speaker sodden with opium' cast the decisive vote.⁸⁸ His experience in Iran convinced Bullard that democracy and complete independence were not likely. Iran needed authoritarian rule and the "molding of new generations of Persians with the help of US advisors."⁸⁹ Britain's regard for Iranian independence was contingent on British interests.

Ostensibly, it was in Britain's interests to ensure an independent, stable, and viable Iran. However, in hard times Britain was often willing to sacrifice Iranian interests. For example, the 1907 understanding with Russia gave lip service to the

⁸⁴ CAB 133/86 as quoted in Bullock 234

⁸⁵ Sir Reader Bullard, *The Camels Must Go* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961) 232

⁸⁶ FO 371/52670 Bullard to Bevin, March 15, 1946

⁸⁷ FO 371/52667 E2318/5/34 Bullard to Bevin, March 15, 1946

integrity and independence of Iran, but allowed the Russians a considerable sphere of influence in northern Iran. This agreement envisioned the possibility of Britain and Russia coming together against Germany, whose growing influence in the Middle East gave considerable worries to the Foreign Office. Similarly, Britain faced with the German menace in 1940 considered, giving Russia a sphere of influence in northern Iran. The secretary of state for India, Leo Amery, asked the secretary of state for foreign affairs, Viscount Halifax, in the summer of 1940, "whether we should not deliberately do a deal with Russia over Iran as [secretary of state for foreign affairs] Grey did in 1907 ... encouraging her to do what she likes in the north, so long as she recognizes our interests in the south."⁹⁰ Halifax replied that it may be possible to come to an agreement with Russians along those lines.⁹¹ The same letter from Halifax to Amery gives an example of Britain's contempt and disregard for Iran: "The result of the dual occupation might be the disappearance of the Iranian government, perhaps temporarily, perhaps forever. But I cannot say that their conduct has been of such a kind as to impose any deep obligations on us ..."⁹²

In August 1941, Britain and the USSR jointly occupied Iran. They proceeded to divide the country into zones of occupation similar to the 1907 spheres of influence. The Soviet Union established a "jealous control of administrative authority" in the Soviet zone and kept "... a fluid situation in Azerbaijan which can be turned to advantage at the end of the war in whatever way then [seemed] best to the Soviet Government."⁹³ To this

⁸⁸ FO 371/52667 E2318/5/34 Bullard to Bevin, March 15, 1946

⁸⁹ FO 371/35098 Tehran to FO, May 3, 1943 quoted in Fawcett *Iran and Cold War* 155

⁹⁰ FO 371/24580, Amery to Halifax, July 23, 1940

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, Halifax to Amery August 1, 1940

⁹² *Ibid.*,

⁹³ FO 371 45478 E 2445/239/34 Mr. Wall to Sir R. Bullard (Tehran) Received in Foreign Office, 16th April) written on 16th of March, 1945 In this six month report British consul in Azerbaijan maintained that

end, the Iranian central government officials were gradually removed, the Soviet candidates promoted, the Iranian police and troop presence limited, and the activities of the British and American consuls in the Soviet occupation zone restricted.⁹⁴

As was the case in 1907 and 1940, the Foreign Office appeared ambivalent about Iran's future and allowed the Soviets a free hand in their zone in a recognition that Britain, given its wartime limitations, could not do anything to prevent Russia from doing what it liked in northern Iran.⁹⁵ As one Foreign Office specialist put it in January 1943:

If the allies win the war, we will owe the Russians a great deal, and whatever happens we owe the Persians nothing. If therefore the Russians are determined to protect their southern frontiers by acquiring further territory in north Persia, *and if we have no means of preventing it*, it would be surely be advisable to put the best face we can on the matter.⁹⁶ (emphasis added)

Another reason for Britain's policy of *laissez faire* towards the USSR was the fact that the spirited suspicion of Soviet Bolshevism subsided during the war. A common enemy changed the Foreign Office perception of the Soviet Union as a pariah-nation to that of a valuable ally. Although the Soviet Union was sometimes a troublesome ally, the Western policy-makers had high hopes that the Communist ideology would not prevent post-war cooperation among the Big Three. They were encouraged by the fact that when faced with a formidable foe, like Hitler, the Soviet leaders toned down their ideology.

This ideological tempering was motivated by pressures from within as much as from the outside of the country. The Bolshevik party retained power only after a bloody civil war, and even in peace time the numerous security organs were constantly on the alert for signs of internal dissension. The Communist party leaders recognized that the

the situation he described had not changed after the oil concession crisis.

⁹⁴ Fawcett *Iran and the Cold War* 91

⁹⁵ FO 371/31388, FO to Tehran, January 19th, 1942 quoted in Fawcett *Iran and Cold War* 151

⁹⁶ FO 371/31388, FO minute, January 17th 1943 quoted in Fawcett *Iran and Cold War* 153

Soviet people were much likelier to defend their country than the Communist regime itself. Therefore, the German invasion produced an unprecedented nationalist revival in the Soviet Union. The symbols of Imperial Russia were brought back. As in the old days, the officers were separated from the rank-and-file by wearing the old style insignia. The military academies and medals were named after the great military leaders of the past. Finally, the Russian Orthodox Church was allowed to function again, a sure sign that communist ideology was being de-emphasized by the Communist leaders. The de-emphasis on ideology within Soviet domestic affairs was matched by a similar toning down in foreign affairs. For example, the vehement anti-capitalist propaganda of the past was replaced with a somewhat positive, if at times critical and biased description of the allies. This was of great importance because the conflict between the socialist and the capitalist worldviews inherent in the Communist ideology was the main obstacle to better East-West relations.

