The Soviet Union and the Iranian revolution

Knowledge, ideology, and the end of modernization paradigms

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The SOVIET UNION and The IRANIAN REVOLUTION
Knowledge, Ideology, and the End of Modernization Paradigms

Dmitry ASINOVSKIIY
THE SOVIET UNION AND
THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION
KNOWLEDGE, IDEOLOGY,
AND THE END OF
MODERNIZATION PARADIGMS

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Summary


The 1978-79 Iranian revolution shook one of the basic principles accepted by Cold War superpowers—the belief in social progress through modernization espoused by socialism as well as liberal capitalism. For Moscow and Washington, the revolution was above all an ideological challenge that analysts and decision-makers in both superpowers struggled to understand and incorporate into their worldview. This thesis examines the Soviet struggle to deal with this ideological challenge and frames the Soviet reaction to the Iranian revolution in the context of the global Cold War. It traces the way scholars, analysts, and policymakers in Moscow tried to make sense of events in Iran and how they ultimately had to revise their thinking on religion, regional geopolitics, and the superpower competition. This research engages three important historiographical discussions. First, it sheds new light on the role played by ideology in the Cold War international relations. Using the Iranian revolution as a case study, this thesis reveals the importance of the ideology as a worldview that in particular prevented the Soviet leadership from seeing the new religious regime of Iran as viable. Consequently it shows that the Iranian revolution revealed the limitations of the Soviet leadership’s worldview, and the way that worldview restricted the ability of the Soviet leadership to deal with new challenges. Second, this thesis examines the role of knowledge and its relation to ideology by studying the role of the Soviet expert community. While often marginalized in the decision-making process of the Brezhnev’s collective leadership, the expert community found new relevance as a result of the revolution. At the same time, that community was often blinded by its own ideological background and its reliance on Iranian
leftists for information. Third, this study contributes to recent debates on the role of religion in the Cold War. In the late 1970s-early 1980s religion was revived as an openly proclaimed ideological notion, and Iran here was among other examples of this revival. Along with the overall ideological challenge, the rise of religion as a political ideology was among the factors that contributed to the end of the Cold War by changing the way Soviet leaders and policymakers thought about world affairs.
Samenvatting

De Sovjet-Unie en de Iraanse revolutie: kennis, ideologie en het einde van vernieuwende paradigma's.

De Iraanse revolutie van 1978-1979 bracht één van de basisprincipes die door de grootmachten tijdens de Koude Oorlog werden aanvaard, aan het wankelen — het geloof in sociale vooruitgang door modernisering, dat zowel door het socialisme als door het liberale kapitalisme omarmd werd. Deze revolutie was voor Moskou en Washington vooral een ideologische beproeving die analisten en beleidsmakers in beide grootmachten nauwelijks begrepen en moeite mee hadden om het in hun visie op de wereld te integreren. Deze dissertatie onderzoekt de strijd van de Sovjet-Unie om met deze ideologische uitdaging om te gaan en plaatst de reactie van de Sovjet-Unie op de Iraanse revolutie in de context van de wereldwijde Koude Oorlog. Aan de hand van dit onderzoek wordt nagegaan hoe geleerden, analisten en beleidsmakers in Moskou de gebeurtenissen in Iran probeerden te begrijpen en hoe zij uiteindelijk hun ideeën over religie, regionale geopolitiek en de concurrentie tussen supermachten moesten herzien. Dit onderzoek werpt een blik op drie belangrijke historiografische vraagstukken. Ten eerste werpt het een nieuw licht op de rol van ideologie met betrekking tot de internationale betrekkingen tijdens de Koude Oorlog. Met de Iraanse revolutie als casestudy toont deze dissertatie het belang aan van de ideologie als wereldbeeld dat met name de Sovjetleiders ervan weerhield het nieuwe religieuze regime van Iran als uitvoerbaar te beschouwen. Bijgevolg toont het aan dat de Iraanse revolutie wees op de beperkingen van hoe de Sovjetleiders naar de wereld keken en hoe die kijk op de wereld het vermogen van de Sovjetleiding beperkte om nieuwe uitdagingen het hoofd te bieden. Ten tweede onderzoekt deze dissertatie de rol van kennis en haar relatie tot ideologie door het bestuderen van de functie van de experts uit de Sovjet-Unie. De groep
experts, die vaak werden buitengesloten in het besluitvormingsproces van het collectieve leiderschap van Brezjnev, vonden een nieuwe rol van betekenis als gevolg van de revolutie. Anderzijds werd die gemeenschap vaak verblind door haar eigen ideologische achtergrond en haar afhankelijkheid van Iraanse linksgezinden inzake het vergaren van informatie. Ten derde draagt deze studie bij aan recente debatten over de rol van religie tijdens de Koude Oorlog. In de late jaren zeventig en vroege jaren tachtig werd religie nieuw leven ingeblazen als een openlijk uitgedragen ideologische gedachte en Iran behoorde hier tot één van de vele voorbeelden van deze heropleving. Samen met de algemene ideologische uitdaging was de opkomst van religie, als een politieke ideologie, medebepalend voor het einde van de Koude Oorlog, doordat het de manier veranderde waarop Sovjetleiders en beleidsmakers dachten over mondiaal aangelegenheden.
Acknowledgments

The history of this thesis started nine years ago when a business school graduate abandoned his perspective career for the passion for history that had always lived in him. This thesis could have never been written unless back then the admission committee of the Tel Aviv University believed in someone with no academic record in history. Thus I am eternally grateful to all the MAMES professors and staff who gave me the entry ticket to the profession of a historian and supported my first steps in it. My special gratitude goes to Meir Litvak, whose courses on Modern Middle East and Iran in the 20th century inspired me to dive into studying Iran.

While I started my career as a historian in Tel Aviv, I believe that I became one during my studies at the European University at Saint-Petersburg. There I got a chance to learn from people whose names I had previously seen only on the front covers of books I had been reading. The unique atmosphere of academic freedom created by the professors and administration of the EUSP was essential for the work on this thesis to get under way. For over three years my studies and initial stages of this research were funded by the EUSP. Not only courses but also comments of Vladimir Lapin, Boris Kolonitskiy, Mikhail Krom, Alfrid Bustanov, Igal Halfin, Anatoly Pinsky to the first drafts of chapters for this thesis helped me to understand how to think, analyze and write as a historian. I am especially grateful to the at the time Deans of the EUSP department of history Sam Hirst and Julia Safronova who not only supported me intellectually but also allowed funding for my research and conference trips during my years at the EUSP.

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discussants I would like to specially mention as their advice and sometimes criticism motivated me to improve my research further and further.

Three months that I spent at Harvard in 2018, thanks to the generous funding of the EUSP, were especially fruitful and laid foundation for this research to truly become a valuable piece of scholarship. Apart from spending this time enjoying the riches of the Harvard libraries and uncountable public events, I was lucky to meet a number of great scholars, with whom even short conversations were immensely important for the development of this research. Among those that I found the most helpful were my conversations with Jeremy Friedman, Odd Arne Westad, Mark Kramer, Terry Martin and Chris Miller.

Thanks to the research funds of the EUSP and ARTES I never had troubles in organizing my research trips to the archives and libraries. In most of them I was lucky to meet great archivists and librarians who were always helpful and patient in working with my orders and unusual requests. I am especially grateful to the staff of RGANI, RGASPI, GARF, ARAN, Churchill College Archive, UK National Archives, National Library of Russia, Russian State Library, British Library and university libraries of the EUSP, UvA and Harvard.

Lastly I want to express my warmest gratitude to my family and friends who were helping me throughout the years of this research. I am especially thankful to those who provided me shelter during my countless trips and were politely spending with me their evenings sharing a pint despite being evidently bored with my endless stories about my archival findings. Anastasia Slutskina, Olga Ivanova and Alexey Tsypushkin — in Moscow, Inna and Leo Asinovski — in Boston, Katie Chizhova and Daniel Silbereisen — in London. Back home I was always surrounded with love and care from my mother, Elena Slutskina.

I dedicate this work to the loving memory of my grandmother, Isabella Slutskina, whose stories about her life were among things that motivated me to become a historian and study the history of the Soviet society.
Note on transliteration

In this thesis for transliteration from Russian and Persian I followed the transliteration tables generally used by the Library of Congress, with the following exceptions:

1. Names appear according to historical custom or customary use for the academic literature in English, as for example: Khrushchev (not Khrushchyov); Azerbaijan (not Azerbaidzhan); Nureddin Kianuri (not Nur al-Din Kianuri), etc.

2. For both Russian and Persian transliterations the diacritical marks are dropped.

3. Russian soft vowels such as ь, я and ё are transliterated as yu (not iu), ya (not ia), yo (not ё). Vowel e is generally transliterated according to the LoC transliteration table (e) unless preceded by the letter ь (soft sign), in which case it is transliterated as ye.

4. Russian letter ё is transliterated as y (not ĭ)

5. Russian letter ы is generally transliterated as y unless it is followed by ь, in which case it is transliterated as i.

6. The endings of Russian male first and last names that end with у are transliterated as y (not iy), as for example: Vasily (not Vasiliy), Ulyanovsky (not Ulyanovskiy), etc.
INTRODUCTION

On June 19, 1982 U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrey Gromyko, held a meeting in New York. Although intended as an exchange of opinions on bilateral relations, the discussion took an unexpected turn. Disturbed by the speech of President Reagan delivered two days earlier at the UN, Gromyko passionately refuted Reagan’s accusations that the Soviet Union was directing an aggressive foreign policy.¹ Much of Gromyko’s statement was dedicated to the issue of revolutions that, according to Reagan, the Soviet Union was exporting to other countries. A man of restrained temper, Gromyko argued with unusual passion that the implantation of revolutions in other countries was an absurd concept as revolutions “happen due to internal developments in those countries and cannot be imported from without”. The Soviet minister even stressed that insistence on the possibility of such implantation “amounts to hysterical illiteracy” proving his point with an example of 1917 October revolution all of which “the Russian people did themselves”. Responding to Gromyko’s passage Haig insisted that apart from “just revolutions aimed at improving social conditions and introducing a new, just system” history also knew revolutions “transplanted from other countries”. Summing up he used the examples of Afghanistan and Poland to stress the aggressive involvement of the Soviet Union in the internal affairs of other states for the sake of preserving the status quo.²


Although we must understand that both politicians used diplomatic formulas to state their positions, this dialogue on the nature of revolutions reveals the ideological importance of the concept to both sides. This importance became especially evident in the light of the Iranian revolution that happened less than four years before the abovementioned meeting. The revolution in Iran presented both superpowers with an ideological challenge for which neither of them was prepared. In this research I seek to look into the history of the Soviet way, and troubles encountered on this way, to deal with this ideological challenge but also to put the reaction of the superpowers to the Iranian revolution in the context of the global Cold War. Roham Alvandi has argued convincingly that Iran lived in the shadow of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. The Iranian history of the second half of the 20th century was largely defined by the Cold War but simultaneously Iran had its own impact and role in the global Cold War. But to what extent did the Cold War define the internal processes of Iranian development and changes? In particular to what extent was the Iranian revolution defined by the Cold War and its logics? And vice versa: to what extent did the Iranian revolution define the further development of the Cold War? I do not seek to give definitive answers to these questions, but, following the direction set by the so-called “new historiography” of the Cold War, I make an attempt to include the Iranian revolution in a framework of the global Cold War that is not defined anymore as purely bilateral confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. Although the conflict

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4 Most pre-1991 Cold War studies of traditional, revisionist and post-revisionist schools concentrated on the origins of the Cold War and on the role of each of the two superpowers in its outbreak and development. For the most noteworthy examples of scholarship for every of these classical schools see: Arthur Schlesinger Jr., “Origins of the Cold War”, *Foreign Affairs* 46, no. 1 (1967): 22-52; William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (Cleveland: World Pub Co., 1959); John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972). The opening of the Soviet archives forced the new generation of Cold War historians to review most of the preceding scholarship, yet in the 1990s the concentration of scholars remained focused on the United States and
of the superpowers was at the core of the Cold War, no matter how we define it, I follow Odd Arne Westad in a call for a pluralist approach to the Cold War history and fully agree with him that the Cold War cannot be only seen through the history centered on the superpowers.\(^5\) Westad has criticized the US-centered approach and even seeing the Cold War as a subsection of the US history.\(^6\) But as a historian of the Soviet Union I inevitably have to put the USSR in the center of this research. However, doing so, I do not claim that the Soviet foreign policy alone can explain the Cold War developments, in particular the grand developments of the late 1970s. In fact the Iranian revolution is a great example of an event that was shaped by the superpower competition but in turn it \textit{reshaped} the Cold War, too.

The year 1979 was unique in Cold War history — it was manifested by a number of epochal events that made the world a different place and the Cold War — a different conflict.\(^7\) On the one hand it clearly intensified the conflict as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the consequent failure of the SALT II ratification evidently ended the détente the Soviet Union. Scholars of the new historiography of the Cold War that emerged in the 2000s challenged this binary approach to studying Cold War and following Odd Arne Westad’s influential book attempted to include the Third World in the research of what was now referred to as the global Cold War, see: Odd Arne Westad, \textit{The Global Cold War} “Third World interventions and the making of our times” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Recent global Cold War historiography also tends to look beyond the state actors and widen the perspective by studying communities of experts, human rights organizations and other non-state actors. See, for example: David Engerman, \textit{Know your enemy: the rise and fall of America’s Soviet experts} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Artemy Kalinovsky, \textit{Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War politics and decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018).


\(^6\) For this kind of analysis of the Cold War see, for example: Anders Stephanson, “Fourteen notes on the very concept of the Cold War” in \textit{Rethinking Geopolitics}, eds. Gearóid Ó Tuathail and Simon Dalby (New York: Routledge, 1999), 62-85.

\(^7\) For the importance of the 1970s in the following changes in the global Cold War see: Niall Ferguson et al., eds., \textit{The Shock of the Global: the 1970s in perspective} (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010)
era. Some Cold War historians even referred to the early 1980s as the start of “the Second Cold War.” Although this term is discussible, it was a qualitatively new stage of confrontation.⁸ On the other hand, some of the local conflicts also experienced monumental changes: Israel and Egypt came to the peace agreement in Camp David, the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia was attacked by the Vietnamese, in Nicaragua the Sandinista Front overthrew the Somosa dictatorship. But 1979 was also a year that saw the rise of a number of personalities that were destined to reshape this conflict (and to make their input to its end eventually). In 1979 Deng Xiaoping started a long process of Chinese economic reforms; Margaret Thatcher was elected the first female British Prime Minister and soon introduced her controversial economic course, that nevertheless returned Britain to the leading positions in the world economy; Karol Wojtyla was the first Pole elected to become the Pope—John Paul II and through his personality to rise the political authority of the Roman Papacy and play his role in the end of the Cold War. Probably the most important person for the changes that occurred in the following decade was Mikhail Gorbachev. On the eve on the new 1979 year he was appointed the Central Committee Secretary for Agriculture and thus moved to Moscow from Stavropol and started his ascent to the highest seat of power. This kaleidoscope of events cannot be fully described through the Cold War lens only and even less can it be analyzed from the point of view of one or another superpower. The intensity of changes that happened in 1979, whether some were terminating long processes that had started earlier, or whether they acquired meaning in the context of future developments, only, present us complexity of actors, processes and developments that transcended the Cold War frame. None of them however, can be analyzed completely without taking the Cold War into consideration. That said, as historians we sometimes need to take off the Cold War lens and remind

ourselves at the same time how integral this lens is for us to analyze the history of the second half of the 20th century.9

Nonetheless, the Iranian revolution stands out as an event that shook one of the basic principles accepted by the leading Cold War powers—the belief in social progress through modernization driven by modern ideologies. It also contributed to the collapse of the Third World as a concept. This collapse was intensified by multiple independent processes such as globalization of capitalism, US interventionism and the break of the Third World consensus after the start of rapid economic growth in part of the former Third World, primarily in East Asia.10 Yet the fall of Mohammed Reza Shah, who in his later years of rule became one of the adepts of Third Worldism, and installment of radical religious regime in his place reaffirmed the failure of the idea of new modern world that could challenge the First and the Second ones.

Inclusion of Iran in “the Third World” requires a short note on terms. As argued by Vijay Prashad the Third World was not a place, it was a project: an idea of the alternative path that the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America could take to reach modernity staying independent from both the United States and the Soviet Union and their competing camps.11 In the 1950s the term was accepted and proudly defended by the new leaders of the decolonized world: Nehru, Sukarno, Nasser, and Nkrumah. At that point Iran hardly reflected the image of the Third World state, being fully depended on the United States following the 1953 coup. This only changed by the early 1970s, when the Shah started to use the improving economic situation to flirt with the idea of the independent regional policy, actually at a time when the term “the Third World” was

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losing its initial meaning. Adopted by the Western scholarship and media it was often used to describe all of the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, despite their political allegiances. Thus it gradually became more of an economic or geographical term. In the Soviet Union it was used, but rarely. For the broader meaning mentioned above the Soviet journalists and scholars preferred to use the long formula: “the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America”. For a narrower and more political meaning of “the Third World” they preferred the term “the states of national democracy” or the states that took “the non-capitalist path of development”. Iran under Mohammed Reza Shah never fitted into these concepts, as despite its decent relations with the Soviet Union, Iran was considered in Moscow to be following the path to capitalism under the American umbrella. The hopes for Iran to take a non-capitalist path of development arose only in 1979 following the revolution and became part of the debates that I discuss in the Chapter 4 of this dissertation. Consequently in the Soviet language there was no stable category that pre-revolutionary Iran could fit into among other countries. In this dissertation I therefore use terms “the Third World” and “the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America” as synonymous unless stated otherwise (as in the previous paragraph where I refer to “the Third World” as a political concept). I refer to the only generalization the Soviet leaders, experts and journalists were making about Iran in its broadest meaning as the conceptually most applicable term.

It is hard to disagree with Federico Romero that no single Third World conflict had as much influence on the Cold War balance as the European theatre that remained the principal one throughout its history. Nevertheless the importance of the Third World for the evolution of the Cold War in the late 1970s—early 1980s to a new period of hostility should not be underestimated. The Soviet war in Afghanistan

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12 I elaborate on the history and evolution of these terms in Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

is traditionally referred to as the watershed between the détente era and the new confrontation but taken out of the context (one of the key parts of which was the Iranian revolution) the invasion of Afghanistan cannot alone explain the new reality of the early 1980s. Similarly the radical developments of the mid-1980s can be (and traditionally they were) explained with decisions of either of the superpowers or through the centrality of the European events. There is certainly no need to neglect these key players and events but in recent years researchers of the end of the Cold War also started to emphasize the role of regional and transnational players.¹⁴ As argued by Pierre Grosser, détente did not die exclusively in Europe. Grosser in his essay referred to the Ogaden war and later the war in Afghanistan but I argue that it also died on the squares of Tehran, Qom and Abadan, and it was not only détente, it was the Cold War as the system of international relations that was dying there.¹⁵ As argued by Odd Arne Westad, a number of fundamental changes brought the Cold War to its end, among them the end of colonialism. Although initially it caused the ideological competition and intensification of local conflicts, by the end of the Cold War most of the newly independent countries chose market economies and more inclusive political systems over the alternatives.¹⁶ Yet surely not all of them. As much as ideologies defined the Cold War, the rise of new ideologies, born out of anti-colonialism and of broader concept of anti-modernism, shook the Cold War order and contributed to its collapse. The version of Political Islam that emerged victorious out of the Iranian revolution was certainly among the most powerful of them. The way the Iranian revolution was understood in Moscow and Washington reveals to us the scale of limitations that the Cold War imposed on the foreign

policy thinking of the superpowers’ leadership. My study of the case of the Soviet response to the Iranian revolution further shows that the late 1970s witnessed not only the crisis of the détente but of the Cold War as the system of international relations.

The Shah of Iran was an ally of the United States, but the relations between these two allies had their ups and downs and underwent serious shifts between the 1950s and the late 1970s. Following the 1953 CIA-sponsored coup against the Prime Minister Dr. Mohammed Mosaddeq, the Shah was completely dependent on the American support.17 Thus the Iran of the 1950s is often referred to as a client state of the United States.18 But through the economic crisis of the late 1950s and the set of modernizing reforms in the early 1960s, the Shah managed to set the Iranian economy on the growth path that was continuing until 1977. With economic independence came new ambitions — the Shah was not satisfied anymore with simply being a client of the United States, he sought to lead a regional superpower. The attitude of the United States to its former client state also changed — the Shah was growing in their eyes to become a partner and a key player of the US strategy in the Middle East.19 Moreover in the 1960s-1970s, especially during the Nixon

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administration, the Iranian regime started to be considered in Washington as a regional policeman that was supposed to shield the Middle East from the Communist threat.  

But the Shah was an uneasy ally that had his own vision of Iran’s regional role: not only as a client of the United States but as a regional superpower with its own set of special relations with global superpowers. Since the early 1970s the Shah started to promote new state ideology that proclaimed Iran as a “Great Civilization” referring to the ancient might of the Persian Empire. Fueled by extra oil revenues, this ideological shift claimed a new role for Iran in the region. It went along with massive armament and participation in local conflicts. Another dimension of Shah’s independent policy was the improvement of Soviet-Iranian relations. Since the early 1960s the Shah, despite being traditionally anxious about the Soviet threat, accepted Khrushchev’s attempts to build mutually beneficial bilateral relations, at least in the economic sphere. The gradual rapprochement between Iran and the USSR resulted in a fruitful economic cooperation throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Often


20 For more on the Nixon doctrine application to Iran and personal relations between Richard Nixon and Mohammed Reza Shah see: Roham Alvandi, Nixon, Kissinger and the Shah: the United States and Iran in the Cold War (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).


critical of the Shah’s alliance with the West and since the early 1970s of his armament program, the Soviets were yet careful not to harm this unique cooperation.\textsuperscript{24}

US-Iranian relations entered an uneasy period after the election of Jimmy Carter as the US President in 1977. Carter’s platform of civil rights protection challenged the Shah’s style of governance. The personal relations between the Shah and the new US President were also not as close as they once had been with Nixon. Nevertheless, no one in the American leadership expected the Shah to be toppled by a mass popular movement. President Carter himself called Iran “the island of stability” in his New Year’s Eve speech in Tehran on December 31, 1977. Similarly, in Moscow no analyst or decision-maker predicted the outbreak of the revolution in Iran. Thus when the revolution started, it was a shock for both superpowers. But while for the United States the question was whether they could save the Shah or whether they could save the alliance with Iran under new leadership, for the Soviets it was a serious question of whom to support. The popular movement seemed to prove the point of Soviet critics of the Shah’s regime: social inequality and the alliance with the United States had led to “the anti-feudal and anti-monarchic” revolution. But the toppling of the Shah threatened economic cooperation. More importantly, the driving forces of the revolution caused serious confusion to the Soviet leadership. Although much of the movement was clearly driven by socio-economic concerns, the significant role of the Shi’a clergy was an unusual and vexingly influential factor for the traditional concept of revolution in both the United States and the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{25}

For the aging Soviet leadership the Iranian revolution presented a puzzle that was more complex than most what previously challenged

\textsuperscript{24} For more on these unique relations between the Soviet Union and the Pahlavi Iran see Chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{25} It is evident how little the leaderships of both superpowers understood about the potential of political Islam from the conversation of Cold War veterans at the roundtable organized in Oslo in 1995, see: Oral history conference transcript “The Intervention in Afghanistan and the Fall of Détente”, September 17-20, 1995, Lysebu, Norway, transcribed by Svetlana Savranskaya.
them in the Third World. On the one hand, it seemed to confirm a trend in Third World countries of turning away from the capitalist West, as witnessed for example in Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, or Afghanistan. On the other hand, the examples of Anwar Sadat in Egypt and Salvador Allende in Chile showed that some “progressive” regimes of the Third World could soon turn away from their pro-Soviet orientation or be suppressed by the US-backed counterrevolution.

Iran was also a very special country in Soviet foreign policy. A neighbor of the USSR, it had a particular attention of the Soviet leadership from the early days of Soviet rule (not to mention Russian imperial interests in the pre-1917 period). For the Soviet involvement in the Cold War, Iran had also been one of the first hot points where the interests of the superpowers clashed. It happened when in 1946 Stalin initially refused to withdraw the Red Army from Iranian Azerbaijan and instead supported the Azeri and Kurdish separatist regimes in the area.26 The key event of the Iranian 20th century history—the coup against the government of Mosaddeq in 1953 was also one of the defining moments in the post-WWII Soviet-Iranian relations. Initially the Soviet leadership completely misunderstood the intentions of Mosaddeq and saw him as an American puppet against the British dominance rather than sincere Iranian nationalist. But later the figure of Mosaddeq was inscribed in the Soviet list of victims of American imperialism and by 1979 the ghosts of the CIA-sponsored coup bothered the Soviet leaders often thinking in terms of historical analogies and certainly remembering 1953.27 The specter of


American interference in Iran’s internal affairs was certainly haunting the Soviet leadership throughout the period of the revolution.

Another dimension of the Iranian puzzle that is vital for understanding Soviet confusion and inconsistencies in reaction to the revolution was the role played by the Iranian left in the revolution and its perception by the Soviet leadership. Many contemporary researchers of the Iranian revolution suggest that the role played by different leftist groups was crucial for the success of the anti-Shah movement.28 Among the groups the most active and influential in the street protests were the radical Marxists from the Fadaiyan-e-Khalq movement and the radical Marxist-Islamists from the Mojahedin-e-Khalq. Those two groups were the most popular among the educated Iranian youth, mostly among students. They had been active in the armed clandestine activities against the Pahlavi monarchy long before the outbreak of the revolution.29 Yet for the Soviet Union, the most appealing player on the left side of Iranian political spectrum was the People’s Party of Iran (the Tudeh). Founded in 1941 during the Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran, the Tudeh carried the stigma of being Soviet agent of influence throughout its history.30 This reputation was strengthened after the unwillingness of the Tudeh to condemn the separatist movements in Iranian Azerbaijan and Kurdistan in 1946, but even more so since

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30 For the details on the Soviet role on the party foundation and the formation of the “Soviet puppet” stigma see: Cosroe Chaquery, “Did the Soviets play a role in founding the Tudeh party in Iran?”, Cahiers du monde russe 40, no. 3 (1999): 497-528; Rowena Abdul Razak, “Convenient Comrades: Re-assessing the relationship between the Soviet Union and the Tudeh party during the British-Soviet occupation of Iran, 1941-5” in Russian in Iran. Diplomacy and Power in the Qajar Era and Beyond, eds. Rudi Mathee and Elena Andreeva (London: I. B. Tauris, 2018)
Tudeh’s lack of support for Mosaddeq in 1953.31 Ironically, during the Iranian revolution, as this dissertation argues, it was not only the Soviet Union that influenced the Tudeh but it was also the Tudeh that shaped a very particular perception of the revolution on the part of the Soviet leadership. I will show that some of the ideological limitations of Soviet foreign policy analysis, and the level of involvement with foreign communist (“fraternal”) parties in the Soviet decision-making and the differences in the attitude of different parts of the Soviet leadership were dependent on either direct links with or perceived the interests of foreign partners like the Tudeh.

Thus for the purpose of this thesis it is important to look at the Iranian revolution not merely as an internal process driven by the forces within Iran. It is necessary to reassess the event in its global context—primarily the context of the global Cold War. Pahlavi Iran was a country that was integrated in the global relations unprecedentedly in Iranian history and as noted by Roham Alvandi, it was on the front line of the Cold War confrontation.32 This struggle for the countries of the Third World (but also particularly Iran) was not only about spheres of influence and security belts, it was also about the competing visions of modernity and more than that: of the future of the humanity.33 Simultaneously the United States and the Soviet Union represented alternative models of modernity but were unified by a faith in social progress manifested in socio-economic development and often driven by revolutions. The analysts and the decision makers of both superpowers (but more so in the Soviet Union)

33 Melvyn Leffler even elegantly claimed that the struggle was for “the soul of mankind”, see: Melvyn Leffler, For the Soul of Mankind: the United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War (New York: Macmillan, 2007).
consequently were used to interpret popular revolutions as progressive but much in the outcome of the Iranian revolution contradicted this assumption. Conservative traditionalism, broad anti-Westernism (that included anti-communism), but more than anything—the rule of Islamic clerics,—puzzled and terrifi ed many of those who initially supported the Iranian revolution in the Soviet Union or even among Western progressives.34

This thesis does not off er a new interpretation of the Iranian revolution or its consequences—questions that continue to stimulate debate among specialists.35 Rather, this thesis investigates the Soviet response to events in Iran. The overthrow of the Shah was welcomed by Moscow; his eventual replacement by a theocratic regime perplexed both Soviet and U.S. officials. It took the superpowers significant amount of time to accept this ideological deviation and even after that the Iranian revolution did not make much sense for most observers in the US and the USSR. In the meantime journalists, scholars, decision-makers in both countries were all nervously proposing different ways of how to fi t the Iranian events in the customary concept of revolution. The inability to fi nd a proper explanation for what happened in Iran was in a meaningful part

a result of ideological worldview customary to both Cold War rivals. More importantly this inability had practical consequences in decisions made and actions taken. The first set of questions this thesis asks, therefore, are about knowledge and decision-making: How did journalists, scholars, and decision-makers in the Soviet Union study events in Iran before, during, and after the revolution? What channels did they have available for making sense of events on the ground? How did they interpret the information they received?

**Ideological worldview vs. the dichotomy of ideology and pragmatism**

The last question points to a larger problem at the heart of this research: what was the role of ideology in Soviet assessments of and response to the revolution? That the Cold War was an ideological confrontation may sound banal; however this only seems to be so. Historians have debated the role played by ideology during the Cold War, as did contemporary analysts. In the 1990s, following the opening of the Socialist Bloc archives, these discussions were revived with new passion. They centered on the Soviet Union, which represented itself as an ideological Marxist-Leninist state but seemed to act as a realist great power. Indeed, the archival revolution of the 1990s has helped put to rest the notion that ideology and theory never mattered to Soviet leaders. We now know that Joseph Stalin spent hours thoroughly reading Marx and marking up the text with his pencil; Nikita Khrushchev spent days discussing the new Party program and its compatibility with teachings of Lenin with a narrow circle of comrades. Leonid Brezhnev, not particularly well educated in Marxist theory, always addressed the main Party ideologist Mikhail

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36 This is not to undermine the discussion on the American ideology that was not as openly prophesied as the Soviet one but nevertheless lied underneath the American stance in the Cold War, the US Foreign policy and, overall, the American position in the world. For an analysis of the US Foreign policy ideology see: Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and US foreign policy* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1987). For the discussion of competing ideologies of the two superpowers in the Third World see: Westad, *The Global Cold War*.

Suslov by his patronymic, “Mikhail Andreevich”, while being used to familiarity when speaking to other Politburo members. He saw Suslov as an educated Marxist theoretician, and thus deserving of particular respect. There were of course many other examples that proved that behind closed doors the leaders of the Soviet Union kept speaking in the very same Marxist terms they used in the public discourse. But did this dogmatism drive their actions? Were they “ideological” when conducting foreign policy?

These questions force us to get deeper in the understanding of the ideology as a concept. For many decades the discussion on ideology and pragmatism of Soviet actions in the course of the Cold War was centered on the binary opposition between the two. In an influential article from 1999, Nigel Gould-Davies argued against this dichotomy. Highlighting the stereotypes surrounding ideology, Gould-Davies deconstructed the image of an ideological state as being inflexible, aggressive, reckless and incapable of cooperation. More importantly, he pointed out the pragmatic core of Soviet ideology in the texts and teachings of Lenin himself. An opportunist and a political mastermind, Lenin was willing to compromise on anything as long as it was necessary to make a step towards the grand ideological aim that he would have never compromised on. Not only the improbable success of the Bolshevik coup in 1917 but also the survival of the Bolshevik power in the first years after the coup was achieved thanks to this core principle of Leninism. The challenge of the Civil war pushed Lenin towards the alliance with local nationalists against the imperial nationalism (or “great power chauvinism” as Lenin preferred to mark it) of his foes. Even more

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39 Gould-Davies, “Rethinking the role of ideology”, 95-100.

