

## **The Democratic Movement in Iran's Azerbaijan Province in 20<sup>th</sup> Century: a Critical Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

In the analysis of the democratic movement of Iranian Azerbaijan, the present paper tries to reach to the conclusion that this movement emerged due to socio-political and economic backwardness of this region as well as lack of land reforms, education and health care. This movement although could not reach to its ultimate aim of correcting these issues due to its short tenure of one year in power (1945-46) however it revives and gave a new soul to the Azeri language that led to its acceptance among the native people. Despite the viewpoints of some of the researchers that the movement culminated with the backing of the erstwhile Soviet Union, it must be said that this was purely native based on the desire of local people. Soviet Union initially supported the movement but because of the pressure from the central government of Iran and the Western powers (Britain and the United States), it deceived the movement the time it was on the verge of success. The current paper tries to prove that it was such pressure that led to the collapse of this movement and accordingly I think the West succeeded by giving vague and hidden promises to the USSR for taking out its support from the democratic movement of Azerbaijan.

**Keywords:** Democratic movement, Azerbaijan, USSR, Iran.

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## **Introduction**

The establishment of the Dimokrat Party of Azerbaijan (Firqa-yi Dimokrat Azerbaijan) has been usually interpreted by both Western and Persian Scholars as nothing but a Soviet creation.<sup>1</sup> It is an approach characterized by the importance given to the role of the Soviet Union within the province of Azerbaijan: the presence of Communist regime has been considered a powerful factor that the establishment of a party with socialist Ideas could become possible. This is a response, however, which fits to the facts neatly, a trap we must be careful, since it conveniently hides many complicated motivations and tensions.

To accept this as one reason, we must also investigate alternative explanations, which one probably could find in the history of Azerbaijan: its internal development, relations with other parts of Iran, especially Teheran and the central government. Azerbaijan province traditional occupied a special status and received proper attention from Iranian rules, which recognized its economic and strategic potentials. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan clearly defined local characteristics, and to some extent it could be said of possessing a national character.<sup>2</sup> Contrary to majority of Persian-speaking Iranians, Azerbaijanis use a language closely related to Turkish.<sup>3</sup> Further, they possess sense of national pride, which they expressed during the Tobacco protest of 1891,<sup>4</sup> the Constitutional Revolution of 1905,<sup>5</sup> and the Khyabani Revolt of 1919 against the treaty signed by then Prime Minister and the British. With these incidents, Iranian rulers referred the province not only a center of 'revolutionary' ideas, but led to continuous tensions between Azerbaijan province and the central government.

The Azerbaijan Society was created soon after Riza Shah's abdication, with the aim of reversing the discrimination, especially with regard to the use of Turkish. Following the collapse of the Society, the provincial committee of Tudeh Party was established in April 1942.<sup>6</sup> The central government became more furious with new organizational and political skills brought by the Tudeh. Despite oppositions, its popularity grew culminating into the establishment of Firqa-Yi Dimokrat Azerbaijan under Pishavari's leadership. However, rejection of his credentials by the 14th Majlis forced Pishavari to seek non-parliamentary measures.

## **The formation of Firqa-yi Dimokrat Azerbaijan**

The policy adopted by Pishavari aimed of minimizing class differences and

maximizing collective movements against Tehran. However, physical recruitments to the *Firqa-yi Dimokrat* proved a more difficult task because political insincerity of previous progressive parties had created an air of mistrust among people. It was also coupled with the effect of oppression and threatening propaganda by the central government. Pishavari therefore published a twelve-point declaration of purpose on September 3, 1945, with the intention to distribute them among the people for their signatures, if they agreed with it.

The declaration placed Azerbaijan's struggle for national provincial representation into the context of democracy and rights exercised by progressive countries, which were even guaranteed in theory but not in practice, to Iranians by the Constitutional Law. Azerbaijan adhered to law so long as the central government respected it, but looking at the global scenarios with democracy victories, it would too, no longer tolerate oppression. With reference to wishes of Azerbaijanis, the *Firqa-yi Dimokrat* could serve their needs as a progressive party.

**twelve-point declaration:**

1. While the *Firqa-yi Dimokrat* respects integrity and independence of Iran, it also seeks autonomy for Azerbaijan.
2. A provincial body would deal with cultural, economic and medical affairs.
3. Turkish will be taught in all primary schools and national university of Azerbaijan will be established.
4. It would deal with industrial development in Azerbaijan, with the aim to reduce unemployment.
5. It would take step to increase trade.
6. Unite towards modernization of Azerbaijan.
7. It seeks lifting heavy taxes on peasants and distribution of lands amongst the landless peasants, and availability of modern equipment to them.
8. Unemployment alleviation by building factories, increasing trade, and constructing railway networks and roads.
9. Conducting free and fair elections in the province.
10. It will fight against corruption amongst civil servants.
11. Spend half of the taxes raised by the central government for internal developments of Azerbaijan, and try to reduce the amount of indirect taxes.
12. It will establish friendly relations with all democratic countries.<sup>7</sup>

The declaration announced that the Firqa's primary responsibility was to support Azarbaijan. Since reforms of Azarbaijan benefit whole Iran, it would focus outside the province only after these were achieved in Azarbaijan.

With further suspicions, the organization and activity of the Firqa began there. Local branches were set up in various towns and cities with efficient and prior planning. A general meeting was convened on September 13, to elect a provisional committee of eleven members. Pishavari was appointed its president, with Shabistari as his deputy. The C.C.U.T.U. (Central Council of United Trade Unions) announced its decision to unite the membership of the Tudeh, with the active help of members like Padagan, and Qiyami. Appointing the members to the central committee later recognized the strength gained from the Tudeh support.<sup>8</sup>

A preparatory conference held on September 20, before the first congress was convened on October 1st. About 1500 delegates attended the meeting, which elected 59 people to represent different positions within the Azarbaijan society. The conference was also taken as an opportunity to express the Firqa's policy in formal petition<sup>9</sup> addressed to the respective Foreign Offices of the Allied Powers. The petition laid out the concern over the suppression of democracy in Iran and as such, with an appeal to the 2nd principle of the Atlantic Charter,<sup>10</sup> it requested to establish democracy in Iran, and to achieve the political autonomy in Azarbaijan in accordance with the people's wishes concerning their own destiny.

