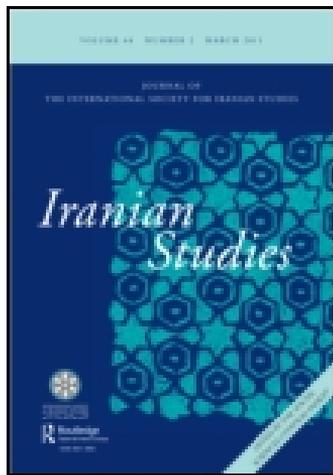


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Artemy M. Kalinovsky

## The Soviet Union and Mosaddeq: A Research Note

*Although it is generally accepted that the Soviet Union did not play a significant role in the events leading to the overthrow of Mohammed Mosaddeq in 1953, little has been written about how the Soviets perceived the Iranian leader and the movement he inspired. This article argues that Soviet leaders generally saw Mosaddeq as weak and ill-disposed towards the Soviet Union. The Soviet failure to secure an oil concession in Iran in 1946 and general conservatism about anti-colonial movements during the late Stalin period conditioned their assessment of Mosaddeq's premiership. After Soviet policy towards the Third World changed in the mid-1950s, Mosaddeq's movement was reinterpreted as a genuine "struggle of national liberation."*

Much of the literature on the coup that brought down Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mosaddeq in 1953 has focused on the role of Britain, the United States, and various players within the Iranian political scene. Some accounts stressed that the US role in the coup was inspired by fears that the populist Iranian premier's policies were creating a situation where the pro-Soviet Tudeh Party might be able to gain power or at least significant influence in the government.<sup>1</sup> Although Mosaddeq himself was not sympathetic to socialism and probably never seriously considered an alliance with the USSR, the Cold War mindset of US President Dwight D. Eisenhower and his administration, as well as that of Kermit Roosevelt and his fellow CIA cold warriors working in Tehran, ensured that they viewed his nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and his general populism as the potential first step towards Iranian dependence on Moscow. Several recent accounts have shifted

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Malcom Byrne "Factors Influencing U.S. Policy Toward Iran, 1945–1953," and Mark Gasiorowski, "The 1953 Coup d'État against Mossadegh," in *Mohammad Mossadegh and the 1953 Coup in Iran*, ed. Mark J. Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne (Syracuse, NY, 2004), 201–26, 227–60; Mark J. Gasiorowski, "The CIA's TPBEDAMN Operation and the 1953 Coup in Iran," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 15, no. 4 (2013), 4–24.

the focus away from Cold War concerns and to the importance of oil production for American and British officials.<sup>2</sup>

Yet while the story on the US and UK sides has been extensively told, with historians marshalling extensive documentary evidence declassified since the 1970s, the Soviet role during nationalization and in the period up to Mosaddeq's ouster has barely been explored. Historians of Soviet foreign policy have produced valuable studies of Soviet policy in Iran during the Second World War as well as in the immediate post-war period.<sup>3</sup> Up to now, all that could be said of Soviet policy during Mosaddeq's tenure was that it largely stayed out of the oil crisis. Farhad Diba, one of Mosaddeq's biographers, is certainly justified in observing that, in general, "the Soviet attitude towards the Mossadegh Government vacillated between a 'hands-off' policy and the maintenance of correct but politely distant relations."<sup>4</sup> What is not clear is why. The question is particularly interesting because the crisis came after Moscow's attempts at a forward policy in Iran had been thoroughly defeated in 1946, one of the first major set-backs for the Soviet Union in the early Cold War.

This paper attempts to fill that gap in the historiography by looking at the Soviet reaction to, and deliberations of, the Iranian oil crisis. It draws primarily on papers from the Molotov Fond at the Russian State Archives of Social and Political History (RGASPI) to evaluate Moscow's Iran policy between 1946 and Mosaddeq's ouster in 1953. The limitations of these sources and lack of access to materials from the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (AVPRF) means that the present article can do little more than point to some interesting questions raised by the documentation that need to be explored further, perhaps by a researcher who has better luck with the guardians of AVPRF than the present author.<sup>5</sup>

While the Molotov papers provide only a glimpse of Soviet policymaking on Iran in the period, they nevertheless do allow us to reach some preliminary conclusions about how events in Iran were seen from Moscow. They suggest that Soviet policymakers

<sup>2</sup>Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (New York, 2011); Ervand Abrahamian, *The Coup: 1953, the CIA, and the Roots of Modern U.S.–Iranian Relations* (New York, 2013); and Ervand Abrahamian, "The 1953 Coup in Iran," *Science and Society* 65, no. 2 (2001): 182–215.

<sup>3</sup>See Natalia Yegorova, *The "Iran Crisis" of 1945–46: A View from the Russian Archives*, Cold War International History Project Working Paper 15 (Washington, DC, 1996); Jamil Hasanli, *Iran at the Dawn of the Cold War: The Soviet–American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941–1946* (Lanham, MD, 2006); and Louise L. Fawcett, *Iran and the Cold War: The Azerbaijan Crisis in 1946* (Cambridge, 1992). See also James Pickett, "Soviet Civilization through a Persian Lens: Iranian Intellectuals, Cultural Diplomacy and Socialist Modernity 1941–1955," *Iranian Studies* (forthcoming, 2014).

<sup>4</sup>Farhad Diba, *Mohammed Mossadegh: A Political Biography* (London, 1986), 138.

<sup>5</sup>Although the original plan was to make use of materials from the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (AVPRF), I was only allowed access to the archive a day before my departure from Moscow. Some documents which were available to scholars in the 1990s, including the Committee of Information (see footnote 45 below), were also off-limits to me. However, as some of the most interesting material on Iran at that archive would come from the Molotov "diary," one can expect at least some overlap with the materials at RGASPI. Documents available from the Cominform collection (at the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI) and at the Lamont Library at Harvard University) and the International Department (at the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History) reflect only mundane issues or are translations of party statements.

viewed Iran as largely lost to Soviet influence in this period, with little native support for progressive politics, and a political class likely to end up in the Anglo-American camp. Their policies were thus aimed at containing American and British involvement, while keeping alive such Soviet economic interests as still existed. After the July 1952 crisis their views began to change—but the figure that impressed them was not Mosaddeq or any of the Tudeh leaders, but rather Ayatollah Seyed Abdul Qassem Kashani (1888–1961), a religious leader who originally supported Mosaddeq but had turned against him by the fall of 1952. Still, it appears that even after Stalin's death in March 1953 his successors avoided interfering in Iranian affairs. In the mid-1950s, however, as Soviet policy towards the Third World underwent significant changes, Mosaddeq's politics and oil nationalization were reinterpreted as an effort at "national liberation." Ironically, this recognition of earlier Soviet errors coincided with Moscow's rapprochement with the regime of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