40 For more on the compromises the Bolsheviks were making in the national question in the early days of the Soviet rule see Terry Martin, The Affirmative Action Empire. Nations and nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939 (Ithaca: Cornell University
evident is the decision to introduce New Economic Policy in 1921—a de facto partial rehabilitation of elements of market economy for the sake of saving the Bolshevik rule despite complete ideological unacceptability of such measures for the radical Marxist views of the Bolshevik leadership.\textsuperscript{41} This lesson of making tactical concessions for the sake of the strategic victory was well learned by Lenin’s disciples and among them his self-declared best pupil—Joseph Stalin.

One of the defining characteristics of Soviet foreign policy under Stalin even before the Second World War was gradual abandonment of the romantic ideals and aspirations for the shortly upcoming global proletarian revolution. Building socialism in one state meant gradual growth of the role of this state’s geopolitical interests as a counterweight to revolutionary dogmatism. Did that mean that under Stalin the Soviet Union transformed into a non-ideological state? Absolutely not. The Soviet Union transformed into a citadel of Marxism-Leninism and the success of the revolutionary doctrine depended on the geopolitical success of the Soviet Union as a state. To put it more simply: the Soviet Union was now thoroughly identified with Marxism-Leninism itself. This argument explains some of Stalin’s foreign policy moves that seem to be purely pragmatic and even betraying the very core of the Marxist-Leninist ideology. The pact with Hitler is certainly the most famous and evident example as signing it Stalin not only befriended the worst ideological enemy but also put many of his Comintern allies among the European Communists in an untenable and often dangerous position. But for Stalin the repression of fraternal parties was collateral damage that had to be accepted in order to preserve the safety of the main citadel of Marxism-Leninism—the Soviet state. It was a Leninist lesson on flexibility that helped Stalin to accept this sacrifice. The same way as Lenin was willing to ally with local nationalists in the Civil war despite their ideological

\textsuperscript{41} For more on the NEP introduction as a “temporary retreat” see: Lewis Siegelbaum, \textit{Soviet State and Society between Revolutions, 1919-1929} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
animosity, Stalin was willing to make a deal with Hitler for the sake of
two camps of capitalists destroying each other. In fact this approach to the
ideological allies abroad remained in the arsenal of Soviet leadership after
Stalin’s death until the very end of the Cold War. Communist parties could
be sacrificed when necessary in order to advance the Soviet interests and
in doing so—advance the Communist movement as a whole towards
its grand ideological goal determined by the Marxist-Leninist teaching.
As we will see, Soviet relations with the Tudeh party of Iran during the
Iranian revolution and the willingness of Brezhnev’s and Andropov’s
Politburo to sacrifice Iranian Communists for a bigger geopolitical goal
shows the continuity in Soviet ideological policy since Stalin’s times
rather than proves lack of ideological thinking in the late Soviet Union.

The equation of Marxism-Leninism and Soviet state interests
was only reinforced by the victory in the Second World War. As Vlad
Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov put it, Soviet foreign policy was
driven by a “revolutionary-imperial paradigm”—a mixture of “imperial
expansionism and ideological proselytism”.42 Finding the roots of imperial
geopolitics in the pre-revolutionary Russian foreign policy tradition,
Zubok and Pleshakov also stress the continuity in Soviet revolutionary
ideals that did not die off with the transformation of the Stalinist Soviet
Union into a superpower but rather helped to develop “a whole set of
highly effective political institutions”.43 However, Zubok and Pleshakov
prefer the term “paradigm,” reserving the term “ideology” for Marxist-
Leninist doctrine. Yet following the convincing argument of Michael
David-Fox that ideology has many faces and doctrine is only of them,
I see nothing wrong in stating that the Soviet Union entered the Cold
War driven by a revolutionary-imperial ideology.44 Moreover, the very

42 Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From
43 Ibid, 4.
44 Michael David-Fox, Peresekaya Granitsy: Modernost, ideologiya i kultura v Rossii
i Sovetskom Soyuze (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2020), 159-220 (Original
edition: Michael David-Fox, Crossing Borders: Modernity, ideology and culture in Russia
doctrine, as I mentioned before, contained certain elements of geopolitical thinking (if we remember Lenin’s teaching on flexibility) thus it is not always easy to distinguish between revolutionary and imperial elements of the Soviet ideology.

All that said, the question remains whether the Soviet Union (and its foreign policy in particular) continued to be driven by ideology in its later years, after the death of Stalin—the unique author and editor of the authoritative discourse if we use the terminology of Alexey Yurchak that he in turn had borrowed from Mikhail Bakhtin.\(^{45}\) The death of Stalin was certainly a watershed in Soviet history and even the intuitive feeling pushes us to distinguishing between the Soviet Union under and after Stalin. Yurchak is right when he claims that there was no one person in the post-1953 Soviet leadership that took the place of Stalin as the ideological authority.\(^{46}\) But it is hard to agree with him on his argument that the later leaders of the Soviet Union were only transmitters of frozen authoritative discourse. It is true that discussions about ideology became the privilege of a few behind the closed doors; it is also true that (especially in the Brezhnev years) most Soviet leaders hardly spoke off the cuff in public, preferring to follow a written and heavily edited text. It is no less true that for many ordinary Soviet citizens—the consumers of ideology, the hegemony of form became the reality whereas the core of the ideological statements and beliefs evaporated.\(^{47}\) But for communists and especially for the Party leadership the pillars of ideology remained strong. We have no reasons to assume that Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Andropov and all the party highest *nomenclatura* at certain point ceased to believe in the future building of communism, class warfare, Marxist laws of history


\(^{46}\) Ibid, 95-116.

\(^{47}\) Ibid.
or any other foundational principles of Marxism-Leninism.\(^48\) Their unwillingness to personally take the place of Lenin or Stalin as authors of ideological discourse did not mean that they were willing to abandon ideology but rather signified the admittance of their “intellectual” inability to unilaterally take the vacant authoritative place. None of the Soviet leaders after Stalin was self-confident enough in terms of their ideological “maturity” to assume this role. Moreover, the principles of collective leadership were not just empty words—they drove the behavior of Soviet leaders: to aspire to take this unique authoritative role was a move that could not be understood by the rest of the Politburo other than as an attempt to rise over the collective leadership. It was especially true for the first decade of Brezhnev’s rule when, following the ouster of Khrushchev (caused in significant part by his negligence of the principles of collective leadership), the Party leaders used every opportunity to stress their devotion to collective leadership.\(^49\) So neither in terms of education, nor in terms of politics were the Soviet leaders eager to take this vacant seat of ideological power. The cult of written text and public speaking only following the written text was certainly a symptom of this lack of confidence. But under Stalin nobody except the vozhd’ was expected to formulate ideology and the fixed ideological formulas on carefully prepared pieces of paper were as customary as in the later years: thus the cult of written text was formed under Stalin, not after him.

Based on his interviews with Georgy Arbatov, one of the foreign policy experts, party intellectuals and Andropov’s advisers, Yurchak argues that the fact that Andropov spent hours with his speechwriters

\(^{48}\) Some aspects of their assessment of the situation in Iran during and after the revolution show their adherence to the foundational theoretical principles of Marxism-Leninism very vividly. For details see Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation.

\(^{49}\) This need of the Soviet leaders to stress the importance of the collective decision-making is revealed by the recently published proceedings of the Central Committee Secretariat sessions, see: Sekretariat TsK KPSS. Zapiski i stenogrammy zasedaniy 1965-1967 gg. (Moscow: IstLit, 2020). For Brezhnev’s personal devotion to collective decision-making see: Schattenberg, Leonid Brezhnev, 273-324.
and advisers, looking for better wording for his speeches, proves that he was looking for fixed formulas and thus the form in his mind dominated the core of the ideology.\(^{50}\) Yet this hours’ long sharpening of text could mean the opposite—the willingness to engage with ideology and come to an ideologically verified text not in form but in content. The fact that Andropov had long discussions with foreign policy experts signals that it was not a pure reproduction but rather active engagement with the ideological discourse in which Andropov could not rely on himself and needed expertise. Overall, there was no new personification of ideological author or editor but there was a collective one.\(^{51}\) Working in private and with great uncertainty the collective leadership was still formulating new ideological dogmas and approaches. Moreover the ideological doctrine experienced massive changes under Khrushchev and Brezhnev, which are very evident in the sphere of Third World foreign policy that will be discussed in the first chapters of this work.

Many of the decisions made by Khrushchev’s and Brezhnev’s foreign policy apparatus may seem to be driven by pure realpolitik, cold-hearted unideological geopolitical interests. The very concept of “peaceful coexistence” with the West may serve as an example of ideological capitulationism (an argument later used by the Chinese leadership). We will see below that, by contrast, peaceful coexistence was proclaimed to be the new form of class warfare and thus remained ideological in form and in core. Sergey Radchenko argues that the Sino-Soviet split became the key event of the Cold War because in its conflict with the Chinese the Soviet leadership “put aside ideology” while transforming a fraternal socialist country into an adversary for the reasons of security

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\(^{50}\) Ibid, 114.

\(^{51}\) The ideology was also important for some in the second row of the Party leadership. A good example here is Mikhail Gorbachev who certainly was not a typical Party functionary but certainly represented a part of nomenclatura whose formation and even idealism was to a certain degree a result of their ideological worldview. For more on Gorbachev and the importance of ideology to him and people like him see: William Taubman, *Gorbachev: His life and times* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017); Robert English, *Russia and the Idea of the West. Gorbachev, Intellectuals and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).
and unwillingness to share power. This in turn, according to Radchenko, led to the overall devaluation of ideology that “marked the beginning of the end of the Cold War”. But differences and conflicts within the International Communist movement did not begin with the Sino-Soviet split. Lenin was not always in accordance with Rosa Luxembourg whereas Stalin had serious ideological differences with Trotsky or Bukharin. In virtually every such case the conflict was a complex mixture of ideological battle and struggle for power or influence. None of those clashes led to the overall devaluation of ideology but rather to significant changes within it. In the particular case of the Sino-Soviet split these changes, as shown by Jeremy Friedman, were manifested by the more active Soviet involvement in the Third World, the competition with the Chinese in the field of anti-imperialism, or the adjustments of Soviet economic and developmental models for the Third World countries.

Karen Brutents, the former deputy head of the CPSU International department, in his memoirs openly stated that in the 1970s the key element of Soviet ideological concept was still the belief in the Soviet Union as the main force of global revolutionary changes and its consequence: “What is good for the Soviet Union, is also good for a global revolutionary process”. Brutents thus confirmed the continuity that existed in the Soviet foreign policy ideology since the Stalinist times. However he did not deny the existence of certain ideological romanticism even in the Brezhnev years. In the following chapters I will try to show how for the part of the Soviet leadership (for example, for Rostislav Ulyanovsky) their knowledge of revolutionary doctrine provided them a blueprint that they used to analyze the Iranian revolution. But overall, according to


54 Karen Brutents, Tridtsat let na Staroy Ploshchadi (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye othosheniya, 1998), 290.
Brutents, much in the Soviet foreign policy in general and in the Third World in particular was driven by the Cold War logics of security and geopolitics.

One may ask if the so-called doctrinal and pragmatic parts of Soviet ideology are so hardly distinguishable—what is the analytical value of stating that the ideology mattered? If the decisions were mostly driven by pragmatism and this pragmatism was the integral part of the ideology—why not to reduce this ideology to pragmatism? The generation of leaders that assumed power after Stalin (and especially after Khrushchev) was formed in its younger years by Soviet ideological maxims. Brezhnev was eleven years old by the time of the Bolshevik coup, Gromyko was eight, Ustinov was nine, Andropov was three. Their youth and maturity was signified by the most meaningful ideological battles and societal changes in Soviet history including collectivization and industrialization campaigns in which all of them were ordinary participants. Most of them were poorly educated in the doctrinal peculiarities of Marxist-Leninist theory (even less so when applied to foreign affairs). Vlad Zubok noted that despite the continuity in Soviet “revolutionary-imperial” approach to the foreign policy, the level of doctrinal knowledge of Brezhnev’s Politburo significantly deteriorated in comparison to previous leaderships. However Zubok writes about a “Marxist-Leninist instinct” that drove some of their early decisions such as the attempts to repair relations with China or an immediate reaction to American intervention in Vietnam. Although in Brezhnev’s Politburo almost no one was “theoretically educated” (except for the uncharismatic and politically untalented Mikhail Suslov), all of its members were formed by Marxism-Leninism and thus the ideology for them was more than just a doctrine—it was a worldview. Michael David-Fox fairly argued that worldview (мировоззрение) is a term much more complicated than doctrine and it could be wider and narrower than the latter one. Moreover it is hard to disagree with him when he claims that the Soviet

leaders themselves could hardly distinguish between their ideological thinking and their own personal set of beliefs.56

In his influential study of U.S. foreign policy, Michael Hunt wrote that “ideologies may become institutionalized and hold sway even after they have ceased to serve any obvious functional role or advance any clearly identifiable class or group interests”.57 In the case of the late Soviet Union many aspects of doctrine transformed in the empty formulas as noted by Yurchak, but this does not mean that the ideology as a whole ceased to matter. Instead, for the Soviet leadership ideology started to serve as “a folk wisdom” in Hunt’s terms—a part of their worldview that influenced their decision-making. Ideology, according to Hunt, is important because “it constitutes the framework in which policymakers deal with specific issues”.58 This is very applicable to the case of the late Soviet Union because, although the ideology as a worldview did not drive every decision of the Soviet leadership, it was always within their framework of thinking and decision-making. Like Lenin, Soviet leaders allowed for many tactical compromises while remaining committed to their grand ideological goal. Their pragmatism was not pragmatism of every other empire looking for geopolitical expansion and security. Soviet geopolitics was driven by people with an ideological worldview that were seeing and analyzing the outer world through a prism of a mixture of their Marxist-Leninist education, system of values, beliefs and their own life experience. Many things in their personal experience pushed them to a more secure foreign policy, less driven by the revolutionary doctrine for most of these people including Brezhnev lived and served through the war and thus were truly eager to avoid a new bloodshed of such scale. However, knowing that these security concerns along with geopolitics were mixed with Marxist-Leninist thinking in a complicated blend within their heads, helps to understand their decision-making process much better.

56 David-Fox, Peresekaya Granitsy, 182-183.
57 Hunt, Ideology and US foreign policy, 13
58 Ibid, 16.
Of course, one should be very careful when analyzing the motives behind the decision-making of the individuals, as even the declassification of most secret documents from the archives allows only for well-informed guesses about the influence of ideology on the decisions of leaders. As Mark Kramer put it: “Even the most secret documents do not necessarily reveal why US and Soviet leaders acted as they did. It is also hard to tell whether the documentary record reflects the actual decision-making process. Leaders after all may choose not to put their real motives down on paper. It is even possible that the leaders themselves are not always sure why they did certain things at different times”.

Mark Kramer’s article serves as a great warning not to rush into simple binary opposition of ideology and pragmatism. Kramer shows vividly using five separate Cold War examples why ideology could be important when it seems that it played no role and vice versa. However, Kramer argues that ideology-based explanations are only important when they go beyond interest or power-based ones. This argument is based on Kramer’s definition of ideology “a set of doctrinal principles, shaped by language, which cumulatively define how an individual views, understands, and acts in the world”. Thus Kramer denies the importance of seemingly pragmatic decisions driven by the ideological worldview. Based on the aforementioned discussion on pragmatic actions driven by ideological motives that proves that ideology and realism can be not mutually exclusive but rather mutually supportive, in this dissertation I will use a wider definition of this concept. I will further refer to the Soviet ideology as an umbrella term that includes both the revolutionary side (“set of doctrinal principles”) and the imperial one (pragmatic geopolitics). In order to avoid confusion in terminology I will use terms theory or doctrine instead of ideology when referring to the former, and geopolitics, realism, pragmatism or realpolitik when referring to the latter.

60 Ibid.
The application of the concept of Soviet ideological worldview is wider than the discussion on the nature of revolutions illustrated by the quoted discussion between Gromyko and Haig. The Iranian revolution serves as a great example for this complicated mixture of approaches as it happened to be a puzzle for both the doctrinal and geopolitical explanations within Soviet ideological thinking. It seemed to be a massive popular movement against “the feudal monarchy” but it was led by the clergy. If it was a progressive anti-imperialist regime, why then did it promote the slogan “Death to the Soviet Union”, proclaimed every Friday after the prayers. These and other “ideological paradoxes” of the Iranian revolution and the early Islamic republic help to shed light on the controversies of Soviet ideological approach to the foreign policy in the Third World. In the following chapters I will demonstrate that all of the Soviet leaders were to a certain degree influenced by different aspects of their ideological worldview. It does not mean that for all of them it resulted in the same reactions, situation assessments and decisions. Some of the Soviet leaders were more preoccupied with the pragmatic security concerns within their Marxist-Leninist worldview whereas others were more attached to the doctrinal foundations of the ideology. More importantly the limitations and biases of this system of thinking prevented all of them from seeing meaningful aspects of Iranian revolution. The revolution serves here as a vivid example that evidently shows these limitations and biases that shaped Soviet foreign policy thinking in many other instances and practically disarmed it in front of the new challenges.

This research does not go deep in studying the subjectivity of Soviet foreign policy makers but I hope for it to open this path that could better connect the global Cold War historiography with the historiography of the Soviet Union. For the latter the study of the “Soviet subject” became one of the most rapidly developing fields starting in the 1990s.61 As

Artemy Kalinovsky has argued, this research has mostly concentrated on Party functionaries, ordinary workers, and cultural elite but not on foreign policy makers.\textsuperscript{62} Moreover, few works on Soviet subjectivity addressed the post-Stalinist period of Soviet history while most focus on the creation of Soviet subject under Stalin.\textsuperscript{63} Thus I seek to connect this research to a number of recent works that stressed the importance of the ideology to the post-Stalinist Soviet leadership and in this way to facilitate future development of new historiography on late Soviet subjectivity.\textsuperscript{64} The limitations in official sources of the late Soviet foreign policy (that will be discussed below in this introduction) are fairly well compensated with the avalanche of personal materials including diaries of Soviet specialists on foreign policy. In this research I use these sources to personify Soviet foreign policy and to show that Soviet leadership was far from monolithic. What united them was their ideological worldview that dictated many of their decisions—though different for each one of them. This way it becomes more evident how analytically revealing can be the study of them as subjects.

**Knowledge: Soviet community of foreign policy experts and the decision-making process**

In the Khrushchev’s era the leadership formulated its demand for the knowledgeable young experts who would have spoken foreign


\textsuperscript{64} For the examples of recent research that stressed the importance of ideology to the Soviet leadership see: Friedman, *The Shadow Cold War* and Natalia Telepneva, “Our sacred duty: the Soviet Union, the liberation movement in the Portuguese colonies and the Cold War, 1961-1975” (PhD Diss., London School of Economics, 2014).
languages and could advise the policymakers. Khrushchev’s “peaceful coexistence” with the West and search for new engagements in the Foreign East along with the atmosphere of Thaw rehabilitated the knowledge. It might have even seemed that knowledge superseded ideology in the list of criteria for foreign policy advisory. However, that was clearly an illusion, since by the early 1960s the demand for the knowledge in the policymaking started to gradually deteriorate. Moreover, knowledge and ideology were neatly connected rather than separated in the worldview of the Soviet foreign policy experts, though their relative weight changed over time. The top leadership was not the only part of a Soviet foreign policy apparatus that was limited by the ideological worldview. I will attempt to illuminate the impact of different institutions within Soviet system on foreign policy and in particular the role of the intellectuals within the governing structures and beyond them in order to show that the problem of ideological thinking was not a unique problem of the ageing leaders of the USSR.

Karen Brutents wrote bitterly in his memoirs about the role played by the Soviet scholarship in the decision-making process; according to Brutents, the influence of experts was reduced to marginal levels especially in the cases of truly important foreign policy decisions made in the Politburo narrow circle.65 Much in the history of the Soviet reaction to the situation in Iran in the late 1970s seems to prove this point—the decisions made in the leadership were hardly influenced by the scholarship but rather vice versa: the scholarship was often tasked to explain the already made decisions. However, as this dissertation will show, this juxtaposition is too simple, as the community of intellectuals in the Soviet foreign policy system was not limited to the research groups of the academic institutes. In fact Brutents and some other party and government bureaucrats were themselves members of this flexible circle of Soviet foreign policy intellectual elite. Most of these people represented the generation that had either fought in the battlefields of the Second World War or lived through it as children. Many of them

65 Brutents, Tridtsat let na Staroy ploshchadi, 168-169.
belonged to the group that Vlad Zubok referred to as “Zhivago’s children”—the Soviet intelligentsia. Yet people like Brutents were not in the part of intelligentsia that chose neutrality or dissent towards the Party and the Soviet state. Instead full of hopes after the war and even more after the beginning of the Khrushchev’s Thaw, people like him joined the Party and were trying to change it from within. Their careers often started at the faculties of history, law, oriental studies of the universities and continued with Party’s help at the research institutes, journals and newspapers, or within the Party itself. For most of them a huge role in their life experience was played by the journal Problemy mira i sotsializma (known to the English-speaking reader as the World Marxist review). Almost all of them spent a term in Prague where the journal was issued. This experience of working abroad, in the company of young journalists and socialist thinkers from around the world, was something that supported their belief in “the socialism with a human face” and made them different from many of their colleagues. Some of them were close to the decision-makers, being in the circle of their advisors or speechwriters. Aleksandr Bovin, for example, was a journalist of Izvestia but he was also Brezhnev’s speechwriter in close contact with the Soviet leader; Georgy Arbatov was the head of US and Canada studies institute but he was also Andropov’s close foreign policy advisor; Karen Brutents held a formal post at the Party but was simultaneously very close to the research community of the Institute of Africa.

As we will see, most of the intellectuals that entered foreign policy world at the peak of the Khrushchev’s Thaw believed in the possibility of shifting the decisions of the leadership towards more peaceful and analytically supported strategy. Yet many of them later admitted that they failed in pursuing this strategic goal. It does not mean, though, that intellectuals’ attempts to influence those in power had no historic effect. Most of these people became the moving force of Gorbachev’s foreign

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policy changes and of Perestroika in general. Some may say that in this attempt to rebuild Soviet relations with the outer world they also failed to achieve what they planned but even so their experience and expert knowledge was applied to the concrete foreign policy decisions. Thus their formation into an expert community through crises and despite the resistance of the leadership is an important process that this dissertation will trace in the necessary detail.67

This narrow circle of intellectuals certainly does not describe all the expert community. Not all the academics, journalists and Party functionaries were attached to the idea of “socialism with a human face”. As we will show below, the expert community involved in the formation of Soviet position towards the events in Iran was split about such perspectives. Indeed, the head of the Indo-Iranian sector of the International department Rostislav Ulyanovskyy was a person of different background, views and perception of the Soviet role in the Third World. In fact in this complicated balance of doctrine and geopolitics within the Soviet ideological worldview Ulyanovskyy was the representative of a more doctrinal thinking. Often charged with tasks to formulate theoretical explanation for the already made decision of the Politburo, he nevertheless made numerous attempts to influence the decision-making and to make the leadership believe in the perspectives of the Iranian revolution to transform into a pro-Soviet movement. Certainly Ulyanovskyy was not a lonely warrior in this field of theoretical conviction. Being an influential figure among Soviet Orientalists and (through his position)—in the International department he had a group of experts that defended his perspective.

Overall the expert community never had a direct influence on the decision-making but through their connections in the leadership and

through minor points of influence they managed to push the leadership to one or another tactical move in the certain period of time. Moreover in the early 1980s the leadership suddenly became more interested in the scholarly expertise, primarily in the field of political Islam. The Iranian revolution was certainly secondary to the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan among the factors that forced the leadership to pay more attention to the Soviet scholarship of Islam but it played its role. Along with the influence of the ideological worldview and role of experts, the field of Soviet perception of Islam in the researched period is one of the key questions of this work.

**Religion and the modernization paradigms of the Cold War**

Although overlooked in the previous decades of scholarship, religion receives more serious attention of the Cold War researchers today. Andrew Preston has even argued that there was “a religious Cold War” alongside with the ideological, cultural and other battlefields of this global conflict. Since the early days of the Cold War, Soviet atheism provided the United States with an opportunity to use religion in their interests. In the first decades of the Cold War it was predominantly Christianity and Christian authorities that were encouraged by the United States to contain the spread of communism in the world, to undermine Soviet rule in Eastern Europe and to serve as moral support for the American cause; with decolonization, by the 1960s, Islam had also become a meaningful factor of the Cold War. Although the Islamic resurgence consisted of very different groups that were often at odds with each other, most of them shared anti-Westernist sentiment and represented a traditionalist

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70 Ibid, xvii.
challenge to the existing Cold War order. This sentiment went along with the ideology of “Third Worldism”, anti-colonialism and other calls for reshaping of the world order. The meaning and role of Islam as a political ideology was seriously underestimated by the leaderships of both superpowers, which did not prevent them from exploiting Islam to their advantage in the Cold War. In the 1970s Richard Nixon supported Anwar Sadat’s attempts to use Egyptian Islamists against the leftist opposition. In the 1980s Ronald Reagan openly sided with the Afghan mojahedins in their struggle against the Soviet invasion. In both cases the US leaders underestimated the political potential of the Islamic movements: Sadat was eventually killed by radical Islamists, whereas the war in Afghanistan became a fertile ground for future evolution of radical Islamism into a global threat.

For the Soviet Union, by contrast, Islam was also an internal factor. Although in the pre-WWII years and during the Khrushchev’s anti-religious campaign, Soviet Islam suffered from the combination of bans and repressions, since the 1940s it was also institutionalized within the Soviet state. The Soviet system of control over Islam reminisced of the Russian Imperial system in which a religious bureaucracy was clustered around the so-called Spiritual Administrations. In the Soviet Union the latter were also reporting to the Council of Religious Affairs—a bureaucratic organ in the structure of the Soviet Council of Ministers. The relations between official Islam and the Soviet state were not always confrontational; rather quite often they were mutually

72 For more on Nixon’s support of Sadat see Paul Chamberlin, “A World Restored: Religion, Counterrevolution and the Search for Order in the Middle East” Diplomatic History 32, no. 3 (June 2008): 441-469.
beneficial. During the Cold War many of the Western Sovietologists tended to describe the relations between the Soviet state and Islam as purely repressive and some went as far as to predict Islam to become a serious challenge to the stability of the Soviet rule.⁷⁴ Those predictions seriously underestimated the moderate faction of the Soviet leadership that saw Spiritual Administrations as necessary elements of stability in the Soviet “East”.⁷⁵ Those predictions also completely ignored the cooperation that existed between the Soviet leadership and Islamic authorities in the Third World foreign policy.

In the 1950-60-s Khrushchev started to use Soviet Islam (or its “heritage”) as one of the vehicles of Soviet cultural diplomacy and Soviet foreign policy overall as shown in the works of Masha Kirasirova, Artemy Kalinovsky and Michael Kemper.⁷⁶ Yet by the early 1980s it became to a certain degree a seeming liability. Although there is no evidence that could prove the theories of researchers like Alexander Bennigsen who prophesied the uprisings in the Soviet regions inhabited by the Muslims, the Iranian revolution along with the quagmire in Afghanistan raised the insecurities of the Soviet leadership about Islam.⁷⁷ The ideological worldview never allowed the Soviet leaders to admit that Islam could be a political ideology but in the early 1980s the establishment of the

Islamic republic in Iran and the growing anti-Soviet armed movement under the banner of Islam in Afghanistan forced them to pay more attention to scholarly activity on this matter. Islam became a topic of multidisciplinary conferences organized by the academic institutions and Central Committee departments. While underrating the political potential of Islam, many of the Soviet experts admitted the importance of the “religious factor” and looked for an opportunity to use it to the Soviet interest. These discussions and their proceedings, published for internal use, reveal that the limitations of Soviet ideological thinking were not only the case for the leadership but also for many academic specialists. However it is possible that their unwillingness even to assume the political potential of Islam was the result of self-censorship that, according to Brutents and others, was the widespread case in the Soviet academia. Preparing the notes for the leadership the experts knew what they were expected to write and thus often did not include the parts unwanted by the high-ranked readers. Nevertheless the very discussion and its developments reveal the intellectual pressure that Soviet experts and ideologues experienced from these seemingly new and unexpected movements such as the Iranian revolution.

In the particular case of Iranian revolution I encountered in the papers of the Council for Religious Affairs various attempts to engage with Iranian mullahs through mediation of Azerbaijan’s Shi’a Muftiate in 1979. This episode, along with the fact that most of the Soviet experts on Iran, especially in the Institute of Oriental Studies, were from Azerbaijan, hints that there was an established tradition of maintaining informal and cultural diplomacy with Iran through Soviet Azerbaijan. This has been documented in studies of the early Cold War period—primarily on the 1946 crisis around Iranian Azerbaijan and,

79 Brutents, Tridtsat let na Staroy ploshchadi, 168-169.
80 For more on these attempts and their outcome see Chapter 4 of this dissertation.
later, in several works by Jamil Hasanli.\textsuperscript{81} Similarly the role played firstly by emigrants from Iranian Azerbaijan and secondly the leadership of Soviet Azerbaijan in the internal changes in the Tudeh party leadership in early 1979 is yet understudied although it has been emphasized in some of the abovementioned works. Thus it is important to look beyond Moscow when analyzing the Soviet policy towards Tehran. And although the limitations of access to the documents in the Azerbaijani archives prevented me from including this perspective as a meaningful part to this dissertation, this may be fruitful avenue for further research.

This is not the first attempt to follow the evolution of Soviet reaction to the Iranian revolution. In the 1980s a number of researchers wrote very detailed analyses of the Soviet-Iranian relations during and after the revolution.\textsuperscript{82} Of course the researchers of the 1980s were much more limited in their access to the Soviet sources. But access to sources is not the only factor distinguishing this dissertation. As mentioned above, the Iranian revolution is not the only focus of this thesis, but it serves primarily as a case study for a number of bigger questions about the Soviet Union, its foreign policy and its position in the global Cold War of the late 1970s-1980s. The complex nature of the Iranian revolution and of its driving forces but also its occurrence on the eve of the Soviet war in


Afghanistan makes it a unique case for the analysis of three dimensions mentioned earlier: the ideological worldview of the Soviet leadership and its limitations and biases, the role of the experts and their relations with the leadership and the role of Islam in the Soviet Cold War thinking of the late 1970s-1980s. Through this multidimensional approach I seek not only to analyze Soviet-Iranian relations in the course and the aftermath of the revolution but to make an input in the understanding of the late Soviet foreign policy in the Third World and elsewhere.

**Note on sources.**

The aforementioned research objectives inevitably lead to the necessity to discuss the limitations that exist in the source base for such research. The biggest obstacle for all the researchers of Soviet foreign policy in the 1970s-1980s is the continuing classification of most official Party and government documents related to the foreign policy of this period. The post-1972 protocols of the Politburo sessions, Central Committee Secretariat sessions, the International department and most other Party departments related to the foreign policy predominantly rest in the classified funds of the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI). The documents of the Foreign Ministry are not formally classified but due to the restricted procedure of access to the funds of the Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (AVPRF) I was allowed to work with very few of the truly useful and revealing documents of the ministry and of the Soviet embassy in Tehran. Another grand limitation, especially to the part of the research dedicated to studying the relations between the leadership and the scholarship, was the inaccessibility of many academic archives, despite their formal availability for researchers. My multiple attempts throughout years to access the Archive of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IVRAN) or the Archive of the Institute of World Economy and International relations (IMEMO) did not end successfully. The reasons had nothing to do with issues of secrecy but rather with lack of organizational structure responsible for the
academic archives. Even with the permission of the administrations I had to face the closed doors of the archives due to the permanent or allegedly temporary absence of archivists. Similarly I could not find any relevant information on the fate of personal archives of certain key individuals in the academic community such as Georgy Mirsky, Evgeny Primakov and some others.