During the 3-day congress, several important steps were taken i.e. the amalgamation of Tudeh and the Firqa-yi Dimokrat, approval of the manifesto,<sup>11</sup> election of the central committee with Pishavari as its head and Shabistari and Padagan as deputies. The policy adopted there closely resembles the declaration of September 3, with some additions such as the right to freedoms of speech, press and associations.<sup>12</sup> Until November 1st, local conferences were to be held throughout Azarbaijan to elect their committees; with franchise to the people between age group of 20-28, irrespective of sex.

It seems that October Congress represented a very significant movement in the history of Firqa-yi Dimokrat Party. The official recognition of the new movement gave the Party an authoritative status in the minds of many Azarbaijanis, who saw it as the real embodiment of their hopes for national and political autonomy.<sup>13</sup> It acted, therefore, as a crystallization of organization, and as a catalyst, which attracted strong support for

democratic demands. Its popularity became so evident that the Firqa accumulated much publicity in countries outside Iran, both negative and positive. As a result of these combined factors, the central government considered the Firqa as a dynamic threat, and reacted vehemently with a series of repressive measures.

### **The road to independence:**

The transformation of the Firqa-yi Dimokrat into the National Government of Azarbaijan was primarily to force circumstances, rather than being a natural consequence of policies adopted by it. Two factors were of extreme importance. We have already explained the nature of peculiar tie of need and solution existed between the Firqa-yi Dimokrat and the people of Azarbaijan. With increasing popularity and success of the party, two contenders for influence and political power were created—the other, the official structure organized by the central government.<sup>14</sup> It was not possible for the Firqa-yi Dimokrat to retain its status as a minority group the face of a rival movement whose actions were authorized and official. In order to grow, it was therefore forced to act on a similar level i.e. it was in effect leveraging for political power on a national basis. The second was the strong governmental pressure against the party.

However, the central government was alarmed soon after the formation of Firqa-yi Dimokrat and wider support from peasant and workers, and as such it sent the gendarmerie for oppressive campaigns against its rural support base. In the long term,<sup>15</sup> however, this proved to be an advantage to the Firqa-yi Dimokrat as many escaping from the terror came into the part-fold and began countermeasures to defend the gendarmes' brutality.<sup>16</sup> In addition, judicial procedure was drawn into campaigns by advising local courts to treat gendarmes' brutality outside their jurisdiction and to turn away peasants' complaints. Many victims escaped into the mountains and deserts while some reached to other cities to tell the story of oppressions.

The initial response of the Firqa itself was passive. It published its grievances abroad through foreign consulates and embassies in Iran, but the reaction was negligible. Turning to the internal reaction, a list of 78 complaints was sent to Musaddiq containing grievances against the persecutory regime of the gendarmerie. There was no positive response from the central Government; indeed its coverage was prevented in Iran by banning sales of paper Azarbaijan and restricting mail services. The

government's attitude witnessed an immediate repercussion as the movement realized non-significance of peaceful means and thus a crowd seized the gendarmerie outposts in several important cities on November 15th. Another seizure on November 18th by the Firqa-yi Dimokrat of Miyana cut off the province from the capital. The central government though called on General Darakhshani, who had Tudeh sympathies, to remain rather than to capitulate immediately. Further, the Firqa declared self-defense in village and formed Fida'i band of young workers, armed by the Firqa-yi Dimokrat. They got much success in counteracting the activities of gendarmeries in villages.

This dialectic between oppression and jostling for power was extended by third element. In the province, there existed much eagerness for the party to take rein of power more firmly. Thus, as the logical outcome, they urged the party to form a national government.

Thus, the Firqa-yi Dimokrat entered its second stage of development, wherein all its members and leaders began comprehensive steps towards establishing the party as the national government in Azarbaijan.

Through newspapers and conferences, the Party took the first task of educating Azarbaijanis about the importance of local and parliamentary elections. These followed by staging the First National Congress in Tabriz on November 20th.

The congress elected a National Committee of 39 members, with the aim of playing intermediary role with the central government, in the negotiations for autonomy and the right to establish a national government in Azerbaijan. These activities however were to be conducted peacefully; without any harm to the independence and integrity of Iran. The policy statement by the National Congress focused upon the democracy and autonomy begin made in Azarbaijan as legitimate in international terms at the same time being loyal to the Constitutional Law within Iran. Such demands did not represent secession from Iran or any violation to its integrity and independence. The National Congress declared that since Azarbaijan could be considered a nation it should be allowed national autonomy in the form of a provincial council, which would operate as a national parliament, and proposed the candidates for these elections as well as those for the Iranian parliament. The national parliament would enact law required for Azarbaijan's own destiny and would ensure political, economic, educational and cultural freedom for the establishment of autonomy. National Commission was empowered to implement measures by removing central government

officials, enforcing the teaching of Turkish language in all schools, and elimination of treacherous elements within the police and army. Members of the National Congress were given supervisory power for the elections to the National parliament, and to safeguard the Commission by all the possible means. By the time the Congress disbanded, the National Commission had set the November 21 as the date of elections.

The results of the elections clearly illustrated the popularity of the Firqa-yi Dimokrat. They also encouraged the Party to go ahead with the National parliament. The elections were so successful that it silenced some of the antagonists to the Firqa's claim to be representing the people. However, the central government endeavored to play down the Party's popularity with the propaganda that the Firqa-yi Dimokrat's support base was not the local Azarbaijani rather Russians who had crossed the border to vote for a party led by a handful of adventurers.<sup>17</sup> This assertion is also reflected in the reports appeared in the foreign press.<sup>18</sup> Despite this propaganda, the growth was very rapid and as such it took the party only three months (from September 3rd to December 12th) to garner such a support. This could be possible without any assistance from the Soviet Union, militarily or financially. Socialism cannot be readily exported unless the ground is fertile for it. Further, since Azarbaijanis were unaware of socialism, the circumstances for its reception, in the face the strong religious element, prevailed: in particular the suppression by the central government prepared the region for the democratic movement.

### **Azarbaijan National Government**

The purpose of the establishment of a National Government and its aims were laid out clearly. In fact, initial desire of the Firqa-yi Dimokrat did not include the formation of an autonomous government. Despite deflection as a result of non-cooperation by the central government, its demand for upholding constitutional law in Azarbaijan did not change. The Firqa originally envisaged as the agent of the Central government, it finally took the job into its own hands and thereby set up the National government of Azarbaijan, aiming to establish and maintain liberty and rights of the people in Azarbaijan.