In the Soviet Union, the de-emphasis on ideology coincided with the emphasis on national interests as opposed to the interests of the world revolution. The Foreign Office opinion registered this development. In August 1944, shortly before the Soviet Union was to make an aggressive demand for Iranian oil, British Ambassador in Russia, Clark Kerr assessed Soviet foreign policy as follows:

... everything seems to show that the [Soviet] regime has discarded the theory of world revolution, and that Communist parties and organizations abroad are now looked upon solely as instruments which, where appropriate, may be employed to further the interests, as they unfold themselves, of Russia as a state as distinct from Russia as a revolutionary notion.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ FO 371/ 43336 Clerk Kerr on Soviet policy, August 31, 1944 from Ross Graham (ed.) *The Foreign Office and the Kremlin: British Documents on Anglo-Soviet relations, 1941-1945*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 173

To the British establishment, Russia as a revolutionary nation was so dangerous that British troops invaded parts of Russia during the civil war to prevent the Bolsheviks from taking over the entire country. On the other hand, the notion of Russia as a state was much easier to deal with. After all, Imperial Russia had been Britain's ally roughly as often as it had been its imperial rival in the preceding centuries. In the past, the Foreign Office sought to alleviate tension with its imperial rivals using the spheres of influence approach. To be successful this policy required both sides to recognize each other's national interests and attempt to divide them clearly. In the famous 'percentage agreement' Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, and British Premier, Winston Churchill, divided Eastern Europe into spheres of influence.⁹⁸ Churchill recognized the Soviet sphere of influence in Bulgaria in exchange for Stalin's recognition of Britain's predominance in Greece.

In similar fashion, Britain recognized certain legitimate Soviet aims in Iran, "provided ... these did not clash with Britain's own aims."⁹⁹ For example, the Foreign Office in January of 1942 compared the proximity of the Soviet-Iranian border to Baku oil fields with the "proximity of Leningrad to the old Finnish and Baltic frontiers." And in the event of victory over Germany, the Foreign Office "recognized that 'Russia would wish to safeguard its frontiers from dangers of future attacks by incorporating into the USSR those areas of Finland, the Baltic and Rumania seized before the German invasion, but also a similar belt of territory in Persian Azerbaijan to ensure the safety of the Caucasian oil fields.'"¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Prem 3, 434/2 and 434/4 Churchill in Moscow, October 1944 from Ibid., p. 175-182

⁹⁹ Fawcett 151

¹⁰⁰ FO 371/31388, Kiubyschew to Foreign Office, 18 January 1942 quoted in Fawcett *Iran and the Cold War* 151

This is not to say that fear of the Soviet Union subsided completely, but various treaties assuaged it. The Soviet actions in northern Iran made at least some of the Foreign Office policy-makers wary and suspicious of Soviet intentions from the beginning. British Ambassador to Iran, Sir Reader Bullard, writing in retrospect, "linked believed that as soon as the Soviets entered northern Iran, they intended to take "a mean advantage of an opportunity" and to reestablish, this time for good, "their grip on northern Persia, which they relaxed after [World War I]." ¹⁰¹ However, in 1941-44 his concern was not widely spread among the Foreign Office specialists because of the existence of the tripartite treaty of 1942, and the Declaration on Iran at Tehran conference of 1943, which both showed potential for cooperation and offered guarantees against possible danger.

However, the Allied successes foreshadowed the change of perceptions and attitudes amongst the Allies. By 1944 the German threat no longer threatened the very existence of Britain and the USSR; not surprisingly both began considering ways of improving their national interests after the war. For Britain the paramount concern as always was the preservation of the empire. To this end, Churchill urged the 'soft underbelly' approach to the proposed Western allies' invasion of Europe. This approach put the emphasis on safeguarding Britain's position in the Mediterranean. Long before the war with Germany ended, the race for lucrative oil concessions after the war had begun. By 1944, British and American oil companies were on the verge of signing a contract for oil concession with the Iranian government. The USSR, sensitive as always about its prestige, wanted to participate in this race on a par with its allies. After the

¹⁰¹ FO 371/52667 Sir Bullard to Mr. Bevin received on March 15th. Sent on March 3rd, 1946

success of the Russian armies at Stalingrad in 1943, "there was a distinctly aggressive note in Soviet policy as demonstrated by its behavior in the oil concession crisis."¹⁰²

According to the latest research in Russian archival material, Soviet interests in Iran "centered on the prospect of gaining access to oil in northern Iran" and were "linked to considerations of Soviet state prestige vis-à-vis ... the United States and Great Britain."¹⁰³ In September 1944 Sergei I. Kavtaradze requested 150,000 square kilometers of northern Iran as an oil concession to the Soviet Union, a boon to the Soviet economy.