### *Background to Soviet Policy*

The Soviet response to events in Iran needs to be understood in the context of the leadership's changing assessment of US and British intentions and their pessimistic reading of the potential for revolution beyond Soviet borders and without the presence of Soviet troops.<sup>6</sup> Over the past two decades, a number of excellent studies have emerged on Soviet–Iranian relations at the dawn of the Cold War. Historians have convincingly argued that disagreements over Iran, along with Turkey and Greece, played a role in the deterioration of relations between the USSR and its recent allies.<sup>7</sup>

Britain and the Soviet Union had jointly occupied Iran at the start of the Second World War as a way of preventing Iran's oil resources from getting into the hands of the Axis powers. Looking at a map of the Soviet Union just after the war, Stalin was happy with Soviet borders in the north, west, and east of the country, but, pointing to the area around Iranian Azerbaijan, complained, "But here I don't like our border!"<sup>8</sup> From 1944, Lavrentii Beria, Stalin's lieutenant and chief of the secret police (NKVD), led the effort to secure a Soviet oil concession in Iran. He noted that the British and Americans were competing with each other for resources, but that they would be likely to join forces against any third country (i.e. the Soviet Union). After initial efforts to secure an oil concession from Iran through negotiations failed, Moscow turned to

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<sup>6</sup>See Vladislav M. Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, 1996); Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2007); Voytech Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: The Stalin Years* (Oxford, 1996); Ted Hopf, *Reconstructing the Cold War: The Early Years, 1945–1958* (Oxford, 2012).

<sup>7</sup>Fernande S. Raine, "The Iranian Crisis of 1946 and the Origins of the Cold War," in *Origins of the Cold War: An International History*, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and David S. Painter (New York, 2005), 93–112.

<sup>8</sup>Felix Chuev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym* (Moscow, 1991), quoted in Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, 17.

using the Tudeh as well as Azeri and Kurdish nationalists to secure its interests in northern Iran. The Soviets hoped to get a favorable majority in the Iranian *Majlis* with the help of the newly created Azerbaijan Democratic Party (ADP) and used an implicit military threat to secure an agreement on setting up a joint oil company as well as a promise to provide more seats in the *Majlis* for Azerbaijan. Some members of the Tudeh opposed the Soviet policy, but the party's leadership ultimately went along with it, discrediting the party in the process.<sup>9</sup> Once Soviet troops were withdrawn, however, these promises were quickly forgotten; Iranian government troops entered Azerbaijan and put an end to the ADP government in Tabriz (as well as the Kurdish republic in Mahabad) and in 1947 the *Majlis* refused to ratify the agreement on a joint oil company.<sup>10</sup>

As Natalia Yegorova has convincingly shown, "state economic and political interests were of decisive importance in understanding Moscow's motives and behavior."<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Stalin had very little faith in Iran's revolutionary potential. In May 1946 he wrote to Ja'far Pishevari, the founder of the ADP and chairman of the short-lived Azerbaijan People's Government, that the only thing that had made it possible to even think about revolution was the presence of Soviet troops. Objectively, however, there was "no profound revolutionary crisis in Iran. There are few workers in Iran and they are poorly organized. The Iranian peasantry still does not show any serious activism." Stalin further urged Pishevari and the Tudeh to work with Ahmad Qavam, the royalist prime minister, who would inevitably be facing a conflict with the British and would need Tudeh support: "I believe we should use this conflict to wrench concessions from Qavam, to give him support, to isolate the Anglophiles, thus, and to create some basis for the further democratization of Iran."<sup>12</sup>

Qavam famously out-foxed the Soviets, promising an oil concession in return for a withdrawal of Soviet troops and then having the parliament vote against the oil concession. This seems to have cemented Stalin's pessimism about "Iran's revolutionary potential." For the next seven years, Soviet policy would be guided by a belief that the Soviets had nothing to gain in Iran and that any developments which threatened the British would just benefit the Americans. Moscow's policy between 1947 and 1952 was focused primarily on protecting its (limited) economic interests and keeping a watchful eye on the British and American presence in Iran. Most of the files in the Molotov papers actually deal with economic and trade issues, and reflect the Soviet Union's priorities of limiting its responsibility for war era debts and protecting or extending trade agreements that existed.

At the same time, Moscow was cautiously watching to make sure Iran was not being used by the UK and the US to threaten the USSR. From January 1948, Soviet officials

<sup>9</sup>Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, NJ, 1982), 309–10.

<sup>10</sup>See Yegorova, *The "Iran Crisis" of 1945–46*; Hasanli, *Iran at the Dawn of the Cold War*; Fawcett, *Iran and the Cold War*.

<sup>11</sup>Yegorova, *The "Iran Crisis" of 1945–46*, 2.

<sup>12</sup>Joseph Stalin to Ja'afar Peshevari, May 8, 1946, translated by Vladislav Zubok, in Yegorova, *The "Iran Crisis" of 1945–46*, 23–4.

were complaining about the activities of foreign, specifically American and British, specialists in Iran. Iranian officials insisted that these were strictly geological explorations and posed no threat to the Soviet Union, and in any case were being conducted by Swiss nationals. Moscow was having none of it; not only did statements by US officials suggest that US nationals were indeed involved in the explorations, the Soviet Foreign Ministry replied, but it could not accept the claim that such explorations conducted near the Soviet border had no military implications. It did not matter whether these investigations were topographical or involved air photography; “such activities, carried out for military purposes in areas near the USSR’s borders were completely unacceptable.” All of this, the Soviets insisted in their 25 May 1950 note, pointed to the fact that Iran was pursuing goals that contradicted the Soviet–Iranian Treaty of Friendship of 26 February 1921.<sup>13</sup> Iran’s relations with Pakistan and India (Iran was active in establishing close relations with both states soon after their independence, and signed a Treaty of Friendship with both countries in 1950) were also treated by Moscow as evidence of British machinations and London’s intent to solidify its control throughout its sphere of influence. At the same time, a draft statement to be issued through the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (TASS) noted that recent British activity also pointed to their fear of US competition: “The increased activity of English agents in both cases is connected to the fact that in the recent period American interference in Iran has started to seriously compete with [the] English.”<sup>14</sup>