The national government sworn in and began its work right from December 12<sup>th</sup>.<sup>19</sup> What the ministers lacked in experience they made up for in dedication. With this political background and expertise, Pishavari, as the

first Prime Minister, was able to lead and guide them.

The day on which the National parliament opened (December 12) has significance on to counts. Here, the twin role played by the central committee is of vital importance. Members of the central committee were appointed as heads of local Fida'i groups, who played instrumental concerning the electoral proceedings and personal safety of candidates. Fida'i groups from outside the city were brought in the vicinity of Tabriz, while the local group disarmed the police and army, and took over barracks all through Azarbaijan.

Simultaneously, other members of the central committee were given the responsibility of removing officials, and taking over government building and posts. Pishavari was elected as the prime minister and he was requested by the parliament that same afternoon to announce his cabinet and programs of the government.

The first objective that the government deemed most urgent, was a cleaning-up operation of government offices and their widespread corruption networks. It was an arduous and lengthy task, since most were remnants from Riza Shah's long dictatorial rule; yet the new ministers were aware of their responsibilities and were anxious for it to be done as quickly as possible.

Their second aim concerned the prosperity of the province. With this in mind, the National Government issued a declaration setting out the steps by which they proposed to achieve their goals. The declaration, together with the personal dedication of the individual members did much to up-grade the reputation of Azarbaijan bureaucracy.

The Cabinet assured the safety of all Foreign Diplomats living within Azarbaijan. This also applied to any foreign nationals residing temporarily or permanently in the province. It was also announced that the government had assumed responsibility for the provincial finances. State officials would be allocated responsibility over parts but by laxity or dishonesty would be tried in a court of law.

In conjunction with above initiatives, the National Government began re-deploying and re-organizing the three branches of the security-forces: army, police and gendarmerie.

Alongside police and army reforms, the gendarmes also laid down their arms, and left their posts. The parliament approved a general amnesty to those allegedly arrested by gendarmerie, an act that seemingly ended this source of disturbance. The National Commission, prior to the government, tired to secure their release, but the act was fully completed only upon the

passing of the amnesty.

The last and the most difficult step of the new government was the subjugation of the army. The delicacy of this problem was compounded by the fact that the army took its orders from Tehran, where the government-unimpressed by the provincial opposition-was at no pains to find a peaceful solution.

Colonel Darakhshani, Commander of the 3rd Division of Army in Tabriz, tried to resolve the issue by requesting orders from Tehran. They arrived at 8p.m. on December 13th, instructing him to call a meeting of his senior officers towards reaching a decision concerning the best course of action to adopt. The *Firqa-yi Dimokrat* in turn, put considerable pressure upon Derakhshani for a quick decision, especially because of possible opposition from the central government. It was a suspicion harbored even more readily since the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, General Arfa was a particularly right-wing officer, son of an English woman and hence thought to be pro-British, and a monarchist sympathizer. The suggestion of his involvement encouraged the belief among Azarbaijanis that the supposed plot was his inspiration, and hence many lives might be lost.

Simultaneously with Derakhshani's meeting, Pishavari invites the officers to another meeting, at which he explained the aims of the newly formed National Government, the importance of the army's surrender, and the danger of resistance.<sup>20</sup> As a result, a truce was duly signed between the army and the National Government of Azarbaijan. The document, signed in duplicate, decreed that for the short-term period, the army to be confined to its barracks until further notice, so that the National Government could organize all the necessary provisions, and supervise the collection of munitions. All officers were given the free choices to either leave Azarbaijan under the safe conduct of the National Government or remain and cooperate with the new authority. Those wishing to stay would be required to take an oath of loyalty, and would thereafter resume their commissions. After swearing-in ceremony, all ranks would be returned their arms and recommence normal duties.

After the truce, Darakhshani then requested a declaration on the day following December 14th. Despite commitments, the agreement under the 2nd article was quickly broken by Colonel Bahrami when he encouraged his officers to disregard the curfew imposed upon the barracks. Their men followed the officers' lead, and the night was spent in wrecking and looting their accommodation and ammunitions. It happened under Col. Zangana in

Urumiyya. The situation was brought under control with the prompt and courageous response of the Fida'is, and their appeal for calm calling it a plot by the central government.

The remainder of the army units within Azarbaijan also submitted with little or no resistance. The few protests were easily overcome by the National government as it in fact was on a much lower scale than reported by Tehran.<sup>21</sup> Celebrations and street parties followed throughout Azarbaijan as expression of their relief at the successful accomplishment of what had been expected or anticipated as a formidable task without any bloodshed.

It was recognized, however, that major tasks still lay ahead in the form of continued opposition from several quarters. Not only was the central government irate: Azarbaijan had now become the focus of international attention, and was thus attracting slander and denigration from multiple sources. These included opportunists, hoarders; landowners; smugglers and criminals supported and armed by Tehran.<sup>22</sup> False propaganda concerning supposed Azarbaijani separatism<sup>23</sup> and atheism<sup>24</sup> and claiming the movement as Russian, not indigenous, from the central government mushroomed, in proportion to its fear that other parts of Iran might follow Azarbaijan's lead. In order to deal with these threats, the National Government concentrates upon the organization and deployment of the Fida'i.

The Fida'i was divided into two groups: one continued their normal duties, with arms; the other was subdivided into sections to provide defense. The basic problem facing the National Government, however, came in the form of their inability to provide either group with basic essentials. The Fida'i constituted, in the majority, of workers, peasants and other non-privileged volunteers. Yet with no money forthcoming from the central government, the National Government did not have the wherewithal even to feed or clothe them. The answer was found in re-opening of those factories that had been closed and the commencement of production, and this source was further supplemented by generous donations from the general populace. As a result, the Fida'i gained in self-confidence and pride, establishing groups in diverse places. They possessed a strong motivation and moral urge, yet their offer to march on Tehran and take over the capital was turned down.