Ostensibly, Britain was not against granting the oil concession to the Soviet Union. According to the January 1946 minutes by the Eastern department of the Foreign Office, Britain's position on the oil concession to Russia was as follows:

As to Russia's need for oil, it is certainly no part of our policy to prevent Russia from obtaining oil in north Persia. Indeed the Soviet Union is the natural market for north Persian oil. We do not wish to put any obstacle in the way of the Russians obtaining a concession in Persia by *normal methods* if and when the Persians are prepared to negotiate.¹⁰⁴ (My emphasis.)

But what did the Foreign Office mean by normal methods, and what did the British recommend when the Iranians were negotiating? By normal methods Britain meant private companies negotiating for oil concessions. The British Ambassador believed that "the Russian demand for a state concession in the territory of an independent friendly Government is unacceptable under international practice."¹⁰⁵ "Exploitation of a concession by one state in the territory of another would present a problem without

¹⁰² Fawcett *Iran and the Cold War* 85

¹⁰³ Yegorova 2

¹⁰⁴ FO 371/43430, Eastern Department minutes, January 20th, 1946 quoted in Fawcett *Iran and the Cold War* 157

¹⁰⁵ The US Ambassador in Iran (L. Morris) to the Secretary of State, Tehran, October 7, 1944 cited Bullard in *FR* 1944 V:454-455

precedent."¹⁰⁶ Whether or not Sir Bullard was truly concerned with legal issues here is less clear than the fact that he was concerned about the implications of Soviet demands to British interests in Iran. His real concern was that "with a huge economic concern spread over 150,000 square kilometers of territory, the Russians could influence the administration, the courts, and the elections in and near that area, and make themselves not only all-powerful there, but indirectly a power in the rest of the country too."¹⁰⁷ Once Iranians were negotiating with the Russians, the Foreign Office recommended imposing "... stringent conditions to limit so far as possible the likelihood of the Russians using the concession to gain political domination."¹⁰⁸

Fawcett argues that Britain "was more exercised about the possible negative consequences to its own assets as a result of the Majlis decision than it was about excluding the USSR from the oil race in Iran", and therefore, followed American lead in presenting complaints about the Soviet behavior to the USSR. Britain was a great deal more concerned about Soviet behavior than Fawcett seems to suggest. Actually, it was the United States that was hesitant to make the presentations to Moscow, and it was Britain who encouraged the United States to follow her lead. In this instance it did do its best to guarantee Iranian independence just as Bullard mentioned. It did not do this out of any high moral considerations but because it coincided with British interests.

Fawcett's argument is that in assessment of Soviet policy in Iran the Foreign Office, as a whole, was more concerned over oil interests than the political implications of the Soviet concession. The British Ministry of Fuel and Power was concerned that a denial of the concession to the Soviets in the north would encourage "Russian interest in

¹⁰⁶ FO 371/52728 Tehran to Foreign Office, February 4th, 1946

¹⁰⁷ FO 371/52667 Bullard to Bevin, March 15, 1946

Persia in areas beyond that with which they are apparently not concerned"¹⁰⁹. Therefore, "no public statement was made against the Soviet demand, nor did the British government attempt to close the door on future negotiations."¹¹⁰ Moreover, Fawcett argues that Britain made representations regarding the Soviet behavior, "not from any commitment to Iranian independence, but because there was no other course open to it at the time," implying that Britain was pressured by the US to protest to the Soviet Union.¹¹¹

The fact that the British did not want to make a public statement is explained by considerations of higher politics. They were not prepared for an open rift with the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the British were concerned for their imperial interests enough to change their conciliatory policies towards the USSR into assertive diplomatic stand up to the Soviet Union. Her Majesty's Government (HMG) considered the matter of Soviet tactics to be serious enough "to warrant an approach on our part to the Soviet Government". As inferred from a later Soviet complaint, the British argued that granting the oil concession could "affect the sovereignty of Persia"¹¹² guaranteed by the tripartite treaty. Concerned over increased Soviet pressure on Iran, the British leadership, after consulting with the State Department, reminded the Soviet Union that the "Persian government has the right to decide for itself and that in view of the tripartite treaty of 1942 and the Tehran Declaration of 1943, the Persian government cannot be forced

¹⁰⁸ FO 371/52728 From Foreign Office to Washington, April 4th, 1946

¹⁰⁹ FO 371/40241, Ministry of Fuel and Power to FO, October 10, 1944; *ibid.*, October 18, 1944 quoted in Fawcett *Iran and Cold War* 157

¹¹⁰ Fawcett *Iran and Cold War* 157

¹¹¹ Fawcett *Iran and Cold War* 158

¹¹² According to WPIS #275 of 10th January, 1945 Soviet Ambassador in London, M. Gusev sent a letter to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, in which he ... commented on 'unfavorable' attitude of British Government in this matter. His government could not agree "with the British argument that granting an oil concession can affect the sovereignty of Persia".

¹¹² WPIS # 266 November 8th, 1944

against its will to yield to the Russian demand".¹¹³ The extent of British concern was reflected in Prime Minister Winston Churchill's note to Foreign Secretary Eden in December 1944 reiterating the fact that "it would be a mistake to withdraw our garrisons from Iran."¹¹⁴ The Foreign Office took the lead in approaching the Soviet Union on the matter not out of high principle concern about Iranian independence, but because the Soviet behavior during the oil concession crisis made the Foreign Office question for the first time the effectiveness of the various agreements signed with Russia in protecting British interests in Iran.