Taken together, Iran’s obstinacy (as the position of Iranian negotiators was perceived by Soviet officials) in trade and debt talks, as well as apparent American and British involvement in Iran, suggested that Iran was firmly in the Anglo-American camp. As we will see, this conviction did not change once Mosaddeq and the National Front were in power. But Soviet intransigence likewise cemented the opinion among Iranian officials that Moscow would not be satisfied until it had military influence in the country and could dominate its internal affairs.<sup>15</sup>

### *Assessments of Mosaddeq*

Early Soviet assessments of Mosaddeq were cold at best. An assessment from October 1949 prepared by Mikhail Maksimov, the deputy of the Near and Middle East Department in the Foreign Ministry,<sup>16</sup> described Mosaddeq as someone with a “very high opinion of himself” who “enjoys authority [*avtoritet*] in Iranian bourgeois-nationalist circles and some young people in the university.” It noted that he was an enemy of “true Soviet–Iranian friendship” because he had proposed a law in 1927 that favored Iran’s obligations to the League of Nations over its agreement with the

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<sup>13</sup>Soviet Foreign Ministry note, Molotov Papers, Russian State Archives of Social and Political History (RGASPI) F. 82, op. 2, d. 1218. See also *Pravda*, June 22, 1950.

<sup>14</sup>Draft TASS statement on Iran–India agreement, Molotov Papers, RGASPI F. 82, op. 2, d. 1218.

<sup>15</sup>Interview with Mir Sultan Ahmed Mirfendereski, March 30, 1984, Harvard Oral History Project.

<sup>16</sup>Maksimov had served as ambassador in 1944–46, and previously led several consulates in Afghanistan.

USSR on neutrality, spoke out against granting an oil concession to the USSR, and introduced “the well-known draft law, directed in essence against the USSR.”<sup>17</sup> Further, the assessment noted, the presence of such people like Hassan Sadr and Karim Sanjabi suggested that the National Front had been created with the help of “pro-English elements.”<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, although the Soviets were concerned that the newly nationalized Iranian oil industry would end up in the hands of the Americans, now that it had been taken away from the British, they recognized that they had to refrain from actions that would make them seem unfriendly. When Soviet Ambassador Ivan Sadchikov proposed breaking off talks over gold, debt, and oil in 1951, the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Trade shared the ambassador’s assessment that the talks were going nowhere, but recommended to Stalin that they keep them going anyway. To do otherwise would make it seem as if the Soviets were also trying to put pressure on Tehran.<sup>19</sup> The proposed instructions to Sadchikov read:

Your proposal regarding the suspension of Soviet–Iranian talks is incorrect. You need to understand that in the current political environment in Iran, when the Iranian government is engrossed in the nationalization of the oil industry and their quarrel with England, any suggestion from us to suspend Soviet–Iranian talks on settling mutual financial claims will be used by the English and Americans in hostile ways against the Soviet Union, and also with the purpose of providing even greater pressure on the Iranian government, to force it to abandon the law on nationalizing the oil industry. Besides this, such a suggestion from us could incite a reaction from Iranian society that would be unfavorable to us.<sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile, Moscow also provided some cautious support for nationalization in the summer of 1951, running a series of TASS notices relating to the conflict with Britain and London’s appeals to the International Court in The Hague. When the latter ruled that profits should be placed in the bank of a third party and not touched by the Iranian side until after the court had made a final ruling, TASS commented that this decision “aimed at creating financial difficulties for Iran and therefore to force it in six month to stand on its knees before the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company.”<sup>21</sup> In September the journal of the Academy of Science’s Institute of Economics, *Voprossy Ekonomiki*, carried a historical overview of the oil issue in Iran which

<sup>17</sup>This presumably refers to the 1944 bill to deny oil concessions to any foreign power. See Homa Katouzian, *Mussadiq and the Struggle for Power in Iran* (London, 1990), 56–8; Diba, *Mohammed Mossadegh*, 90–94; Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 212.

<sup>18</sup>“Regarding the National Front in Iran,” October 28, 1949, RGASPI F. 82, op. 2, d. 1220.

<sup>19</sup>Gromyko and Menshikov (Minister of Trade) to Stalin, July 12, 1951, RGASPI F. 82, op. 2, d. 1219.

<sup>20</sup>Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to Ambassador Sadchikov (draft), RGASPI F. 82, op. 2, d. 1219.

<sup>21</sup>*Pravda*, July 21, 1951.

was supportive of the nationalization and highly critical of British and American actions in Iran. The article was reprinted in the more widely read *Pravda* in October. The article ended with the words, "English and American imperialism are preparing a deal behind Iran's back the purpose of which is the preservation of imperialism's dominance in Iran."<sup>22</sup> The following week, an article by the well-known economist Evgenii Varga interpreted the crisis as an attempt by American oil companies to push out their British competitors.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, even as Soviet officials began to take a more positive view of the oil nationalization, their suspicions grew that Britain's loss would quickly become America's gain. Mosaddeq's relationship with the US prior to the July 1952 crisis further confirmed Soviet suspicions that he was driving out the British only to put Iran in the American camp. In a note to Stalin from May 1952, Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei Vyshinskii pointed out evidence that American-Iranian military cooperation was increasing. The newspaper *Ettela'at* had published notes exchanged by Mosaddeq and US Ambassador Lloyd Henderson, which mentioned the question of military advisors, and statements by Minister of Communications Javad Bushehri and Special Assistant to the Secretary of State Michael McDermott suggested that the US would be providing military aid. The US military mission in Iran, which had suspended its activities in January, had now resumed work. Thus, Vyshinskii concluded, "although the notes [exchanged by] Mosaddeq and Henderson do not speak explicitly about United States aid to Iran, nevertheless the aforementioned notes in the press, statements by ... Bushehri and McDermott ... make it clear that in the exchange of notes between Mossadegh and Henderson they were speaking about providing Iran with military aid, which in turn was connected to the activity of American military advisors in Iran."<sup>24</sup> Vyshinskii's message was passed on to the Iranians on 21 May and published in *Pravda* on 23 May;<sup>25</sup> the Iranian reply, which came almost six weeks later, on 2 July, insisted that it would not undertake any actions that would violate the 1921 accord and the government of Dr. Mosaddeq "never follows any policy, except for the policy of neutrality."<sup>26</sup>

### *Whose Side to Take?*

It appears that from 1950 several Iranian actors were vying for the USSR's support as a way to shore up support within the country and also balance against the US and UK. In January 1951 the head of the shah's Chancellery, Nurzad, approached the Soviet Embassy's second secretary, a certain Kuznetsov. He pointed to the growth of American and British anti-Soviet propaganda in Iran, and expressed his surprise that Moscow had done so little to counteract it. Luckily, he had a solution: why not

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<sup>22</sup>*Pravda*, October 15, 1951.