These limitations certainly created a significant gap in the source base. Despite the limits on access to the documents in RGANI, I managed to discover in its funds some valuable materials on the Soviet reaction to the events in Iran through different stages of the revolution. These are the files of the Department of Information and Propaganda and other subdivisions of the Central Committee apparatus (Fund 5, Op. 69, 76, 88) and documents from the personal fund of Leonid Brezhnev (Fund 80). The documents from Fund 89 that were declassified by the presidential decree of President Yeltsin in the 1990s in preparation for the trial over the Communist Party were also of great help. Although it is important to remember that these documents were purposefully selected to present the activities of the CPSU in a negative way, they helped me to trace the evolution of Soviet attitude to the Tudeh party of Iran and revealed the form of communication between Moscow and the Tudeh.83 Even more revealing for the nature of Soviet-Tudeh relations and interaction were the documents discovered by Jeremy Friedman in the East German archives. In his article Friedman showed the complex role played by the SED International department as simultaneously the mediator between Moscow and the Tudeh and self-sufficient player in its relations with Iranian communists.84 For the purposes of this research the East German documents serve as additional evidence of the measures taken by the International department in support of the Tudeh and of the ways the

Tudeh managed to influence people in Moscow (e.g. Ulyanovsky). Many of the mentioned documents were quoted or referred by Friedman in his article whereas some of them and some more are available in English translation in Wilson Digital Archive thanks to the effort of Roham Alvandi and Woodrow Wilson Center. Another Wilson Digital Archive collection that helped to uncover the connections between Soviet decisions on Iran to the situation in Afghanistan is the collection on the War in Afghanistan that is based on the documents from RGANI, AVPRF and archives of other countries of the former Socialist Bloc.

The intensity and complexity of the theoretical discussion on the nature of the Iranian revolution and Soviet reaction to it is brilliantly revealed in the proceedings of the editorial board of the main Party organ—Kommunist. A sequence of articles in Kommunist on the situation in Iran served as one of the principal theoretical foundations for Soviet position but the discussions about those articles at the editorial board available in Fund 599 of the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI) reveal the controversial feelings of the Party ideologues on this matter. Soviet attempts to approach the new Islamic leadership of Iran through religious channels at the early stages of bilateral relations are revealed by the papers of Council for Religious Affairs available in the Fund P6991 of the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF).

The lack of documents from the academic archives was the biggest limitation for understanding the nature of relations between the scholarship and the decision-makers. However, it was partially compensated by reading of the academic publications in the so-called “Special bulletins” or other collections marked “For internal use only” (dlya sluzhebnogo polzovaniya). Published in small numbers and circulated solemnly within a limited number of academics, these collections give an idea about the

questions that were on the cutting edge of scholarly interest stimulated from above. In general, the analysis provided in those articles does not differ that much from some of the scholarly publications in the open sources—self-censorship was apparently a much stricter limitation than the external censor. But the set of topics and the timing of their discussion help to clarify the evolution of scholarly interests in connection to the developments in the news from Iran and Afghanistan. The very appearance of first collections dedicated to Islam and its role in the politics in 1980 reveals the growing demand of the Soviet leadership and scholars to understand what was happening in countries like Iran. Also the documents from other academic institutions (such as the US and Canada Studies Institute) ended up in the Archive of the Russian Academy of Science (ARAN) (the very place the IVAN and the IMEMO archives also had to be submitted but never were). Some of these documents proved to be helpful as many of the roundtables and expert discussions on Islam and its role in politics and international relations took place in these havens of relatively free thought.

Another way I have tried to fill the lacunas of the Russian archives was through research in the National Archives of the United Kingdom. Although clearly most of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office documents provide us the external view of British diplomats at Soviet reactions, some gave me insight to private conversations of British diplomats with Soviet diplomats in Tehran or Soviet scholars and representatives in Moscow. And overall the meticulousness of British documents helped me trace the sequence of events in Soviet-Iranian relations as the FCO managed to save special folders on Soviet-Iranian relations for every calendar year. It was thus enormously helpful not only in terms of information obtained but also for structuring my further research.

Apart from the official documents stored in the archives, one of the principal type of sources for this research were oral and published memoirs of diplomats, journalists, intelligence officers. Among the oral interviews I would like to stress the importance of my interview with
Mikhail Krutikhin who at the time of the Iranian revolution was the TASS correspondent in Iran. My interview with him not only provided me with information about the circumstances in which Soviet citizens lived in revolutionary Iran but also hinted on the functioning of the International department and Soviet embassy in Tehran that was very important in the early stages of research. For example, Krutikhin was the first source that helped me to understand the role played by Rostislav Ulyanovsky and the degree of the KGB involvement in the embassy activities. Later much of this information found its confirmation in other sources: documents or memoirs.

The written memoirs, diaries and personal documental archives that were of greatest help for this research objectives were the materials of the former KGB officers: Leonid Shebarshin, Vladimir Kuzichkin, Vasily Mitrokhin; the Party and academic intellectuals: Anatoly Chernyaev, Karen Brutents, Aleksandr Bovin, Georgy Arbatov; the diplomats: Vladimir Vinogradov, Oleg Grinevsky, Georgy Kornienko. All of these publications have their limitations and are in different way problematic. Firstly, all of them have the same problem (from a researcher’s point of view) as every other memoir: they are written retrospectively in a teleological manner and in every case have clear subjective purpose to present events in a certain way. The memoirs of the KGB officers are the most illustrative of this

87 Leonid Shebarshin, Ruka Moskvy. Zapiski nachalnika sovetskoy razvedki (Moscow: Terra, 1996)
90 Aleksandr Bovin, XX vek kak zhizn: Vospominaniya (Moscow: Zakharov, 2003)
91 Georgy Arbatov, Chelovek sistemy: Nabludeniya i razmyshleniya ochevidtsa eyo raspada (Moscow: Vagrius, 2002)
92 Vladimir Vinogradov, Diplomatiya: lyudi i sobytiya: Iz zapisok posla (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1998)
93 Oleg Grinevsky, Tayny Sovetskoy diplomatii (Moscow: Vagrius, 2000)
94 Georgy Kornienko, Kholodnaya voyna: Svidetelstvo eyo uchastnika (Moscow: Mezdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1994).
problem. For Shebarshin, who was the only one among the three who
did not betray his service, it was important to clear himself of what he
considered a failure. His mission to Iran not only did not work out in
terms of building a united front of leftist parties (a task he had from
the International department) but also ended with the defection of
his subordinate—Vladimir Kuzichkin. It was a blot on Shebarshin’s
reputation that significantly influenced his later views of the entire Iran
saga. Another intention of Shebarshin in these memoirs appears to be
the desire to present his boss Yury Andropov as the only sensible and
educated man in the Soviet leadership. This idea is not only evident
in Shebarshin’s memoirs but also in dozens of interviews he gave
to the researchers before his death and that found their reflection in
some of the preceding scholarship. Shebarshin extensively quoted his
conversations with Andropov and it unintentionally helped me to figure
out, for instance, that Andropov (often presented as a pure pragmatic)
advised Shebarshin to read Marx in order to understand better the
situation in Iran: a great example of ideological worldview.

Vladimir Kuzichkin was a defector. This fact alone makes his
memoirs problematic. Clearly one of the purposes of this book was to
present himself as a victim of the KGB and the Soviet system and to wash
off the stigma of betrayal. Kuzichkin’s memoirs were extensively used
by many of the researchers who concentrate on the history of the KGB
and especially on the First Chief Directorate—the KGB subdivision
responsible for espionage. For me it was important that Kuzichkin had
been a KGB agent in Iran, personally responsible for contacts with the
Tudeh and other leftist groups during the revolutionary period. His
insights in the way messages were passed from the Tudeh to Moscow
and money was passed in the opposite direction are also supported by
evidence in the documents and other memoirs. Thus much of his account
on the KGB activities in Iran can be considered credible.

Vasily Mitrokhin, unlike the previous two, was not personally
involved in the KGB activities in Iran. In fact it is wrong to treat his
account as memoirs—it is a supposedly documental source, though
carrying similar problems. Mitrokhin was a KGB archivist that defected to the UK after the fall of the Soviet Union and brought with him his personal archive of KGB documents that he had been collecting for decades copying them from the KGB archive. Most of the documents he managed to bring with him were used in the two volumes that he published with historian Christopher Andrew. Unfortunately, the chapter in the second volume dedicated to the KGB activities in Iran contains very few revelations and did not add up much to what I already knew about the KGB in Iran from other sources. However I managed to work with the original Mitrokhin archive that is now available for the researchers in the Churchill College Archive at the University of Cambridge. This archive contains a thick folder on Iran. Unfortunately, though, it is not a folder full of original documents or their copies. It is filled with a text typewritten by Mitrokhin and that is supposedly based on the original documents. The problem with this text is that many of the facts presented there cannot be confirmed by any alternative sources. For example, Mitrokhin claims that the KGB had planned special activities in order to discredit the Shah of Iran in the eyes of the Western community as early as in 1975. Everything that we know about the Soviet-Iranian relations before the revolution, including documents of the Central Committee, contradicts this assumption. Thus many of Mitrokhin’s claims can only truly be considered credible after the declassification of the KGB archives where we could check the original documents, if they exist. Another problem evident in the Mitrokhin papers is that most probably he was influenced by Kuzichkin’s memoirs. In his text he sometimes openly refers to Kuzichkin, but the attentive reader could notice other places where he almost copies the text from Kuzichkin’s book. Thus I had to be very careful using Mitrokhin papers but along with other sources they

96 GBR/0014/MITN 1/2: Iran, 1988, Typescript volumes compiled by Mitrokhin in Moscow, 1987-1992, The Papers of Vasily Mitrokhin, Churchill College Archives Centre, University of Cambridge (further: MITN 1/2)
served as a great help in the research of the KGB and its role in the Soviet foreign policy.

The problem of memoirs (or sources not connected to personal experience) used in other memoirs is also evident in other cases. For example, I suspect that the diplomat Oleg Grinevsky quoted the materials of the Cold War veterans’ conference in Lysebu, Norway in 1995 and presented it as his personal memory.\(^{97}\) Thus this is another very serious limitation of this type of sources. The memoirs of most diplomats are very reserved and tend to describe more the situation in Iran rather than the Soviet decision-making and their personal role. It is especially true for the memoirs of the Soviet ambassador in Iran—Vladimir Vinogradov. Loyal to the principles of classic diplomacy Vinogradov wrote a book in which told a reader almost nothing about the Soviet diplomatic practice dedicating most of it to his impression and analysis of the Iranian revolution. Nevertheless even in the accounts of this kind I tried to find some details that could be helpful in deconstruction of Soviet decisions and reactions.

One of the most important personal sources used in this research is the diary of Anatoly Chernyaev. A diary as a source has many benefits in comparison to the memoirs. Written in the moment of events it reflects the feelings of the person without long-standing retrospective analysis. And even if parts of Chernyaev’s diary were later edited, it contains priceless material for all researchers of the late Soviet foreign policy. Chernyaev was not responsible for Soviet-Iranian relations but he clearly outlined the structure of communication and processes within the International department. He also mentioned Iran quite a number of times, revealing the differences that existed in the Soviet leadership on how to assess the Iranian revolution. Chernayev also provides character sketches of some of the people responsible for certain aspects of Soviet-Iranian relations: Boris Ponomarev, Rostislav Ulyanovsky. It is important to remember

\(^{97}\) Grinevsky, *Tayny Sovetskoy diplomati*, 101. Compare to: “The Intervention in Afghanistan and the Fall of Détente”, 40
that these sketches are deeply subjective but, again, combined with other sources they help to understand deeper the Soviet foreign policy system and personalities within it.

Lastly, the mass press and thematic journals served as another meter for the Party and government interest in the course of development of the Iranian revolution. The tone of publications in mass newspapers like Pravda and Izvestia is known to many scholars of the Soviet Union since the times of the Cold War as one of the very informative sources on the direction of thought and practical approach at the Soviet top. In addition to that I worked with a number of popular journals for mass readers dealing with the issues of international relations and in particular with the situation in the Foreign East, including Novoe Vremya and Narody Azii i Afriki. The way the events in Iran were presented to the internal reader reveals the evolution of theoretical explanations: from the seeming aspirations for the continuing revolution led by more progressive forces to the stable support of the Islamic republic and its religious “anti-imperialist” leadership and eventually to the virtual disappearance of Iran from the pages of the press following the crush of the Tudeh.

Note on structure.

This thesis is structured in a chronological manner starting from the two chapters that deal with periods preceding the late 1970s. In Chapter One I present the evolution of Soviet ideological thinking and Third World foreign policy conduct from the death of Stalin to the late years of Brezhnev, discussing main actors and institutions involved in decision-making and its support. I dedicate special section of this chapter to discuss the situation in the Soviet scholarship and its connection to power. Another section of this chapter is dedicated to the evolution of Soviet perception of religion within the revolutionary and national-liberation movements in the Third World. Chapter Two is also centered on the preceding periods but with the concentration on the evolution of Soviet-Iranian bilateral relations. This chapter sheds light
on the special status of Iran in Soviet foreign policy in comparison to other southern neighbors of the Soviet Union or countries of the Third World. The foundations of this very special attitude can be traced back to the imperial times or at least to the period of the Russian Civil War. But in this chapter I mostly discuss the period from the Azerbaijan crisis through the Soviet misreading of Mohammed Mosaddeq, failed attempts of rapprochement with Mohammed Reza Shah and finally to the eventual establishment of close, often mutually beneficial, relations since the 1960s. These special relations existing between the Soviet Union and Shah’s Iran serve as an additional explanation for geopolitical concerns within the Soviet leadership with the start of the revolution (though later overwhelmed with combination of doctrinal thinking and new geopolitical opportunities). The following three chapters cover the period from the last pre-revolutionary years to the crush of the Tudeh party and de facto freezing of the Soviet-Iranian relations in 1983. In Chapter Three I analyze Soviet expectation on the perspectives of the Shah’s Iran on the eve of the revolution and the following confusion with the growing turmoil. This chapter shows the level of misunderstanding and lack of scholarly expertise to explain the situation in Iran but also the internal struggle in the ideological worldview of Soviet decision-makers on the choice of the position to be taken by the Soviet Union. Chapter Four is centered on Soviet attempts to make sense of the Islamic republic and build some kind of friendly contact between the USSR and the new revolutionary regime in its first years. This chapter also uncovers the utopian expectations of part of the Soviet establishment to hijack the Iranian revolution and transform it into a pro-Soviet movement. An important part of the chapter is dedicated to the relations between the Soviet Union and the Tudeh party — the modes and level of mutual influence along with the strategies pursued by both sides within their specific models of thinking. Chapter Five puts Soviet relations with the Islamic republic in the framework of bigger international processes primarily Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iran-Iraq war. In this chapter I analyze how the context was enforcing the already existent mistrust of the Soviet Union
in Iran and Soviet gradual abandonment of high expectations of the Iranian revolution. The attempts to present it in the better light started to gradually disappear from public and private discourse of the Soviet leadership leaving space only for the satisfaction with geopolitical gains brought by the revolution. The last chapter of this work (Chapter Six) deals with the period of Soviet-Iranian rapprochement and revival of bilateral relations under Gorbachev. Through this chapter I discuss the foundational shifts of the Soviet foreign policy and the whole system of thinking. With the new generation of leaders the ideological worldview as we knew it under Brezhnev and his lieutenants was gradually withdrawn from the foreign policy. It was substituted by new romanticized ideological vision combined with a more pragmatic approach in building alliances but that would be a discussion for another research to come.
Chapter 1

THE SOVIET UNION
AND THE THIRD WORLD
BY THE END OF THE 1970s

The 1978-79 Iranian revolution raised many hopes and expectations in Moscow, most of which failed to come true. Initially, the Soviet press referred positively to an “anti-imperialist” and “anti-monarchic” progressive movement, but such assessments soon became rare. The Iranian revolution challenged the seemingly stable and well-ordered Soviet system of ideological assessment of the revolutionary movements in the Third World. It could not fit Soviet doctrine but it also did not match the expectations of geopolitical improvement of the situation in the Middle East. The Soviet system of foreign policy making—the ministries, intelligence agencies, party departments, and research institutes which were charged with making sense of the world and enacting policy—had grown in capacity since Stalin’s death, and had dealt with numerous challenges to Soviet ideology posed by the global Cold War. But they still found themselves poorly prepared to deal with the Iranian revolution. In this chapter I analyze the roots and evolution of Soviet foreign policy-making from the first years of the Cold War under the rule of Stalin, through Khrushchev’s redefinition of Soviet foreign policy in the Third World, to Brezhnev’s collective leadership and a new role of the Third World as an arena of the global Cold War in the times of détente between the main adversaries.

By the 1970s, support for post-colonial governments and anti-colonial movements was one of the key elements in how the USSR saw itself and presented itself to the world. Simultaneously the Third World turned into a key factor in Soviet geopolitical considerations. Yet before the mid-1950s Soviet interest in the Third World was limited due to
Stalin’s suspicion of anti-imperialist elites in the decolonizing world. In the 1950s Nikita Khrushchev made a decisive turn in Soviet relations with the Third World, requiring a new ideological approach that redefined not only this specific aspect of Soviet foreign policy but also the way that the Soviet leaders saw their country’s place in the world, the way they wanted it to be seen.

The 20th Party congress in 1956, primarily remembered for Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin’s “cult of personality” also marked the introduction of a new strategy in Soviet relations with the capitalist world—“peaceful coexistence”. From that moment onwards the Soviet Union no longer proclaimed the goal of destroying the capitalist world in an inevitable revolutionary conflict but agreed to coexist and even compete with it (although not reclaiming the Marxist thesis about the continuing class warfare). A radical ideological shift on its own, it also had a number of meaningful consequences. Firstly, this new ideological position contributed to the deterioration of the Soviet-Chinese alliance. Khrushchev’s proclamation of peaceful coexistence was rejected by Mao Zedong, who called the Soviet leaders “capitulationists”, and instead insisted on revolutionary anti-imperialism. As a result, by the end of the Khrushchev era a close ally had become a new adversary. From the doctrinal point of view it was a completely new reality in which the competing socialist revolutionary project was more dangerous in terms of struggle for the souls of the mankind than the capitalist foes. The Third World turned out to be one of the main areas of this competition and thus the Soviet involvement in the Third World affairs was only aggravated by the Sino-Soviet split. Secondly, peaceful coexistence in Europe (although it became relatively peaceful only after Khrushchev’s demise1) went along with the Soviet offensive in the Third World. Peace in Europe and the decolonization wave outside of Europe also

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1 The period of Khrushchev’s rule included at least two major crises in Europe: the 1956 Hungarian uprising and the 1961 Berlin crisis, see: Fursenko and Naftali, Khrushchev’s Cold War, 114-137, 388-408; William Taubman, Khrushchev: the Man and his Era (New York: W. W. Norton &Co., 2003), 270-299, 396-441.
forced Soviet scholars and policymakers to reassess the place of non-European countries within Soviet ideology. The anti-imperialist leaders of the Third World were now considered “progressive”, even though they were not always ready to embark upon the Marxist-Leninist path of development. In turn, this resulted in an introduction of new ideological terms to define such progressive, yet non-socialist countries — “states of national democracy” that took “the non-capitalist path of development”. Thus even after the death of Stalin, the Soviet leadership proved capable of revising the ideological foundations not only of its foreign policy in favor of geopolitical interests, but of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine itself. Moreover, under Khrushchev, the role of the doctrine in foreign policy grew bigger than in the last years of Stalin or the later years of Brezhnev’s collective leadership.

The meaningful role of doctrine was evident with the appearance or reorientation of myriad of research institutions in social sciences and in particular in the foreign policy. The Soviet leadership directly felt the necessity of expertise, as they were no longer willing to accept all the premises of Stalin’s approach to the Third World. But it also meant willingness to continue the revisions of the existing doctrine according to the changing circumstances. In the sphere of Third World foreign policy the need for experts was particularly acute, as the Soviet Union simply lacked professionals who knew something about the countries of the Third World or were at least able to communicate in local languages. This turn to expert knowledge resulted in the formation of a new circle of foreign policy specialists who were willing to provide their expertise and to revise ideological dogmas.² However, with Khrushchev’s ouster the demand for their expert knowledge gradually shrank. Although Brezhnev’s collective leadership continued to pursue the strategy of engagement with the Third World, they mostly operated with the

² Georgy Mirsky, one of the most renowned Soviet Third World experts, remembered that in the mid-1950s he was in the group of young experts working on new theoretical foundations for the changed Soviet policies in the Third World, see: Georgy Mirsky, Zhizn v tryokh epokhakh (Moscow: Letniy Sad, 2001), 187.
doctrinal concepts developed in the Khrushchev’s period, adjusting them accordingly to different circumstances but not making radical changes. Yet the experts did not disappear, and although they had little say in the day-to-day making of foreign policy, their theoretical and empirical work did to a certain degree affect how Soviet policy elites made their decisions.

Nevertheless, the Iranian revolution came as a surprise for both academics and decision makers. Moreover, it soon became clear that the existing Soviet blueprints did not work to explain what was happening in Iran, primarily due to the unusual nature of the driving forces of the Iranian revolution. On the one hand, following the Shah’s overthrow, Iran seemed to get closer to the definition of “a state of national democracy”. But on the other hand religious rule was not among the attributes that Soviet ideologues included in the definition of “a non-capitalist path of development”. However, despite the overall negative perception of religion Soviet reading of Marxist-Leninist theory was not too negative on the existence of religious elements within the anti-imperialist ideologies of the Third World countries as long as it could be explained as a temporary phenomenon. The persistence of religious rule in Iran challenged this temporary acceptance of religious anti-imperialism and thus posed a grave doctrinal problem for the Soviet scholarship (and leadership) to explain the Iranian events in the long run.

Ideology and Soviet relations with the Third World from Stalin to Brezhnev

Soviet strategy towards the Third World in the late years of Stalin’s rule in many ways was a function of Soviet successes and failures in Europe. A politician formed in the age of empires, Stalin believed that the destiny of the world was decided in Europe. The course and results of the Second World War only supported this perception. A student of Marx’s works, Stalin also believed in progressive development and did not expect much from “the backward countries” of the Third World. The
interwar period with the Great depression in the United States and the economic crisis in Europe was rendering the perspective of the revolution in the industrialized part of the world much more realistic. The aftermath of the Second World War, with the Soviet Union emerging from it more influential than ever before, could only strengthen Stalin’s expectations of the European working class to turn against capitalist domination. Yet, as a pupil of Lenin, Stalin was often ready to make compromises about theoretical dogmas for the sake of pragmatic decisions and state interests. The international situation in the interwar period transformed Stalin into a fundamental believer in geopolitics. Unlike orthodox revolutionaries, Stalin used the craft of a statesman, making compromises and seemingly betraying principles in order to defeat his enemies. This approach evidently reached a climax on the eve of the Second World War with the 1939 pact with Hitler, which at the same time illustrated the limits of Stalin’s successes in geopolitics. This type of policies is often attributed as pragmatic opposing the strict ideological approach of the Marxist orthodoxy. But Stalin’s pragmatism never contradicted his overarching ideological goals. The pragmatism of the founding fathers of the Soviet system (both Lenin and Stalin) was always a tool employed for the sake of the eventual victory of ideology. Most importantly, this approach did not vanish with Stalin’s death but, as many other elements engraved in the foundation of the Soviet system, ossified but continued to form the core of the Soviet foreign policy until the last years of the USSR.

In the light of the aforementioned approach, the willingness of the Soviet Union to deal with new “bourgeois-nationalist” regimes in the Third World was very low—be that the Sukarno regime in Indonesia or the young revolutionary regime in Egypt.¹ For Stalin, the leaders of those revolutionary regimes were more concerned about preserving their privileges with regard to the rest of the population than caring about a truly anti-imperialist agenda, not to mention the global proletarian

revolution. Thus for Stalin the Third World was not only secondary but also unreliable as all of those new leaders had their own agendas, despite their alleged common denominator: anti-imperialism. More importantly, their agendas were rarely Marxist, and even more rarely they were interested in the Soviet socio-economic experience as an exemplary model.

Certainly there were meaningful exceptions for those countries of the Third World in which the communists had resources and support to win the struggle for power. The most important example is China, which had been one of the first set-backs for the Comintern in the 1920s but by the late 1940s had become the most promising asset of the communist movement in Asia. Yet even there Stalin’s skepticism was evident in the way he treated Chinese communists, showing his open public support only when they had already achieved victory over the Guomindang. It fits into a general ideological paradigm of Stalin’s later years—Soviet relations with the Guomindang were well established and suited the Soviet Union (i.e. the communist idea) well. Untimely expression of support to the Chinese communists could undermine this stability whereas the loss of Mao Zedong and his comrades could have been accepted as a necessary evil.

Nonetheless, the death of Stalin became a watershed in the Soviet approach to the Third World, but this ideological turn took time. Initially, the collective Party leadership, and primarily Vyacheslav Molotov, once again responsible for foreign policy after a period of disgrace in the last years of Stalin’s rule, continued to see the Third World as a secondary arena in the Cold war. This perception is evident in the case of the Soviet reaction to Mohammed Mosaddeq’s attempts to nationalize oil industry

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6 Radchenko, Two Suns in Heavens, 1-22.
in Iran and the coup against him in 1953, a case that will be addressed in more detail in the following chapter. However, with Khrushchev’s ascent to power the changes in the Soviet attitude about the opportunities of the Third World became increasingly visible.

These changes went along with the developments in the Third World itself. Not only the Chinese revolution but also the wave of decolonization forced Khrushchev and his circle to reassess the Soviet view of the Third World. By the time of Stalin’s death, several nationalist and anti-imperialist revolutions took over the ideological agenda of the world revolution that could not be explained in the orthodox Marxist terms of class and industrial development alone.7 Most of the Third World movements, however, fielded discourses of nation and race which had not been completely alien to Soviet ideology despite always being secondary to the discourse of class; the leaders of revolutionary Russia, having overthrown an empire, had engaged with them during their struggle against Tsarism, throughout the civil war, and in the process of state building.8

Unlike his predecessor, Khrushchev was much more active in travelling both abroad and within the Soviet Union. The new Soviet leader’s mobility not only helped him in the internal Party struggles but also became a tool in his international relations. A few months before the 20th Party congress Khrushchev, accompanied by Soviet Premier Nikolay Bulganin, visited India, Burma and Afghanistan in a month-long trip. Those visits, hardly imaginable under Stalin, caused a kind of euphoria in the Soviet leadership about the potential of the developing world. It seemed now open for the victorious socialist offensive that would bring

7 For more on this shift in the revolutionary movement see the Introduction to: Friedman, Shadow Cold War, 1-24.
“the Foreign East” to the Soviet sphere of influence and thus would lead to the defeat of capitalism.⁹

Ivan Maysky, the academician and former Soviet ambassador to the United Kingdom, expressed his view of the upcoming triumph in his personal letter to Khrushchev and Bulganin after their return. Maysky claimed that the situation in Asia and Africa was more favorable for “the struggle for global domination of socialism” than in Europe or the United States. According to Maysky, with the loss of colonies the imperialist countries would enter the phase of crisis that would result in the sequence of socialist revolutions in the capitalist world. “Already in the 1930s,” Maysky wrote to Khrushchev and Bulganin: “when I worked in London as Soviet ambassador, I came to conclusion that masses of the British proletariat would really take the socialist path only when England lost its empire or, at least, significant parts of it. Now this moment is coming”.¹⁰

The Soviet Union was also entering the Third World as a developmental model and a source of aid. In order to make this claim more appealing, the Soviet leadership started to present its Central Asian republics as a positive example of former colonies that overcame backwardness and legacy of colonialism with the Soviet developmental model. This project not only allowed the Central Asians to become a part of the international politics but also served as a self-convincing ideological example for Khrushchev and his circle.¹¹ Yet many in the Third World still saw Central Asia as an example of Soviet colonialism (or at least possession of colonial heritage). This was among the reasons a Soviet delegation was not invited to the 1955 Bandung Conference (also known as the first large-scale Asian-African or Afro-Asian conference)

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⁹ Hopf, *Reconstructing the Cold War*, 236
¹¹ For more on Central Asia as a developmental model see Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of socialist development*. 
that became one of the foundational events for the solidarity movement of decolonizing nations. The Soviet leadership and personally Nikita Khrushchev saw this event as a great opportunity for the Soviet Union to present itself to the Third World in the role of a champion of the anti-colonial movement. Thus, when Soviet representatives were not invited to participate in the Bandung conference, the Soviet leadership was hugely disappointed. The representatives of the People’s Republic of China and personally the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai were by contrast welcome in Bandung and made an effort to present China as a potential leading force of the anti-imperialist movement.

Bandung was among the factors that motivated Soviet leadership to reassess the ideological foundations for their Third World strategy. For Khrushchev, the inconsistency between the Marxist-Leninist theory and his practical policy was an issue that needed to be resolved. Thus such a serious turn in the foreign policy could not be made without adjustments to the doctrine. Supporting newly emerging Third World regimes hardly fit with orthodox Marxist theory. The majority of decolonizing states were “backward” economically. According to Marxist classification most of them could be marked as feudal or traditional, lingering on the pre-industrial stage of the socio-economic development. Marxist theory would assume the necessity for those countries to pass through the capitalist stage of development that would include industrialization and the emergence of a proletariat. Only after that turn to socialism could be made.

Here, like in many other aspects of his policy, Khrushchev proclaimed this doctrinal shift a ‘return to the Leninist path’. Although initially Lenin saw Russia as “the weakest link in the capitalist chain” and the revolution in Russia had to be followed by revolutions in industrialized countries, practice proved this prediction incorrect. At that point Lenin had developed one of his own bypasses of orthodox Marxism.

12 For more details on the Bandung Conference see: Christopher J. Lee, Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010), 1-42.
Basing his new theory on the experience of the Russian Civil War, when temporary alliances with local nationalists of “the oppressed nations” proved efficient, Lenin charged the newly founded Comintern with a new strategy. That strategy included promotion of nationalist revolutions in the imperial colonies. Seeing imperialism as a global phenomenon directly derived from the capitalist domination, Lenin considered anti-imperialism a perfect tool to undermine capitalism and eventually launch an anti-capitalist proletarian world revolution.\(^\text{13}\)

“The non-capitalist path of development” (nekapitalisticheskiy put razvitiya) was one of the concepts developed in the early 1920s when the Comintern adopted the abovementioned strategy. The foundation of the non-capitalist path of development theory (if we try to explain it in the simplified way) represented the adaptation of Lenin’s ideas about the compression of the capitalist formation in the Marxist theory of social development up to its complete abundance. The national liberation movements, according to the theory, could continue to exploit the revolutionary potential of national revolutions, develop it, and eventually transform their revolutions into socialist ones, bypassing the development stage of capitalism. The concept of “the non-capitalist path of development” was gradually abandoned under Stalin along with the overall disappointment with the potential of the revolution in “the Foreign East”.\(^\text{14}\)

The revival of the concept in Khrushchev’s time was neatly connected to the USSR’s aspirations for a new role in the international arena. As shown by David Engerman, the introduction of the non-capitalist path of development was a result of the encounter of the Soviet leaders and

\(^{13}\) Friedman, The Shadow Cold War, 8.