Such action was representative of a typical approach adopted by the National Government. There are several reasons to indicate, however, it was a mistaken one that should have been avoided. The lesson from the past should have been intimated to the government that Tehran had always

succeeded in crushing previous democratic movements, and would try to do the same now.<sup>25</sup> If in fact, they had marched on Tehran, many observers believe the broad sympathy derived from general dissatisfaction, would have given them ample support to end the operation of the central government. Although this was not in fact done, there did take place negotiations between Pishavari and Qavam, during which a useless provisional treaty was attempted. During the ensuing three months of negotiation, suppression of the Democratic Movement was planned.<sup>26</sup>

### **Reaction against the Firqa-yi Dimokrat:**

It is appropriate to divide the reaction against the Firqa-yi Dimokrat into two parts, internal and external. These correspond to pressure coming from within Iran, primarily from the central government, and to international coverage of the movement, both from the West and from the Soviet Union.

#### **Internal reaction:**

The central government played a major role in the reaction against the Firqa-yi Dimokrat on two fronts, as it were. The Firqa, in its first three months, was a rapidly growing movement which was attracting widespread support base within Azarbaijan. It was able to recruit member from all segments and strata of society towards the pursuit of democratic ideals and autonomy for Azarbaijan. It thus posed greater threat and challenge to the conservative elements, which dominated the central government. On the other hand, the central government itself was split and divided amongst itself at this time.

The immediate policy adopted by the central government towards the Firqa-yi Dimokrat was suppression leading to its elimination. The campaigns were initiated against progressive and radicals throughout Iran. Trade unions were banned and the leaders of the movements were arrested. At the same period, terrorization by gendarmes ran at its most brutal.

The terrorization employed by the central government was aimed towards preventing any successful implementation of social and democratic reform, and autonomy, which would lead eventually to a democratic government in Azarbaijan. It was to a large extent, however, a blind policy. The central government was during this period suffering an acute crisis of factionalism. The premiership changed hands alternately between Sadr and Hakimi. Both were in fact under British influence, and the British on the

other hand favored the government status quo against the democratic movement in Iran. The nationalist minority in the Majlis led by Musaddiq, resisted Sadr's appointment.<sup>27</sup> They refused to take their seats on the grounds that Sadr was too old; his anti-constitutionalism and collaboration with Riza Shah's dictatorship was well known; and the vote was indurate. Hakimi, who was Musaddiq's last resort and backed by Sayyid Zia and ultimately by the Shah, pressed for a stronger government to deal, as they saw it, with the Soviet. Qavam and the other members of the Democrat Fraksiyun, on the other hand, sought progressive democracy, the aim, too, of the Tudeh Party.

The records of Majlis proceedings indicate that the parliament had also caught up both in personality and power conflicts to be capable of forming an adequate or realistic opinion of the aims of the *Firqa-yi Dimokrat*. It therefore came to the mistaken conclusion that the *Firqa* was simply an artificial party made up of adventures and manipulated by traitors. The military option that was adopted on these grounds ultimately foundered on the resistance to the gendarmes, and the non-co-operation of the Soviet Union.

During the crisis, the Soviet Union professed to regard the movement as a democratic movement struggling against the reactionary approach of the central government, and treated it as a legitimate indigenous demand for local rights, refusing to allow the central government to send reinforcement troops to her garrisons in Northern Iran. She stated that repression led to bloodshed and an increased troop presence would mean an escalation of unnecessary violence; she also desired to follow a policy of non-interference. It was the opinion of the Soviet Union that the problems of the North were caused by the central government; no government should need recourse to such measures if it held the confidence of its people. The Soviets would therefore guarantee the non-participation of troops in the terror imposed by the gendarmes. The central government subsequently took up a different track, upon diplomatic lines. A more subtle plan was adopted by which it was hoped that the Azerbaijanis could be deceived if an ostensibly efficient and sympathetic governor were appointed, able to win their support, his offers of reform would in fact be a persuade the people to turn against the Party leaders, Bayat was given the post, and indeed was an excellent politician. This plan failed, too, however, for the *Firqa's* leadership was politically mature and saw through the central government's attempt to use them as pawns in a political chess game. The *Firqa-yi Dimokrat* was able to counteract the government's propaganda with its own,

and restrict the effectiveness of the former. Therefore its position was strengthened among the Azarbaijanis as a consequence of the dichotomous approach employed by the Tehran government.

The propaganda campaign by the central government had widespread repercussions in the international arena. Britain especially felt the situation to be a particularly sensitive one for her position in the Middle East, and in essence, internally Iranian affairs into the focus of world attention.

This centered first of all on international press coverage of the supposed march on Tehran by the *Firqa-yi Dimokrat*, armed with Soviet weapons, on November 19. Reuters announced that London believed or suspected that such an event could not be organized without the support of the Soviet Union. The conclusion thus drawn by Britain was that the Soviet intended a take-over of Iran and it was therefore Britain's duty to intervene to prevent and in some way to safeguard Iran's democracy and independence, which she saw threatened by the separatist *Firqa-yi Dimokrat*. However, Bevin's note to the Soviet Union asking permission for Iranian troops to move into Iranian Azerbaijan was answered with a firm rebuttal, which indicated that the Soviets believed the central government to be at fault, and that it should not need additional troops in Azarbaijan, if indeed it held the confidence of the people. Britain, still fearful that such a democratic movement should spread outwards from Iran, took the matter to the U.N., where she was supported by the Iranian representatives, who reflected the view of central government.

#### **External reaction:**

In this way, external opinion was flown that the *Firqa-yi Dimokrat* was a separatist movement, and the local Iranian were by the same measures and means kept ignorant of the actual nature of the *Firqa*. The U.N. delegates, Ala and Taqizada, were in fact double instruments of the British and Iranian governments: on the insistence of the British, the central government encouraged its U.N. representatives to take the problem to the General Assembly, and thus turn it into an international issue. Its status as an international problem would give the central government weight to force the Soviet Union to withdraw its support of the movement, ad leave Tehran free to crush it.

We can thus see quite clearly the process whereby the *Firqa-yi Dimokrat* came to be labeled as a separatist movement: it was a necessary ploy of the

ventral government, in its attempt to remove Soviet influence and to declare it to be a separatist movement since only as such could it be constituted as an international problem and be brought to the U.N. Not only so, but the fundamental instigation came from the British, who were suffering under the Cold War atmosphere and were fighting fiercely any suspected attempt of Soviet-backed movements spreading in any part of the world.