<sup>23</sup>*Pravda*, October 22, 1951.

<sup>24</sup>Vyshinskii to Stalin, May 13, 1952, RGASPI F. 82, op. 2, d. 1219.

<sup>25</sup>*Pravda*, May 23, 1952.

<sup>26</sup>Iranian reply to Soviet note, July 2, 1952, RGASPI F. 82, op. 2, d. 1219.

invite the shah to the Soviet Union and thus show that the USSR's attitude towards Iran was nothing but friendly.<sup>27</sup>

The Soviet ambassador, Sadchikov, welcomed the overture. It was clearly coming from the shah himself, he told the Soviet Foreign Ministry. It was unlikely to cause any hostility on the part of Mosaddeq, and may have even been coordinated with the prime minister. The visit could also help with the upcoming negotiations for the renewal of a Soviet–Iranian fisheries agreement. The agreement, granted by Reza Shah in 1927, had not been profitable for Iran, because, according to Diba, payments were in rubles, the Soviets controlled sales, set prices, and oversaw the accounts, leaving the Iranians little choice but to accept whatever figures they were provided with.<sup>28</sup> Mosaddeq thus did not want to renew the agreement, and Sadchikov hoped that a visit by the shah could help. But the Foreign Ministry did not share Sadchikov's enthusiasm. First, it pointed out, this was not the first time the shah's representatives had made this approach; a similar overture had been made in 1950, through other people in the shah's staff as well as the press. The draft reply was discussed in the Central Committee and Politburo between 12 and 21 January, and Sadchikov was ultimately told that he was giving too much credence to Nurzad's claim to be expressing the shah's wishes, and in any case it needed to be understood as an attempt to draw the USSR into "the game the Iranians were playing with the British and Americans." If the shah was indeed interested in visiting the Soviet Union, his staff should find a way to raise this question directly.<sup>29</sup>

Even more curious was the approach by Ayatollah Seyed Abdul Qassem Kashani, the popular and controversial religious leader, in December of that year. Interned in 1944–45 by the British, who suspected him of pro-German sympathies, and exiled in 1949–50 by the shah, Kashani was elected to the 16th Majlis in 1950. Kashani's politics included a great deal of anti-imperialist rhetoric and he became a Mosaddeq ally in the oil nationalization campaign.<sup>30</sup> Kashani apparently approached a Russian merchant, Isaev (only his surname is given in the document), and asked him to request a confidential meeting with Sadchikov. Sadchikov was instructed to refrain from a confidential visit, since this could lead to rumors about Soviet intentions. Instead, he was to welcome a formal visit from Kashani at the embassy, but Kashani replied that this would be impossible.<sup>31</sup> Less than two months later, however, he used an appointment with Soviet doctors to again lay out his position. He wanted to come out more directly as a friend of the Soviet Union, he said, if

<sup>27</sup>Gromyko to Stalin [undated, but between January 17 and 21, 1951], RGASPI F. 82, op. 2, d. 1219.

<sup>28</sup>Katouzian, *Mussadiq and the Struggle for Power in Iran*, 133–6; Diba, *Mohammed Mossadegh*, 167–8.

<sup>29</sup>Instructions to Soviet Ambassador in Tehran Sadchikov, January 21, 1951, RGASPI F. 82, op. 2, d. 1219.

<sup>30</sup>On Kashani, see Shahrough Akhavi, "The Role of the Clergy in Iranian Politics," in *Musaddiq, Iranian Nationalism, and Oil*, ed. James A. Bill and William Roger Louis (London, 1988), 91–117; Abrahamian, *The Coup*, 54–7; Fakhreddin Azimi, "Unseating Mossadegh," in *Mohammed Mossadegh and the 1953 Coup in Iran* (see note 1), 56–62.

<sup>31</sup>Gromyko to Stalin, March 1952, RGASPI F. 82, op. 2, d. 1220.

only the latter would do its part in helping Iran out of its difficult financial situation by settling its debt. This would be a demonstration of the Soviet Union's genuinely good intentions (unlike those of the imperialist powers) towards Iran.<sup>32</sup>

In March, Kashani tried again to get a confidential meeting with Sadchikov. Kashani's secretary, Shaoban Kazemi, approached Kuznetsov, the Soviet Embassy's second secretary. Kashani wanted the Soviets to know that if they would look at Iranian questions less narrowly, they would certainly reconsider its position regarding the repayment of its "rather small" (*nebol'shogo*) debt to Iran. Iran was in a difficult situation, and without some financial assistance it would fall. This would not be in the Soviet interests, Kashani emphasized, as at the moment Mosaddeq's government was resisting imperialists.<sup>33</sup>

This time it was Ambassador Sadchikov who was skeptical. Providing financial assistance to Mosaddeq was inadvisable, he wrote to Moscow, considering Mosaddeq's pro-American sympathies and his attempts to solve the oil problem by finding a compromise with the British and Americans. The Foreign Ministry instructed Sadchikov to once again invite Kashani for a formal visit to the embassy, but at the same time to point out that Tehran's attitude on the debt issue suggested that the government's attitude to the Soviet Union was, in fact, unfriendly.<sup>34</sup>

At one point, it appears, Kashani had begun to act as a sort of mediator between the Soviets and Mosaddeq. Perhaps they were trying to test him out before deciding what kind of relationship to establish with the cleric. Judging by the available record, Moscow had decided sometime between Sadchikov's March note and the beginning of April to have Kashani sound out Iran's Oil Ministry on the possibility of resuming oil sales to the USSR. Kashani met with Oil Minister Bagher Kazemi and reported Soviet interest in resuming these oil sales. He asked the minister to invite Sadchikov to begin negotiations. Kashani then asked Sadchikov to confirm that if the talks on oil were successful, the USSR would promise not to use oil sales as an excuse for later interference in Iran's internal affairs, and to support Iran financially in case of external pressure from outside powers unhappy with Iran's sales to the USSR.<sup>35</sup>

So far, Moscow and, to a lesser extent, the embassy in Tehran seem to have missed the importance of what was happening in Iran. It is also possible that they were telling Stalin and his immediate circle what they wanted to hear. These were some of the tensest moments of the Cold War; speaking positively about a figure who had been labeled an American puppet by the bosses in Moscow was dangerous. In 1950, Daniil Semenovich Komissarov, who had worked in the Soviet Embassy in Iran since the early 1940s, was recalled to Moscow shortly afterward and grilled by

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid. The conversation was quickly relayed to the ambassador, who passed it on to Moscow in a telegram of February 22, 1952.