\(^{14}\) It can be argued that in the 1920-30s this concept never really had practical meaning. Most of the references to it as actively engaged with in this earlier period come from the 1950s-1960s when setting it with a new political meaning Khrushchev’s leadership needed to mark it as the one invented by Lenin and abandoned by Stalin. See David Engerman, “Learning from the East. Soviet Experts and India in the Era of Competitive Coexistence”, Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East 33, no. 2 (2013): 232.
economic scholars with the reality of the Third World, primarily with the case of India. Unable to determine the Marxist stage of development for India and other Third World countries, Soviet economists and ideologues arrived at a concept that could support the new political orientation of the Soviet leaders and smooth the controversy between orthodox Marxist-Leninist theory and the realities of the contemporary Third World. After all, communism remained the same destination for all—only some of the progressive forces were taking a special path to it, different from Soviet socialism but yet different from capitalism.15

In 1960, new theoretical concepts were presented in the Moscow declaration at the Forum of the Communist and Labor parties. The declaration was centered around two conceptual terms: “the non-capitalist path of development” and “state of national democracy” (gosudarstvo natsionalnoy demokratii). The “state of national democracy” was supposed to be ruled by the wide coalition of political forces that included proletariat, peasantry, “democratic intelligentsia” and “national bourgeoisie”. The program was further developed in 1961 when at the Twenty-Second Party congress the non-capitalist path of development was presented as a requirement for the decolonizing states to avoid the continuity of dependence on the former metropolis.

According to the Soviet doctrine, from that moment on formal independence should not have satisfied the national liberation movements any longer. Instead, true independence had to be built on socio-economic transformation from within, which would bring deeper changes and allow the newly decolonized country to opt for the non-capitalist path of development. The true conceptual problem in this new theoretical framework was to distinguish whether the forces leading the decolonizing state were actually taking it towards the non-capitalist path of development or not. The circumstances of each case were so specific that the model had to be adjusted to every case individually. This approach caused the appearance of

numerous classifications developed by Soviet scholars who tried to build a hierarchy of decolonizing states based on the economic and social circumstances, industrialization stage, and size of proletariat. Despite the concept growing heavier and more complex with every new case, Soviet theoreticians continued to insist on the correctness of the model. But following the sequence of failures of Khrushchev’s attempts to successfully align with Third World leaders, this theoretical cover more and more often started to be used to explain geopolitical moves of the Soviet leadership. Yet as in Stalin’s times, the grand ideological goals never disappeared from the horizon.

Khrushchev’s initial attempts of attracting the decolonizing countries of Asia and Africa to the Soviet Union’s course seemed promising. The 1956 Suez crisis provided the Soviet leadership with an opportunity to be actively involved in the Third World problems and to demonstrate its renewed commitment to the anti-imperialist struggle. Although Khrushchev initially took a moderate stance, with the escalation of the conflict the Soviet leader could not help but “teach the imperialists a lesson” and used “the nuclear argument” to make his point. The Soviet political presence in the Middle East was thus established. Another decolonizing region that attracted the attention of the Soviet leadership was Western and Central Africa. The decolonization wave started in the late 1950s and culminated in 1960. In some of the newly independent African states this created a quest for modernization. Following the departure of colonial powers, some of the new African leaders were eager to build modern states which in their view required rapid developmental projects. The Soviet Union represented an alternative path to modernity not connected to the dependency on technologies, resources and capitals of the former colonial masters. This perception was neatly connected to the development of the neocolonial theory. Its author and simultaneously

16 Friedman, The Shadow Cold War, 74.
17 Fursenko and Naftali, Khrushchev’s Cold War, 57-113; Zubok, A Failed Empire, 109-119.
the leader of newly independent Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, was among the African leaders that Khrushchev was trying to charm with the Soviet developmental assistance. Along with Nkrumah in the late 1950s the leader of Guinea, Ahmed Sekou Touré, also got engaged in the cooperation with the Soviets.\(^\text{19}\)

However by 1960 the situation in the Third World started to turn more and more unfavorable for the Soviets. The promising ascent to power of pro-Soviet Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba of Congo resulted in an armed crisis and a civil war in which Lumumba was murdered and his forces defeated. In 1963, the government of Abd al-Karim Qasim in Iraq (known for his sympathy to the USSR) was overthrown in a Ba’athist coup. Few years after Khrushchev’s resignation Nkrumah was overthrown, Sekou Touré expelled Soviet advisors and started a new rapprochement with France, Nasser got involved in the series of conflicts with Israel, which resulted in a disastrous defeat in 1967. Overall Khrushchev’s strategy of courtship of the Third World turned out to be a failure. This at least became one of the principal accusations against him at the 1964 October plenum when he was ousted and forced to retire. In one of the versions of report that had been prepared by the plotters but that was not published before 1995, Khrushchev’s policy in Africa and the Middle East was marked as naïve and impractical:

> After they ate what we gave them, the leaders of some of these countries turned away from us [...] In Guinea the Soviet Union helped to build the aerodrome, the plants, the radio station [...] All that is gone now! The so-called socialist Sekou Touré kicked us out and did not even allow us to use an aerodrome that we had built for flights to Cuba. In Iraq we made a bet on Qasim and launched big development projects there [...] whereas

soon Qasim was ousted and open enemies of the USSR came to power and drowned the Iraqi Communist party in blood.20

Another point of criticism against Khrushchev at the 1964 October plenum was the deterioration of the Sino-Soviet relations in the early 1960s.21 Already in Bandung it had become evident that China appealed as a better fit for the role of the leader of the anti-imperialist movement to the former colonies. Its long history of semi-colonial dependence and anti-imperialist struggle combined with non-European origins made the PRC a natural example for many of the postcolonial states.

In the circumstances of increasing decolonization and violence that accompanied it in the early 1960s, Mao Zedong was turning more and more hostile to the Soviet policy of “peaceful coexistence” with the capitalist world. By the early 1963 the smoldering conflict turned into an open fire following the outcome of two major conflicts of 1962. For Mao, Khrushchev’s refusal to uncompromisingly take the Chinese side in the border conflict with India was a betrayal of the Communist unity that was unmasking Soviet capitulationism portrayed as “peaceful coexistence”. Mao’s perception was only strengthened by the end of 1962 when Khrushchev gave in to the American pressure and cancelled the placement of Soviet missiles on Cuba.22 Starting from 1963 the Chinese launched a massive propaganda campaign directed primarily at the countries of Asia and Africa, blaming the Soviet Union for capitulationism and claiming the inability of the Soviets to lead global anti-imperialist movement. The growing split between two communist powers brought substantial damage to the Soviet reputation in the Third World. The Chinese successfully depicted the Soviets as fearful of war

21 For the Sino-Soviet conflict over the course of the global revolution see to Friedman, The Shadow Cold War, 1-24. See also Radchenko, Two Suns in Heavens and Luthi, The Sino-Soviet Split.
22 Friedman, The Shadow Cold War, 60-62.
and thus ready to give up the ideals of global revolution and even collude with imperialists in order to save peace.\textsuperscript{23}

The ouster of Khrushchev changed little in the dynamics of the Sino-Soviet relations. Able to reject “peaceful coexistence”, Brezhnev’s collective leadership yet was not willing to do it. Blaming Khrushchev for his mistakes in the foreign policy, Brezhnev’s Politburo in practice took it even further down the road of peaceful coexistence with the West, yet with a distinct exception of the Third World where the confrontation was only reinforced. Despite the early attempts to reach a rapprochement with Mao, by 1965 the new leaders of the Soviet Union came to conclusion that the split with the Chinese was not temporary. Much of the rest of the 1960s Soviet foreign policy in the Third World was sharpened against the Chinese challenge with a strategic goal to return to the Soviet Union the status of the leader of the anti-imperialist movement.

The split with the Chinese and the following struggle for leadership in the Third World marked a watershed between Khrushchev’s romanticism of new theoretical concepts and the return to geopolitics as the main tool to achieve ideological goals under Brezhnev. From the early 1970s the state interests of the Soviet Union again defined the core of the Soviet strategy to achieve ideological victory in the Cold War. Among other, it was the reason to accept détente. While showing up at cordial meetings with President Nixon and proclaiming slogans for peace, Brezhnev and others were careful to secure their alliances in the Third World and to reassure their counterparts there of the continuing loyalty of the Soviet Union to the anti-imperialist movement.\textsuperscript{24} Thus, ideology functioned on two levels: the ideology of

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, 105-115.

\textsuperscript{24} This is not to say that the Soviet leadership sought to undermine the détente. On the contrary, the détente was in many ways Brezhnev’s personal project that he personally fought for overcoming the conservative resistance in the apparatus. See: Vladislav Zubok, “The Soviet Union and the détente of the 1970s”, \textit{Cold War History} 8, no. 4 (2008): 427-447.
slogans and reassurances that covered geopolitical decisions in public sphere and the grand ideology of confrontation with capitalism that was realized through geopolitical measures. In a way it represented the new iteration of the two-faced revolutionary imperial ideology inherited from Stalin’s times.\textsuperscript{25}

The developments in the Third World, such as the growing passion for economic struggle against neocolonialism in the wave of the growing economic difficulties seemed to prove the efficiency of Soviet geopolitical moves. There were reasons for the Soviet leaders to be optimistic about the potential of the liberated countries of Asia and Africa. In Iraq a new coup in 1968 under the leadership of the General Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr overthrew pro-Nasserist government of President Arif. Al-Bakr’s right hand and then Vice-president Saddam Hussein soon started to gather power and turned into the most influential figure in the Iraqi politics. Gaining the reputation of a progressive politician, Hussein soon engaged in the course of industrial reforms, expanded control over oil revenues and by 1972 signed a Treaty of Friendship with the Soviet Union. Similarly, in neighboring Syria General Hafez al-Assad in 1970 staged a coup and became the new Syrian President. Soon the military cooperation between Syria and the Soviet Union intensified—the Syrian Mediterranean port of Tartus was transformed into a Soviet naval base. In 1969 in Somalia Major General Mohammed Siad Barre overthrew the Republican regime following the assassination of President Aburashid Ali Shermarke. Although since 1960 the Soviet Union entertained friendly relations with Somalia, the bilateral relations of the countries began to flourish only after the 1969 coup. The same year the construction of the Soviet naval base in Berbera was completed. The Soviet navy now had access to the deep waters of the Indian Ocean.\textsuperscript{26} This revolutionary trend in the Middle

\textsuperscript{25} Zubok, A Failed Empire, 192-226.

East was intensified with the departure of last British troops from Aden and the decolonization of South Yemen. The newly established People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen was a significant factor in the future Soviet decisions to get involved in the insurgencies in the Horn of Africa. In the neighboring Oman the rebels in the Eastern province of Dhofar were also supported by the Soviet Union through the People’s Democratic Republic Yemen.27

All of these developments, especially those in Syria, Iraq and Somalia, also contributed to a positive assessment of the role of the army in the Third World. 28 Yet the early 1970s brought a number of disappointments for the Soviet leadership that came from army generals in different regions of the Third World. In 1972, two years after the sudden death of “the big friend of the Soviet Union” Gamal Abdel Nasser, the new Egyptian President Anwar Sadat ordered to cancel the military cooperation between Egypt and the Soviet Union and expelled all Soviet military advisors. Even more bitter was a disaster in Latin America—the Pinochet coup in Chile. Most of the abovementioned new allies of the Soviet Union had come to power as a result of a coup or a revolution. By contrast, the socialist President of Chile Salvador Allende had been democratically elected in 1970. Chile thus represented an especially important example of a “state of socialist orientation” with a dominant pro-Soviet leadership “widely supported by Chilean masses”. Thus, the overthrow of Allende came as a shock for the Soviets from both doctrinal and geopolitical points of view. Later, during the Iranian revolution the Soviets expected the United States to defend their Middle Easter ally the same way they defended their interests in Chile. Thus the Chilean


coup had a tremendous influence on the Cold War thinking of the Soviet leadership.\textsuperscript{29}

Yet despite the unfortunate developments of 1972-73, by the mid-1970s a positive trend for the Soviet leadership seemed to develop even more rapidly than the Soviets could have expected. The successful establishment of Marxist-Leninist regimes in the former Portuguese colonies of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau following the Carnation revolution in Portugal shaped the euphoric perception among the Soviet foreign policy makers—that the Third World was finally building Soviet-style socialism.\textsuperscript{30} The Ethiopian revolution and the establishment of Marxist-Leninist regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam immediately resulted in a rapid rapprochement between the new Ethiopian leader and the Soviet Union. Moreover, when in 1977-78 another Soviet ally, Mohammed Siad Barre of Somalia, started a conflict with Ethiopia over the contested border region of Ogaden, the Soviet leadership eventually decided to side with a new Ethiopian regime.\textsuperscript{31}

Acquiring new allies in Asia and Africa, the Soviet Union was promoting its geopolitical interests far beyond the European theatre of confrontations with the capitalist West. The confrontation itself was in the period of détente, thus the geopolitical achievements in the Third World also served as a showcase of victorious steps of Marxism-Leninism and other anti-imperialist ideologies. At least the staff of the CPSU International department was spending months and years to present it this way. Yet to what extent these theoretical constructions influenced the decision-making process?

\textsuperscript{29} See more on the importance of the Chilean experience for the Soviet assessment of the Iranian events in Chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation.


In fact Brezhnev’s collective leadership showed a stunning continuity with the pre-Khrushchev’s years in the way it arrived at foreign policy decisions. Odd Arne Westad rightly compared the foreign policy system created under Stalin to a massive edifice of ministries, secret services, experts, that Stalin himself never used in full, activating one or another part of it for a specific issue. Amazingly, twenty-five years later this hierarchical pyramid was still in place and fully functional. 32 Thus it is difficult for a historian today to deconstruct the functions of one or another element within this structure—as it was never intended to have a strict division of responsibilities. Since the 1970s this complex system of different foreign policy institutes was often functioning as a decoration for the decisions of a new collective Stalin—the Politburo. Yet it was still not a monolith construction that consisted of different people with different perceptions of the foreign policy.

**Soviet foreign policy institutions and the Third World**

The only institution that was formally responsible for Soviet Foreign Policy was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs headed by Andrey Gromyko. Yet in practice its functions were often duplicated or supplemented by other organs. Among them stood out the International Department of the Central Committee led by Boris Ponomarev. Responsible for the relations with the International Communist Movement, the International department had clandestine contacts with the pro-Soviet and other non-governmental groups abroad, whereas the Ministry conducted its policy through the official channels. After the Hungarian uprising in 1956, the Politburo made a decision to form another special department of the Central Committee in order to maintain relations with the fraternal parties of the Socialist Bloc. Thus the 2nd International (or “fraternal”) department was formed. For ten years, from 1957 to 1967, it was headed

by Yury Andropov, the future head of the KGB and later the CPSU Secretary General.

The political importance of the International departments was often exaggerated by the American sovietologists in the atmosphere of the Cold War. Ponomarev, Andropov and their deputies were claimed to be the secret masterminds of the Soviet foreign policy, having the KGB and the Foreign Ministry in their pocket. Ponomarev’s deputy Anatoly Chernyaev described this trend in his diary in the following way:

[Vadim] Zagladin sent me the chapter of the new big work of [Leonard] Shapiro—it is about the CPSU.\(^33\) The chapter is dedicated to the role of the International department of the Central Committee. Although Shapiro is their biggest Sovietologist and Kremlinologist, in general, all of it is nonsense. Unbelievable exaggeration of the department’s role—all the way to claiming that we develop all the foreign policy ideas, that Foreign Ministry does not have its own voice, that we choose all the cadres for the foreign policy, and on top of everything they “tremble” before us and not before anyone else. Ponomarev’s role is also incredibly exaggerated and is absolutely unbelievable. However, from the point of view of “scholarly logics”—i.e. the biography of Boris Nikolaevich, it seems to them that it makes sense. They understand nothing about us!\(^34\)

Although we do not want to repeat the mistakes of Shapiro and others, it is important to stress that the International department was the leading institute in adjustment of the theoretical concepts inherited from the Khrushchev’s times to the contemporary foreign events, especially in the Third World. Perhaps, its role and influence in decision making process was indeed overestimated. However, we should as well not underestimate the weight of the International department as a center that accumulated expert knowledge. Ponomarev and Andropov did not rely

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\(^{34}\) Chernyaev, *Sovmestniy Iskhod*, 270.
only on the external experts—they preferred to hire to their departments those *apparatchiks* who possessed not only communist conscience and loyalty but also expertise. Almost all the employees of the department had a doctoral degree and many of them were the recognized specialists in studying one or another region or discipline. The International departments stood out from the line of other departments, where the Party record was more important than the expertise or the knowledge of the foreign language.\(^{35}\)

The main brain power of the department was concentrated in groups of consultants—relatively young experts often with the academic background who were attached to one or another sector. Groups of consultants were established during Khrushchev’s Thaw when fresh and not dogmatic view of the world was valued.\(^{36}\) Many of these consultants were members of the war generation, having either fought in the Second World War or lived through it. This experience, combined with the spirit of the 20\(^{th}\) Party congress, created a unique environment in which these young men were formed. This environment was supported by the spirit of internationalism and freedom that many of the consultants experienced working in Prague for the journal *Problemy mira i sotsializma* under the editor-in-chief Alexey Rumyantsev in the late 1950s.\(^{37}\) The belief in the necessity of reforms and the atmosphere of international exchange of ideas were characteristic for the worldview of these people. What distinguished them from both conservatives and dissidents was their true belief in the ideals of socialism and passionate willingness to be drivers of change in order to transform a Stalinist empire into a cradle of “socialism with a human face”. Marxism-Leninism for them was not an empty cover for *realpolitik* but rather

\(^{35}\) Anatoly Chernyaev, *Moya zhizn i moyo vremya* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1995), 240.


a rule book that could be adjusted accordingly to the course of the reforms. Yet by the time most of them reached the supposed position of influence their expertise and passion for reforms was largely not in demand anymore. Educated and prepared under Khrushchev, many of these analysts, thinkers, scholars, philosophers and experts of other kinds could not reach the decision-makers with their ideas and proposals. On the contrary they were often tasked to find explanations for the decisions already made.\textsuperscript{38}

Some of the consultants later became Ponomarev’s deputies. Vadim Zagladin, Karen Brutents and Anatoly Chernyaev all started their careers as consultants in the early 1960s. Some of the others moved back to academic work in the research institutes. For example, Georgy Arbatov, who had worked as a consultant at the Andropov’s 2\textsuperscript{nd} International department, later founded and headed the US and Canada Studies Research Institute maintaining his influential connections in the Central Committee. In the 1960s many of the abovementioned experts also joined a special pool of speechwriters for Brezhnev. Not being experienced in the international affairs, Brezhnev initially preferred to have his public statements prepared by the “enlightened” intellectuals from the International departments.\textsuperscript{39} The group was gathering regularly at Brezhnev’s residence in Zavidovo. There the young specialists, many of whom had already known each other from Prague, worked together in a narrow circle alongside the Secretary General.

In this group Aleksandr Bovin stood out as the closest speechwriter to Brezhnev. He was probably the best example of a Soviet expert who had an opportunity to do and say a little more than anyone else due to his close relations with the Secretary General. Being Brezhnev’s main speechwriter on the international matters and a shestidesyatnik in spirit, Bovin was indeed the favorite of the country’s leader. He was spending

\textsuperscript{38} English, \textit{Russia and the Idea of the West}, 117-158.

\textsuperscript{39} English, \textit{Russia and the Idea of the West}, 117-158; Zubok, \textit{A Failed Empire}, 205.
weeks in Zavidovo during which he was always around Brezhnev, participating in speech readings, discussions on the drafts and less formal pass-times—primarily Brezhnev’s favorite ones, i.e. hunting. This closeness to the leader allowed Bovin and other experts from the Zavidovo circle to believe that they had an influence on the decision-making process. Many of them remembered that changing a word or a sentence to a more moderate or “anti-Stalinist” tone in a speech was a small victory for them. But this level of influence also shows how powerless they truly were in the policy formation process. They were needed to present the world with a set of words to explain the decisions made at the Politburo, where their level influence was extremely low.

As a journalist and a public figure, Bovin also possessed a certain degree of freedom and independence, often expressing publicly the views of “the Party intellectuals”—most of which could usually be expressed only in private gatherings with a permission of higher officials. Working in the late 1970s-1980s as a journalist, he was one of the few Soviet experts who published a number of very remarkable articles in press analyzing the Soviet view of the situation in Iran and Afghanistan. His articles on Iranian revolution, which represented the views of certain groups within the Soviet leadership, will be discussed in the following chapters. Some of the Soviet diplomats who worked in Tehran remembered that every time a new article by Bovin appeared, it caused a furious reaction by the Soviet ambassador Vladimir Vinogradov.

40 For Bovin’s account on his “influential position” see: Bovin, XX vek kak zhizn, 242.
Rostislav Aleksandrovich Ulyanovsky, the deputy head of the International department responsible for a broad region that included India, Iran and Afghanistan, requires special attention as he was the key person in relations with the Tudeh party of Iran and in the formulation of the Soviet ideological position in reaction to the Iranian revolution. There are not many sources on his early life and career apart from his own memoirs, published only once in the last year of his life.\(^43\) It is also difficult to analyze Ulyanovsky’s role in the department relying on the memories of his colleagues. Chernyaev in his diaries mentioned Ulyanovsky only infrequently and always in a negative context. In the part of the diary with Chernyaev’s reaction to Leonard Shapiro’s book, the author paid special attention to the description of Ulyanovsky’s role in the book:

…They write about Ulyanovsky—that is another proof that they are completely unaware of the real situation and functioning of our department. Neither Shaposhnikov, nor myself are mentioned, although I had a very direct relation to what they read in B.N.’s [Boris Nikolaevich (Ponomarev) — D.A.] writings. I have to admit it wounded my pride. Yes! Here it is more important how you “appear”, not what you “mean”. For example, Ulyanovsky does nothing in our department and does not have any weight but he appears in Pravda every month…\(^44\)

Chernyaev obviously did not like Ulyanovsky and considered him “an idler and a scoundrel”. We should not forget Ulyanovsky had

\(^{43}\) Rostislav Ulyanovsky, “Iz prozhitykh let. Memuary”, Vostok, no. 3 (1993): 124-145; Rostislav Ulyanovsky, “Iz prozhitykh let. Memuary (okonchanie), Vostok, no. 4 (1993): 134-151. Moreover these memoirs are very tendentious and a significant part of it is the description of the author’s Gulag experience — the period of writing plays its role — 1992-1993 is the period when the Russian book market was flooded with the descriptions of personal experience during the Stalin’s terror. The other part of the memoirs represents a Party autobiography rather than the attempt to analyze a personal life experience. “The author’s position is often hardly distinguishable from the position of the Central Committee” — wrote then the editor-in-chief of Vostok Leonid Alaev in his introduction to the publication.

\(^{44}\) Chernyaev, Sovmestniy iskhod, 270.
a different life experience than most of his colleagues in the department. Born in 1904, Ulyanovsky started his scholarly and party career in the Comintern of the 1930s when most of the “young intellectuals” of the 1960s were too young to even go to a primary school. As a researcher he happened to become one of the first Soviet specialists in Indian studies. In 1934 he was the first to translate and publish the autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi. A year before that he wrote an important study on the “objectively revolutionary role” of Gandhi. In 1935 Ulyanovsky was arrested, accused of participation in a Trotskyist organization and sentenced to five years in labor camps. In later interviews he connected his arrest to his positive analysis of Gandhi as at that period Stalin personally polemicized against Gandhi and those like him. The arrest must have had a huge influence on Ulyanovsky’s personality. Even after the end of his term in the labor camps, he was not allowed to return to his scholarly career, and had to wait until the mid-1950s to defend his dissertation that had been ready shortly before his arrest. Yet Georgy Mirsky remembered that being an intelligent and educated person, Ulyanovsky was from the cohort of people who were ironically called nedosidevshie — the ones who “understood and learned nothing” from their imprisonment. Mirsky remembered that even after his retirement Ulyanovsky did not allow himself and those around him to criticize Stalin.

These details of Ulyanovsky’s biography can help us understand his later position as a deputy head of the International department. His history of belief in national-liberation leaders and movements dated back to the interwar period. Being a firm believer in the Marxist-Leninist doctrine, Ulyanovsky was looking for theoretical explanations in favor of anti-imperialist movements. His stubborn support of the Iranian revolution, even when many in the Soviet leadership had given up the expectations to draw Iran into the Soviet sphere of influence, had its roots in his early career. Ulyanovsky was among the authors of “the

46 Mirsky, Zhizn v tryokh epokhakh, 176.
non-capitalist path of development” theory. He remained its supporter until the very last days of his life. Even in 1992, when the Soviet Union had already become a memory, he continued to promote the progressive nature of “the non-capitalist path” in his memoirs. Ulyanovsky certainly had his own ideas of how the changes in the Third World were to develop and in the following chapters his ideas about the perspectives of the Iranian revolution will play an important role in explanation of the Soviet position. Yet similarly to his younger colleagues, professor Ulyanovsky (he preferred to sign his writings this way) had limited influence on the Politburo. However, his position in the bureaucratic hierarchy of the Central Committee apparatus still offered him a handful of formal and informal channels of influence. In case of the Iranian revolution he was also a key figure in communications with the Tudeh party and even managed at certain points to impose the Tudeh vision of the situation in Iran on the leadership but these periods were never long-lasting.

Active positions of high-ranked bureaucrats such as Rostislav Ulyanovsky show that the real International department was far from the image of the oasis of liberalism as it is often presented. However what made it different from the rest of the Party apparatus was that it was one of the few institutions within the Soviet leadership that absorbed many of the foreign policy and regional experts produced under Khrushchev. Khrushchev’s reforms introduced the expert community to become a part of the foreign policy system and it was different from the times of Stalin. Not all of them ended up to pursue the career in the International department but through the connections acquired on their educational and career path they formed a privileged and well interconnected community. In the following section I will try to look into the relations between this community and the decision makers and make an attempt to define the role of scholars and other experts in the decision-making process by the late 1970s.

47 Ulyanovsky, Iz prozhitykh let (okonchanie), 148.
48 See Chapter 4 of this dissertation for details.
Soviet scholarship and the role of expert knowledge in Soviet decision-making

In making decisions on Iran, or any country outside the socialist bloc, the Politburo could rely on several groups of experts: diplomats, journalists, intelligence operatives, and academic experts working in research institutions. How much access any one of these individuals had to decision-makers depended on their institutional affiliation in two ways: first, in terms of their immediate access to information about current events (and also the extent to which they could operate within Iran) and second, the extent to which their information could reach the leadership. As we will see, academic experts often spent their entire careers studying the country but were not well placed to shape decision making directly, while some intelligence officials or journalists could immediately inform the leadership about a quickly changing situation even if their knowledge about the country was more superficial. Most of these individuals, however, shared an educational background and often other social and professional ties that informed how they approached the study of contemporary Iran.

Under Khrushchev, the government had turned again to reviving institutionalized expert knowledge for domestic and foreign policymaking, a development that affected almost all fields of social science. It was a sign of the times—sending aid and specialists to the decolonizing countries was not enough to detach the former colonies from their colonial masters. The colonial powers had centuries-long experience of interaction with the locals and studying their culture. The Soviet Union lacked this cast of professionals that spoke local languages or studied local cultures. Despite long Russian Imperial tradition of ethnographical studies, in the mid-1950s Anastas Mikoyan famously said that “the East had awoken while Soviet scholars were still asleep”. Among the most renowned academic institutions that were either opened or reoriented for

the contemporary Third World expertise between 1956 and 1964 were the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), the Institute of Oriental Studies (IVAN), the Institute of Africa, the Institute of Latin America. Simultaneously, the educational institutions were also encouraged to increase their training of regional specialists, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. A handful of institutions in Moscow prepared a cohort of experts trained in foreign languages (primarily main European ones and those of the Third World), culture and history of a particular Third World country. These institutions included of Moscow State University (MGU), Moscow State Institute for International Relations (MGIMO) or Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies (MIV) (in 1954 MIV was merged with MGIMO). Simultaneously a number of institutions in the Soviet “East” were established to prepare specialists for the Soviet Oriental Studies. While for many areas of Oriental studies the dominant regional scholarly centers were located in Tashkent and Dushanbe, for the particular case of the Iranian Studies Baku, the capital of Soviet Azerbaijan, was by far the most important regional center of education and scholarship.\(^50\)

This shared educational path created a relatively close-knit community which maintained informal connections throughout their career. On the one hand, these individuals were part of the larger revival of the intelligentsia that took place in the 1950s and 1960s, a process made possible by de-Stalinization, the state’s turn to expertise and the mass expansion of higher education across Soviet republics. On the other hand, even within the broader intelligentsia expert communities constituted a relatively privileged group.\(^51\) Most had access to the

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\(^{51}\) The IVAN scholar Nina Mamedova remembered that this elitism was also often supported by family or friendly connections that most of the IVAN vostokovedy had with Party and State elites. See Nina Mamedova’s interview (part two) to *Izustnaya istoriya*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vyt3PGrVb0c
foreign world that other Soviet citizens, including highly educated ones, lacked: for many in the form of work-related trips (sometimes long-term posts, e.g. tenures at *Problemy mira i sotsializma* in Prague or in the Soviet diplomatic missions, as correspondents of news agencies, or at KGB residencies.), for many others—in terms of access to the foreign literature and other materials from *spetskhran* (restricted areas of Soviet libraries with limited access).\(^{52}\)

Under Khrushchev’s leadership the creation of the expert community was considered a necessity for building relations with the Third World.\(^{53}\) Consequently the research centers established or reoriented at that period for the needs of contemporary politics (IMEMO, IVAN, Institute of Latin America, Institute of Africa, and others) were considered sources of expertise for the decision-makers. The experts often moved from one research center to another or to jobs at the International department, journalism and other similar posts. But by the late 1960s the Politburo’s demand for this expertise significantly dropped. Bobodzhan Gafurov, the director of the IVAN, himself bitterly complained to Brezhnev about lack of demand from the international departments and other foreign policy institutions to accept the analytics from the IVAN. In particular, Gafurov complained about the readiness of the International department to spend enormous amounts in aid to the Third World countries while not willing to learn from efficiency assessments about these investments produced by the IVAN.\(^{54}\)

However the informal connections that most of *vostokovedy* acquired through the years remained active. Robert English, who concentrated his research on the enlightened experts and *apparatchiks*, argued that the reformist intellectuals were joined not only by their shared anti-Stalinism

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\(^{53}\) In this process a significant role was dedicated to the representatives of the Soviet “East” who ended up being largely represented in the community of Soviet Third World experts, see more in: Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development*, 43-66.

\(^{54}\) Jansen, *People’s Internationalism*, 203.
but also by personal and professional bonds, strong educational and career links.\(^{55}\) English’s argument can be applied to a wider group of experts as not all mezdunarodniki were the “neo-Westernizers” as English defined his researched group. In fact, in both the International department and research institutes there were influential groups of conservative (even “neo-Stalinist”) experts. Yet they also constituted a part of this informal community, sharing similar educational and career trajectories with their more “liberal” counterparts.

At this stage available sources do not provide us with a clear picture of how this community influenced the decision-making in the Brezhnev era. It is evident that there was no direct influence—most of the key decisions were made within the Politburo, sometimes discussed at the Secretariat.\(^{56}\) Decision-making was a prerogative of a very narrow group of Soviet leaders that did not have a habit to request expert opinions on the international situation. However, people like Andropov and Ponomarev were surrounded by groups of experts and could hardly avoid being influenced by their opinions. The influence that experts had on decision-makers was thus often applied through informal communication. Experts were among the sources of information that the decision-makers could use to form their perception of the international situation. Of course the level of experts’ influence differed from one official to another and it is hardly possible to evaluate their cumulative input in the final decision. Yet along with KGB intelligence, the information from correspondents on the ground and from the fraternal parties, experts were among the sources that informed the leaders. These seeds of information combined with the ideological worldview of the leadership often were the principal ingredients that led to one or another decision.