Historically it will be seen that the real disruptive movement pursued by the southern tribes, who were actually acting under the influence of the British. As a planned warning as to the consequences of an autonomous Azerbaijan, the British encouraged these tribes to agitate for their own autonomy, to show how the idea would snowball throughout Iran. The southern tribes had formed a precedent already in the 1920s, with British using Shaykh Khazal that time. Contrary to the southern tribes, the Firqa-yi Dimokrat was truly democratic, its aims directed towards an end to discrimination and an end to British influence over Iran, and to finally end up to discrimination and an end to British influence over Iran, and to finally end up with setting up a democratic government first in Azarbaijan, and in Tehran.

Despite the misrepresentation of Firqa-yi Dimokrat, people soon understood its true nature and aim: the march on Tehran never materialized; the Firqa realized it's promised within Azarbaijan and indicated that they were thus not simply empty verbalizations. It further confirmed its desire to co-operate with the central government by accepting the peace treaty proffered by Qavam, both to diffuse the slander, and to show that it was indeed autonomy and not separation, that the Firqa-yi Dimokrat wanted.

The central government propaganda against the movement, in the long term was an advantage to the Firqa and Azarbaijan. Highlighting political, geographical, historical and economic<sup>28</sup> importance and focusing on Azerbaijan as a nation, different from the other nationalities in Iran, with its own language, customs, it was thus pointed out nationally and internationally that Azerbaijan was ethnically different from the rest of Iran. It was this kind of national identity, which lay at the heart of this considerable enthusiasm for autonomy.

### **The fall of the Firqa-yi Dimokrat**

Azerbaijan, at the end of 1945, received the attention of foreign powers and of Tehran, and suffered accordingly. America, Britain and the Soviet Union

faced major problem in Iran at the end of the war, as a consequence of the presence of both Soviet and British occupation forces. Disagreement over withdrawal marked the beginning of the Cold war that ensued after 1945.<sup>29</sup>

Emerging ties between foreign powers and various factions in Iran, and their mutual antagonism compounded these difficulties. The central government was traditionally pro- West, and accorded with the latter's desire to see the Azerbaijan democratic movement crushed.<sup>30</sup> Firqa-yi Dimokrat, however, resisted both the central and foreign powers but was supported (not as a puppet) by the USSR.

In the case of Iran, the USSR was doubly suspicious of the central government, since it was both reactionary and pro-western. Since the Soviet Union had its border with Iran and was anxious to safeguard,<sup>31</sup> the Soviet played its cards to limit Iranian power by backing the Firqa-yi Dimokrat.

This development concerned the West and the central government. Both Britain and America believed the Firqa-yi Dimokrat might be turned by the Soviets from a mere interest group into a full- fledged movement.<sup>32</sup> Thereby, the Soviet Union would be enabled to infiltrate the central government, known to be pro- West,<sup>33</sup> and assume a position of influence. A similar process was suspected also in the Soviet interest given to the Tudeh Party.<sup>34</sup>

Western propaganda thus began, claiming that the USSR intended the annexation of Azerbaijan.<sup>35</sup> This claim was justified on the grounds that Firqa-yi Dimokrat leaders had received training in the Soviet Union. The Firqa must thus be a Soviet puppet, being used as the agent to annex Azerbaijan.

The statements were denied a number of Firqa-yi Dimokrat clearly pointed out that in no way was the party seeking annexation to the Soviet Union.<sup>36</sup>

The central government went even further in maligning the Firqa-yi Dimokrat. It announced that Soviet military personnel were leading the revolt in Azerbaijan. This claim was not completely unrealistic, however, since the Azaris could distinguish easily from Russians nor were there that number of Soviet troops in Azerbaijan. Furthermore, the Iranian Army present in Azerbaijan at the time, which had no sympathies with the Firqa-yi Dimokrat, denied it.<sup>37</sup>

The true reason behind the Western propaganda lay in the West's opposition to Soviet expansion in Iran and the Middle East for own sake and anti Communist policies. This fear is reflected in Truman's statement saying

the Soviet Union desired domination of at least a part of Iran, if not all, and that this was part of her plan to control entirely all the oilfields within the Middle East;<sup>38</sup> and also in the recognition that any kind of democratic movement in the Middle East threatened their interests and must therefore be crushed and prevented from spreading.<sup>39</sup>

The central government propaganda was motivated by three factors. It was concerned that its pro-Western attitude should continue, simultaneously with Western influence in Iran, and thus demanded the suppression of the left element in Iran. The central government was neither willing to share its power, nor to institute reforms.

Lastly, since the central government was undemocratic, such movements presented a challenge to its authority and power. American concern over the Iranian situation continued with the sustained active interest by the Soviet Union particularly in Azerbaijan. In a Foreign Ministers Conference in London in September 1945,<sup>40</sup> America declared that she was withdrawing her forces from Iran starting on November 1, 1945. It was her wish that due to the delicate situation involving Iran herself and the Big Powers, that Britain and the Soviet Union should remove their troops beginning from January 1, 1946,<sup>41</sup> in order to stabilize the area and the growing conflict. Both Bevin and Molotov, who nevertheless eventually agreed to a withdrawal date of March 2, 1946, rejected Byrnes proposal.<sup>42</sup>

The situation in Azerbaijan rapidly deteriorated in the period following the Foreign Ministers Conference. Government announcements proclaimed that the Soviets had introduced 12000 additional troops into Bandar Pahlavi, an act that seriously worried the West. The anxiety of the central government, however, centered rather on the growth of the *Firqa-yi Dimokrat*, and increased its resolve to crush the movement. Tehran ordered troops to Azerbaijan, but the Iranian army was halted at Qazvin by Soviet forces. The Soviet commander announced that an attack on Azerbaijan was an implicit attack on the Soviet Union, since Azerbaijan was a Soviet-occupied zone. Hakimi was sufficiently cautious to order the Iranian troops to remain in Qazvin until he had received an explanation from the Soviet attache in Tehran. A formal note was then sent to the attache on November 23, 1945, requesting explanation of incident.<sup>43</sup> The reply stated that the Soviet Union was attempting to maintain order in the area: an increase of forces would escalate the disturbance, at the same time as being unnecessary, since bloodshed would ensue, and the USSR would be forced to bring more Soviet troops into Azerbaijan to Keep the balance. Thereby

the situation would only be worsened.