<sup>33</sup>Gromyko to Stalin, March 1952 RGASPI F. 82, op. 2, d. 1220.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Vyshinskii to Stalin, April 11, 1952, RGASPI F. 82, op. 2, d. 1219. The Foreign Ministry recommended[0] leaving this as a possibility, but insisting that it was tied to the resolution of outstanding questions about the USSR's debt, which the Soviet side had done everything in its power to solve.

Molotov, who wanted to know why the Iranian Embassy in Moscow was asking them to recall Komissarov as someone “not acting in the interests of friendship between the USSR and Iran.” Komissarov, for his part, argued that the Iranian leadership was being disingenuous when it claimed that it wanted friendship with the USSR and that the government in any case was on the verge of a political crisis caused by rising unemployment and peasant impoverishment. Komissarov was warning of the kind of revolutionary situation that Stalin had said, in his letter to Peshavari, did not exist in Iran.<sup>36</sup> Komissarov was arrested shortly thereafter. Although we do not know for certain what motivated Komissarov’s arrest, and whether it was related to his reading of the situation in Iran, it is not difficult to imagine that other embassy employees would try to stick more closely to the interpretation coming from Moscow.<sup>37</sup>

In July, Mosaddeq’s relations with the shah reached a new crisis point when he insisted on his right as prime minister to appoint a minister of war and a chief of staff, rather than ceding that right to the shah. Mosaddeq resigned and the shah appointed Qavam, but after five days of street protests the shah was forced to accept Qavam’s resignation and reinstate Mosaddeq.<sup>38</sup> Following the crisis, however, both the embassy and Moscow’s assessments of events in Iran changed. Sadchikov noted that the Americans had supported the first stages of nationalization in the hopes of helping their own oil companies. But once they recognized that supporters of nationalization amounted to an “anti-imperialist” movement, they turned against it, and now shared London’s opinion that Iran needed a “strong” government that could “deal” with the democratic elements and solve the oil issue according to Anglo-American interests. This was evident, Sadchikov wrote, in their joint attempt to replace Mosaddeq with Qavam in July, which failed due to “the determined resistance of all sectors of the population taking part in the movement for nationalizing the oil industry.”<sup>39</sup>

Although the embassy was impressed with the larger “anti-imperialist” movement in Iran, they were still unimpressed by Mosaddeq himself. Early Soviet assessments saw Mosaddeq as an Anglo-American puppet, but by late 1952 he was seen primarily as a weakling who could not survive in the long term. At the same time, they were taking Kashani seriously as a political force. It is hard to tell whether Kashani’s earlier contacts went anywhere, but the embassy’s assessment from October 1952 suggests that Soviet officials, either in Tehran or perhaps even in Moscow, had begun to contemplate throwing their support behind Kashani. The assessment noted that the situation was growing unstable, and that Mosaddeq’s apparent willingness to make a deal with the British and the Americans was driving those people in the National Front who were “more committed to the nationalization of

<sup>36</sup>Note to Stalin, March 24, 1950, RGASPI F. 82, op. 2, d. 1220.

<sup>37</sup>Komissarov would join the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Soviet Academy of Sciences after his release and go on to have a long and distinguished career as a specialist on modern Iranian literature.

<sup>38</sup>Abrahamian, *The Coup*, 138–47; Katouzian, *Musaddiq and the Struggle for Power in Iran*, 121–5.

<sup>39</sup>Sadchikov to FM, October 15, 1952, RGASPI F. 82, op. 2, d. 1220.

the oil industry” to the “well known political and religious figure Kashani.” It was quite possible that Kashani was “preparing the ground” for a takeover and would be sounding out the Soviet Embassy on the possibility of getting Moscow’s support. At the same time, Sadchikov noted, Kashani’s intentions were unclear and the embassy still had to conduct negotiations with Mosaddeq over the fisheries agreement. It was best to stay neutral and study the situation further to better understand Mosaddeq and Kashani’s intentions. Only then would the embassy report to Moscow about the advisability of moving closer (*zblizhenie*) to Kashani “for the purposes of strengthening Iran’s resistance to Anglo-American pressure and improving Soviet–Iranian relations.”<sup>40</sup>

The documentary record available in the Molotov Fond runs out in October 1952 (when Stalin criticized Molotov and took all responsibility for foreign policy away from him),<sup>41</sup> with the Foreign Ministry drafting a set of instructions to Sadchikov reflecting the renewed interest in the “anti-imperialist” potential of developments in Iran. By this point the relationship between Mosaddeq and Kashani was deteriorating, despite efforts by their supporters to effect a reconciliation.<sup>42</sup> The embassy was instructed to continue monitoring and reporting on the strength of the “national liberation” movement in Iran, including the movement for nationalization of the oil industry, as well as US and British plans in Iran, including disagreements between the two powers. It was to monitor the relationship between Mosaddeq and Kashani without giving any sign that it was backing one against the other; in fact, Sadchikov was to visit both of them, as well as Hossein Fatemi, the new Iranian foreign minister, in an official capacity upon his return to Tehran. Most crucially, the embassy was instructed to accept offers to buy oil if the Iranians were to bring that up. The last amounted to at least a cautious attempt to offer the Iranian government a helping hand, untethered to other outstanding issues.<sup>43</sup>

Unfortunately, none of the documents reviewed thus far give any indication of relations with the Tudeh Party and how Tudeh assessments affected views of Mosaddeq in Moscow, and to what extent the latter was dictating the party’s behavior in Iran, though the issue has been addressed in Tudeh memoirs, oral histories, and studies such as those of Homa Katouzian, Fakhreddin Azimi, and Maziar Behrooz. Muhammad Turbati, a Tudeh member who later fled to Stalinabad, writes that while Tudeh members originally debated how they should respond to Mosaddeq and whether he was truly progressive, at some point that debate was cut off—presumably at Moscow’s orders—and Mosaddeq was then labeled as “bourgeois nationalist.”<sup>44</sup> The party appears to have operated with the Soviet Union’s interests at least partially in mind, and it is not surprising that the responses to oil nationalization that appeared

<sup>40</sup>Sadchikov to FM, October 15, 1952, RGASPI F. 82, op. 2, d. 1220.