Despite the fact that later in 1946 the United States was to lead Western response to the Soviet refusal to withdraw, in 1944 the United States was less willing than Britain to confront the Soviets about their actions for fear that such confrontation would affect Soviet cooperation on other issues. Given the American leadership's suspicion of British intentions in Iran, the United States was very concerned not to give the Soviets the impression that the Americans were 'ganging up' with the British against them. Also, the considerations of 'higher politics' were in the picture. In other words, Soviet cooperation on other issues was more important.¹¹⁵ Bullard's impression of the American policy on oil concessions prior to early 1946 was that "they [Americans] did not much care what happened in the north so long as they could secure concession in the south."¹¹⁶ Leyland Morris, US Ambassador to Iran, did not incline to follow "British initiative, unless

¹¹³ Ibid.,

¹¹⁴ Llewellyn Woodward *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1962) 319

¹¹⁵ FR 1944 V: 476-7 Memo of conversation between Deputy Director of the Office of the Near Eastern and African Affairs (Alling) with Michael Wright of the British embassy, November 24, 1944

¹¹⁶ FO 371/52728 Tehran to Foreign Office, February 4, 1946

Department feels once Iranians have been informed of British representations they should know for a matter of our own prestige we likewise intervened on their behalf.”¹¹⁷

The Yalta Conference in February 1945 provided an opportunity to continue an assertive policy towards the USSR. Foreign Secretary Eden's proposals at the conference were premised on the need to reaffirm Allied guarantees to Iranian independence and integrity, signified by the tripartite treaty of 1942 and the Allied Declaration on Iran of 1943. In order to make this reaffirmation, according to Eden, the Allies should leave the question of oil concessions unresolved until the withdrawal of their troops, and then they should announce that they would begin the withdrawal earlier than the final date indicated in the tripartite treaty. However, Soviet Foreign Minister, Vyacheslav M. Molotov, did not see a need for “a self-denying” agreement, or for a statement reassuring the Iranians about oil or withdrawal of foreign troops.¹¹⁸ Although no agreement was reached on Iran, at the Yalta Conference the Allies decided on many important agreements such as Declaration on Liberated Europe.

From Yalta to Potsdam, Western belief in the possibility of cooperation with Soviet Russia was challenged by move by the Soviets to assure political domination of Romania, Bulgaria, and Poland. In an apparent defiance of the Declaration on Liberated Europe, the Soviet Union gradually took over the countries of Eastern Europe. The fact that the Soviet Union chose to ignore the democratic principles of the Declaration on Liberated Europe in favor of creating communist governments in Eastern Europe suggested to some in the State Department that the Soviet Union was an ideologically motivated expansionist. The numbers of such hostile observers, would only grow as the

¹¹⁷ FR 1944 V: 477-78 The Ambassador in Iran (Morris) to the Secretary of state November 25, 1944

¹¹⁸ Woodward 319

Soviet Union proceeded to pressure other countries on its border for various concessions. Many were confirmed in their belief in Soviet-expansionism as the Soviet-backed Azerbaijani nationalists took over northern parts of Iran in December of 1945. In response, the Americans followed quintessentially ideological approach to the Soviet problem. There was a pattern of Soviet takeovers, which dangerously resembled Hitler's policies right before World War II. The totalitarian regimes of Hitler and Stalin were anathema to Western ideologies, capitalism and democracy. In this manichean view of the world the two ideologies could not live peacefully side-by-side. Luckily, however, Stalin was not bent on war the same way Hitler was. Therefore, in response to Soviet expansion, the United States sought to contain the Soviet Union as they did during the Iranian crisis, hoping that after continuing isolation the USSR would eventually be destroyed by its own contradictions.

For their part, the British could not ignore the ideological undertones of a virulent Soviet anti-British propaganda since the oil concession crisis in 1944. British concern was reflected in R.H. Bruce Lockhart's annex to Deputy Undersecretary's important paper, "Stocktaking After V.E. Day" of July 1945. Lockhart wrote, "it would seem ... foolish of us to ignore the influence of Marx on Russian policy to-day ... The Bolsheviks have a historical motive or impulse for an expansionist policy."¹¹⁹

However, it was considerations of British imperial position in the Middle East and Mediterranean not the ideological implications of Soviet actions that shaped British perceptions on cooperation with the Soviet Union. In "Stocktaking After V.E. Day" Deputy Undersecretary Orme Sargent outlined British national interests. It was crucial to "obtain wholehearted co-operation of the United States" both to deal with the economic

crisis and to prevent Russian penetration in Europe. But since "our big partners especially the United States, [feel] ... that Great Britain is now a secondary power and can be treated as such" it was essential to "increase our strength" and rally Western Europe, and the Dominions as collaborators.¹²⁰ As a result an overriding British aim until 1949 became the reestablishment of Britain as a world power equal to and independent of both the United States and the Soviet Union, which reflected the Foreign Office view that British weakness was a temporary not a permanent phenomenon. To achieve this aim it was vital to preserve the Empire and avoid any weakening of Britain's imperial position.¹²¹