\(^{56}\) The role of the Central Committee Secretariat remains understudied at this point as most of its documentation remains classified. However recent publication of selected notes and minutes of Secretariat sessions reveal the importance of this body for the decision-making process within the Central Committee. See, *Sekretariat TsK KPSS. Zapiski i stenogrammy zasedaniy 1965-1967 gg.*
Having the role of experts in mind, we have to look deeper into how they formed their opinions about the international situation, using the particular case of the Iranian revolution and Soviet relations with the new revolutionary regime. Most of the Soviet academic experts on Iran rarely visited the country. Unlike journalists and the KGB agents, who had been stationed in Iran for years, Soviet Iranists either made occasional visits or studied the situation in the country through publications in the press or in the scholarly articles (including Western scholarship that was available for some of them in the spetskhran).

Among the research institutions that concentrated on the Oriental (and in particular Iranian) Studies, the leading role was reserved for the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Soviet Academy of Sciences (IVAN). Although the Institute traditionally derives its history from the foundation of the Asiatic museum in 1818, the studies of the contemporary East became its main focus only in the 1950s, especially after the appointment of Bobodzhan Gafurov as the director of the Institute. Gafurov was clearly a symbolic figure. For the preceding ten years he had been the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Tajikistan—de facto the head of the union republic. However, while working in Party apparatus, Gafurov was also pursuing a scholarly career, primarily dedicating his life to writing the monumental narrative of Tajik national history. In

57 This situation was not unique to Iranists. Other Soviet Third World experts encountered similar obstacles. The situation was somewhat easier for the specialists who studied Soviet allies or clients in “the Foreign East” but still for most scholars foreign trips were a rare experience. For the example of Soviet African Studies specialists see: Steffi Marung, “The provocation of empirical evidence: Soviet African Studies between enthusiasm and discomfort”, African Identities 16, no. 2 (2018): 176-190.
59 Gafurov’s role in building the Tajik national myth also had implications for Iranian studies as much of the Iranian cultural heritage was to be included in the Tajik national narrative. For more about the Gafurov’s transfer to academic career and his role in a struggle for a Tajik national narrative see: Kirasirova, “Sons of Muslims”, 119; and Masha Kirasirova, “My Enemy’s Enemy: Consequences of the CIA Operation against Abulqasim Lahuti, 1953-54”, Iranian Studies 50, no. 3 (2017): 439-465.
1956 he sent a letter to the Central Committee with his propositions about the future of Soviet Oriental Studies. In particular he proposed the studies to be reoriented from a historical to a contemporary focus. Following the 20th Party Congress he was appointed a new director of the IVAN and consequently was put in charge of realization of his propositions. Yet in his role as Institute director Gafurov remained an important political figure for Soviet Third World policy. Among the IVAN scholars that specialized on contemporary Iran there were two main educational paths. Some of the experts graduated from the Moscow State University in the 1940s-1950s, where they had been the students of Boris Zakhoder (a patriarch of Soviet Iranian Studies who taught at the MGU while heading the Sector of Iran at the IVAN). Among them were such experts as Liudmila Kulagina, Elena Doroshenko, and Nina Kuznetsova. The second group of researchers were graduates of Azerbaijan State University, and included such experts as Salekh Aliev and Semyon Agaev.

While several republics produced specialists who knew Persian, Azerbaijan and its research institutions played a particularly important role in in Soviet Iranian studies. Despite a long tradition of Iranian studies since the imperial times, the real boom started in Baku following the 1941 invasion of Iran by the Red Army. From that moment the political leadership of the Soviet Azerbaijan but also the Azeri intelligentsia assumed the role of intermediaries between the Soviet Union and Iran. Even when the political project of Iranian Azerbaijan

61 Agaev did not work in the IVAN but was instead affiliated with the Institute of the Peoples of the Near and Middle East in Baku and with the Institute of the International Workers’ Movement in Moscow. Nevertheless he was among the most active scholars of the contemporary Iran along with the representatives of the IVAN. For more on the biographies of the IVAN experts and other vostokovedy see: Sofya Miliband, Vostokovedy Rossii: XX-nachalo XXI veka. Biobibliograficheskii slovar (Moscow: Vostochnaya literatura, 2008).
62 For more on the Red Army invasion and the 1946 Iranian Azerbaijan crisis that followed it see Chapter 2 of this dissertation.
failed to survive the crisis, the cultural and scholarly institutions in Baku remained. Yet in the late 1940s the Azerbaijani Iranists along with their colleagues in IVAN were more preoccupied with ancient history and literary studies. The structural reforms in the Soviet Oriental studies that started in the mid-1950s had a direct influence on the main concentrations of Iranian studies in Soviet Azerbaijan. Prompted by Moscow, this new structure of Soviet Iranian studies had to serve the long-term political goals of the Soviet Union. This led to what Nina Mamedova referred to as “the division of labor in Soviet Iranology”.

In this framework the research centers of Central Asian republics (but also in Tbilisi and Yerevan) concentrated on the Iranian philology, ancient manuscripts, and so on, while Baku became the center for contemporary Iranian studies.

One of the main targets in the research activities of the Baku scholars was the study of Iranian Azerbaijan. This research trajectory had a lot to do with the many of the ADP members and other Iranian emigrants that were resided in Azerbaijan. In the 1960s-1970s the leadership of Soviet Azerbaijan continued to support the ADP (even after it officially merged with the Tudeh) and maintain it as a political asset. Moreover the emigrants were actively involved in the socio-political life of the republic: among other things they were often invited to meetings with

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63 Many of these studies were not without a contemporary reason as well. One of the main objectives of the Azeri scholars at that period was to write the national history of the Azeri people. Great literary figures such as Nizami were essential for construction of national narrative. Thus it was necessary to win a contest with Persian national narrative for such key historical and literary figures. See: Gasimov, “Observing Iran from Baku”, 7-10.

Similar processes were going on in Soviet Tajikistan where figures like Rudaki were proclaimed Tajik national heritage. Stalin himself pronounced Ferdowsi, Omar Khayyam, Sa’di, Hafez and other great literary figures of the Persianate world “the literary heritage of Tajikistan”. See: Kirasirova, “My Enemy’s Enemy”, 446.

64 Mamedova, “O nekotorykh problemakh sovremennoy iranistikii”, 38.

65 The centrality of Azerbaijan for the Soviet Iranian studies was reaffirmed in 1962 when Baku was chosen to be the host city for one of the first all-union conferences on the history of Iran, Turkey and Afghanistan. See: Hasanli, Sovetskiy Azerbaijan, 581-582.
foreign delegations but most importantly some of the emigrants joined the scholarly and teaching community. By the 1970s there were several secondary schools where Persian was taught as a foreign language in Baku, among them a school that was named after Jafar Pishevari that was considered to be an entry point to the Faculty of Iranian Studies at the Azerbaijan State University.

Baku was not the only place where the Iranian emigrants played an important role in scholarly activities. The academic experts’ understanding of Iran, and the ideological conceptions they had imbibed as part of their education, was reinforced by close relations that many of them had with the Iranian communists that lived in the Soviet Union. This influence could be particularly important in the IVAN where some of the emigrants worked among their Soviet colleagues studying Iran (e.g. Shamsadin Badi). Similarly many of the Iranian emigrants taught Persian at the universities—not only at the Azerbaijan State University but also at the MGU which was among main schools for the Iranian studies scholars in the Soviet Union. Consequently many of the experts maintained relations with their teachers or colleagues and through this informal communication adopted their vision of events in Iran.

One of the options to get to know Iran better and to be sent there for a lengthy visit was to engage in formal or informal collaboration

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66 Hasanli, Sovetskiy Azerbaijan, 268-315.
67 Gasimov, “Observing Iran from Baku”, 12. For more on Pishevari see Chapter 2 of this dissertation. The rehabilitation of Pishevari and his promotion to the rank of the Azerbaijani national hero was a result of the support for the ADP expressed by Veli Akhundov, the First Secretary of the Azerbaijani Communist Party in 1959-1969. See Hasanli, Sovetskiy Azerbaijan, 305-308.
68 Mamedova, “Istoriya izucheniya Irana”, 17
with the intelligence. Most of those who studied Persian at the university were approached by the KGB as possible collaborators or agents—for example, this was the way Vladimir Kuzichkin became a KGB agent.\(^70\) Another option was to become a military interpreter. As most of the male students were conscripted to military after their studies, those who studied Persian could be sent to Iran to serve at the Soviet mission—that was the way Mikhail Krutikhin first visited Iran.\(^71\) Some of the Soviet specialists in Iranian studies were allowed to travel to international conferences. A good example is the 1966 International Congress of Iranian Studies in Tehran where the Soviet Union sent an impressive delegation that was supposed to be led by Bobodzhhan Gafurov himself.\(^72\) Yet all experts included in the delegation specialized either in ancient Iranian history or in Iranian philology or literary studies. None of the experts from the final list was a specialist on the contemporary Iran. This selectiveness in scholarly communications was a result of Soviet vision of the scholarly exchanges as a part of the cultural diplomacy. Throughout the 1960s-1970s many of the Soviet specialists on Iranian history, literature, philology and art travelled to Iran, many of their Iranian colleagues were invited to the Soviet Union. There was also institutional cooperation between Iranian universities and Soviet research centers that included book exchanges, translations of Persian classics, lectures, and so on. Yet the objective of all that cooperation was to present “a less politicized face” of the

\(^{70}\) Kuzichkin, \textit{Inside the KGB}, 12-35.

\(^{71}\) Author’s interview with Mikhail Krutikhin. Moscow. November 2017.

\(^{72}\) The archives do not provide us with a clear explanation for later changes made in the delegation but Gafurov eventually did not lead it. Nodar Mossaki and Lana Ravandi-Fadai assume that it was not a coincidence as the delegation was considered a tool in the cultural diplomacy of the Soviet Union and the figures of Soviet representatives were supposed to be neutral and not controversial for the Iranian audience. Gafurov as the main author of Tajik national narrative and thus a figure that was perceived controversially in the Iranian scholarly community hardly fit this profile. See: Nodar Mossaki and Lana Ravandi-Fadai, “Uchastie sovetskoy delegatsii v I vsemirnom kongresse iranistov”, \textit{Vestnik Rossiyskoy Akademii Nauk} 88, no. 2 (2018): 186.
Soviet scholarship. Naturally it resulted in a much less frequent communication between the scholars of the contemporary Iran with the country of their studies. Many experts for various reasons did not have the privilege of visiting Iran and were restricted to studying the country through secondary sources that included the publications in the Iranian and Western press but also the Iranian and Western scholarship. These circumstances had a direct influence on the speed of their reaction to the internal developments in Iran, especially in such chaotic and fast changing cases as the revolution.

Overall it is hard to disagree with Denis Volkov that much of the contemporary Iranian studies in the Soviet Union of the 1960s-1980s “turned into a monotonous uniform scholarship in full conformity with the Communist Party’s ideology” and that much of scholarly work was overwhelmed with doctrinal formulas, and had a limited analytical value due to the extensive self-censorship. However even within this general framework there were different scholars with different approach to this reality.

One scholar that mostly concentrated on the doctrinal reading of the Iranian realities in full conformity with the latest Party doctrinal

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74 It is important to remember that foreign trips (especially to “capitalist countries” — kapstrany) in the Soviet Union were indeed a privilege, that many were stripped of for a variety of reasons such as not being a member of the Party, having ideologically controversial background, being of Jewish ancestry, etc. This is not to say that Soviet specialists on contemporary Iran never visited the country. For example, Salekh Aliev, one of the most renowned specialists on the 20th century IVAN, visited Iran a number of times, including in 1979. His program of activities there remains unclear but the pictures from his 1979 trip were published in the edited volume dedicated to his memory published by the IV RAN after his passing. See: N. M. Mamedova et al., eds., *Iran. Istoriya, ekonomika, kultura. Pamyati S. M. Alieva* (Moscow: IV RAN, 2009).

formulas was Semyon Agaev. Born in Azerbaijan, Agaev spent much of his career working at the Institute of the Peoples of the Near and Middle East in Baku. After receiving his first degree (kandidat nauk) at the age of 29, and the second (doktor nauk) at 36, in the early 1970s Agaev moved to Moscow and became affiliated with Moscow’s Institute of the International Workers’ Movement. Although in the Soviet scholarship of contemporary events there was hardly a chance to avoid references to the Party’s position on the matter, Agaev’s works represented a remarkable example of actively polemical articles and books, in which, as noted by Muriel Atkin, the subject was less significant than its use as the occasion to propound a doctrinally correct explanation. Agaev was also allegedly close to Rostislav Ulyanovsky, and although there is no hard proof of that, he extensively quoted Ulyanovsky in his works on Iran whereas the latter repeatedly wrote introductions for Agaev’s books.

A strikingly different example of the Soviet Iranian studies specialist was Elena Doroshenko. Following the defense of her dissertation for the first academic degree (kandidat nauk) in 1953 Doroshenko started to work as a researcher at the IVAN and worked there until her passing in 1998. Unlike Agaev she managed to receive her second degree (doktor nauk) only after the collapse of the Soviet Union, at the age of 77, three months before her death. Doroshenko was among first Soviet Iranists who started to research Shi’a Islam and Shi’a clergy of Iran as a factor in the socio-political life of the Iranian society. Almost a decade before the Soviet scholarship was pushed by the Iranian revolution and the quagmire in Afghanistan to look more thoroughly at Islam as the political factor, Doroshenko had to struggle

for the opportunity to study religion and religious authorities. Yet by the time of the Iranian revolution her monograph was the only Soviet scholarly piece that analyzed the role played by the Shi’a clergy in the domestic situation in Iran. Unlike Agaev and other scholars, who preferred to rely on the Soviet and Iranian press, Soviet scholarship and a handful of Western researches, Doroshenko extensively used not only Iranian, but also most recent Western sources in a variety of languages. It certainly did not mean that Elena Doroshenko was free from the ideological standpoints. However, unlike the works of Semyon Agaev, Salekh Aliev and some others, Doroshenko’s research went beyond the purpose of just defending the line of the Party. As Muriel Atkin put it: “Where [Mikhail] Ivanov is quick to apply labels to determine political merit or defect of everyone and everything, Doroshenko avoids this practice almost entirely”.

The routine of Soviet Iranists mostly consisted in preparing their own research, supervising their doctoral students and writing analytical notes for different state and Party institutions. The irregular activities included internal conferences or joint conferences with other research institutions. The products of such gatherings were the Special Bulletins that included printed versions of papers and keynotes presented at these conferences and congresses. This routine was somewhat changed after

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80 According to Nina Mamedova the study of religion was disapproved by the IVAN administration, and only the support of Artyom Arabadzhyan, the head of the Iran sector, allowed Doroshenko to continue her studies. Ironically later Arabadzhyan was among main critics of the concept of “Islamic” revolution and forbade this term to be used in the scholarship produced by the IVAN. Author’s interview with Nina Mamedova. Moscow. May 2016. See also: Nina Mamedova’s interview (Part One) to Izustnaya Istoriya, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hVAVczr_OGQ.

81 For more on Elena Doroshenko’s analysis of the pre-revolutionary Iranian clergy see Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

82 Mikhail Ivanov was the MGU professor and the scholar of Iran, who also published on the matter of religion in Iran but unlike Doroshenko’s his accounts of Shi’a Islam mostly consisted of the ideological clichés about the backward role of religion.

83 Atkin, “Soviet and Russian Scholarship on Iran”, 246.

84 For more on the analytical work for the leadership on the example of IMEMO, see: Pyotr Cherkasov, IMEMO. Ocherk istorii (Moscow: Ves mir, 2016), 261-271.
Evgeny Primakov was appointed director of the institute. Some in the expert community considered Primakov’s own scholarly achievements overestimated. Chernyaev referred to him sarcastically as “our academician” or “an author of one journalistic book”. Nevertheless Primakov’s style of directorship impressed many in the IVAN. One of the researchers remembered how he submitted an analytical note to the director’s office expecting it to be formally read and signed for publication. When next day he received his note with comments and corrections made personally by Primakov, he realized that times had changed. Active and interested exclusively in contemporary events, Primakov, who was appointed right before the Iranian revolution, gathered the specialists from the sector of Iran on a weekly basis. During these meetings everyone had to present updates on the situation in Iran. Although Primakov in the late 1970s-early 1980s was not yet a decision-maker himself (he was promoted to become one under Gorbachev), he was an influential figure. While it is difficult to trace both his influence in the power circles and the influence the Iranists could have on him during these meetings, they nevertheless created a new channel for opinions discussed in the IVAN to reach decision-makers. In this way the scholarly community was trying to catch up with the rapidly developing situation.

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85 Chernyaev, Sovmestniy Iskhod, 357, 643. In 1979 Primakov was elected a full member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences (“full academician”) in his fifties which was unusual. Chernyaev even compared Primakov to Sergey Trapeznikov, notoriously unversed and conservative head of the CC Department of Science. However, Primakov’s biographer Leonid Mlechin argues that Primakov was elected, firstly, due to the support of his former boss, the director of the IMEMO Nikolay Inozemtsev, secondly, due to the unwritten rule that the director of the academic institute had to be the member of the academy. It is noteworthy that at the same elections when Primakov was elected, Trapeznikov was refused. See Leonid Mlechin, Primakov (Moscow: Molodaya Gvardiya, 2015), 79-80. It is also noteworthy that Chernyaev’s notes from the late 1980s when he and Primakov together advised Gorbachev on foreign policy, characterize Primakov almost exclusively in a positive way. Chernyaev, Sovmestniy Iskhod, 779-970.

86 Mlechin, Primakov, 78-79.

87 Nina Mamedova’s interview (Part One) to Izustnaya Istoriya, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hVAVczr_OGQ
Those who managed to get a posting abroad, even if they were less familiar with the academic literature on Iran, were still better placed to inform Moscow on events. Igor Sinitsin, who worked as Andropov’s assistant while the latter was the head of the KGB, remembered that at times of international crises the KGB leadership often relied on the interceptions of teletypes of the foreign news agencies that were the fastest to publish news. The TASS messages always arrived later because they went first to the TASS central coordination center, where they were sorted, censored and marked to be sent to the political leadership of the country.\textsuperscript{88} The information from the KGB residents or the embassy staff arrived only later due to bureaucratic and technical obstacles. The agent had to write a report (keeping in mind the reader and adjusting the report accordingly), later the report had to be encrypted, sent from the public telegraph (in extreme cases the embassy’s radio transmitter was used, especially when a revolutionary situation prevented agents from using the telegraph). In Moscow the message had to be received, registered, decrypted and passed to the head of the relevant KGB or MID department. The department head in turn passed it if necessary to Andropov or Gromyko while they passed it to Konstantin Chernenko who was responsible for collecting messages for Brezhnev.\textsuperscript{89} In this race for information the academic experts were a lost element. They were never informed as well as the leadership, and consequently were slow and often behind events in making their assessments. By contrast, the individuals on the ground, while sharing an ideological background with academic experts, were at least able to report on development that seemed to challenge the formally accepted models of social and political change.

By the late 1970s, disappointment was growing in the Soviet expert community about the way the Soviet engagement with the Third World progressed. Soviet models for development (including the Central Asian

\textsuperscript{88} Igor Sinitsyn, \textit{Andropov vblizi. Vospominaniya o vremenakh “ottepeli” i “zastoya”} (Moscow: Rossiyskaya gazeta, 2004), 239.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid, 239-240.
model) of the Third World were gradually abandoned as ineffective. The growing competition with the Chinese for the Third World and the revival of traditionalist trends in the Third World challenged the Soviet standing in the global Cold War. The revolution in Iran happened to be a clear indicator of religion proving to be more potent than any expert in the Soviet Union had expected. As we will examine in the necessary detail, this deadlock forced the leadership to pay some attention to the experts—the early 1980s saw a certain revival of the expertise that was demanded in order to explain why certain Third World countries failed to take a progressive path but instead got carried away with the chimera of religious revival. The leadership and the system were, however, rarely willing to change their strategic positions significantly even after receiving such expertise, using instead the potential of the International department and research institutions to adjust the theory and positions accordingly.

**Soviet perception of the role of religion in the Third World.**

Religion was one of the principal enemies of the Marxist-Leninist ideology. Yet even this clearly defined enemy could be incorporated in the Soviet strategy of international relations with the Third World. The interest of the Soviet leadership in religion was initially limited to its potential as an attractive factor in cultural diplomacy towards the Third World. Cultural diplomacy had been central to Khrushchev’s initiatives in his courtship of the Third World, and it had also included the idea of a dialogue between the religious authorities. Portraying Central Asia as developmental model to the Third World in the 1950s, the Soviet leadership also hoped to present it as a cultural model. The stigma of the atheist state had not helped to attract many adherents in the deeply

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90 Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development*, 218.

91 Despite Khrushchev’s anti-religious campaigns the incorporation of religion and its elements was also true for the Soviet domestic policies, see Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 57-83.
religious parts of Africa and Asia. Thus religion in general and Islam in particular became one of the vehicles of Soviet cultural diplomacy. Along with Central Asian and Transcaucasian intellectuals that were summoned by the Soviet leadership to serve as mediators with the foreign East, religious authorities, and more than others the SADUM (the Central Asian Spiritual Administration) were charged with similar tasks.\footnote{On the new role of the Soviet “Eastern” intelligentsia see Kirasirova, “Sons of Muslims”, 106-107; on the new role of the SADUM on the international arena see: Tasar, Soviet and Muslim, 242-297.} In the Brezhnev era the role of the SADUM and other spiritual administrations (i.e. Transcaucasian Spiritual Administration that had a Shi’a department and thus was more relevant to dealing with Iran) continued to increase. These muftiates were controlled by the Council for Religious Affairs and while ostensibly acting on behalf of “Soviet Muslims”, in reality the muftis were representing the Soviet government. By the mid-1970s in all but the name Soviet religious authorities were Soviet foreign policy bureaucrats who well were integrated in the complex building of the Soviet foreign relations apparatus.\footnote{Tasar, Soviet and Muslim, 277-287.}

Starting to use religion as a cultural diplomacy tool, Khrushchev and his circle had not expected religion in the Third World to persist, or even less to revive as an influential ideological teaching. Religion was a temporary attribute that the backward countries of the Third World had to abandon in the foreseeable future for the sake of progressive development. Most Soviet scholars who were studying the topic of religion in the Third World in the 1960s and 1970s approached the issue from a similar angle. They saw religion as a predecessor of nationalism, accepting its anti-colonial basis, which had helped to shape local nationalisms. Soviet orientalists and specialists on religion thus had to explain the persistence of religion in the societies that had taken “a path of progress” and to find a language and an ideological approach to deal with this phenomenon. For Soviet researchers it
was necessary “to study true meaning of influence that religion had on the social thought of the peoples of the East and the new content that is dressed in the traditional religious forms in order to unseal the main features and peculiarities of the ideological struggle in the developing countries”. In order to do so they often used the metaphor of “awakening” that was hardly new to socialist thinking. The oppressed peoples of the Third World were said to wake up from the long nightmare of colonialism and this process of awakening neatly tied in with the process of national and social liberation. Awakening from a centuries-long slumber, the peoples of the Third World needed an ideology and naturally turned to religion as the most customary and clear ideology they knew.

Accepting religion as a necessary evil for certain parts of the Third World, most analysts referred to Lenin’s statement about the dual nature of religion and the necessity to assess the political nature of one or another religious movement through a lens of forces that this movement includes and the role that it plays in a particular socio-political setting. Thus, religion in the Third World could be used by the forces of reaction but it could also play a positive role as a harbinger of progress and revolution. It was then the task of a well-trained Marxist scholar to search for details that would have helped determine which role religion played in a given case. Certainly, such theoretical constructions left considerable space for scholars to adjust the theory to the Party line in each particular case.

Even a champion of Soviet Third World courtship like the then director of IVAN, Bobodzhan Gafurov, wrote referring to Lenin that “political protest movements with religious surface were common for

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95 Oleg Druzhbinsky and Vladimir Teplukhin, Istорichеский опыт социальных преобразований в странах “Третьего мира” и религия (Moscow: INION, 1978), 3.
all peoples at the certain stage of development”.

These reservations made by Gafurov were in fact the main weak point of the Soviet theory on the role of the religion in the Third World when the time came to apply it to the case of the Iranian revolution. The key notion of all the “findings” of Soviet scholars was the temporality of the progressive role of religion. There was no Soviet expert that claimed a potential persistence of religion in the ideology or in mass consciousness of the liberated countries of the Third World could occur in the future. Overcoming the painful economic consequences of colonialism, the masses were supposed to gradually turn to the only true road of atheism and scientific perception of the world.

Reality brought certain corrections to this idealist theory. Religion not only persisted on the political map of the Third World, it became even more politicized. In the review of one of the foreign studies on the role of religion in the Third World, the reviewer from the Soviet Institute of Scientific Atheism referred to the argument of the author that humanity was stuck between two options: the society of consumerism and the society of administration (“capitalism” and “socialism” respectively). The question that the reviewer posed afterwards was the following: “Is there a potential for a different kind of revolution in the Third World?”

A few months later the Iranian revolution proposed an answer to this seemingly rhetorical question.

**Conclusion**

By the late 1970s the Soviet leadership and Soviet scholars had a well-developed doctrinal framework to explain the trends in the Third World. Most of those blueprints were invented in the Khrushchev era, when the

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97 Druzhbinsky and Teplukhin, Istoricheskiy opyt sotsialnykh preobrazovaniy, 55.
Soviet Union got more involved in Third World politics. However, after Khrushchev the meaning of certain theoretical concepts was still a matter of interpretation: to include one or another Third World country in the category of “states of national democracy” on “the non-capitalist path of development” was often an arbitrary decision of the leadership and to explain such decisions was the responsibility of experts and intellectuals. Most of these experts were trained during the Khrushchev’s Thaw and were initially meant to counsel the leadership on the matters of their foreign policy expertise. In reality their influence on the decision-making process in the period of Brezhnev’s collective leadership was dwindling. The key decisions on the foreign policy were made in the narrow Politburo circle in which few of the leaders were educated either on Marxism-Leninism and its recent modifications or on regional specificity of the Third World countries.

Despite this seeming marginalization of the expert knowledge, Soviet research institutions led by the abovementioned intellectuals were often well-suited to analyze the international situation. In fact the level of Soviet expertise on the Third World, as it became evident in the following years, was comparable to that of Western counterparts. For most of the Soviet experts it was clear that “the non-capitalist path of development” was often used as a cover despite contradictions that existed in reality. However the ideological worldview was not only the prerogative of the senescent leadership. Most of the Soviet experts were also educated in Marxist-Leninist tradition, and although they often had opportunities unavailable to the rest of the Soviet citizens (e.g. access to the foreign press and other publications), most of them still saw the world through the prism of basic concepts of the doctrine. Moreover there were bureaucratically influential experts (and simultaneously decision-makers) such as Rostislav Ulyanovsky, who seemed to genuinely believe in theoretical concepts such as “the non-capitalist path of development” until the last days of his life.

In the following chapter I will show how Iran was placed in this foreign policy ideological framework throughout the decades preceding
the revolution. Consequently I will try to answer the question of why in this case the attempt to attribute the new revolutionary Iran to the category of states of national democracy did not help Soviet foreign policy makers neither to understand the Iranian revolution, nor to use it for the benefit of the Soviet Union. The last part of this chapter already hinted at the fact that the key issue was how to understand political role of religion. As I tried to show it was not the religion itself that contradicted Soviet ideological worldview but the persistence of the anti-modernist trend set by the religious rulers of Iran. In the following chapters I will show that the longer religious rule in Iran persisted, the more the ideological dissonances grew among the Soviet experts and decision-makers.
Chapter 2

THE SOVIET UNION AND IRAN FROM STALIN TO BREZHNEV.

When, in 1978, news started coming from Iran to Moscow about the growing popular protest against the rule of Mohammed Reza Shah, Soviet leaders hesitated to support and encourage this revolutionary effort against the autocratic ally of the United States. On the contrary, they were concerned by the potential destruction of stable and mutually beneficial relations that they had managed to build with the Shah throughout nearly two decades preceding 1978. This fruitful cooperation went against most stereotypes of classic Cold War binary thinking. In order to explain it, we need to look at the evolution of Soviet-Iranian bilateral relations over the course of the twentieth century, and especially the decades preceding the revolution.

Soviet-Iranian relations in the period between the 1917 revolution in Russia and the 1978-79 revolution in Iran went through a series of crises and rapprochements. In the early years of Bolshevik rule Iran became one of the arenas of Soviet attempts to spread Communist revolution. However, this effort soon proved to be futile, and one of the Bolshevik leaders who saw it first hand was Joseph Stalin, who in 1920-21 among other things was responsible for overseeing the revolutionary process in Transcaucasia, Turkey and Iran. When Stalin became the undisputed leader of the Soviet Union, Iran was far from the main areas of his foreign policy interests, but the Second World War made Stalin look at Iran once again. The strategic location of Iran led to the joint Anglo-Soviet occupation that later provided a basis for one of the first Cold War conflicts—the 1946 Iranian Azerbaijan crisis. This clash encompassed a struggle for Iranian oil, raised the issues of separatism and of the rights
of national minorities in Northern Iran and became the first episode of active involvement of the United States in the Iranian issues. The 1946 crisis defined the future decades of the Soviet-Iranian relations. On the one hand, it defined Stalin’s passivity about Iran for the rest of his rule. On the other, it also defined Stalin’s later distrust of Mohammed Mosaddeq, although Stalin’s negative reading of Mosaddeq also fit his generally negative perception of local anti-imperialist leaders. Finally, the 1946 crisis defined the Shah’s anxiety about his northern neighbor and shaped his firm anti-communist stance.

Nikita Khrushchev’s monumental turn of foreign policy to the Third World had its implications for Soviet-Iranian relations, too. Khrushchev saw Iran as one of the Third World countries that could be attracted by an alliance with the Soviet Union under the banners of anti-imperialism and modernization. Numerous attempts by the Soviet leader to charm the Shah and to push him towards a more independent policy from the United States achieved little success. Moreover, in 1959, following the failure of Soviet-Iranian negotiations on the non-aggression treaty, the bilateral relations reached their nadir. However in the early 1960s, the Shah’s attempts to act more independently combined with the crisis of Khrushchev’s Third World policy led to an unexpected rapprochement. The Soviet Union and Iran, while remaining on different sides of the Cold War, engaged in numerous trade and economic initiatives that were beneficial for both sides.

This practical cooperation continued and widened after the ouster of Khrushchev. The Shah was a political opponent of the Soviet Union but he was also a neighbor that the Soviet leadership was happy to have a productive partnership with. In the realities of détente this situation was not really that outstanding. In fact, the case of Iran had similarities with the periods of partnership that the Soviet Union had with France, Italy, and even West Germany in the early 1970s. Yet for the Third World, which in the 1970s became the principal arena of the global Cold War, this case represented a very pragmatic side of the Soviet foreign policy,
in which the revolutionary part of Soviet ideology was temporarily put aside in favor of practical cooperation.