<sup>41</sup>On Molotov’s demotion see Geoffrey Roberts, *Molotov: Stalin’s Cold Warrior* (Washington, DC, 2012), 129; and Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 95.

<sup>42</sup>Azimi, “Unseating Mossadegh,” 58.

<sup>43</sup>Instructions to Sadchikov (Draft), October 1952, Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI) F. 82, op. 2, d. 1219.

<sup>44</sup>Muhammad Turbati, *Az Tehran to Stalinabad* (Berkeley, CA, 2000).

in Tudeh periodicals echoed the Soviet line. In June 1950 an article in *Mardom* (the People) stated, "Already we can be sure that revisions in the southern oil contract will not be in favor of our people and will only result in the consolidation of England's position in our country."<sup>45</sup> At the same time, Maziar Behrooz, examining Soviet and Tudeh coverage, argues that the Tudeh may have had Soviet interests in mind, but developed its policy independently, and criticized the oil nationalization even as the Soviet press praised it.<sup>46</sup> But the Soviet assessments cited above suggest that the Tudeh was echoing what Soviet officials were saying internally; perhaps, unable to come out against nationalization in the Soviet press, Moscow left the initiative to the Tudeh. In any case, just as the Soviets' assessments of Mosaddeq were beginning to change following the July crisis, when the Tudeh had mobilized to help return Mosaddeq to power, so the Tudeh adopted a more favorable attitude. Behrooz also explains this as the result of a more moderate faction winning control of the Tudeh after July 1952.<sup>47</sup>

Noureddin Kianuri, a Tudeh activist and Central Committee member who fled after the 1953 coup and later served as the party's chairman after 1979, makes the distinction between "extremists" within the Tudeh who continued to resist supporting Mosaddeq and moderates who thought that for all his faults the Tudeh should be mobilizing in his support,<sup>48</sup> a point echoed by other Tudeh memoirists.<sup>49</sup> In any case, Mosaddeq himself was ambivalent about how much support he wanted from the Tudeh, and their poorly coordinated attempts to rally support during the August coup proved too little and too late. What never materialized, however, is support from the Soviet Union. With a documentary record that runs out in October 1952, we can only speculate as to whether such aid was even considered.

### *Soviet Policy from January 1953 to the Coup*

Stalin's death led to some rapid changes domestically—including the suspension of the campaign against the "Kremlin Doctors" and the release of many camp inmates—but little immediate change in foreign policy. This was not just a case of Stalin's successors (especially Molotov, Beria, Khrushchev, Kaganovich, and Mikoyan) subscribing to the policy pursued in the dictator's last years (though this too played a role) but also their fear, in the context of a "collective" leadership within which each was trying to gain primacy over the others, of doing something that could later be used against them. Major changes in Soviet foreign policy, particularly towards the Third World, would only come in 1955, when Khrushchev had already emerged as the dominant figure.

<sup>45</sup>Quoted in Maziar Behrooz, "The 1953 Coup in Iran and the Legacy of the Tudeh," in *Mohammed Mossadeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran* (see note 1), 108.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>48</sup>[http://www.rahetudeh.com/rahetude/mataleb/kiya/html/kiya\\_16.html](http://www.rahetudeh.com/rahetude/mataleb/kiya/html/kiya_16.html).

<sup>49</sup>Sadegh Ansari, *Az zendegi-ye man: pā be pā-ye hezb-e Tudeh-e Irān* (Los Angeles, 1996), 324–33.

It is not surprising, then, that Moscow's policy toward Iran in the spring and summer of 1953 did not differ from what had come earlier. This has not stopped speculation that Stalin himself was in the process of changing his mind about Mosaddeq. In an interview for the Harvard Iranian Oral History Project, Ahmed Mirfendereski, an Iranian diplomat who served as ambassador to the Soviet Union in the 1960s, was asked whether, if Stalin had lived, the coup would have been avoided. (The interviewer mentioned that he had heard this opinion from a number of Iranian diplomats who had worked in the Moscow embassy.) According to Mirfendereski, Stalin had basically made an offer to Mosaddeq: "If you come to my side, I will support you."<sup>50</sup> Of course, no such offer was formally voiced; Mirfendereski bases his reading on newspaper statements, and it is not clear whether such a reading of Soviet statements was widespread among Iranian officials. Nor would such an offer have been acceptable to Mosaddeq. It does seem, however, that Mosaddeq had some vague notion that the Soviet Union's "involvement in international affairs"<sup>51</sup> since the end of the Second World War could help guarantee Iran's independence, and wrote that Stalin's death in 1953 "cleared the way for the overthrow of my government," presumably because his successors were either too desirous of accommodation with the Americans or too weak willed to continue opposing them.<sup>52</sup>

The point here is not to speculate about Mosaddeq's intentions, but rather to understand how Moscow may have read the situation. In light of what we have seen regarding Moscow's interest in Kashani, it is more likely that it was the break between Kashani and Mosaddeq that kept Moscow at a distance. Strains between the two had been growing throughout the latter half of 1952. In January 1953, when Mosaddeq asked the Majlis to renew the "Delegated Powers Act" that had given him extraordinary powers six months earlier, Kashani and several other supporters openly turned against him. When, at the end of February, it became known that Mosaddeq had asked the shah to leave the country, Kashani helped organize demonstrations outside the premier's house.<sup>53</sup> It was Kashani, it should be remembered, that Moscow had come to see as a potential revolutionary leader—not Mosaddeq.

At the same time, Mosaddeq was proving obstinate about renegotiating a Caspian Sea fisheries agreement that was due to expire in February 1953. Curiously, Mosaddeq remembers the Soviet ambassador as being understanding. In his "memoirs," he recalled that:

throughout this period, Sadchikov, the Soviet ambassador came to my house only once or twice, and talked about the Caspian Sea fishing concession held by the Rus-

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<sup>50</sup>Interview with Mir Sultan Ahmed Mirfendereski, March 30, 1984, Harvard Iranian Oral History Project.