The central government remained unconvinced by the Soviet reply, and thus, to circumvent the military problem, made a request to George Byrnes through Husayn Ala, the Iranian ambassador in Washington, for American intervention. Husayn Ala declared to Byrnes that the *Firqa-yi Dimokrat* was not an indigenous movement, but engineered and inspired by the Soviet Union.<sup>44</sup> It therefore posed a threat to Iran's independence and integrity, and American influence was sought to counter this development.

The reason behind this approach to the United States was the unwillingness of the central government to negotiate directly with the Azerbaijanis. It was this refusal that was primarily responsible for the magnification of Iran's internal affairs into an international issue. For the first time therefore, at the beginning of 1946, the internationalization of the Azerbaijan problem was mooted within Iran: Humayunfar, Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, announced that if the Azerbaijani movement could not be forestalled through negotiations, Iran was willing to formulate a case to present before the U.N. Security Council.<sup>45</sup> Early in 1946, a start was indeed made on just such as formulation by the Shah and his government.<sup>46</sup>

This appeal to America bore fruit at the subsequent Foreign Ministers Conference held in Moscow in December 1945. During the discussion concerning Iran, Byrnes intimated quite forcefully to the Soviet Union that if she did not withdraw her support for the *Firqa-yi Dimokrat*, America would feel obliged to support the resolution, intended to be submitted to the U.N., proposed by Iran.

Stalin's reply to Byrnes indicated that while America could be sure of Soviet withdrawal at a later date, a Soviet presence in Azerbaijan was currently imperative in order to protect her oil interests, since the central government was itself incapable of preventing sabotage. Her ultimate withdrawal was dependent upon the attitude shown by Tehran to the Soviet Union.

The British also made a suggestion to avoid taking the matter before the U.N. Security Council and thereby threatening any other discussions by antagonizing the USSR. On 16th December, in Moscow, Bevin thus proposed a Tripartite Commission composed of Britain, America and the Soviet Union. The Commission would be responsible for examining the Iranian problem and working towards its resolution. The American response was positive, but the Soviet reaction was unfavorable, and the central government, under Hakimi, was also not keen. Tehran feared that the

Commission might recommend Provincial Council in which the Firqa-yi Dimokrat might be represented. Hakimi, while he realized the legitimacy of such a Council under the Constitution, yet resisted the participation of the Firqa and desired the crushing of the movement. Iranian liberals further disapproved of the establishment of a Commission of Big Powers, because they considered Azerbaijan to be an internal affair and foreign powers to have no right to intervene therein.<sup>47</sup> Nationalists, too, rejected the proposal—Musaddiq, for example, stated that a Commission might again divide Iran into two zones of influence as in 1907.<sup>48</sup> He proposed an alternative suggestion that the Iranian government should make representations to the Soviet Union and to the Azerbaijanis to resolve the problem. Mosaddiq urged that the pro-West Hakimi government step down and a neutral government be elected as the only means to effect the necessary steps towards negotiations<sup>49</sup>.

Iran, as a whole, rejected this proposal, and favored taking the matter before the U.N., believing that the Soviet injection of troops into Azerbaijan violated the Charter of the United Nations. This indicates clearly that the central government, backed by Iranian conservatives, was responsible for internationalizing the Azarbaijan war, due to their inherent biases: in sharp contrast to the liberal belief, and wish, that the issue was capable of internal resolution, the pro-West, anti-Soviet and anti-Firqa-yi Dimokrat prevalence within the central government caused the matter to be turned into an international problem.

The British, who indicated that if it was rejected, Hakimi would be left to face the Soviet Union alone, pressured the Iranian government into accepting the proposal of a tripartite commission.<sup>50</sup> Hakimi was able; however, to force a modification of the proposal whereby the Commission should discuss the issue with Iranian representatives in Iran itself, primarily concerning the withdrawal of foreign troops according to the Tripartite Treaty of 1942 and the Tehran Declaration of 1943.<sup>51</sup> Hakimi then made representations to the Soviet Union, which was rejected with a refusal to participate in the Commission: such a Commission, it was declared, was a threat to Iran's sovereignty and integrity.<sup>52</sup>

Western attitudes to the modifications demanded by the Hakimi government were also divided: American opinion was quite in favor of them, but the British disagreed, and insisted that Bevin's model should stand, as it was.

Internal opposition to the plan came from within the Majlis. Musaddiq, for

example, thanked the Soviet Union for its refusal to participate, for if she had, the uniting of the Big Powers would have brought an end to Iranian sovereignty. The Powers should rather institute a democratic government in Iran and respect her independence and integrity, which they themselves guaranteed. As a result of these divisions and conflicts, Hakimi decided to cancel the whole arrangement for a Commission.<sup>53</sup> Tehran was then left with three options: negotiations with the Azarbaijanis themselves, negotiations directly with the Soviet Union, or recourse to the resolution of the problem through the U.N.

The American ambassador, Murray, urged Hakimi to take the first option, approaching the Firqa-yi Dimokrat with a negotiating team made up of his most able members of Cabinet.

The second option was strongly supported by radicals, liberals and nationalists - such as Musaddiq - in Iran, and also to a lesser extent by Britain and America. The emphasis here was laid on total efforts to reach direct negotiations with the Soviet Union, but this did not foreclose final resort to the U.N. for resolution of the Problem.<sup>54</sup>

The majority opinion backed the internationalization of the problem through recourse to the U.N. Security Council.<sup>55</sup> The Shah Conservative and pro-British deputies within the Majlis backed this intention, with the result that Hakimi, while himself preferring direct negotiations with both Azerbaijan and the Soviet Union, was limited by his own government's attitude.<sup>56</sup>

Therefore, at the beginning of 1946, the Hakimi government officially adopted recourse to the United Nations.<sup>57</sup> Thus Hasan Taqizada, the head of the Iranian delegation to the U.N. wrote a formal letter to the Secretary of Security Council, saying that the Soviet Union was interfering in the internal affairs of Iran. The Azerbaijan affair thus threatened world peace, and the Iranian therefore had made great attempts at reaching negotiations with the Soviet Union was Soviet government, since these had failed, she was now asking for the issue to be put on the Security Council agenda.