**Stalin and Soviet-Iranian relations from the early days of the Bolshevik rule to 1953.**

Iran’s Cold War relationship with the Soviet Union bore the legacy of centuries-long history of relations between Russia and Iran. This legacy made Iran different from many other countries of Asia and Africa for the Soviet leadership—it was a neighbor that Russia had seen as a rival empire from at least the 18th century.\(^1\) Similarly in Iran the Russians (like the British) were traditionally perceived as a colonizing power. This background certainly had an influence on mutual perceptions and anxieties in the second half of the 20th century. The 1917 Russian revolution gave Iran a lull from Russian imperial expansion shortly when it brought the Bolsheviks to power. However, the latter soon regained much of the territory and ambitions of the former empire under the banner of social revolution. The attempts to spread the revolutionary ideas beyond the old imperial borders practiced by the Bolsheviks in the years of the Russian Civil War also touched Northern Iran where the short-lived Gilan and Khorasan Soviet Republics were established. In particular the establishment of the Gilan Soviet Republic was a result of support that the Bolsheviks provided to a local strongman, Mirza Kuchak Khan.\(^2\) This support could only become possible in the aftermath of the Second Congress of Comintern, where Lenin called the local communists of the East for a temporary alliance with nationalist bourgeoisie on the common basis of anti-imperialism and with an ultimate goal to expel the

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\(^1\) See for example: Muriel Atkin, *Russia and Iran 1780-1828* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1980).


See also a published collection of documents on the Soviet involvement in Gilan in *Persidskiy front mirovoy revolutsii. Dokumenty o sovetskom vtorzhenii v Gilyan (1920-1921)* (Moscow: Kvadriga, 2017).
colonial powers. Although this call was not welcomed by many of the Asian delegates and even involved Lenin in a discussion with the leader of Indian Communists, M.N. Roy, who argued that local communists had to fight the bourgeoisie as much as imperialist powers, for the Bolsheviks the strategy of allying with local anti-imperialists became acceptable. In the 1950s exactly the documents of the Second Congress of Comintern would be used as a basis for theory of the non-capitalist path of development.

Yet by 1921 many of the Soviet leaders, including Lenin, came to understand that global proletarian revolution was not going to happen fast and most of the adventures that aimed at the spread of revolutionary ideas beyond the borders of the former Russian Empire were abandoned. In November 1920 Joseph Stalin, whose responsibilities included overseeing the revolutionary movements in Transcaucasia, Turkey and Iran, sent a telegram to Lenin in which he insisted that the Bolsheviks could benefit from a unified Iran, adding that in this country “only a bourgeois revolution was possible”.\(^3\) In the telegram Stalin also expressed his disappointment with Kuchak Khan, who “abandoned us and ran to the forest”.\(^4\) Thus it is evident that Stalin already in 1921 was convinced that the communist revolution in Iran (or even more broadly “in the East”) had no perspectives due to the almost non-existent proletariat. The example of Kuchak Khan might have contributed to Stalin’s distrust of local nationalists who in his view always pursued their own interests.\(^5\)

One of the outcomes of the Soviet decision to build relations with the central government of Iran rather than with local nationalists was the signing of the Soviet-Iranian treaty in February 1921. Two articles


\(^4\) Ibid.

\(^5\) That said, the experience of alliance with Chiang Kai-shek in the late 1920s and the following break off might have been a more influential factor.
of this treaty (articles 5 and 6) played an enormous role in the Soviet-Iranian relations until they were abrogated by the Islamic Republican leadership in 1979. According to these articles Soviet Russia could intervene militarily in Iran if the latter were transformed into a base for aggressive actions against the Soviet Russia by a third country or enemy organization. Initially these articles were designated to prevent the subversive activities of the anti-Bolshevik forces some of which found asylum in Iran after being defeated in the Russian Civil War. Yet later articles 5 and 6 transformed into a diplomatic weapon that Soviet leadership used or repeatedly threatened to use against Iran. In particular the only official use of the articles as a legal base for military intervention was the August 1941 intervention of the Red Army in Northern Iran when following the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union, the British and the Soviets coordinated to jointly occupy Iran. Following the invasion the Allies overthrew Reza Shah Pahlavi and installed his young son Mohammed Reza on the Peacock Throne. They also signed the Tripartite agreement with the new Shah, in which they committed to respect the sovereignty of Iran and to withdraw their forces within six months after the end of the war.

The so-called “Iranian corridor” that was used during the war to supply the Soviet Union with the land-lease assistance from the United States also led to the deployment of tens of thousands of American troops that were tasked to manage this supply corridor in Iran. Thus the traditional area of Russian-British competition saw the appearance of a new great power that became Iran’s “empire by invitation”.6 With the war nearly over, the shape of the new international order became a point of competition between the allies. As Vlad Zubok noted, for Stalin the political environment in Iran, with the weak Shah, the corrupt Majlis and the presence of the Red Army, provided a historic

6 I borrow the term from Geir Lundestad who used it to describe the US role in the post-WWII Western Europe, and Roham Alvandi who applied it to the American role in Iran, see: Geir Lundestad, “Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952”, Journal of Peace Research 23, no. 3 (1986): 263-277; Alvandi, Nixon, Kissinger and the Shah, 7.
opportunity. In 1944 he demanded the Majlis to give the Soviet Union the exclusive rights for oil exploration in the Gilan and Mezenderan provinces. In Stalin’s view he only demanded what was rightfully his as the British had their oil concessions in Southern Iran for decades; but for the Iranians such a demand was a bold reminder of the Anglo-Russian colonial plot against the sovereignty of Iran. The main voice of this anxiety was Mohammed Mosaddeq who pushed a law through the Majlis forbidding the granting of concessions before the withdrawal of foreign troops from Iranian soil.

Following this unsuccessful attempt, the Soviet Union continued to confront British and American interests in Iran after the end of the war. Yet this time Stalin mobilized the national minorities of Northern Iran which resulted in what is traditionally referred in historiography as “Iran crisis” or “Azerbaijan crisis”. Following the surrender of Japan on September 2, 1945, the deadline for foreign troops’ withdrawal from Iran was set for March 2, 1946 according to the Tripartite Agreement. While the British and American troops left Iran by that date, the Red Army showed no sign of withdrawal preparations. Moreover the pro-Soviet communists founded the Azerbaijan Democratic Party (ADP) in Tabriz, the capital of Iranian Azerbaijan and declared province’s autonomy from Iran. Simultaneously in Mahabad the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) proclaimed the independence of the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad. Both movements were de facto supported by the Red Army, which prevented the Iranian military from entering the Northern provinces. The Iranian central government, with the support of the British and the Americans sent a protest to the UN, while the Prime Minister, Ahmad Qavam, went on a diplomatic mission to Moscow. As a result, Iran and the Soviet Union came to an agreement. Iran withdrew its protest from the UN and agreed to establish joint Soviet-Iranian oil company with

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8 For more on the Soviet oil interests in Iran during and after the war see: Jamil Hasanli, Sovetskaya politika po rasshireniyu yuzhnykh granits: Stalin i azerbaidzhanskaya karta v borbe za neft (1939-1945) (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2017); and Hasanli, At the Dawn of the Cold War.
51% of shares held by the Soviets that would have extract oil in the north of Iran. The Soviet Union agreed to withdraw the Red Army and did so by May 1946. Following the withdrawal of the Soviet troops, all the promises were forgotten by the Iranian government. The Iranian military entered the Northern provinces and suppressed the separatist governments whereas the Majlis refused to ratify the creation of Soviet-Iranian oil company.

As one of the first conflicts between the former allies the crisis around Iranian Azerbaijan and Iranian Kurdistan for decades attracted the attention of Cold War historians and contemporary analysts. Yet with the opening of the Russian archives in the early 1990s, a number of excellent studies showed in detail the motivation and plans of the Soviet side and answered many of the questions raised by the researchers in previous years. Historians highlighted the role played by the leader of Soviet Azerbaijan, Mir Jafar Bagirov, who was appointed responsible by Moscow to deal with Azeri and Kurdish separatists and pursued his own agenda, dreaming of unification of Iranian and Soviet Azerbijans or at least of wide autonomy of Iranian Azerbaijan under the Soviet influence. What also became evident was Stalin’s pessimism about the revolutionary perspectives of Iran. Drawing on the documents of the Soviet Foreign Ministry and the Communist Party (including communications between Stalin, Molotov, Bagirov and Soviet representatives in Iran) Natalia Yegorova convincingly showed that Stalin was driven by geopolitical and economic interests of the Soviet Union rather than by the belief in Iran’s revolutionary potential. On the contrary, when the geopolitical cost of the Soviet presence in Iran became too high for Soviet interests elsewhere, he made a deal with Qavam and saw it as a good enough outcome of this Iranian gamble. He wrote quite openly in a letter to the ADP leader Jafar Pishevari that the

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9 See Yegorova, “The Iran Crisis”; Scheid Raine, “Stalin and the creation of the ADP”; Hasanli, At the Dawn of the Cold War; Fawcett, “Revisiting the Iranian Crisis”.
10 Yegorova, “The Iran Crisis”, 2. See also Hasanli, At the Dawn of the Cold War, 277-321.
bigger objectives of the global revolutionary movement that Pishevari could not see from his standpoint made the Soviet withdrawal from Iran an objective necessity.\textsuperscript{11} The cost of this decision was the abundance of the pro-Soviet activists in Northern Iran who had to either find asylum in the USSR or suffer repressions from the Iranian central government. Along with the ADP and the KDP, the Soviet decision to withdraw troops also had a negative effect on the positions of the Tudeh—the party of Iranian Communists that was founded in 1941 with the Soviet help.\textsuperscript{12} In 1945, on the wave of euphoria about the Soviet victory in the Second World War, the Tudeh was at peak of its popularity in Iran. However, their support for the separatist movements in the North gravely damaged the party’s reputation. The Soviet withdrawal was followed by arrests of party activists. Yet when Soviet ambassador Ivan Sadchikov urgently requested Moscow to support the Tudeh, he received a cold response from Stalin that the Soviet Union could not interfere in Iranian internal affairs.\textsuperscript{13}

Stalin’s probing of geopolitical limits in Iran not only resulted in the loss of Iran for the Soviet Union but also stimulated, along with Soviet activity in Turkey, Manchuria, Central Europe, the growth of distrust in relations with the former allies and thus fueled the beginning of the global Cold War and built the basis for the deep US involvement in the Iranian affairs.\textsuperscript{14} For the Iranians, the 1946 crisis revived old fears of Russian expansion and formed firm anti-Soviet positions in Iranian elites whereas for the Americans it revealed the importance of Iran as an element of their containment strategy that was in formation at that very period.\textsuperscript{15} On top of that, for the Soviet Union the Azerbaijan crisis among other geopolitical

\textsuperscript{11} Stalin to Pishevari, May 8, 1946, in Yegorova, “The Iran Crisis”, 23-24. Despite Stalin’s “pragmatic” wording the withdrawal was arguably an ideological decision or can, at least, be understood in an ideological frame.
\textsuperscript{12} See: Chaquery, “Did the Soviets play a role”.
\textsuperscript{13} Zubok, “Stalin, Soviet Intelligence, and the Struggle for Iran”, 7.
\textsuperscript{14} On the role of Iranian crisis in the Cold War escalation see: Scheid Raine, “Stalin and the creation of the ADP”; Zubok, A Failed Empire, 44-56; Zubok and Pleshakov, Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War, 45-46.
\textsuperscript{15} Alvandi, Nixon, Kissinger and the Shah, 12-13.
adventures of the period signified the emergence of even deeper Stalin’s pessimism about the Third World.

In Soviet-Iranian relations this pessimism resulted in a period of Soviet neutrality and almost indifference towards Iran until the early 1950s. In the Soviet leadership a conviction formed that Iran joined the enemy camp and transformed into a British-American protectorate. This conviction was reaffirmed in 1949 when news came about the assassination attempt on the Shah’s life by a leftist fanatic who was allegedly connected to the Tudeh leadership. The Majlis outlawed the Tudeh, yet most of its leaders escaped to the Soviet Union. In these circumstances the appointment of Mohammed Mosaddeq as the new Prime Minister of Iran in 1951 and his oil nationalization program could not be seen in Moscow as a genuinely anti-imperialist development.

On the contrary, despite early reserved support for the oil nationalization program, Stalin soon came to the conclusion that it was a symptom of the internal struggle between the imperialist powers. In Stalin’s view Mosaddeq represented U.S. interests against the British. Importantly,

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16 In 1957 the Tudeh leadership organized a commission to investigate the 1949 attempt on the Shah and decisively refused any connection of the terrorist to the Tudeh. However the commission condemned the actions of young Nureddin Kianuri who failed to communicate the information about planned assassination attempt that he learned in advance to the Central Committee, see: “Resolution of the CC of the People’s Party of Iran of 1 March 1957 Regarding the Events of February 1949,” March 01, 1957, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, RGANI, f. 5, op. 28, d. 499. Department for Relations with Foreign Communist Parties (International Department of the Central Committee), 1953-1957, microfilm, reel 125. Obtained by Roham Alvandi and translated for CWIHP by Gary Goldberg. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119720


18 Even before Mosaddeq’s appointment, when he established the National Front in 1949, Former Ambassador to Iran Mikhail Maksimov (at that moment he was the Deputy Head of the Department of Near and Middle East at the Foreign Ministry) wrote a very negative characteristic of Mosaddeq as an enemy of the Soviet Union and sent it to Molotov, see: “M. Maksimov, ‘The National Front in Iran’,” October 28, 1949, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, RGASPI, f. 82, op. 2, d. 1220, ll. 30-32. Contributed by Jamil Hasanli and translated by Gary Goldberg. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119116
recent research shows that the Soviet leadership was very well-informed about the internal political struggles in Iran: Soviet representatives were repeatedly approached by different sides, Soviet intelligence gained first-class information, including secret data from Iranian and Western diplomatic mail. However, Stalin refused to see in Mosaddeq a genuine radical anti-imperialist.\(^\text{19}\)

This example shows us the deep mixture of theoretical and geopolitical considerations and biases in the mind of the aging Soviet vozhd. This mixture had been changing throughout Stalin’s life in power, and as noted by Erik van Ree, tactically Stalin was often influenced by the circumstances but strategically he was an inflexible believer in Marxism-Leninism as he understood it.\(^\text{20}\) Towards the end of Stalin’s life, his criticism of national bourgeoisie grew from pure Marxist unacceptability of “exploitation” to a moral judgment of bourgeoisie as “plutocracy” that cared for its own interests while weakening the state.\(^\text{21}\) Stalin was unambiguous about the betrayal of patriotism exercised by the national bourgeoisie in his last public speech at the 19\(^{th}\) Party Congress when he addressed “the representatives of the communist and democratic parties” as those who must “raise the banner of national independence and national sovereignty” cast overboard and “sold for dollars” by the bourgeoisie.\(^\text{22}\) Mosaddeq was thus a natural example of such betrayer of national interests. In Stalin’s view, the Iranian nationalist that acted publicly against one imperialist power must have represented the interests of other imperialists because in Stalin’s reading of Marxist-Leninist doctrine that was what the local bourgeois nationalist were supposed to do. Simultaneously the combination of security issues along with Stalin’s understanding of the way the geopolitics functioned led him to a logical conclusion that Iran was indeed the field of geopolitical battle

\(^{19}\) Zubok, “Stalin, Soviet Intelligence, and the Struggle for Iran”, 15-17.
\(^{21}\) Ibid., 281-282.
between the Americans and the British. Thus geopolitical considerations perfectly fitted theoretical assumptions and led to the overall deeply ideological reading of the situation that resulted in Soviet passivity towards Mosaddeq.

The death of Stalin on March 5, 1953 did not bring immediate radical changes to the Soviet policy towards Mosaddeq. The collective leadership that emerged at the top of the Soviet hierarchy soon showed that misreading Mosaddeq was not a result of Stalin’s individual suspiciousness but an ideological position on nationalist leaders of his kind. It is also important to take broader geopolitical considerations into account—the shaky armistice in Korea that was reached in July 1953 was much more important for Soviet leaders than risky support of the Iranian nationalist whom they distrusted and whose agenda could drag them into new conflicts with the West. Not to mention the internal struggle for power that peaked in June 1953 with the arrest of Lavrentiy Beria which distracted new Soviet leaders from the situation in Iran. However, Soviet intelligence in the summer of 1953 was aware about the planned coup and the decision not to intervene was again political. Soviet leaders, in particular Vyacheslav Molotov, who retook control of the Soviet foreign policy after Stalin’s death, ignored the alarming signals from Tehran.

When following 1957 struggle for power Molotov was ousted and accused of his “anti-Party position”, among other things he was blamed for his 1953 misreading of Mosaddeq. By then Nikita Khrushchev had launched his campaign of reorientation of the Soviet foreign policy towards the Third World, for which Mosaddeq represented almost the ideal type of anti-imperialist leader that Khrushchev was willing to form an alliance with. Consequently Molotov’s passivity in 1953 could not be treated otherwise than a big mistake under the new ideological circumstances.

One of the greatest losers of Soviet passivity on Mosaddeq and in the face of the coup against him was the Tudeh party. Despite the ban on party activities in Iran and emigration of most leaders, the Tudeh still had a support base in Iran and had a capability to mobilize its supporters for strikes or other protests. Yet during the oil nationalization crisis the Tudeh acted in accordance with the Soviet position and never decisively supported Mosaddeq.\(^{26}\) This seeming indecisiveness had a number of consequences. Firstly, it further cemented the Tudeh’s reputation as Soviet puppets and alienated many of the Tudeh sympathizers. Secondly the return of the Shah and transformation of Iran into a US client-state led to the campaigns of repression in which the Tudeh was crushed and decimated more than the National Front or other political forces.\(^{27}\) By the late 1950s its political weight was reduced to almost zero, most of its activists lived abroad in exile; the party became disconnected from the active political life within Iran.

The case of the Tudeh can serve as an example of continuity in Soviet position towards fraternal parties. Following the 1946 crisis Stalin did not consider the Tudeh as a valuable asset and largely ignored the party leadership.\(^{28}\) Similarly after Stalin’s death, Molotov did not seem to have taken seriously potentially devastating consequences of Soviet neutral position on the coup for the Tudeh. The fraternal party was considered by the Soviet leaders as an asset that could be sacrificed for the sake of the Soviet state interests which (unlike the proclaimed solidarity of international communist movement) was truly in the center of Soviet foreign policy ideology.

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\(^{26}\) After the condemnation of Molotov’s attitude to Mosaddeq in 1957, the Tudeh leadership also had to repent its actions, see: “Resolution of the Central Committee of the People's Party of Iran about the Anti-Party Group,” July 07, 1957, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 189. General Department of the Central Committee, 1953-1966, microfilm, reel 44. Contributed by Roham Alvandi and translated by Gary Goldberg. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119721

\(^{27}\) Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, 3-25.

\(^{28}\) Zubok, “Stalin, Soviet Intelligence, and the Struggle for Iran”, 25
The Shah and Khrushchev’s rediscovery of the Third World.

The successful coup against Mosaddeq and return of the Shah resulted in an unprecedented dependence of Iran on the United States. The Americans provided Iran with substantial aid, whereas the Shah started to see his alliance with the United States as the foundation of his monarchy. Nevertheless throughout the next decade the Shah often expressed his dissatisfaction with low amount of American support, thus showing that he kept feeling insecure about the potential Soviet aggression or communist revolution from within. Yet overall the Shah completely abandoned the neutrality that had been defended by Mosaddeq, and decisively took the American side in the global Cold War. For Nikita Khrushchev, who as CPSU First Secretary was gaining more and more political weight in Moscow, this was a nightmare. In 1955, the year when Khrushchev and Soviet Premier Nikolay Bulganin toured India, Burma, and Afghanistan in manifestation of new Soviet Third World policy, a military block was formed on the southern borders of the USSR—the Baghdad Pact. This new alliance represented the implication of the containment strategy of the Eisenhower administration that was referred to by the Americans as the Northern Tier. Iran was the essential element of this project along with Turkey, Pakistan and Iraq. The Shah, however, had his reservations—in particular, he was concerned about the possibly harsh reaction of the Soviet Union, which still could enforce dangerous articles of the 1921 Treaty. The Shah also tried to exchange his participation in the alliance for greater American supplies of modern weaponry. After all, the

31 In a memorandum that the Shah personally delivered to Washington during his official visit in December 1954, he quite frankly claimed that Iran wanted to enter the regional alliance but it could not do it as a weak partner that must have relied on the defense systems of its neighbors. See: “Memorandum by the Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs (Jernegan) to the Secretary of State. Tab A: Ambassador Henderson’s Summary of the Memorandum to be Handed to the President by the Shah at the Opening of Their Talk at the White House on December 13”, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume X, Iran. 1951-1954. Document 504, December 5, 1954, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v10/d504
Shah saw his participation in the alliance as a way to secure future American military protection and was willing to make this decision despite not only the discontent of his northern neighbor but also of the Iranian public opinion that only reinforced its conviction of the Shah as the stooge of the Americans.\textsuperscript{32}

In Moscow the intelligence about American attempts to form a regional military alliance and in particular about American approaches to the Shah was available long before the Shah’s final decision to join the pact.\textsuperscript{33} Although it was not a surprise given Molotov’s conviction about Iran’s definitive choice of the capitalist camp, these news still caused grave concerns. However the Soviet response was initially designed to please and to reassure the Iranians that the Soviet Union had no aggressive intentions to its southern neighbor. In May 1955 the Supreme Soviet swiftly ratified the Soviet-Iranian Frontier and Financial Agreement signed a year earlier, while in June the formal head of the Soviet State Marshal Kliment Voroshilov sent an official invitation to the Shah of Iran to visit the Soviet Union. Yet when in October the Shah announced his final decision to join the pact, Molotov summoned the Iranian Charge d’Affairs and warned him that Iran’s adherence to the military anti-Soviet bloc would violate the 1921 Treaty and would allow the Soviet Union to invoke the article 6.\textsuperscript{34}

The diplomatic exchange continued in November when the Iranian Foreign Ministry sent to Moscow an official note, which described Iranian adherence to the Baghdad Pact as natural in the context of Soviet aggressive actions in the aftermath of the Second World War. The draft five-page aggressive response note prepared by the Soviet


\textsuperscript{33} For more on Soviet intelligence gathering prior to the creation of the Baghdad Pact see: Sergey Lebedev, ed., Ocherki istorii rossiyskoy vneshney razvedki. Tom 5: 1945-1965 gody (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye othosheniya othosheniya, 2003), 321-364.

\textsuperscript{34} Michael Pye, “In the Belly of the Bear? Soviet-Iranian Relations during the Reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi” (PhD Diss., University of St. Andrews, 2015), 92.
Foreign Ministry not only rebutted Iranian accusations but also directly put the responsibility for “the consequences” of Iran’s adherence to the Baghdad Pact on the Iranian government.\(^{35}\) However the draft had to be approved by the Presidium (the Politburo) of the Central Committee.\(^{36}\) Here the role and the growing influence of Khrushchev and his position towards the Third World became apparent. In a discussion on the note he (and Voroshilov) confronted Molotov, Kaganovich and Bulganin who supported the draft note, and expressed the opinion that a note had to be sent but a softer language needed to be used.\(^{37}\) Eventually a much softer version of a note was accepted, the mentioning of “the consequences” that would follow was dropped and the direct accusations were substituted by vague diplomatic formulas of discontent.

Despite the Soviet reaction, the official visit of the Shah to the USSR was not cancelled. Between these two events the 20\(^{th}\) Party Congress took place; it was at the congress that Khrushchev not only made his historic denunciation of Stalin but also announced new foreign policy ideological trend—peaceful coexistence with the Capitalist West. Thus when the Shah’s airplane landed in Moscow on June 25, 1956, it was a somewhat different Soviet Union although it might have been yet not evident. During his meetings with the Shah, Khrushchev tried to use all his charm to communicate to the Iranian monarch the main message: the Soviet Union was breaking with its Stalinist past, part of which had been the 1946 Azerbaijan crisis. Consequently Iran had no reason to fear the Soviet aggression and did not need the Baghdad pact to protect it. The

\(^{35}\) Ibid, 92-93.

\(^{36}\) Between 1952 and 1966 the highest organ of the Party was named the Presidium of the Central Committee (*Prezidium TsK KPSS*) instead of the Politburo.

\(^{37}\) “Chernovaya zapis protokola zasedaniya Prezidiuma TsK KPSS № 177”.

Shah defended Iran’s sovereign right to be a part of any alliance including the Baghdad pact but reassured Khrushchev that “Iran would not be used a spring board (in Russian translation—*platsdarm*) for aggression against the Soviet Union”. The Shah’s choice of words here directly referred to the 1921 treaty where this exact formula (*platsdarm dlya agressii*) was used in the article 6. Although the Iranian Foreign Minister Ardeshir Zahedi remembered that the meeting with Khrushchev only reinforced the Shah’s insecurity and conviction that the Soviet Union still imposed danger to his throne, Soviet-Iranian relations saw some improvement following the almost three weeks long official visit: a number of major agreements on trade, transit, border zone joint activities were signed in the following year.

In the aftermath of the Shah’s meeting with Khrushchev (while the Shah was still touring the Soviet Union) the Presidium of the Central Committee decided to send a new ambassador to Iran. After a consideration of the Central Committee Secretariat an experienced Soviet Party bureaucrat, Nikolay Pegov, was chosen to take a post in Tehran. At the same Presidium session the Soviet leaders decided to

38 Alvandi, “Flirting with Neutrality”, 422.
39 Zahedi remembered that at the end of the meeting Khrushchev turned to a harsher rhetoric reminding the Shah of Soviet military might. Moreover the rest of the Shah’s tour included a number of visits to Soviet naval and air bases that were supposed to prove Khrushchev’s words and “bring the Shah to his senses”. See Pye, “In the Belly of the Bear”, 98-99. For more on the Soviet-Iranian agreements signed in 1957 see: Rouhollah Ramazani, *Iran’s Foreign Policy 1941-1973: A Study of Foreign Policy in Modernizing Nations* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1975), 303-308.
41 Nikolay Pegov was not a career diplomat; in 1956 he held the post of the Supreme Soviet Presidium Secretary. However earlier, in the aftermath of the 19th Party Congress in 1952, in the last months of Stalin’s rule he had been appointed a Party Central Committee Secretary who had been equal in his responsibilities to Malenkov and Suslov. These three Secretaries were supposed to head the Presidium sessions one after another in case of Stalin’s absence. Thus it is evident that in 1952 Stalin considered Pegov in the pool of his successors.
reduce Soviet financial support to the Tudeh. Pegov’s appointment along with the reduction of support to the Tudeh clearly indicated willingness to compromise and the importance of good relations with the Shah for the Soviet leadership.

Meanwhile, the Shah remained dissatisfied with the level of American support. He was deeply disappointed, too, about the refusal of the US to join the Baghdad pact. The Shah’s suspicion deepened after the so-called Qarani affair, when a military plot to overthrow the monarchy led by General Qarani was uncovered in January 1958 and he learned that the Americans had known about the plot but failed to notify him. The bloody overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy that followed in July 1958 shocked the Shah. He felt betrayed by the Americans but also was disillusioned about the Baghdad pact as the organization failed to protect the very seat of the alliance. Nevertheless, the Shah suspected the hand of Moscow behind the coup in Iraq and demanded new guarantees of protection from Washington. In an attempt to restore the reputation of the Baghdad Pact the US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles agreed to sign bilateral defense agreements with the remaining members. The negotiations on this bilateral agreement between Iran and the United States caused a renewed Soviet interest in Iran.

43 The United States did not formally join the pact because it could arouse strong opposition of Israel and result in escalation of an Arab-Israeli conflict, see: Yesilbursa, The Baghdad Pact, 50.
45 Alvandi, “Flirting with Neutrality”, 422. Following the coup Iraq withdrew from the Baghdad pact. The organization was renamed the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) with the headquarters in Ankara.
46 As we know now the Soviet Union had nothing to do with the organization of the Iraqi coup, although it certainly pleased Khrushchev, see: Fursenko and Naftali, Khrushchev’s Cold War, 158-184.
While the Soviet Union repeatedly protested the Iranian-American talks on the bilateral defense agreement, informally Ambassador Pegov approached the Iranian authorities with a competing offer: to sign a Soviet-Iranian non-aggression treaty. Surprisingly the Shah confidentially agreed to proceed with these negotiations. A new treaty would have superseded the 1921 treaty and would eliminate the threat of the Soviet Union invoking articles 5 or 6. Simultaneously the Shah’s discontent about the Americans added up to this tempting perspective to get rid of the 1921 treaty. Following diplomatic consultations, a secret Soviet delegation headed by the Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Semyonov arrived in Tehran in January 1959. 47

Despite the secrecy of the Soviet mission, both the British and the Americans knew about the arrival of Soviet delegation. In the United States the Shah’s diplomatic maneuver was considered to be a blackmail to extract additional American aid in exchange for cancellation of talks with the Soviets. Although the British were unhappy about the perspective of US-Iranian defense agreement, they took the Shah’s sudden turn to the Soviet Union more seriously. A British diplomat, Sir Denis Wright, was received by the Shah thanks to the effort of the Court Minister Hussein Ala, who was also shocked by the Shah’s flirtation with the Soviets. According to Wright, the Shah did not look like someone who was only talking to the Soviets in order to extract more aid from the Americans. On the contrary, the Shah told Wright that “he was fed up with his allies and the Baghdad pact”. 48 Thus, as Roham Alvandi convincingly argued in his article based on British and American documents, the Shah was not playing games with the Americans but instead was taking first steps towards a more independent foreign policy. 49 However, Khrushchev and the Soviet leadership failed

to capitalize on the Shah’s disappointment and anxiety. Instead, the Soviet delegation presented to the Shah a draft of the non-aggression treaty which differed from the initial Iranian draft that Pegov had delivered to Moscow. In particular, the new draft lacked any mention of the abolition of articles 5 and 6 of the 1921 treaty. For the Shah this was a red line that the Soviets should not have crossed. The negotiations ended with no success — for the next two weeks the Soviet delegation was kept waiting in Tehran with no audience with the Shah whereas simultaneously both the Americans and the British applied immense pressure on the Iranian monarch. Even after the personal intervention of Khrushchev, who proposed to return to the initial draft to the treaty, the Shah was no longer willing to come to agreement with the Soviet delegation.50

Soon after the failed Soviet-Iranian negotiations the Shah signed a bilateral defense agreement with the United States. For the Soviet-Iranian relations the outcome of the Shah’s initiative to act independently was appalling. Khrushchev considered the Shah’s retreat as an attempt to play the Soviet Union and consequently took it as a personal insult. As a result the Soviet Union launched a massive propaganda campaign against the Iranian monarchy, including aggressive radio broadcasts across the border. For the next three years Soviet-Iranian relations were at their lowest point since the 1940s. During his talks with the Iraqi delegation in Moscow in late February 1959 Khrushchev could not stop himself from referring to Iran:

We would like the Iraqi republic to shine like a diamond in a short period of time. The Iraqi republic has every opportunity to do it. Go to Tashkent, Baku and look what the Soviet Union did with these Muslim countries. These countries are located next to Iran. Compare the achievements of Uzbekistan, Turkmenia or Azerbaijan to Iran, and you will see that Soviet Central Asian and Transcaucasian republics advanced much

50 Ibid, 432-437.
further in comparison to Iran, Turkey and other countries of the Near and Middle East.  

Apart from the contemptuous mention of Iran’s poor development, the quote is also interesting in ideological terms. It shows vividly Khrushchev’s specific understanding of what was “Muslim” that had little to do with religion but rather with cultural heritage that in turn made all “Muslim countries” similar (Khrushchev also spoke about “Muslim Albania”) in terms of their opportunities. In fact, it serves as a great example of his ideological worldview: all “Muslim countries” had to go through a similar developmental cycle, different from the one described by Marx but still precisely predetermined with Marxist-Leninist “scientific” accuracy. This quote also greatly exemplifies Khrushchev’s personal perception of Soviet “Eastern republics” as a developmental model for the Third World.