<sup>51</sup>Homa Katouzian, ed., *Musaddiq's Memoirs* (London, 1988), 290.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 58–60; Ali M. Ansari, *Modern Iran: The Pahlavis and After*, 2nd ed. (London, 2007), 139–47; Abrahamian, *The Coup*, 167–9.

sians which was expiring in February 1952 [*sic*]. He asked for the concession to remain in force until later when a new agreement would be negotiated. I said how can a government which had nationalized the South-Iranian oil concession before the date of expiry, and repatriated the British employees of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, keep in force the Fishing Agreement, and let the Soviet employees run the production as before? Do you know what the Soviet ambassador's reply was? He said: "You are right, and we should not have made this request." He then apologized and left, and two days before the expiry date the government took over the fishing industry.<sup>54</sup>

Yet from the few files made available to me at the Foreign Ministry, it appears that discussions over fisheries were actually quite tense. After one meeting at the Soviet Embassy on 30 January 1953, Mosaddeq complained that Soviet officials were threatening to tie the renewal of the accord on fisheries to Soviet–Iranian relations in general.<sup>55</sup> In other words, while he wanted to use the nationalization of fisheries to prove his independence to the West without harming relations with Moscow, he seems to have felt that the Soviets were blackmailing him by tying the accords to relations in general. Indeed, at the end of the above passage in his memoirs Mosaddeq speculates that his refusal to renew the fisheries agreement "is probably why the Soviet Union refused to return to my government the eight tons of gold which it owed Iran as war debt."<sup>56</sup>

We do, however, have some clues from an article published by Vladislav Zubok on a "committee of information" that operated from 1952 to 1953.<sup>57</sup> The committee analyzed intelligence and provided digests and advice to the Soviet leadership. Unfortunately, the relevant documentation cited by Zubok, which was available in the early 1990s, has been reclassified. Among other things, the materials cited by Zubok confirm that the Soviets were aware that a coup was in the works from October 1952 and that General Fazlollah Zahedi, a former minister of interior, was likely to lead any post-coup government.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, as late as May 1953, the committee was writing that Mosaddeq was planning to "smash the national liberation movement and suppress opposition elements around the shah in order to create the conditions for further collusion with American monopolies."<sup>59</sup>

Zubok also reveals that Mosaddeq approached the Soviet ambassador in the summer of 1953 and repeated the arguments made previously by Kashani. He

<sup>54</sup>Katouzian, *Musaddiq's Memoirs*, 272; Diba, *Mohammed Mossadegh*, 167–8.

<sup>55</sup>Mosaddeq to Soviet Embassy in Tehran, January 30, 1953, Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (AVPRF), Iran referentura, op. 42, folder 129, d. 014, 98–9.

<sup>56</sup>Katouzian, *Musaddiq's Memoirs*, 272.

<sup>57</sup>Vladislav Zubok, "Soviet Intelligence and the Cold War: The 'Small' Committee of Information, 1952–53," *Diplomatic History* 19, no. 3 (1995): 453–72.

<sup>58</sup>Zubok, "Soviet Intelligence and the Cold War," 466. A little over a month before the coup, *Pravda* published a TASS notice summarizing US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles's statements in the *New York Times* regarding the likelihood that Mosaddeq would fall, under the headline "The State Department Is Preparing A Military Coup in Iran."

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 466–7.

needed a trade agreement with the Soviet Union to help mitigate the effects of British pressure. But Molotov, now firmly in control of the foreign policy machinery, stuck to the old line, telling the Soviet ambassador:

you do not wish to understand the essence in the relationship between the United States and England on this subject. You should not forget that Mosaddeq prepared the decision about liquidating British oil concessions at the behest of or after clearing it with the United States so as to remove from the world market the strongest competitors of American oil monopoly ... Americans, of course, can perform a role of friends of the British and produce an impression of American pressure on the Iranian government on behalf of the Britons.<sup>60</sup>

In other words, Molotov still saw Mosaddeq as basically being in cahoots with the Americans, and any evidence of American pressure on Mosaddeq as a ploy to distract from the real issue, which was Iran being absorbed into the American orbit.<sup>61</sup>

Once the coup took place, the committee of information at first assured the Soviet leadership that the Iranian masses would turn against the new government, but within a few months they admitted that the new government was firmly in place, as was American influence in the country.<sup>62</sup>

It is worth remembering that the coup took place as the battle for power among Stalin's successors was beginning to turn bloody. Molotov, who had lost control over foreign policy in October 1952, regained it as Stalin was dying in March 1953. In June, Lavrentii Beria had been arrested. In the July plenum convened to ratify his arrest, Khrushchev led the way in denouncing Beria's proposal for German reunification.<sup>63</sup> As Mark Kramer has argued, nothing Beria did with respect to eastern Europe was beyond the bounds the other leaders had agreed on.<sup>64</sup> Still, Beria's arrest may well have motivated the rest of the leadership to tread more cautiously, lest a moment of creative foreign policymaking be used against them. At the same time,

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<sup>60</sup>Zubok, "Soviet Intelligence and the Cold War," 466.

<sup>61</sup>A Soviet negotiating team was sent to Iran in August 1953. Though apparently treated by some observers as evidence of growing closeness to the USSR, it was more likely part of the ongoing attempt to resolve outstanding economic questions dating back to the war on the most favorable terms possible for the USSR. Kristen Blake, *The US-Soviet Confrontation in Iran, 1945-1962: A Case in the Annals of the Cold War* (Lanham, MD, 2009), 84. Similarly, though Sadchikov was recalled in July and replaced by Anatoly Lavrentiev, this does not appear to have any particular significance. Mark Gasiorowski's suggestion that Lavrentiev replaced Sadchikov in preparation for a coup on the basis of Lavrentiev's experience in Czechoslovakia seems improbable, considering that Lavrentiev had served in Yugoslavia from 1946 to 1949 and was in Czechoslovakia in 1951-52, not 1948. See Gasiorowski and Byrne, *Mohammed Mossadeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran*, 330. For biographical information, see A.A. Gromyko et al., *Diplomaticheskii Slovar'* (Moscow, 1985-86), 2: 131.

<sup>62</sup>Zubok, "Soviet Intelligence and the Cold War," 467-8.

<sup>63</sup>Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 91-3. See Mark Kramer's trilogy, "The Early Post-Stalin Succession Struggle and Upheavals in East-Central Europe: Internal-External Linkages in Soviet Policy Making," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1, no. 1 (1999): 3-55; no. 2 (1999): 3-38; and no. 3 (1999): 3-66.

<sup>64</sup>Kramer, "Early Post-Stalin Succession Struggle," Part 2, 28-30.

one of the Soviet leadership's priorities in the months after Stalin's death had been ending the Korean War, and an armistice had finally been signed on 26 July.<sup>65</sup> It would not be a stretch to say that Soviet leaders did not want to undermine their peace efforts in Korea by picking a fight with the Americans and British in Iran, especially considering their previous skepticism of Mosaddeq.