In the summer of 1945, the Foreign Office perceived a threat to the British imperial interests in the Middle East and the Mediterranean, and "this perception was crucial to the formulation of British ideas on future Allied cooperation."¹²² If the Russian demands on Turkey for revision of borders, bases in the Straits, and revision of the Montreux Convention were satisfied, the British influence in Greece and Turkey would dwindle and the Russian influence grow. Britain could not allow the USSR to dominate the Mediterranean, the throat of the British Empire. The underlying assumption was that the Soviet Union presented a potential threat to British interests and could not therefore be considered a friendly power. This became the prevalent attitude within the Foreign Office not because of the events in Eastern Europe, but because of Soviet desires for greater influence in the eastern Mediterranean. For example, the "most disquieting feature of Soviet policy" according to the British Ambassador in Moscow immediately

¹¹⁹ R.H. Bruce Lockhart of the Foreign Office April 11, 1945 quoted in Ross 215

¹²⁰ Orme Sargent's paper "Stocktaking after VE day" July 11, 1945 quoted in Ross 211

¹²¹ John Kent "British Empire" 166

¹²² Kent "The British Empire" 167

prior to the Potsdam Conference was not the Soviet activities in Eastern Europe, but their attitude to Greece and Turkey which suggested 'a threat to our position in the Middle East.'¹²³ Moreover, in an apparent "lack of importance attached to democratic principles in comparison to Britain's strategic interests," Britain was prepared to 'sacrifice' Hungary and Romania in return for Greece and Bulgaria.¹²⁴

Concern over Soviet activities in the eastern Mediterranean was paralleled by similar concern over Soviet activities in Iran. The Weekly Political Intelligence Summaries refer to continuing efforts by the Russians to expel unwanted persons from their occupation zone. Moreover, these reports remained concerned about the "weakness of Iranian government[s] vis-à-vis Russia".¹²⁵ In the six months following the oil concession crisis Iran had three changes in governments. In April 1945, the Soviet newspapers intensified their campaign against the Iranian government. No doubt as an expression of British anxieties, in May 1945 the British government responded sympathetically to the Iranian request for an early troop withdrawal.

The visit of the Soviet Trade Union Delegation in July provided an opportunity for the British Ambassador to summarize the recent atmosphere in Iran. "There are many signs that Russians are making a tremendous effort to obtain virtual mastery over this country [Iran] before the moment of evacuation arrives."¹²⁶ The Weekly Political Intelligence Summary for the week of July 18th, 1945 reported that, "There are

¹²³ *Documents on British Policy Overseas* Series I, Vol. I Conference at Potsdam, July – August 1945, 1945, (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1985) Clerk Kerr to Eden July 10, 1945

¹²⁴ Kent sees evidence of this in a Foreign Office brief for the Moscow Conference that stated: "our strategic position in Greece and the Middle East ... makes it particularly important to us that Bulgaria should not simply act as an instrument of Soviet foreign policy." *DBPO*, Series I, Vol. II, 699 quoted in Kent "British Empire" 169

¹²⁵ WPIS November 29, 1944

¹²⁶ *Documents on British policy overseas* Ser. 1 v. 1 (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1984) 166 no. 91 Bullard to Eden, July 11, 1945

indications that the Soviet authorities are endeavoring to obtain mastery over Persia, or at any rate, that part of it in which they are mainly interested, before the time of military evacuation arrives"¹²⁷. In addition to virulent anti-Iranian propaganda, the Soviet Union was encouraging Kurdish independence in northern areas to which the Iranian troops were not allowed access. The Communist party of Iran, Tudeh, which had been extremely active on behalf of the USSR since the oil concession crisis, continued to take measures adverse to the Iranian government. According to Bullard the Soviet campaign was not in preparation for a violent coup, but an effort to "force upon the electors so many of their candidates that even if Tudeh has not a majority in Majlis [Iranian parliament] it will be able to run it."¹²⁸

Because these activities appeared threatening to the British interests, Bullard's recommendations on how to deal with the Soviets were immediately adopted during the Potsdam Conference. Bullard was so concerned with the adverse activities of the Soviet Trade Union delegation that he requested the military to deny the delegates access to the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company facilities in southeastern Iran.¹²⁹ He recommended both increased publicity about Soviet activities, which the Eastern department of the Foreign Office found difficult to implement because of Soviet censure, and early withdrawal of as many foreign troops as possible from Iran. In response to Churchill's proposal of a joint program for the progressive withdrawal of Allied forces from Iran, Stalin agreed to the first stage of the program – withdrawal from Tehran. Stalin refused to commit himself on later stages and agreed to Churchill's proposal to refer this issue to the Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in September 1945. However, Stalin assured the United States

¹²⁷ WPIS July 18, 1945

¹²⁸ DBPO ser. 1 vol. I no. 91 Bullard to Eden, July 11, 1945

President that "the Soviet Government had no intention of taking any action against Persia."¹³⁰

Stalin's reassurances at the Potsdam conference were questioned as the activities of the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan, formed with Soviet help in September 1945, threatened British interests again. This party was organized to attract the votes of Azerbaijani nationalists as well as Communists. With 30-40 deputies to Majlis elected with Russian help, the Soviet Union would have been in virtual control of the Iranian parliament. A Soviet controlled Iranian parliament might have revoked the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company concession, and more likely than not would have prevented the British from obtaining favorable oil concessions from Iran in the future. Also, due to the Democratic Party activities Britain's imperial prestige and position in the Middle East were on the line. The Weekly Political Intelligence Summary for December 20, 1945 was concerned about the effect the success of the Soviet policy might have on Arab perceptions of Britain's strength. "It has been suggested", stated the summary, "that if Russia succeeds in her present policy in Azerbaijan, Egyptians may decide that we are not strong enough to stand up to her and that it will be safe to begin hedging."¹³¹ As during the summer of 1945 the underlying assumption of British policy was that the Soviet-backed Democratic Party was threatening British interests, and that the USSR could not be considered a friendly power.