However, Iran evidently was not considered as a Muslim country that would have soon stepped on a “non-capitalist path of development”. In 1961, at the Vienna summit with newly elected American President John F. Kennedy, Khrushchev brought up Iran as an example of American wrongdoings. Blaming the Americans for supporting “the rotten regime of the Shah”, Khrushchev openly prophesied the upcoming social revolution in Iran. Although the Vienna talks in general were an ordeal for Kennedy, here he did not hesitate to agree with Khrushchev, arguing that Iran indeed needed to be reformed. Yet despite the harsh rhetoric,

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52 See Chapter 1 of this dissertation. For more on Khrushchev’s understanding of “Muslims” see: Kirasirova, “Sons of Muslims”. For more on the Central Asia as a model for development for the Third World see: Kalinovsky, Laboratory of Socialist Development.


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a year later Khrushchev agreed to forget his resentment and allowed the Shah to make a diplomatic move that brought the Soviet Union and Iran to a rapprochement.

It is important to take into account the context of other issues that Soviet foreign policy had to deal with in the late 1950s- early 1960s. For Khrushchev it was a period when most of his hopes proved to be unrealistic. His honeymoon with Eisenhower that seemed to start after Khrushchev’s voyage across the United States in 1959, abruptly ended on May 1, 1960 following the U-2 incident. And although Khrushchev saluted the election of Kennedy, the confrontation of the superpowers over Berlin and later Cuba was only increasing. His repeated attempts to repair the deteriorating relations with the Chinese resulted in a disastrous split within the socialist camp. More importantly this new ideological struggle had serious implications for the Soviet Third World policy. With the Chinese entering the competition for the Third World under the banner of “true anti-imperialism” the Soviet Union needed to repair its ideological image that included securing its state interests geopolitically against this new enemy.

Khrushchev’s prophesies about the upcoming social revolution in Iran were not completely groundless. In the early 1960s, Iran entered a period of grave socio-economic crisis that manifested itself in massive street protests. The disastrous relations with the Soviet Union along with the Shah’s distrust of Kennedy, who came to office criticizing Eisenhower’s support of anti-communist dictatorial regimes, altogether worsened the Shah’s positions in the country even more. Moreover the Soviet propaganda campaign contributed to the popular discontent in the period of crisis, and ending those broadcasts could improve the Shah’s position domestically. Thus both the Soviet and the

54 Zubok, A Failed Empire, 123-153; Fursenko and Naftali, Khrushchev’s Cold War, 263-292.
55 See an overview in Chapter 1 of this dissertation. For a detailed account on Sino-Soviet struggle for the Third World see Friedman, The Shadow Cold War.
56 Abrahamian, Iran between Two Revolutions, 419-426.
Iranian side were in an unfavorable foreign policy situation, and could benefit from a rapprochement. This explains why the Shah’s proposal to give the Soviets a written pledge that no foreign missile base will ever be allowed on the Iranian soil that was met by Khrushchev without enthusiasm in 1959, was eventually accepted in 1962.57

When Khrushchev had started his courting of the Shah in the mid-1950s, his ambitions had certainly reached beyond this kind of agreement. He had wanted at least to push the Shah out of the American camp and to move it closer to the Third World regimes he dealt with elsewhere: Nasser’s Egypt, Nehru’s India, or Nkrumah’s Ghana. However, the Shah did little to make Iran fit the Soviet concept of the “state of national democracy”. On the contrary, signing the bilateral defense agreement with the United States he seemed to reaffirm his loyalty to the Americans. Along with his treatment of Soviet delegation in 1959 that Khrushchev considered a humiliation, Soviet-Iranian relations came to a nadir. Yet the external circumstances described above also pushed Iran and the Soviet Union to resolve their differences, and Khrushchev agreed on what he still could achieve. Ideologically, the agreement put Iran into a unique and very specific position. It was an American ally that did not at all qualify for a state of national democracy on the non-capitalist path of development. In fact, there was no other American ally with which the Soviet Union had such decent (even flourishing in the late 1960s-1970s) bilateral relations. Luckily for Soviet foreign policy theoreticians, in the following decade the Shah’s foreign policy was turning more and more independent, which must have made the abovementioned paradox more acceptable for the Soviets.

Brezhnev’s collective leadership and Soviet-Iranian partnership.

Following the 1962 rapprochement, Soviet-Iranian relations saw a significant improvement, primarily in the economic sphere. The Shah’s program

57 For more on the course of negotiations that led to the 1962 rapprochement see: Alvandi, “The Shah’s détente with Khrushchev”, 427-442.
of reforms that he named “the White Revolution” received positive comments in the Soviet press. *Pravda* referred to the reforms as an essential step to advance Iran from feudalism to capitalism, without mention of Iran possibly taking a non-capitalist path of development.\(^{58}\) In November 1963 Leonid Brezhnev, then the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, the formal head of the Soviet state, arrived in Iran for an official visit. In his speech to the Majlis, Brezhnev called to put behind the differences that the two countries had in the past. Furthermore Brezhnev laid a wreath to the tomb of the Reza Shah, who had traditionally been referred to in Soviet official statements as no less than a Nazi collaborator.\(^{59}\) Brezhnev’s visit was a huge success: the Shah did not hesitate to tell the British ambassador that Brezhnev “could not have been nicer” whereas SAVAK recorded that ordinary Iranians “showed extraordinary emotion” greeting Brezhnev.\(^{60}\)

In the wake of Brezhnev’s visit a number of agreements were signed between Iran and the USSR: an agreement on the joint construction of hydro-electric dams on the Araxes river, on cooperation in dredging work at Bandar Pahlavi and on the construction of grain silos at the Caspian Sea. In the aftermath of Brezhnev’s visit and the Shah’s return visit to the USSR in the summer of 1965, new agreements on technical and economic cooperation were signed. The most important of them was a January 1966 agreement that included the construction of a trans-Iranian gas pipeline (with a consequent agreement on the natural gas deliveries from Iran to the Soviet Union), on the construction of the Isfahan steel mill and a mechanical engineering plant in Iran and on deliveries of machinery


\(^{60}\) Pye, “In the Belly of the Bear”, 132-133.
and equipment from the USSR. Under the agreement, the Soviet Union provided Iran with a low-interest loan to be repaid in natural gas deliveries; and provided industrial and technical training for the Iranian citizens.\footnote{Yodfat, \textit{The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran}, 30; Ramazani, \textit{Iran's Foreign Policy}, 334; Bill, \textit{The Eagle and the Lion}, 171.}

In 1966 Soviet-Iranian cooperation reached a point where the Shah was willing to enter talks with the Soviet Union on purchasing Soviet-made weapons, including jets and missiles. However it is still debatable whether the Shah was willing to proceed all the way with this deal or whether it was one of his many attempts to extract a better deal from the Americans. Nevertheless the news about the possibility of Soviet-Iranian arms deal caused grave anxiety in Washington. Only two years earlier the Johnson Administration had provided the Shah with a 250 million dollars credit for arms purchases and expected his appetite to be satisfied. Yet the Shah’s insecurity that had earlier been caused by the threat of direct Soviet aggression was now stimulated by the radical Arab nationalist regimes that were supported by the Soviets—at that period, that was primarily Nasser’s United Arab Republic.\footnote{Stephen McGlinchey, “Lyndon B. Johnson and Arms Credit Sales to Iran 1964-1968”, \textit{Middle East Journal} 67, no. 2, (Spring 2013): 234. The Shah was in particular worried about the deployment of Egyptian troops to support the Soviet-backed republicans in the Yemen civil war in 1962 and consequently about the emergence of the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) in 1967, see Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabih, \textit{The Foreign Relations of Iran: a Developing State in a Zone of Great-Power Conflict} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 140-162.} The Shah argued that the deal with the Soviets had simply better terms: while the Americans were ready to provide a loan with 5.5 per cent interest to be repaid in hard cash, the Soviets were offering 2.5 per cent loan with repayment in natural gas deliveries.\footnote{Yodfat, \textit{The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran}, 31; Pye, “In the Belly of the Bear”, 141-143.} Although the Johnson Administration was convinced that the Shah was using the deal with the Soviets to blackmail them, after a long and complicated diplomatic exchange by August 1966, the US made some concessions: the Hawk
missiles’ costs were scaled down while delivery schedule for all the military equipment was accelerated. On these terms the Shah agreed not to purchase any highly sophisticated Soviet weaponry. He still signed an arms deal worth of 100 million dollars with the Soviet Union in January 1967, but that purchase consisted exclusively of low-level military equipment.

The Shah’s fear of radical Arab nationalist regimes became a truly important factor in the Soviet-Iranian relations after the 1968 military coup in Iraq. Following the coup the ruling Ba’ath party entered an alliance with the Iraqi Communists and consequently reached a rapprochement with Moscow. It led to a sequence of arms deals, economic and technical aid agreements and climaxed with the 1972 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Moscow and Baghdad. In the context of Anwar Sadat’s decision to expel Soviet military advisors and turn Egypt away from the alliance with the Soviet Union to a rapprochement with the United States, the Soviet Union invested a lot of effort in developing relations with its new Middle Eastern ally. Now the Shah had a radical, Soviet-backed regime right at his doorstep—in a country that he had territorial disputes with. Moreover, this development happened in the context of British announcement of their upcoming withdrawal of all military forces “East of Suez” (including the Gulf region). The departure

64 “Memorandum from the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to Secretary of State Rusk and Secretary of Defense McNamara”, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XXII, Iran. Document 168. August 2, 1966. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v22/d168. For more on the course of the US-Iranian negotiations see: Johns, “Johnson Administration, the Shah of Iran”, 73-84; McGlinchey, “Lyndon B. Johnson and Arms Credit Sales to Iran”, 235-242. 65 Johns, “Johnson Administration, the Shah of Iran”, 85-86. In the following years the Shah continued purchasing Soviet weaponry. However, the scale was relatively low, especially in comparison to the Iranian military imports from the United States under Nixon Administration, see: Richard Herrmann, “The Role of Iran in Soviet Perceptions and Policy” in Mark Gasiorowski and Nikki Keddie, eds., Neither East, Nor West: Iran, the Soviet Union, and the United States (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 70-71. 66 Oles Smolansky and Bettie Smolansky, The USSR and Iraq. The Soviet quest for influence (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 16-18.
of the British, who had used to be the great power in the region for over a century, could create a vacuum of power and a struggle for regional supremacy. In this potential struggle the Shah feared Soviet ambitions to expand their sphere of influence to the Indian Ocean with the help of the Iraqis.\(^{67}\)

Luckily for the Shah, the new American President Richard Nixon along with his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger saw in him a partner and an ally that exemplified perfectly the regional strongman that they were looking for in the Gulf area and more broadly in the Middle East. Witnessing the quagmire in Vietnam, the Nixon Administration chose the strategy of reliance on regional allies that were supposed to protect American interests in different regions of the Third World without direct interventions of the United States. In Nixon’s eyes, there was no better candidate for the Middle Eastern part of the Nixon Doctrine than the Shah. Trusting the Iranian monarch personally since his vice-presidency under Eisenhower, Nixon soon dropped all limitations on arms sales to Iran implemented by previous administrations.\(^{68}\) The rising oil prices (especially after the 1973 oil crisis) along with the gates of the American arsenal open for Iranian purchases led to a massive campaign of armament of the Iranian military. In turn it allowed the Shah to pursue his lifelong dream of forging a regional superpower out of Iran.

In order to do that, the Shah needed to improve his relations with the conservative monarchies of the Gulf that he saw as a counterweight to Arab radical regimes. However, Iran had historic disputes with the rulers of the Gulf. The most significant of these disputes was Bahrain, a historic territory of the Persian Empire that had been conquered by the al-Khalifah clan in the late 18\(^{th}\) century and recognized as a sovereign state by the British. Iran never dropped the territorial claim for Bahrain and even raised the issue at the League of Nations in 1927. With the British


\(^{68}\) Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger and the Shah*, 28-64.
departing from the Gulf, a historic opportunity appeared to realize the long-standing territorial claim. Yet the Shah saw no strategic benefit in the reincorporation of Bahrain. On the contrary, such move could cause a bold reaction of the conservative monarchies of the Gulf that could put Iran in total isolation in the region. Thus through a long negotiation process with the British and the Arab monarchies, doing all possible overtures to save the face, in 1970 the Shah abandoned Iran’s claim for Bahrain.69 This diplomatic move opened for him a whole set of opportunities to develop his independent regional policy. The abandonment of Bahrain contributed to the improvement of relations with Nasser’s Egypt that in the aftermath of the defeat in the Six-Day War entered a harsh political crisis. It also contributed to a reserved reaction of the Arab rulers of the Gulf, when in 1971 the Shah deployed his troops to the island of Abu Musa disputed with Sharjah and the Tumbs disputed with Ras al-Khaimah.70

Concerned about the strategic security of the Strait of Hormuz, in 1972 the Shah got involved in the internal affairs of Oman, the only country apart from Iran that controlled these gates to the Persian Gulf. Fearing a Marxist revolutionary insurgency in the Omani province of Dhofar, the Shah deployed Iranian troops to assist Sultan Qabus ibn Said in the suppression of the rebels.71 Simultaneously, even before famous Nixon’s visit to China in 1972, the Shah also started to seek a rapprochement with the PRC. The first announcement on the establishment of diplomatic relations between Iran and the PRC came in August 1971, shortly after the signing of the Soviet-Indian treaty of cooperation. The following war between India and Pakistan only strengthened the new relations as both countries had close ties with Pakistan.72 It can be argued that the Chinese

69 For more on the negotiation process and circumstances of the Shah’s decision see: Alvandi, “Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and the Bahrain question”.
70 The Shah saw the control over the islands in the middle of the Gulf as a strategic necessity to remain in control of the Strait of Hormuz. For more on the Shah’s diplomatic and military actions over the Gulf islands see: Friedman, The End of Pax Britannica, 202-214; Alvandi, “Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and the Bahrain question”, 176-177.
71 See: Goode, “Assisting Our Brothers”.
72 Yodfat, The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran, 33-34.
were even more interested in building better relations with Iran. Seeing
the Shah as the firm bastion against Soviet expansion, the Chinese were
willing to reduce their support to the Dhofari insurgency, which played
a major role in its eventual suppression in 1975.73

Yet the most serious headache for the Shah remained Iraq. He
saw it as the main element in the Soviet encirclement strategy that he
believed existed. In reality, the Iraqi Ba’athist regime was too busy
consolidating its power, whereas the Soviets used every opportunity to
reassure the Shah that the Soviet-Iraqi alliance did not pose a threat to
Iran.74 The reports of the State Department and the National Security
Council analytics for Nixon and Kissinger were also very reserved about
the negative implications of the Soviet-Iraqi treaty for the American
ally.75 However the Shah managed to employ the Cold War logics and
convinced Nixon and Kissinger, who relied on his judgment, that Soviet
expansion plans existed and Iraq was their main instrument.76 The two
primary fronts on which the Shah confronted Iraq were the territorial
dispute over the Shatt al-Arab waterway and Iraqi Kurdistan, where
the rebellious Kurds challenged the central government in Baghdad in
a struggle for autonomy. For the Shah the latter was instrumental for
the former.

Since the early 1960s the Shah had provided the Iraqi Kurds with
military and financial assistance in order to keep the Baghdad government
busy in the north. Simultaneously the Shah used his assistance to the
Kurds as leverage in a dispute over the Shatt al-Arab. Ironically the Iraqi

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73 Ibid, 455-457.
74 Pye, “In the Belly of the Bear”, 163
75 “Memorandum from Harold Saunders and Samuel Hoskinson of the National
Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs
https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve04/d194 ; “Briefing Paper
Prepared for President Nixon”, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976,*
https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve04/d308
Kurds were led by Mulla Mustafa Barzani, one of the key figures of the 1946 separatist Mahabad republic in Iranian Kurdistan. After the suppression of the Mahabad republic he and his militias managed to escape to the Soviet Union, where Barzani was elected the head of the KDP and studied in the Higher Party School under alias “Mamedov”. In the aftermath of the 1958 coup, Barzani returned to Iraq and soon became the leader of the Kurdish movement for national autonomy. Between 1963 and 1968, when the relations between the USSR and Iraq were at their low point, siding with Barzani had been an easy choice for the Soviets, but after the 1968 coup the conflict between the central government in Baghdad and the Barzani Kurds became a trouble that the Soviet Union was trying in vain to resolve throughout the 1960s and the 1970s. The situation got even more complicated when in 1972 the Shah, bypassing the CIA and the State Department, managed to convince Kissinger that the United States had to abandon their neutralist position towards the Kurds. It resulted in the covert CIA operations that provided Barzani with financial and military aid from the United States, too.

The Shah played his diplomatic cards almost perfectly in his policy towards Iraq. Drawing the United States into the conflict he guaranteed the stalemate in Iraqi Kurdistan. It led to an inevitable compromise between Baghdad and Tehran that was reached in 1975, when the Algiers Accords were signed. Iraq agreed on settling the territorial dispute over the Shatt al-Arab on Iranian terms. The border was announced to go along the thalweg (the middle of the main navigable channel) contrary to the Iraqi earlier claims of sovereignty over the whole waterway. Following the agreement the Shah ceased his support to Barzani, which led consequently to termination the US aid to the Kurds as well and the eventual defeat of the Kurdish rebellion.

77 Evgeny Primakov, Konfidentsialno: Blizhniy Vostok na stsene i za kulisami (Moscow: Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 2006), 325.
78 Smolansky and Smolansky, The USSR and Iraq, 64-70.
79 Alvandi, Nixon, Kissinger and the Shah, 84.
80 For more on the Shah’s support for the Kurds and his eventual abandonment of Barzani see: Alvandi, Nixon, Kissinger and the Shah, 65-125.
This moment marked the highest point of the Shah’s rule. In domestic affairs, his autocracy seemed almost unchallengeable. Most of his political opponents including the Tudeh leadership and radical Shi’a clerics such as Ayatollah Khomeini were in exile. The only evident danger was coming from dispersed leftist revolutionary groups that were in the underground under the constant pressure of SAVAK. In the international relations the Shah achieved his long cherished dream of turning Iran into a regional superpower. He evidently stated his ambitions in the Gulf and managed to contain the threat of Arab radical nationalism. After the Watergate scandal and Nixon’s resignation, his contacts with the Ford Administration were less cordial, but the Shah continued to represent the main ally of the United States in the Middle East. On top of that he managed to maintain good neighborly relations with the Soviet Union despite his openly proclaimed anti-communism. Throughout the 1970s the trade and economic cooperation between two countries continued to grow.

The Soviet leadership achieved their goal of pushing the Shah towards a more independent policy, but not in the way that they expected. In conducting an independent policy the Shah militarized Iran and intensified his anti-Soviet rhetoric and policies against Soviet allies in the region. This certainly fueled Moscow’s dissatisfaction, which was clearly reflected in the Soviet press from the early 1970s. For instance, Iran’s participation in the suppression of the rebellion in Dhofar resulted in critical broadcasts of Radio Moscow in Persian that portrayed the Shah and the Sultan as the puppets of the American imperialism. The Soviet ambassador in Tehran repeatedly protested Iranian military deployments in Oman and even had to boycott a number of social occasions at the court as a sign of Soviet discontent.81 Similarly, Iran’s rapprochement with the Chinese was seen with growing anxiety in Moscow, but the Soviet press was preoccupied with attacking the PRC while remaining reserved about the Shah and his policies. Iran’s siding with the Iraqi Kurds created additional anxiety for the Soviet

leadership as an open conflict between Iran and Iraq was not in the Soviet interests. Following another official visit of the Shah to the USSR in 1974, Pravda published a statement by the Head of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, Nikolay Podgorny, who addressed the Shah very directly about the necessity to resolve the differences between Iran and Iraq.\(^8^2\) The Minister of the Royal Court, Asadollah Alam, who was present in Moscow, remembered that during the talks Brezhnev told the Shah slamming his fist down on the table in agitation that “the existing tensions between Iran and Iraq do not accord with the interests of peace”.\(^8^3\) Consequently the Algiers Accords were met in Moscow with relief. This case, as should become even more evident during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, showed that the binary Cold War thinking cannot fully explain Soviet policies in the Middle East. Instead of alienating “pro-American Iran” and suppressing “US-sponsored Kurdish rebels” in favor of “pro-Soviet” Iraq, the Soviet leadership was looking for a compromise in this complicated triangle, with each side of which they wanted to maintain decent relations.\(^8^4\)

Brezhnev and other Politburo members believed in personal contacts in international relations.\(^8^5\) The personal relations that the Soviet leadership managed to build with the Shah appeared as outstanding. Between 1955 and 1975 the Shah officially visited the USSR five times (four of them after the ouster of Khrushchev) while different Politburo members (Brezhnev, Kosygin, Podgorny) paid four official visits to Iran. This count does not include Kosygin’s meeting with the Shah at the opening of the Trans-Iranian pipeline, Podgorny’s attendance of the Shah’s monumental celebration of 2500 years of Persian monarchy and other meetings at international forums. But they underline the fact that the Soviet leaders saw good personal relations with the Shah not merely as a formal expression for the public. Brezhnev’s personal notes reveal

\(^8^2\) Pravda, November 19, 1974, 5.
\(^8^3\) Pye, “In the Belly of the Bear”, 168.
\(^8^5\) Schattenberg, Leonid Brezhnev, 431-434.
to us the respect he had for the Iranian monarch. In his notes Brezhnev did not mention the Shah often but whenever he did, he referred to the Shah as “His Majesty” or “the Shahanshah”. This on its own is revealing, but the most interesting entry about the Shah Brezhnev made in 1977 when he was meeting Vladimir Vinogradov who was appointed new Soviet ambassador to Iran. He instructed Vinogradov in the following manner:

Pass on my greetings to the Shahanshah. While talking one on one, tell him that you met with me. Tell him that you sensed some unusual feeling (the note continues in the third face emulating what Vinogradov would have said to the Shah—D.A.): Comrade Brezhnev as if talking to himself said: “Comrade Vinogradov, we are neighbors [with Iran] and we have good relations. What reasons does the Shah have to buy arms in such quantities on such immense sums? Certainly it is the Shah’s business, he rules the state, but he surely knows that the USSR will never attack Iran”—at this point [Comrade Brezhnev] finished his thought. He thinks that our economic cooperation is good and he does not see a perspective for it to worsen. […]. Talking to me he remembered his visit to your country and asked me: “How many times did the Shah visit us? And how many times did our comrades visit Iran ‘on top level’, as we say here?” Probably the time played its role and he was surprised that we owe you on this matter. He asked to pass on that he personally would take care of this issue in order to pay this debt.86

This amazing exchange provides us with a number of hints about Brezhnev’s personal attitude to the Shah and to Iran. Firstly, it was important for him to tell Vinogradov word by word how the ambassador had to pass on Brezhnev’s message. The playful tone gives us an impression that it is a message that one old friend passes to another. Secondly, Brezhnev was personally concerned with the Shah’s armament and did not miss a chance to mention it despite the

overall friendly tone of the message. Overall Brezhnev’s note presents us Soviet perception of Iran in the late 1970s in a nutshell. Despite the worrying armament, the economic cooperation worked smoothly. On top of that the Shah was a good friend with whom it was a pleasure to do business. And nothing seemed to challenge these mutually beneficial relations until the popular social revolution in 1978-79 ended the Shah’s rule.

Conclusion

In the late 1970s Iran stood out among the other Third World countries with which the Soviet Union had decent cooperative relations. Despite the Shah’s independent policies, Iran remained a firm ally of the United States, while the Shah personally remained a convinced anti-communist. Soviet scholars and ideologues did not even try to apply to Iran the model of non-capitalist path of development. On the contrary, the Shah’s reforms were explained as a step from feudalism to capitalism. Although Soviet discontent about Iran’s massive armament and active strive for regional supremacy was evident in the Soviet press and public statements, the cooperation that developed between the two countries since the early 1960s outweighed this dissatisfaction. Consequently the rhetoric used by Soviet journalists was very modest and rarely attacked the Shah personally. Even the Shah’s secret diplomacy in Iraqi Kurdistan that led to the US involvement in the internal affairs of the Soviet ally did not cause any harsh reaction towards Tehran. Indeed, this case showed Soviet willingness to compromise and push its allies in the Middle East for similar compromises for the sake of geopolitical stability in the region.

In fact we can argue that Iran after 1962 served as a unique example in Soviet foreign policy in the Third World. There was a decisive dominance of pragmatic geopolitical side over the ideological theory in Soviet relations with Iran. It partly explains the unwillingness of the Soviet leadership to note the growing social unrests in 1978 as a sign of upcoming radical changes in Iran. It also explains the very slow reaction
of the Soviet scholarship and press to the already evident massive protests in late 1978. Until the last days of the Shah, the Soviet leadership hoped to maintain mutually beneficial relations that it had with the Shah’s government. In the next chapter I will show how this status quo had to be reassessed and how political changes in Iran forced the Soviet leadership to search for a new balance of doctrine and geopolitics in their foreign policy approach to Iran. With the success of revolution Iran ceased to be the exception it had been for the Soviets during previous fifteen years but it took the Soviets years to understand that post-revolutionary Iran was a new kind of exception. Moreover, the following chapters will show that this understanding was never fully accepted in Moscow until the last days of the USSR.
Chapter 3

THE SOVIET UNION AND
THE GROWING TURMOIL IN IRAN.

The fall of the Shah in January 1979 eventually forced Soviet policymakers to conduct a full-scale review of Soviet-Iranian relations. Yet until November 1978 the Soviet leadership expressed no official reaction to the growing protests in Iran. Before November, the situation in Iran had not been at the top of the Soviet leadership’s agenda. Even when the KGB allegedly expressed first signs of pessimism about the destiny of the Iranian monarchy in August-September 1978, the leadership remained silent. Soviet leaders did not rush to break with the Shah. After all, as I tried to show in the preceding chapter, the Shah was a partner that the Soviets liked to deal with.

In previous chapters I tried to present the variety of Soviet foreign policy experts and decision makers within and around the Soviet leadership. Many of them played an important role in the way the Soviet Union reacted to the Iranian revolution. However, I argue that experts in Moscow and representatives in Iran were of very little help to the Soviet leadership in 1978 and during the outbreak of the revolution. Very few of them were prepared for the revolution at all, and almost no one was ready for the leading role of the Shi’a clergy. Yet even those experts who could help to adjust the initial reaction of the leadership were either too slow to produce their analysis or were simply not among the first to be asked for help. The information was mainly coming to Moscow from the KGB residency and the news correspondents stationed in Tehran. However neither of these two sources had inside information about the internal situation at the Shah’s court or within the opposition leadership due to the virtually destroyed network of agents in the years preceding the revolution. Simultaneously unlike the experts, people on the ground were not trained for a deep scholarly analysis of the revolutionary situation in Iran. Thus the leadership
was supplied with pieces of crude information with no deep professional analysis. Consequently the official reaction that was finally formulated in November was not based on the expert analysis of the situation in Iran but rather on the binary Cold War logics of confrontation with the United States. Even the form in which the Soviet position was formulated reflected this background. In an interview to a Pravda correspondent, Leonid Brezhnev warned the United States against interference in the internal affairs of Iran. At that point the possibility of American covert intervention became the main concern of the Politburo. The Shah as an American ally who had stable relations with the Soviet Union was a bearable neighbor. But a weak Shah saved by the Americans and dependent on growing American military presence near the Soviet border— that was unacceptable.

A more detailed look at Iran followed only afterwards. In January 1979 the Politburo formed a commission on Iran that contributed to the development of visions for the future of Iranian revolution. At that point the issue of the religious leaders being the most powerful opposition group worried the Soviet leadership much less than the potential American intervention. After all, it took months for Ayatollah Khomeini to accumulate dictatorial power and form religious rule. In January-February 1979 the International Department, led by Boris Ponomarev and Rostislav Ulyanovsky expected the presence of religious authorities in the new Iranian leadership to be short-lived while the revolution in their vision was to continue under the leadership of “progressive” forces. Using the Russian revolution as a blueprint, they defined the toppling of the Shah as the Iranian February which was to be followed by the Iranian October. Consequently one of the main tasks of the International department was to revive the activity of the Tudeh that was to become the main vehicle of Soviet influence and that was supposed to eventually make the Iranian October real. Yet while the revolution did not come to that stage, the International department advocated for supporting Khomeini as the most anti-imperialist of all Iranian opposition leaders.

Although from the very beginning there were some Soviet leaders that had a different understanding of events (e.g. Yury Andropov), their
position towards Khomeini was no different. Andropov was skeptical about the perspective of the Tudeh and foresaw the survival of the religious rule through revolutionary chaos. Yet he also stood for supporting Khomeini as the leader that could ensure the decisive break of the U.S.-Iranian alliance. Thus different fractions of the Politburo had different visions of perspectives of the revolution, yet all of them were driven by different aspects of their ideological worldview. While Ponomarev and Ulyanovsky were more influenced by the doctrine and believed in an upcoming progressive revolution in Iran, a seemingly more pragmatic Andropov believed that the set back of the Americans in Iran was an ideological victory for the Soviet Union and global communist movement.

**On the eve of the revolution (1975-1978)**

The revolution in Iran was a sudden and unexpected development for most experts and decision-makers around the world. The Soviet leadership and academic specialists were not an exception. This is not to say that the Soviets fully agreed with Jimmy Carter, who famously proclaimed Iran “an island of stability” few months before the peak of the revolution. Some expectations of social tensions in Iranian society were evident on the pages of the Soviet press in the years that had preceded the revolution. Soviet analysts noted the growing social inequality and repeatedly criticized the Shah’s regime for excessive spending on arms that had a negative effect on the Iranian economy. However, none of the pre-revolutionary publications in the Soviet press gave any indication that they expected social unrest.¹

¹ One of such articles was published in January 1978 when occasional sparks of protests were already evident in Iran. Yet the article followed the traditional blueprint with short overview of recent Iranian history, special emphasis on the 1953 coup, expressions of support for the Shah’s initiatives of the 1960s and mild criticism of the Shah’s foreign policy and primarily arms deals. The article is also a good reflection of the official Soviet position towards Iran. The Shah’s foreign policy, militarization, special relations with the United States were subjects for criticism whereas an economic development, reforms, trade relations with the Soviet Union were stressed as positive trends in the development of Iranian society. See: P. Demchenko, “Neftedollary i politika”, *Novoe Vremya*, no. 5, January 2, 1978, 12.
Soviet Iranian studies experts in their scholarly publications also expressed their concerns about the repressive trend of the Shah’s regime and social problems that accompanied it. Nina Mamedova, whose primary interest was the Iranian economy, later remembered that a well-trained economist could foresee the upcoming explosion. However it is hard to be sure that Mamedova’s memories were not influenced by later events. At least, neither Mamedova, nor Artyom Arabadzhyan, the head of the Sector of Iran at IVAN and another specialist on Iranian economy, argued in their pre-1978 works that social revolution was at the doorstep of the Shah’s palace. On the contrary, in one of the last pre-revolutionary fundamental collective monographs on Iran published by IVAN, Arabadzhyan dedicated a chapter to describe positive trends in Iranian development since the early 1960s, concluding that Iran had entered the last phase of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Moreover Arabadzhyan argued (clearly referring to the Fadaiyan-e-Khalq, Mojahedin-e-Khalq and other underground revolutionaries) that “leftist elements” (levatskiye elementy) that called for the immediate overthrow of the monarchy were making an adventurist and untimely step. Similarly, in 1978 when the protests in Iran had already started, Arabadzhyan published an article in one of the IVAN Special Bulletins that was only circulated within the scholarly community, where he discussed the many possibilities of cooperation between the USSR and the Shah’s Iran in the upcoming years with no sign of expecting the upcoming fall of the Shah.