After Molotov was ousted in 1957, his misreading of the situation in Iran was piled on top of the many sins already attributed to him. Already during the 1957 plenum that led to Molotov's downfall, Vladimir Semyonov, a deputy minister of foreign affairs, articulated a similar critique. He presented Molotov's failure to understand the events in Iran as part of his overall failure to understand national liberation movements in general:

It is well known that at the time of the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian oil company in 1952, Iran was similar to Egypt after the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company. Enormous opportunities appeared for Soviet diplomacy to influence Iran and the Mosaddeq government. But because of the rigid and un-Leninist policy pursued by Comrade Molotov, who was then minister of foreign affairs, in relation to Iran, these opportunities were not exploited. Comrade Molotov mistakenly saw the conflict surrounding the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company not as a conflict between Iran and the colonizers of the West, but as a conflict between oil companies of England and of the USA, fighting with each other for Iranian oil. As a result of this improper position Soviet diplomacy missed favorable opportunities to improve our relations with the Iranian state, with which we have a two-and-a-half thousand kilometer border, that had worsened after 1945. When the shah came here last year, some of the senior people in his delegation quietly said to us "How could you not help Iran in such a difficult period? Why did everything turn out this way?"<sup>66</sup>

Molotov's misreading of developments in Iran would be used against him several years later. In the process, the Mosaddeq period was re-evaluated as a "revolution of national liberation."<sup>67</sup>

Does this criticism imply that there were other voices suggesting a different policy in Iran in 1952–53? Without Foreign Ministry documents and a better picture of what Moscow and the Soviet Embassy in Tehran were saying to each other (as well as what was being discussed in Moscow itself) it is impossible to say. Certainly the information provided by Zubok suggests that Molotov was quick to silence any talk of helping Mosaddeq—his skepticism of the oil nationalization and of the nationalist

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 7–8.

<sup>66</sup>V.S. Semyonov's statement in A.N. Iakovlev et al., eds., *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich 1957: Ste-nogramma iunskogo plenuma TsK KPSS i drugie dokumenty* (Moscow, 1998), 676–7.

<sup>67</sup>Zubok cites in "Soviet Intelligence and the Cold War" (48) a 1959 document entitled "On the Issue of the Anti-party Position of V.M. Molotov in the Period of Revolution of National Liberation in Iran in 1953."

prime minister prior to 1952 was still informing his policies in August 1953. In addition, we should remember that the critique of Molotov in 1957 was meant also as a justification of the Third World policy being pursued by Nikita Khrushchev since 1955—one articulated as a deliberate break with Stalin and resisted by Molotov.<sup>68</sup> Molotov's problem, Semyonov said, was that he saw the world as divided strictly into capitalist and socialist countries, but did not see the "particularities of the East, where there are colonized countries, feudal governments, and countries which are just making their national-liberation revolutions, and bourgeois countries with backwards economies, and so forth." Not seeing these distinctions, Molotov could not escape the "inflexibility that his line suffered from while he directed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs."<sup>69</sup> Of course, Molotov was being blamed for a policy line that no one had dared to challenge, but Semyonov's statement is as good an articulation as any of why the Soviet Union had not responded differently to Mosaddeq and how its policy towards the Third World was changing in the 1950s.

### Conclusions

This overview of materials on Iran in the Molotov Fond does allow us to draw some preliminary conclusions about Soviet policy in Iran during Mosaddeq's premiership. First, Soviet policy does seem to have been dictated primarily by economic and security concerns. Distrust of "bourgeois nationalists" and the Soviet experience in 1946 blinded Stalin and Molotov to the broader significance of what Mosaddeq was doing. While this was consistent with Soviet foreign policy in Stalin's last years, it is nevertheless striking how limited the Soviet view of developments in Iran appears to have been, especially before July 1952. One cannot help but be sympathetic to Kashani's plea that if the Soviet Union would only look at the Iranian situation less narrowly, it would surely change its policy and adopt a more flexible position on economic questions, thus allowing the nationalist movement to survive the crisis.

Second, the evidence, however incomplete, seems to support the view of Geoffrey Roberts that Iran (along with Greece and Turkey), had a "secondary place in [Stalin's] priorities."<sup>70</sup> Although Roberts is talking about immediate post-war policy, not the Mosaddeq period, the general conclusion still holds. Soviet leaders seemed unenthusiastic about the developments taking place in Iran and clearly did not want to be drawn into them.

Third, it is striking, though not truly surprising, how little the Tudeh appears to have fitted into Soviet calculations. Admittedly, this could be simply a reflection of the sources used, but this is unlikely. Several of the documents cited attempt to

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<sup>68</sup>See Hopf, *Reconstructing the Cold War*, 235–42; Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge, 2005), 66–72; Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary* (New York, 2007).

<sup>69</sup>Semyonov's statement in Iakovlev et al., *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich 1957*, 677.

<sup>70</sup>Geoffrey Roberts, "Moscow's Cold War on the Periphery: Soviet Policy in Greece, Iran, and Turkey, 1943–8," *Journal of Contemporary History* 46, no. 1 (2011): 58–81.

provide an overview of the broader political situation in Iran, and these strongly suggest that neither Moscow nor the Soviet Embassy in Tehran expected much in terms of popular support for the Tudeh. Stalin's admonition to Pishevari cited earlier in this paper still held throughout the Mosaddeq period and the political crises in 1952–53, when an external enemy did appear. In their view, Mosaddeq was weak, the Tudeh irrelevant, and only Kashani was a likely force that could command support in the street and have enough backbone to stand up to the British and Americans. Of course, there was an element of self-fulfilling prophecy here. True, the Soviet Union could only have had little influence over developments in Iran, but its intransigence on trade and debt issues only weakened Mosaddeq, thus confirming their view that he would not be able to stand up to the British and Americans in the long term. Similarly, just as Soviet policies in 1945–46 undermined the Tudeh, so its stance on trade and economic issues could only heighten the suspicions of those who saw the Tudeh as the tools of a hostile power.

The story of Soviet relations with Mosaddeq is unlikely to change our understanding of the coup itself. The fact that Moscow had virtually no intention of dealing with Mosaddeq, for example, does nothing to settle the debate between those who believe Cold War concerns were paramount and those who believe it was all about oil, since that is a question more of US perceptions rather than Soviet intentions. It does, however, help us fill in the story of Soviet–Iranian relations in the twentieth century, also a topic of Roham Alvandi's article in this issue. It will be interesting to see how reassessments of this episode, of the kind suggested by the criticism of Molotov cited by Zubok, informed Soviet–Iranian relations and Soviet Third World relations in the Khrushchev era and beyond.