Concerned about its imperial position in Iran, Britain again responded more vigorously than the United States against the Soviet actions. At the time of Moscow Conference in December 1945 when Secretary of State, James F. Byrnes, was prepared to

¹²⁹ DBPO ser. 1 Vol. I no. 93 Bullard to Eden, July 11, 1945

¹³⁰ DBPO ser. 1 vol. I no. 241 p.591-92 Record of Seventh Plenary Meeting at Potsdam July 23, 1945

sacrifice the fate of 'Koreans, Rumanians, and Iranians' in order to achieve 'some kind of agreement' with the Soviet Union,¹³² Britain proposed to limit any further spread of Azerbaijan autonomy. The tripartite commission proposed by Britain at the Moscow Conference would have advised the Iranian government to allow the use of minority languages, set up provincial councils, and would have supervised the first elections to provincial councils. Only the United States agreed to consider this proposal while the Soviet Union and Iran refused. The reason that the Iranian Majlis did not support the idea was their fear "that the object of the proposals was to place the country under mandate, [and] to restore the conditions of 1907."¹³³ The creation of provincial councils, which was in accordance with the Iranian constitution, nevertheless appeared to many observers and historians as a thinly disguised attempt to divide Iran between Russia and Britain.¹³⁴ However, the real reason for the proposals was to reduce "the scope of Azerbaijan autonomy" and bring "the province back under *de facto* authority of Iran."¹³⁵ An honest effort by the British government to stand up to the Soviet Union in Iran was not well received because of Britain's record in Iran marked with poor regard for the Iranian ruling classes.

Alongside with the growing concern over the British imperial interests in Iran was a concern over the ideological tool of the Soviet policy, the Tudeh party. As the main tool of Soviet policy in Iran, it organized demonstrations in support of the Soviet oil concession request, as well as an anti-government left-wing press campaign. In its campaign, the terms fascist, reactionary, and British agent became interchangeable. The

¹³¹ WPIS # 324 20/12/45

¹³² Kennan *Memoirs* 187

¹³³ FO 371/52667 Sir Bullard to Mr. Bevin received on 15th of March. Sent on 3rd of March, 1946

¹³⁴ Fawcett *Iran and the Cold War* 152

Tudeh party also fomented strikes all over Iran, including the area where the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company was located. There was no doubt in the mind of British policymakers that Tudeh was under Soviet Control. In summarizing the political situation in Iran during 1944, Political Intelligence Center in the Middle East Paper # 75 of July 10th, 1945 wrote, "The Tudeh Party may have started out as a left wing Persian movement, but its activities show it to be largely under Soviet control. ... [I]t betrays its Soviet inspiration by its frequent use of the interchangeable terms 'fascist' and 'British Agent.'" The Tudeh propaganda was dangerous to all British interests in Iran because it lowered British prestige, but it was especially dangerous among Anglo-Iranian Oil Company workers.¹³⁶

However, it was not until after the March crisis that the British perceptions of the Soviet Union took ideological undertones. If as late as early March 1946, Bevin explained Soviet activities in Iran as desire for oil rather than ideological drive,¹³⁷ the briefing of Ambassador to Russia, Maurice Peterson, on March 1946, finally helped crystallize British perceptions of Russian activities. Orme Sargent, since 1946 the Permanent Undersecretary of the Foreign Office, asked a rhetorical question, "were they [the Russians] only after oil, or were they hoping to establish a defensive *glasis*, or were they pursuing an offensive and expansionist policy?" Given the Soviet failure to withdraw from Iran, his answer, representative of the consensus in the Foreign Office,

¹³⁵ FR 1945 viii: 519 "The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Harriman) to the Secretary of State" December 28, 1945

¹³⁶ Great Britain Foreign Office Weekly Political Intelligence Summaries Kraus International Publications: Millwood NY London England, Schaan Liechtenstein 1983.

¹³⁷ Wm. Roger Louis *British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-51* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) 54 -73

was that the Soviet aims were not either economic or defensive or ideological, but all three combined."¹³⁸

It was in the immediate aftermath of the Iranian crisis that Frank Roberts, a minister at the British Embassy in Moscow, wrote the British equivalent of the 'Long Telegram' by George F. Kennan, one of the central documents of the early Cold War. Echoing Kennan's conclusions about the Soviet foreign policy, Roberts drew attention to "the ever-increasing emphasis laid here upon Marxist-Leninist ideology as the basis for Soviet internal and foreign policy."¹³⁹ This in turn caused the Russians to approach "the Middle East as an artichoke whose leaves are to be eaten one by one."¹⁴⁰

Roberts's telegrams contributed to the emphasis on ideology with which the Foreign Office would approach the Soviet Union from March 1946 onwards. His recommendation that from now on it was essential "to treat the problem of Anglo-Soviet relations in the same way as major military problems were treated during the war" led to the establishment, with the support of the Deputy Undersecretary, Christopher Warner, of the important inter-departmental Foreign Office Committee on Policy Towards Russia in April 1946.¹⁴¹ From thence on the Russia Committee would "pool recent information regarding Russian doings ... in order to get a collated picture and consider what action political, economic, or in the publicity sphere should be taken as a result."¹⁴² It was his terminology – "the return to the pure doctrine of Marx-Lenin-Stalinism" – which

¹³⁸ FO 371 56832 "Report of meeting in Sir Orme Sargent's Room on March 18th, 1946, to brief Sir Maurice Peterson.