On January 24, 1946, Vyshinsky, the head of the Soviet U.N. delegation, denied the allegations against the USSR. He asserted the Soviet view that Azerbaijan was indeed an internal Iranian affair, and that the matter could and should be resolved through direct negotiations with the people of Azerbaijan, and neither with herself or through the U.N.<sup>58</sup>

According to the Irano-Soviet Treaty of 1921 and the Tripartite Treaty of 1942, the Soviet Union had a legitimate right to maintain troops in Iran. She

could not at present afford to withdraw forces because her interests were threatened by the reactionary Hakimi government. V yshinsky concluded the speech with a comparison with British troops maintained in Indonesia and Greece: if these remained, the Soviet Union reserved the right to maintain troops in Iran.<sup>59</sup>

Taqizada replied on January 26th, claiming before the Security Council that Iran's case was based on the true facts, and should therefore be examined carefully and thoroughly by the U.N.

During this exchange within the U.N., a major change occurred within the Iranian government. Hakim's power was weakened with the pressure from general reaction against his policies, combined with opposition inside the Cabinet, particularly from Musaddiq. Consequently, unable to resolve these difficulties, he found himself forced to resign. Soon Qavam was elected as a new Prime Minister, who formed his Cabinet, on January 26, 1946.<sup>60</sup>

### **Qavam and International Conflict**

The premiership of Qavam reflects considerably to his personal influence and political outlook. No sooner had Qavam arrived in power, the issue was wrested from his control and forced to the attention of the U.N. on 30th January, and the promised direct negotiations with the USSR became an inescapable reality in the resolution of the security Council which demanded continuous contact with the parties and reserved the right of intervention to itself in the event of failure, maintaining the issue on the agenda.<sup>61</sup> The Iranian delegation, headed by Qavam, was welcomed in Moscow on 29th Bahman, 1324 (18th February, 1946) but the meetings with Stalin and Molotov the meetings with Stalin and Molotov reached no firm conclusions.

The linked issues of oil Azerbaijan and troop withdrawal demonstrated fundamental differences of approach, Molotov demanding oil concessions and trying to avoid negotiations about Azerbaijan by referring Qavam to Pishavari and his administration. Even his promised withdrawal date (March 2nd) was qualified by a requirement of favorable actions on Iran's part. In response, Qavam was obliged to reject Soviet demands in order to maintain consistency with previous Iranian policy.<sup>62</sup>

Moderated Soviet proposal for a joint-stock company and proposed reforms in Azerbaijan were intended as a conciliatory package, and withdrawal was still promised, commencing on the agreed date. Qavam replied very harshly, showing a belligerent attitude towards Azarbaijan's

linguistic demands and insisting upon completion of the Soviet withdrawal by 2nd March before any concession would be made - thus the Soviet memorandum was effectively rejected. The angered Russians, on March 1st, answered uncompromisingly,<sup>63</sup> withdrawing the assistance earlier preferred and stating that the Northern force would remain to protect the Soviet's insecure Iranian interests,<sup>64</sup> which she saw as threatened, and justified herself in terms of the Irano- Russian Treaty of 1921.

A Russian announcement on March 2nd describing the withdrawal only from the less problematic regions of Mashhad, Shahrud, and Simnan angered Qavam, for whom the withdrawal date was of supreme symbolic importance.

With no major successes gained in the fortnight of talks, other than the appointment of Sadchikov as Russian ambassador, a joint declaration was published on March 5th promising a later resumption of the talks, and upon his return to Iran, Qavam confessed to the press his failure to move the USSR on the issues important to the Iranian central government.

These direct negotiations drew widespread popular support, but the approval of the bulk of the people proved not to be an accurate reflection of the true efficacy of international talks, and a number of political figures including Musaddiq and the contributors to Jabha Melli, considered talks with Tabriz to be a more acceptable and less dangerous alternative solution. The failure of the Russian talks pressurized Qavam into this second field of negotiations.

The situation, which subsequently obtained in which the USSR failed to withdraw its troops by March 2, 1946 caused a controversy which inspired a strong reaction from Iran and the West and ultimately contributed to the beginning of the Cold War.

British reaction was strong because the importance to her Iranian interests and the traditional rivalry existing in Iran with Russian influence meant that Britain was opposed to the Northern concessions although she would not have been concerned if they had existed anywhere else in the world. Her sole reason for the ultimate acceptance of the Russian concession was the hope of Soviet withdrawal and the promise of the defense of her own rights. By November 1945, Britain was confident that her influence in the government and army was secure. Britain's stance in reaction to the events of March 1946 became gradually aligned to the United States, and the U.K. ultimately relinquished her position as Superpower in Iran.<sup>65</sup>

America's developing role was therefore diametrically opposite to Britain. At the beginning of World War II, America was unbiased to the point of neutrality and was acceptable as an intermediary amongst the signatories of the Tripartite Treaty. The increasing involvement of America brought about a growing estrangement from the Soviet Union as America took a firm stand over the non-interference clause of the Tehran Declaration, and the active encouragement by the U.K. and Iran to take a strong position<sup>66</sup> was supported by American Suspicious that Russian non-cooperation might be significant in future relations elsewhere. Iran seemed to be a test case for the developing Cold War.

A third significant party was the Central Iranian Government which, inspired by Sayyid Ziya set out to discredit Soviet motives and depopulations the Firqa's image as a true revolutionary movement. In its weakness, Iran looked overseas for assistance and pressurized the Western bloc to take an active part in resisting the Soviet influence.<sup>67</sup>

Lastly, the Tudeh Party itself activated its power to countermand government propaganda, justifying Soviet action with criticisms of an Iranian government seen by them as undemocratic and, acting as the self-styled national mouthpiece of the USSR. It pointed out the necessary preconditions for the Soviet withdrawal, and stated that the Soviet Union needed to strengthen the growing democratic movements in Iran, justifying its interference with reference to Britain's imperial career and contemporaneous intervention in various Mediterranean states.<sup>68</sup>

Meanwhile, on the diplomatic front, Qavam returned from Moscow having failed to achieve a successful withdrawal. Despite the statement that negotiations would continue Qavam quickly went to Murray, the American ambassador, and extracted statements of support in the event of Iranian approach to the U.N. Despite Soviet objections<sup>69</sup> on March 18, 1946, Ala presented a formal note to the Security Council, which appeared before the Council on 25th March, which declared:

**A)** The Soviet failure to withdraw troops after March 2, 1946, was a violation of the Tripartite Treaty of 1942.

**B)** Soviet intervention in Iran's internal affairs through military presence and political agents (i.e. the Firqa-yi Dimokrat and Kumala-yi Kurdistan) was a violation of the Tripartite Treaty, the Tehran Declaration, and the United Nations' Charter.