¹³⁹ FO 371 56763 N4065/97/38 Roberts to FO, March 14, 1946

¹⁴⁰ FO 371 56831 N3812/605/G38 Roberts to FO, March 20, 1946

¹⁴¹ Sean Greenwood "Frank Roberts and the 'Other' Long Telegram: The View from the British Embassy in Moscow, March 1946" *Journal of Contemporary History* (SAGE, London, Newbury Park and New Delhi), Vol. 25 (1990), 103-22

¹⁴² FO 371/71687 Warner to Jebb, November 22, 1948 Warner was reviewing the work of the committee some eighteen months after its creation; quoted in Smith 37

underpinned a lengthy memorandum by Warner on 'The Soviet Campaign Against This Country And Our Response To It.'¹⁴³ In this perhaps most important British early Cold War document, Warner urged other Undersecretaries to "think out how to minimize both by measures of defense and counter-offensive the Russian attack ... against this country."¹⁴⁴

Conclusion

In Anglo-Russian relations in the immediate aftermath of World War II Britain emphasized economic and strategic rather than ideological differences with the Soviet Union. Until the Soviet demand of an oil concession in northern Iran in 1944 threatened British interests, Britain hoped to reconcile these differences in Iran by following a conciliatory policy towards the Soviet Union in Azerbaijan. The common German threat, the Soviet de-emphasis on ideology, and the guarantees of the tripartite treaty and the 1943 Tehran Declaration on Iran explain why the British were hopeful and conciliatory. However, the friendliness of wartime Anglo-Soviet relations faded as the imminence of the German defeat rekindled the competition of national interests in the area.

In light of its traditional rivalry with Russia since the middle of the nineteenth century, Britain could not allow Soviet Russia to pressure Iran into a concession in northern Iran because of the dangers inherent in such huge state-to-state concession. Despite hesitation of the Petroleum Division of the Foreign Office, Britain, concerned for its economic and strategic interests in Iran, issued a strong protest to the Soviet Union. Contrary to post-revisionist scholarship on the Iranian crisis, Britain's policy towards the Soviet Union at the time and in the aftermath of the oil concession crisis was assertive

¹⁴³ Greenwood 117

¹⁴⁴ FO 371/56832 April 2, 1946 quoted in Smith 37

rather conciliatory. The imperial rather than ideological approach of this policy was highlighted during the summer of 1945 when Britain decided against cooperation with the Soviet Union based not on the trampling of democratic principles in Eastern Europe, but on the concern that cooperation with the USSR could negatively affect the British imperial position in the Middle East and the Mediterranean.

The Labour Party, which came into power during the summer of 1945, offered alternatives on foreign policy. The most radical perspective was offered by the left wing of the party. In order for Britain to follow its socialist path unadulterated by American capitalism, and in order for the world to live in peace, Britain must come to an agreement with the USSR regarding existing imperial differences. However, the nature of the Labour party ensured that more conservative trade unionists dominated the leadership and thus decided how to run foreign policy. Labour Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin, a trade union boss, played a formidable role in British foreign affairs during the years that the Labour party was in power. His views coincided closely with the imperial approach of the more traditional Foreign Office. The importance the Foreign Office and Bevin attached to the maintaining of the British imperial positions throughout the world came into sharp conflict with the United Nations-oriented foreign policy of Prime Minister Clement Attlee. However, in the end the imperial approach shared by Bevin and the Foreign Office prevailed.

In highlighting the imperial approach followed by Britain towards the Soviet Union it is important to point out that this approach did not completely discount the danger inherent in Soviet ideological tools. The intelligence reports reaching the Foreign Office were certainly concerned about the activities of the Communist party of Iran,

Tudeh. However, the Foreign Office continued to emphasize its imperial differences with the Soviet Union during the Azerbaijan Revolution of December 1945. At the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers, Britain attempted to curb the autonomy of *de facto* independent Azerbaijan because an exclusive Soviet hold over this territory would lead to eventual control of Iran, which threatened British imperial position in Iran.

In contrast to Britain, the United States followed an ideological approach to the Soviet Union. American strategic interests in the Middle East and economic interests in Iran were minimal. American policy-makers based their policy on workability of the United Nations until they realized that Soviet ideology prevented the possibility of postwar cooperation. In the aftermath of this change in perceptions, they switched to a manichean view of the world where cooperation between communist regime and capitalist democracies was impossible. Although the communist takeover of Eastern Europe in 1944-45 influenced American belief that ideology was the main drive of Soviet policy, this suspicion was not translated into action until the March 1946 crisis. In the meantime, in contrast to Britain's active stance, the United States exhibited hesitancy in standing up for Iranian interests during the oil concession crisis and the December 1945 Conference of Foreign Ministers.