**C)** Iran urged the U.N. therefore to take immediate action under Article 35 of U.N. Charter, which states that the Security Council is given authority

to investigate any conflict that might threaten international peace.

Qavam had made supportive statements indirectly but the extent of his complicity is uncertain and the timing was unfortunate, with Sadchikov due to arrive on March 20th to continue negotiations. Surprisingly, Soviet requested more time, until April 10, to prepare, and Sadchikov pressed to conclude negotiations and by March 25th withdrawal was well under way, with a six-week completion target.<sup>70</sup>

Suggesting that Ala presents the Iranian evidence, Gromyko protested the latest agreement pre-empted the UN.'s interference. Ala failed to produce evidence to support the. Russian claims and the Council maintained the issue on its agenda,<sup>71</sup> despite Russian claims that participation by a non-Council-member was not competent.<sup>72</sup> At the same time, French-proposed commission made no real improvement but supported the Soviet,<sup>73</sup> postponement.

Gromyko walked out on the 2ih and Ala presented his case. On March 29, the Council decreed that Iran and the USSR should hold talks and report it on April 2, 1945. On that date, Ala shocked everyone by withdrawing the complaint and supporting the Soviet position, claiming that the central government needed outside help in negotiations with the Firqa-yi Dimokrat.<sup>74</sup> The main activity of the Council was now substantiate the Russian withdrawal and the discussion was postponed until May 6th, when the USSR and Iran would report on the state of the withdrawal, and the U.N. would determine its future role.<sup>75</sup>

Qavam's attitude to the Russian negotiations was very much colored by his continual American leanings and before opening negotiations with Moscow, he promised Ambassador Murray that any joint-stock company would be balanced by an American concession in Baluchistan. This American friendship was vital to the survival of a government which trusted the USSR as little as its people did Britain, and the diplomatic path was thus laid for the two treaties of April 4, one of which was a general diplomatic agreement, the other a specifically confessional oil treaty, and Gromyko demanded, on the 6th, that Iran be removed from the agenda.<sup>76</sup> Stettinius, the U.S. representative, urged the Council to wait until May 6 and Sadchikov replied in Tehran by pressurizing Qavam to withdraw the case, issuing veiled threats<sup>77</sup> which Qavam took very seriously, consulting the U.S. military attache Jernigan, who also leaned on him not to withdraw the complaint for reasons of national prestige in the UN.<sup>78</sup>

Qavam's final submission to Russian pressure relieved him both of the

popular support for withdrawal of the issue and; partially, of his fear that continued debate in the U.N. might tempt Russia to leave a very healthy Firqa behind them when they left. Ala was instructed to withdraw the case,<sup>79</sup> to great Western disappointment and obvious Soviet delight.

Now the Security Council was torn between the technical resolution of the problem according to U.N. principles, and the significant anglo-American suspicion, and Iran's withdrawal was enforced. American support was sought for a proposal for the U.N. to supervise the 15th Majlis elections in an attempt to prevent a Tudeh walkover, and for American statement that Qavam was working under Soviet pressure in order to keep the issue alive and viable.<sup>80</sup> Thus Article 33, which would have forced the dismissal of the case, was declared inapplicable with Dutch and British support, the latter party declaring the resolution of April 4th to be still valid.

Soviet charges of Western bellicosity were answered with claims of Russian intervention, and on April 23, the issue was retained, at least until May 6.<sup>81</sup>

Now Soviet wishes for a peaceful border and a smooth beginning to the oil project led to her pressurizing Tehran to conclude negotiations, and Qavam's desire to bring a secure peace and appease his people ensured his enthusiastic response.

## **Conclusion**

The variety of issues discussed was compounded by the bifurcation between the internal and international aspects of the crisis.

Qavam suppresses the Firqa-yi Dimokrat, and rejected the Soviet oil concession all on the Western support in the face of Soviet aggression.<sup>82</sup> The Azerbaijan democratic movement arose out of general dissatisfaction with the central government's policies and the regime in Tehran. It was fueled by the readiness of the Azerbaijanis to fight for reforms after years of suppression, and given the opportunity to develop through the presence of Soviet forces sympathetic to democratic movements in Iran. Following the oil treaty signed with the USSR, the localized policy of the Firqa-yi Dimokrat was universalized to extend over the whole of Iran. By doing so, they received further support and backing from other progressive parties in the country, and to gather with others, formed the Freedom Front in November, 1946. At the end of one year, the movement had reached such strength as to be able to take over Tehran: it refrained from doing so,

however, as a consequence of Qavam's conciliatory attitude. This was in all probability their greatest mistake, for it gave time and occasion to Qavam to plan their destruction.

The primary factor leading to the collapse of the Azerbaijan movement lay in the withdrawal of support by the Soviet Union. Confusion still exists over the radical alteration in Soviet policy: some observers<sup>83</sup> believe that it was a result of the promise of an oil concession, together with the view that Azerbaijan should be the internal affair of Iran, and opposition to *Firqa-yi Dimokrat* from within Azerbaijan itself. These reasons, however, do not justify the complexity or truth of the issue. Two alternative explanations can be seriously put forward: the threat made by the United States to drop an atomic bomb<sup>84</sup> on the Soviet Union if she did not withdraw her support from Azerbaijan, or from similar movements in the rest of the world, a threat which the Soviet Union at that time could not return. More likely, is the suggestion that the Soviet Union, America and Britain came to an agreement whereby Soviet influence was approved in China in return for withdrawal of support from the *Firqa* regime, Gen. Markos Vafiades in Greece, the Communist Party of Italy, and other communist parties throughout the world.<sup>85</sup>

The Azerbaijan movement, while being democratic, modern and progressive achieving many reforms, thus fell victim to international politics and intrigues and was sacrificed to factors and interests external both to Azerbaijan itself and to Iran.

Apart from those external factors enumerated above and the opposition from central government, a further crucial reason or failure was disunity amongst the progressive movement in general and central leadership of the movement in particular.

The talk of unity did not translate into practice; Qavam exploited this weakness and thus systematically destroyed the threat in a manner similar to that employed in the 1979 Revolution, according to certain critics.

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