A study of British perceptions of the Soviet Union in Iran illuminates a different kind of approach to foreign relations of the USSR and thus a different mode of assessment of how the Cold War started. The post-revisionist charge that British imperial policies were conciliatory towards the USSR does not pay sufficient attention to the evolution of these perceptions as the threat of Germany to the British Empire diminished, and replaced by the threat of the Soviet Union to the British imperial interests. The

hawkish attitude of this imperial approach had more to do with the genesis of the Cold War than has previously been argued. *Philosophy*

Bibliography

Archives

- Class FO371, General Correspondence
Russia Correspondence available on microfilm at SRLF (D 8199598) and 1946-48 (D 8075822)
- Public Record Office, London
British Foreign Office Archives,
Class FO 371 General Correspondence
Eastern Department, Persia
Northern Department, Russia
Class FO 800 Bevin's Papers

Published documents and memoirs:

On British perceptions of Soviet Union in Iran:

- Attlee, Clement *As it Happened* London: William Heinemann LTD, 1954
- Bullen Roger and Pelly, M.E. (eds.) *Documents on British Policy Overseas* Series I,
Volume I Conference at Potsdam, July – August 1945
Volume II Conferences and Conversations 1945: London, Washington and
Moscow
London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1985
- Bullock, Alan Ernest Bevin, Foreign Secretary, 1945-1951 Heinemann: London, 1983
- Ross, Graham (ed.) *Foreign Office and the Kremlin: British Documents on Anglo-Soviet Relations 1941-1945* London: Cambridge University Press, 1984

On Soviet policy in Iran:

- Dmytryshyn, Basil and Cox Frederick *The Soviet Union and the Middle East: a documentary record of Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, 1917-1985* Princeton, New Jersey: Kingston Press, c1987

On American perceptions of Soviet Union in Iran:

- Acheson, Dean *Present at the Creation; my years at the State Department* New York: Norton, 1969
- Kennan, George *Memoirs: 1925 to 1950* Boston: Little, Brown, 1969-1972

US Department of State,

- *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers 1944 Volume V: the Near East, South Asia, and Africa, The Far East* Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1965
- *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers 1945 Volume VIII: the Near East, South Asia, and Africa, The Far East*. Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1965
- *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers 1946 Volume VII: the Near East, South Asia, and Africa, The Far East*. Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1965

Newspapers:

- New Statesman* :UCSB AP 1. N 46 ser.2 vol. 1 (1931) – ser.2 vol. 46 (1953) [microfilm]
- Tribune* UCLA URL AP 4 T731 BN Aug-Dec. 1946 B (1947-1961) [microfilm]

Secondary Sources:

On British point of view:

- Adamthwaite, Anthony "Britain and the world, 1945-9: the view from the Foreign Office" *International Affairs*, 1985
- Fawcett, Louise L'Estrange "Invitation to the Cold War: British Policy in Iran, 1941-47 in *Britain and the First Cold War* ed. by Anne Deighton New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990.
- Fawcett, Louise L'Estrange *Iran and the Cold War: Azerbaijan crisis of 1946* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992 DS 318. F38 1992
- Kazamzadeh Firuz *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1864-1914: A Study in Imperialism* New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 1968
- Kent, John *British Imperialism and the Origins of Cold War 1944-49* London: Leister University Press, 1993
- Kent, John "The British Empire and the Origins of the Cold War" in *Britain and the First Cold War* ed. Anne Deighton New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990.
- Kuniholm, Bruce Robellet *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East: Great Power Conflict and Diplomacy in Iran, Turkey, and Greece* Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, 1980
- Louis, Wm. Roger *The British Empire in the Middle East 1945-1951: Arab nationalism, The United States, and Postwar imperialism* Chapter II on the Northern Tier: Iran, Turkey, and Greece, 1945-1947
- Louis, Wm. Roger *Imperialism at Bay: The United States and the Decolonization of the British Empire, 1941-1945*
- Reynolds, David *The Origins of the Cold War in Europe: International Perspective* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994
- Rothwell, Victor *Britain in the Cold War, 1941-47* London: Cape, 1982

Smith, Raymond and Zametica, John "The Cold Warrior: Clement Atlee reconsidered, 1945-47" *International Affairs*, 1985

Tomplinson, Jim "The Attlee Government and the Balance of Payments, 1945-1951" *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 2., No. 1, 1991 pp. 47-66

On 'Socialist Foreign Policy Alternative':

Gordon, Michael R., *Conflict and Consensus in Labour's Foreign Policy 1914-65* (1965)

Meehan, Eugene, Jr., *The British Left-wing and Foreign Policy* New Brunswick, 1960

Morgan, Kenneth O. *Labour in Power, 1945-51* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984

On Soviet policy in Iran

Mastny, Vojtech *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: the Stalin Years* New York: Oxford University Press, 1996

Ulam, A. *Expansion and Coexistence: Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-73* 2nd ed. New York: Praeger, c1974

Yegorova, N.I. "The Iran Crisis of 1944-46: A view from the Russian Archives", Cold War International History Project Working Paper # 15 (May 1996)

Zubok, Vladislav and Constantine Pleshakov *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996

On American point of view:

Louis Gardner *The Architects of Illusion: Men and Ideas in American Foreign Policy, 1941-49* Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970 E 813. G27

Hess, Gary 'The Iranian Crisis of 1945-46 and the Cold War' *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 89, no. 1 (March. 1974), pp. 117-46

John. L. Gaddis *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War*