The area where the experts could be expected to be of help more than anywhere else was on the role of religious authorities in the Iranian politics. Yet in most studies of contemporary Iran published in

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2 Nina Mamedova’s interview (Part One) to Izustnaya Istoriya, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hVAVzcr_OGQ
the pre-revolutionary years the role of the Shi’a clergy was discussed as a secondary issue. Indeed most publications that discussed the history of the Shah’s “White revolution” addressed the negative reaction of the conservative clergy and even mentioned Ayatollah Khomeini as the leader of those protests and an influential exile. Yet when the narrative turned to the contemporary issues, the clergy completely disappeared from the scholarly analysis.6 The only fundamental Soviet research of the contemporary Iranian Shi’a clergy, its political leaders and views was Elena Doroshenko’s “‘Shiitskoe dukhovensstvo v sovremennom Irane’” published in 1975.7 As I noted in previous chapters it was not easy for Doroshenko even to get permission to study Iranian religious authorities. The obstacles encountered by Doroshenko in her pursuit of the “religious” topic can serve as further evidence that although religion in the Third World was a legitimate research object for Soviet scholars, it largely remained an abstract concept, while its actual representatives and their political role was often left aside.8 Yet Doroshenko’s book represents an important exception. Relying on primary sources that included the writings of some of the Iranian religious leaders and on the contemporary Iranian and Western scholarship, Doroshenko presented the Shi’a clergy as a powerful political force. There are no signs of Doroshenko’s expectations for this force to lead a social revolution, but she discussed in detail the views of different Iranian clerics, not only mentioning key figures as Ayatollah Khomeini or Ayatollah Shariatmadari but also showing differences in their views. She also stressed a status of “a hero and

7 Elena Doroshenko, Shiitskoe dukhovensstvo v sovremennom Irane (Moscow: Nauka, 1975). Ten years later Doroshenko published new updated version of her monograph that is more known to the scholarly community. However, despite the same name, it was an absolutely new book as it studied of the role of the Iranian clergy in socio-political life of the country from the post-revolutionary perspective. See: Elena Doroshenko, Shiitskoe dukhovensstvo v sovremennom Irane, 2nd edition (Moscow: Nauka, 1985)
8 For more on the Soviet studies of religion in the Third World see Chapter 1 of this dissertation.
a martyr” that Ayatollah Khomeini obtained following his exile to Najaf. Doroshenko argued that Khomeini’s anti-Westernism made him the closest heir of the political and economic ideas of Mosaddeq in contemporary Iran and consequently he was not only leading the religious opposition but also accumulated the solidarity of “progressive intelligentsia and students”. 9

Reading such analysis in 1975 could have given the decision-makers some idea about the political potential of religious authorities in Iran. Yet it is evident that Doroshenko’s book never made it to the tables of high level bureaucrats. During the 1995 seminar of Cold War veterans in Lysebu, two highly important former Soviet officials, Anatoly Dobrynin, former Soviet ambassador to the United States, and Karen Brutents, former deputy head of the International Department, both explicitly argued that the Soviet leadership knew very little about Islam in Iran and even less about its political potential. Dobrynin insisted that Islamic fundamentalism was never discussed as an entity or issue and that he knew of no official documents or discussion in the Politburo or in the Foreign Ministry on this matter. In this underestimation of political Islam, the Soviet leadership was very similar to the Americans. At the same seminar, former NSC member Gary Sick remembered how the CIA director Stan Turner had to explain to the Vice-President Mondale what “the Ayatollah” was.10 Karen Brutents ironically responded to that remark that he doubted that anyone in the Soviet leadership had known that term. Even more revealing was a short remark by Dobrynin: “None of them asked”.11 Although the Lysebu discussion happened more than fifteen

9 Doroshenko, *Shiitskoe dukhovenstvo*, 1st ed., 117. Some of her analysis of the political role of the Iranian clergy and fractions within it Elena Doroshenko discussed in the articles that preceded the publication of the monograph and were published in both scholarly and popular journals. See: Elena Doroshenko, “O nekotorykh religioznykh institutakh i deyatelnosti shiitskogo dukhovenstva v sovremennom Irane” in Gafurov, ed., *Religiya i obschestvennaya mys’ narodov Vostoka*, 175-195; Elena Doroshenko, “Poka ne vernulsya “skrytiy imam”, *Nauka i religiya*, no. 7 (July 1970), 66-70.
10 “The Intervention in Afghanistan and the Fall of Détente”, 54
11 Ibid, 96
years after the events and some of the quoted remarks are clearly ironic they do however reflect very much general situation within the Soviet decision-making centers.

For most Soviet people, including those interested in international relations, the role of the clergy in Iranian political life remained a mystery. It is especially evident in an article that appeared in Novoe Vremya, one of the most influential and popular mass journals on foreign affairs, in the fall of 1978, when the name of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was mentioned in the Soviet press for the first time, not without an embarrassing mistake:

…The most powerful opposition group that acts against the Shah—notes the New York Times—consists of Muslim traditionalists loyal to Ayatollah Mohammed (sic!) Khomeini, religious activist, who has been living in Iraq in emigration since 1963, when he had organized the movement all around the country against the land reform and other modernization measures initiated by the Shah.12

We need to be fair to the Soviet journalists—they quoted the New York Times correctly. Khomeini’s name was in fact mixed up in their source.13 However, instead of using this mistake to their advantage, Soviet journalists quoted the American article as if there were no misspellings. Thus in 1978 there was apparently no journalist, editor, any other expert neither in the New York Times, nor in the Novoe Vremya, that could point out an obvious mistake in the name of one of the biggest religious and political figures in Iran. The fact that both Soviet and American journalists in 1978 knew almost nothing about the key figure of the Iranian religious opposition tells us in a way a lot about the level of international ignorance in Iranian matters. It also supports very vividly the ironic remarks of Brutents, Dobrynin, Sick

and Turner, according to which even those experts that existed were of very little help to the decision makers and were hardly requested to be of help.

The information that was coming from people on the ground was also far from alarmist. Two years prior to first revolutionary protests, in 1976, Vladimir Svetozarov, the APN (Agentstvo Pechati “Novosti”) correspondent stationed in Tehran, sent an analytical note to Moscow.¹⁴ From the APN headquarters it was forwarded to the Central Committee Department of Propaganda. Like some other Soviet journalists abroad Svetozarov was recruited by the KGB and his responsibilities included sending such analytical notes to inform the Central Committee.¹⁵ Describing the political situation in Iran, Svetozarov stated that positions of the Shah were stable and potential for revolutionary developments in Iran was low.¹⁶ Nevertheless Svetozarov did not deny the existence of social tensions and popular discontent with the Shah’s regime, describing the worsening economic conditions of the poorest social groups. However, Svetozarov’s assessment of the working class perspectives to turn against the regime suggested that there was no organized political movement among workers. Yet he noted the ideological discontent with the ongoing westernization in all kinds of social groups of Iran: “The penetration of moral and

¹⁴ Unlike many other notes that ended up in the classified archives of the International Department, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the TASS, this one was submitted to the Department of Propaganda and thus was declassified. Due to this bureaucratic exercise we do not only have an important example of a document genre but also an analysis of the situation in Iran, two years before the revolution, presented to the Central Committee.

¹⁵ Svetozarov’s allegiance to the KGB is confirmed by the list of agents in Iran, smuggled to the UK by the former KGB archivist Third World Mitrokhin. According to this list his codename for operative work was “Bazarov”. See MITN 1/2, 73; Svetozarov’s affiliation with the KGB was also confirmed by Mikhail Krutikhin who served as a TASS correspondent in Tehran in the same period of time. Author’s interview with Mikhail Krutikhin. Moscow. November, 2017.

ideological values of the imperialist West to Iran is condemned in the circles of democratically attuned representatives of intelligentsia, students and in some parts of the clergy.”17 (emphasis mine—D. A.). Svetozarov also described the protests of religious students in Qom that had happened a year earlier, and confirmed that some religious leaders were in opposition to the Shah’s regime. He stressed, though, that it was not the clergy as a social group but certain “unofficial circles of local clergymen”. According to Svetozarov, some of the clergy leaders “dared to openly step forward against the strangling of political freedoms and strengthening influence of the Western bourgeois culture on the youth”.18

Svetozarov’s affiliation with the KGB and his reserved concerns about opposition to the regime may give us the impression that Soviet intelligence was generally convinced of the stability of the Shah’s rule. However, Vasily Mitrokhin, in his notes supposedly based on the documents from the KGB archive that he managed to smuggle abroad in the early 1990s, presents the view of the Soviet intelligence in a different light. It is important to note that although these bits of information about the KGB pre-revolutionary activities are the most interesting, they are simultaneously very poorly supported by the evidence and generally contradict the existing scholarly consensus about the general framework of Soviet-Iranian relations in the years preceding the revolution.

Mitrokhin’s notes suggest that in 1975 the Politburo approved the resolution for the KGB First Chief Directorate (Pervoe Glavnoe Upravlenie—the KGB directorate responsible for intelligence activities abroad) to assume while planning its activity in Iran that the state interests of the Soviet Union were best suited by the destabilization of Iranian political life. This destabilization was to be supported by “specific intelligence methods”. The intended result of the operation was to create

17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
the conditions for regime change in favor of “progressive democratic forces”. In the meantime all possible measures had to be taken in order to prevent any harm to Soviet-Iranian relations as a result of this intelligence activity.19

According to Mitrokhin, following this resolution, in 1975-77 the KGB First Chief Directorate intensified its work to widen the illegal residency in Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. The head of the “S” Directorate (illegal agents), Vadim Kirpichenko, who also was one of the KGB coordinators responsible for the Middle East, managed to convince the Deputy Head of the KGB, Vladimir Kryuchkov, that the KGB needed to recruit new illegal agents among Iranian students studying abroad.20 This proposal to recruit new agents in the particular case of Iran was also a result of a disastrous situation in the KGB illegal residency in Iran.

Most Soviet illegal agents in Iran had been recruited in the 1940s and thus were losing their importance by the late 1970s. The highest ranked KGB agent in Iran was General Ahmed Moharrabi. A high-ranked officer, Moharrabi used to work in the American military mission in Iran and later in the Iranian General Staff. In the KGB reports his codename was “Man” or “Kerman”. Moharrabi had been working for the KGB since 1944, and he regularly provided Moscow with information, using his connections in the government and at the court. In 1976 he was even awarded the Order of the Red Banner but later he was uncovered by the Iranian counterintelligence and on December 25,

19 However, apart from Mitrokhin’s papers this resolution is not mentioned in any other available sources. Most probably the real proof of its existence can be found only following the opening of the KGB FCD or the Politburo archives. For Mitrokhin’s account see: MITN 1/2, 17.
1977 executed for treason. Another high ranking KGB informant close to the Shah’s court was Fereydoon Hoveida (codename “Zhaman”), the Iranian ambassador to the UN from 1971 to 1979 and brother of the Iranian Prime Minister Amir Abbas Hoveyda. Like Moharrabi, Hoveyda was recruited under Stalin—according to Mitrokhin, Moharrabi’s initial recruitment dated back to 1952. However, unlike Moharrabi, Hoveyda was considered “an unstable asset”, who provided information only from time to time. Also his origins and fortune deprived the KGB of the financial motivation factor, which apparently was crucial in the case of Moharrabi. Yet Hoveyda was not useless for the Soviet intelligence. In 1972, as a head of the workgroup of the UN General Assembly political committee, Hoveyda was used to pressure the delegates to accept the Soviet project of the Declaration for Détente Intensification and Nuclear War Prevention. For this service Hoveyda was awarded with a cuff link worth one thousand dollars. The KGB’s connection to Hoveyda was maintained even after the revolution and the execution of his older brother.

By the mid-1970s, Soviet legal residence was represented by thirty agents, who worked under cover of the embassy and other Soviet representative organizations. The residence maintained contact with 150 informants among Soviet citizens in Iran who worked in different spheres of bilateral cooperation. Soviet intelligence had very scarce connections among Iranians and no active agents at the Shah’s court. Apart from the

21 MITN 1/2, 21; Kuzichkin, Inside the KGB, 196. Some details of Moharrabi’s service to the KGB and his following exposure are described in the memoirs of the at the time KGB resident in Tehran Leonid Bogdanov. However, Bogdanov’s memoirs are mostly devoted to his later service in Afghanistan, and an episode about “the Iranian agent” (Bogdanov refrains from mentioning the name of the agent but the described details clearly point at Moharrabi) is just a short digression from this general narrative. See: Leonid Bogdanov, Afganskaya tetr (Moscow: Natsionalnoe obozrenie, 2004), 34-35.
22 MITN 1/2, 23
23 Ibid, 6
In 1975, the KGB Baghdad residency, following a request from the Tehran residency, tried to establish contact with Ayatollah Khomeini in order to assess his ability to destabilize the political situation in Iran. The attempts were not successful. In May 1978 the residency reported to the center about the growing influence of Khomeini on the Iranian emigration circles and about his clear anti-Soviet and anti-communist views. In particular, the report stressed Khomeini’s dissatisfaction with the events in Afghanistan and his conviction that the April revolution in Afghanistan was a result of the Soviet intelligence activities. Yet according to Soviet agents in Iraq, “a priest [Khomeini — D.A.] did not consider the toppling of the Shah as an option”. Although this part of his memoirs is hard to verify, Vladimir Kuzichkin quoted another agent and claimed that Khomeini had a meeting with Soviet recruiters. According to Kuzichkin during the meeting Soviet representative expressed the will of the Soviet Union to support Khomeini in case he gains power in Iran. Kuzichkin mentions nothing about Khomeini’s reaction to this proposal.

According to Mitrokhin, the KGB drafted a document titled “Perspective Plan of Actions Concerning Iran for 1976-1980”. The main objective of the Soviet intelligence was to create the perception that the Shah’s regime was unstable, promote the image of a morally disgraced monarch and a corrupt court. A plan for active measures in regards to Iran developed by the Eighth Department of the KGB First Chief Directorate received the codename “Zafar”. Apart from the objective described above, the realization of the plan would have to lead to widening of the

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24 Ibid, 108; this information was also confirmed by Mikhail Krutikhin in his interview to the author. Author’s interview with Mikhail Krutikhin. November 2017. Moscow.  
25 Ibid, 38  
26 Kuzichkin, Inside the KGB, 239  
27 MITN 1/2, 6
Soviet-Iranian trade and economic connections, growing anti-American sentiment inside Iran and tensions between Iran and its neighbors.28

The plan included three main directions of work: psychological pressure on the American representatives in Iran, discrediting of the Shah’s regime in the eyes of the Western human rights organizations, and misinformation of the Shah’s court about instability of its alliance with the United States in the framework of Carter’s human rights program. For instance, Mitrokhin claimed that in 1978 the Shah was fed with rumors about American plans to intensify pressure on him and to force him to liberalize his regime. Ironically, one of the rumors launched by the KGB contained information that the Americans planned a terrorist attack against the Shah using the assistance of “the fanatic wing of the Iranian clergy”.29 If this rumor was indeed launched, it reveals a lot about the KGB reading of the clergy’s stance in Iranian social life: a reactionary class that could be American agents rather than leaders of anti-American opposition. While this perception proved wrong, the general idea of anti-American sentiment as something potentially popular in Iranian society proved to be a correct assessment of the KGB.

If we assume that Mitrokhin’s claims about the “Zafar” plan are true, the KGB played its role in building a corrupt image of the Iranian monarchy but its influence was hardly substantial. A year before the revolution, the KGB analysts themselves did not see much potential for a popular uprising and assessed the perspective of opposition forces to take power very moderately, emphasizing the role of the military: “The most real alternative to the Shah in case of his removal from the political scene is the military. The regime’s opposition is weak and divided. In general, current state of opposition does not pose any threat to the existing regime…” 30 Thus the KGB, similarly to the IVAN experts, was of very little help to the leadership when the situation came to decisive

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28 Ibid. Similarly to the preceding KGB “destabilization” resolution described by Mitrokhin, the information about “Zafar” is also not supported by other sources.
29 Ibid, 48-49.
30 Ibid, 38
moments of the revolution. In terms of reading social developments, the only interesting case of the KGB activities is their attempt to contact Khomeini. If that attempt indeed took place, the KGB was probably the only Soviet institution that realized that Khomeini was an important political figure in the Iranian society. However, as the attempts to get in touch with the Ayatollah failed, they did not make much use of that understanding. Their general assessment was more conservative and thus of little help to the analysis of situation. This conservatism was partly a result of the bureaucratic culture that characterized not only the KGB but Soviet system in general. However, ideology may have played a role as well—even seeing Khomeini as an influential political actor, the KGB analysts could hardly expect him to be a revolutionary leader. In their worldview formed by Soviet ideological clichés the revolutionary leaders looked very different.31

Until the summer of 1978 the growing protests in Iran remained virtually unnoticed by the Soviet officials and media. The first mention of the Iranian protest movement in the Soviet press were provoked by statements of Iranian officials that implied Soviet role in the growing instability in Iran. The term “black and red reactionaries” (in reference to the clergy and the left) entered the vocabulary of Iranian officials and served as an explanation for the growing disorders throughout 1978. For the Soviet press it was, of course, a reason to sharply react. While earlier the domestic policy of the Shah was mostly beyond Soviet criticism, in the summer of 1978 the Soviet press started a series of publications about the unacceptable socio-economic conditions of life in Iran that had caused the ongoing protests.32 Some Iranian bureaucrats, close to the court, were accused of slander as they were active in promoting the role of the

31 However, in the history of the Soviet-Iranian relations there was a precedent when the Soviets intended to see a “progressive” leader in a religious figure. During the Mosaddeq rule Soviet intelligence reported on perspectives of Ayatollah Kashani to become the leader of the progressive opposition forces. See more in Kalinovsky, The Soviet Union and Mosaddeq.
communists in the destabilization of the country. Religious leaders were initially presented as a minor force that was a part of a bigger movement, fostered by social injustices. Attempts of the Western media to describe the Iranian situation as a clash between secular and religious power were pronounced “a mistake”.34

Oleg Grinevsky, at the time the head of the Department of the Near East at the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs, claimed in his memoirs that the issue of Iranian protests was presented for the first time to Brezhnev in September 1978. Grinevsky even remembered that Brezhnev’s assistant Andrey Aleksandrov-Agentov explained to the Secretary General the role played by “the Islamic fundamentalists”. If Grinevsky’s memories are accurate, Brezhnev’s response says a lot about the perceptions at the Soviet top: “It means the Americans are behind all that”.35 Similar binary thinking was evident in the activities of the Soviet intelligence. In July, during a meeting with Ivan Fadeykin, at that time the KGB resident in Tehran, the head of the KGB Yury Andropov stressed the dangerous nature of the Shah’s Iran as potential base near the southern borders of the Soviet Union that could be used by “the main adversary” (i.e. the United States). Mitrokhin argued in his papers that Andropov insisted to continue the destabilizing activities in Iran in order to influence the internal political situation and Iran’s relations with the neighbors (primarily, Afghanistan). Allegedly he said to Fadeykin: “We need to keep the Shah busy, not to give him a chance to intervene in the affairs of other states”.36 In August-September 1978, Soviet intelligence for the first time assumed that the Shah might not survive the crisis.37 Nevertheless Soviet officials

36 MITN 1/2, 50
37 Grinevsky, Tayny Sovetskoy diplomatii, 101 This claim was also supported by Leonid Shebarshin in some of his remarks in Lysebu. In fact Grinevsky could use Shebarshin’s words at Lysebu as a source for his own statement in the memoirs. See“The Intervention in Afghanistan and the Fall of Détente”, 40.
took a very cautious approach to the situation. The main attention in the Iranian was concentrated on the reaction of the United States.

On October 25, 1978 Aleksandr Bovin published his analysis of the situation on Iran in *Literaturnaya gazeta*.\(^{38}\) Apart from traditional overview of the history of social movement in Iran with special emphasis on the 1953 coup, he touched upon the nature of forces that opposed the Shah, including the role of religious leaders:

On the one hand the regime faces the opposition from the right that is represented by the top clergy. The adherents of Islam reproach the Shah with the import of Western lifestyle — greed, alcohol drinking, depravity to the detriment of Islamic values. On the other hand, the opposition from the left demands radical democratization of political regime as a necessary prerequisite to resolve socio-economic problems. Both accuse top officials of corruption, enrichment, both denounce terror and repressions.\(^{39}\)

Bovin thus presented the religious opposition as a real force on the political map of Iran. And although, according to Bovin, the religious opposition’s program contradicted progressive ideas, it nevertheless stood against the westernization imposed by the Shah’s regime. In absence of official statements from the Soviet leadership, Bovin formulated a set of theses that could serve as the closest extract of Moscow’s view of Iranian crisis: protests became possible as a result of the wrong foreign policy of the Iranian government; causes of protests were in the socio-economic problems of the Iranian society; the accusations of Marxists had no grounds and if there were to be an intervention, it was better to remember the 1953 coup to find out who could be the intruder. The religious component was mentioned but only as a minor factor that did not influence main developments.

\(^{38}\) Aleksandr Bovin, “Iran: Consequences and Reasons”, *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, October 25, 1978, 14. Starting from this article Bovin became one of the regular Soviet commentators of the situation in Iran.

\(^{39}\) Ibid.
Grinevsky remembered that underestimation of the religious component was evident in the decision making centers as well. Most Soviet officials believed that the revolution was driven by socio-economic crisis (which was in many ways correct) and thus based on their ideological worldview analysis the Soviet leaders naturally expected the national bourgeoisie and the left to be the main driving forces of the movement.\textsuperscript{40} However in public the Soviet Union continued to maintain friendly neighborly relations with the Shah. In the press there was an evident distinction between official relations and the invested interest of “the Soviet people” in the domestic situation in Iran.\textsuperscript{41}

**The Politburo wakes up (November-December 1978).**

In November 1978, Soviet leaders started to seriously consider the likelihood of American covert intervention in Iran. The example of Mosaddeq was no longer a mere historical reference, since the scale of crisis called for the main ally of the Shah to do something. For the Soviet leadership the potential appearance of the Americans at their doorstep was a serious reason to pay closer attention to the developments in Iran. News from Tehran alarmed the heads of the Soviet military and the KGB, Dmitry Ustinov and Yury Andropov. Ustinov demanded that the Politburo should take measures against the Americans and not wait until the U.S. military stood at the Soviet southern borders. Reports of the Soviet ambassador in the United States, Anatoly Dobrynin, also offered little comfort. In one of the reports Dobrynin quoted Marshall Shulman, special adviser on Soviet affairs to Secretary Vance, who told Dobrynin that President Carter “was very worried about the Shah’s destiny”. For the hotheads in the Soviet leadership the meaning of the phrase was unambiguous: the Americans were about to intervene.\textsuperscript{42}

Unlike Andropov and Ustinov, Soviet Foreign minister Andrey Gromyko did not believe in the probability of an American intervention. He

\textsuperscript{40} Grinevsky, *Tayny Sovetskoy diplomatii*, 101.
\textsuperscript{41} Yodfat, *The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran*, 46.
\textsuperscript{42} Grinevsky, *Tayny Sovetskoy diplomatii*, 102
considered it too risky for the United States. Yet Gromyko did not object
when Andropov, Ustinov and Ponomarev insisted that Brezhnev must warn
the Americans against active involvement in the Iranian crisis. Moreover,
on November 13, Gromyko was the one to visit Brezhnev and discuss the
idea with the Secretary General. The next day, Gromyko presented a draft
proposal to the Politburo. At the Politburo session on November 16, the
draft was approved and next day the letter was sent in Brezhnev’s name to
President Carter. Soviet concerns were formulated in the letter quite frankly:

The question is of the events in Iran and, to be more precise, that
according to numerous reports actions are being taken on the part of the
United States to influence events in that country. This is confirmed by
information from various sources. Information is also coming in even
about a possibility of a military interference by the US in Iran. We would
not want to believe it. But, unfortunately, it is difficult for us to judge real
intentions of the United States, the more so that no denials followed press
reports to that effect.

Following this explanation, Brezhnev warned President Carter from
any kind of interference, in particular a military one, in Iranian domestic
affairs and stressed that the Soviet Union would have considered it a threat
to its security. Yet this private warning was apparently not sufficient for
the Soviet leadership. A point had to be made publicly: the Soviet Union
was not to tolerate American intervention in Iran.

On November 19, 1978 a statement by Leonid Brezhnev was
published on the front page of Pravda. The Secretary General stated
the official position of the Soviet Union in regards to the situation in Iran.

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43 Ibid.
44 Leonid Brezhnev. Rabochie i dnevnikovye zapisi. Tom 1, 923
45 “Letter from Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev to President Carter.”
Soviet Union, Document 158.
https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v06/d158
46 Ibid.
47 “Otvet L. I. Brezhneva na vopros korrespondenta Pravdy”, Pravda,
November 19, 1978, 1
In his statement Brezhnev warned foreign power to abstain from any kind of interference in the internal affairs of Iran. The statement was made in a form of Brezhnev’s answer to the question of an anonymous Pravda correspondent. It was an old but quite rare form of official statement.\textsuperscript{48} The text of the statement was the product of collective confirmation by the Politburo members. The final draft of the statement on the situation in Iran developed by the Central Committee Secretariat and approved by the Politburo is available in the archive and has an entry marking: “in realization of point 13 of the protocol no. 130 from November 17, 1978”.\textsuperscript{49} Unfortunately the Politburo protocols from November 1978 remain classified and do not allow us to look into the details of internal discussion about the initial Soviet reaction to the events in Iran. However, as there was a protocol we can be sure that the matter was indeed discussed and that the content of Brezhnev’s statement was the collective position of the Soviet leadership rather than an occasional interview of the Secretary General.\textsuperscript{50}

Brezhnev’s statement caused an immediate reaction from Washington. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance responded publicly, rejecting Soviet accusations that the US was planning to interfere in the internal affairs of Iran and expressed hopes that the Soviet Union would also respect Iran’s sovereignty. In fact, Brezhnev’s statement in Pravda must have alarmed the U.S. leadership very seriously. According to the New York Times

\textsuperscript{48} Yet there were a number of occasions when this form of statement was used in the late Brezhnev’s years. A rather thin folder with drafts of these numerous statements can be found in the collections of RGANI: Postanovleniya Politburo ob utverzhdenii tekstov otvetov L. Brezhneva na voprosy korrespondentov gazety Pravda. RGANI F. 80 Op. 1 D. 297

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid, L. 8.

\textsuperscript{50} Four days later, already after the American response took place, Brezhnev also informed political leaders of the Warsaw Treaty Member countries about his statement and willingness of the Soviet Union to prevent any American interference in Iran. See: “Meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Treaty Member Countries,” November 22, 1978, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Contributed to CWIHP by Ambassador Vasile Sandru from his personal files. Included in CWIHP e-Dossier No. 24, by Mircea Munteanu. http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110836
column from November 20, Secretary of State Vance, National Security Advisor Brzezinski and Defense Secretary Brown met at the State Department on a Sunday morning, November 19, as soon as reports about Brezhnev’s statement reached Washington. With President Carter in contact by phone from Camp David, they jointly formulated a response. As the New York Times correspondent remarked, “only in moments of crisis does the United States comment at the highest levels on Sundays”. The public response was also followed by a private one, passed by Brzezinski to Ambassador Toon for transmission to Brezhnev. Carter’s message reiterated American concerns about the Soviet desire to use alleged American plans to intervene in Iran as a pretext for their own interference: “I trust it was not your intention to suggest that the incorrect reports to which you refer might be used to justify Soviet interference in Iranian affairs. I am sure you appreciate that any such interference would be a matter of the utmost gravity to us.”

Thus as Oleg Grinevsky ironically put it in his memoirs: “Moscow and Washington intimidated each other”. In fact, Grinevsky claimed that the Politburo never had any clear plan to implement Brezhnev’s warnings. The KGB was instructed to use different channels of misinformation to make Americans think that the Soviet army was preparing for serious actions. In reality most of what was intended to create an impression of a preparation for action were routine annual exercises.

For many in the American leadership the argument that the unrest in Iran was either provoked by the Soviets or was going to be utilized by them for their advantage was very convincing. Gary Sick remembered that he had a series of arguments with some of his colleagues at the National Security Council. Most of them were convinced that the Soviets

53 Grinevsky, Tayny Sovetskoy diplomatii, 102-103.
were behind the Iranian crisis and called Sick naïve for trying to prove the opposite.\textsuperscript{54} Similarly, in the Soviet Union, the role of the Americans in Iranian events was massively overestimated. There were even voices in the Soviet leadership that suspected the leaders of protests of being connected to the Americans. They understood revolutionary events as the result of CIA plans to topple the Shah, who became too independent. For instance, the head of the Central Committee International Information department, Leonid Zamyatin, expressed this kind of suspicion in a television interview to a famous Soviet journalist Valentin Zorin in his show \textit{Devyataya Studiya}:

When the independent policy [of the Shah—D.A.] did not please the Americans, it was decided to remind him in this way that it was necessary to look closely at what was happening in his country. […] The Americans thought that this would not have damaged the Shah’s regime and at the same time would have made him more compliant. […] When these events were in progress, several forces joined in […] the entire movement was suddenly headed by the Shi’a clergy, because they had suffered of the land reform carried out by the Shah…\textsuperscript{55}

Anatoly Chernyaev, at that time the consultant at the International Department, cited in his diary his short exchange with the First Secretary of Leningrad Party Organization Grigory Romanov and quoted his answer to Romanov’s question about the situation in Iran that was quite similar to Zamyatin’s statement:

— What will happen in Iran? — he almost shouts.
— I do not know. Perhaps, the Americans will topple him [the Shah—D.A.]. He does not suit them anymore.\textsuperscript{56}

In his later entries Chernyaev contradicted his own initial reaction cited above and testified that Zamyatin’s interview caused deep dissatisfaction in the International Department. Chernyaev’s diary also

\textsuperscript{54} “The Intervention in Afghanistan and the Fall of Détente”, 38-39.
\textsuperscript{55} Quoted in Yodfat, \textit{The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran}, 49.
\textsuperscript{56} Chernyaev, \textit{Sovmestniy Iskhod}, 344-345.
hints that experts of the International Department did not pay much attention to the Iranian events until January 1979. Although Iran was way beyond his sphere of responsibility and expertise within the International Department, Chernyaev bitterly wrote that his appeals to the leadership to pay attention to the developments in Iran did not get any response:

“The 1905 revolution” is going on in Iran, a powerful turn of mass popular struggle. At our doorstep. And what do we, Marxists-Leninists, know about it? Was there at least one man in the Soviet Union, scholar or politician, who could have suspected what was going to happen there? What is all our scholarship and theory “serving the politics” worth? As a result we have a “competent” opinion of the head of the Central Committee International Information department [Zamyatin—D.A.], pronounced on television for all the Union to see: “all these events are a result of the CIA machinations, as if the Americans wanted to scare the Shah a bit, because he had not behaved well…” Zamyatin even wrote a note to the Central Committee, proposing “to follow the line of support of stability in Iran” (i.e. to support the Shah!). Suslov and Kirilenko already signed the note with their approval visas. Luckily the events developed faster than the bureaucracy functioned in the Central Committee apparatus. They overshadowed this “Zamyatin line”.

Chernyaev’s reaction illustrates the confusion within the Soviet leadership about the Iranian revolution. Looking for an easy answer about its roots, they resorted to Cold War binary thinking and searched for the hand of Washington (despite the information from the ground). Yet Chernyaev’s comparison of the revolution in Iran to the Russian 1905 revolution made in his private diary is also very revealing in terms of the ideological worldview that dominated the Party analysis of international situation. Chernyaev, a Party intellectual, used a familiar Marxist-Leninist blueprint of 1905 revolution to explain events in Iran. Thus even those who prided themselves on being able to see through Soviet ideological

57 Ibid, 352
formulations were still drawing on orthodox interpretations of history to make sense of events.

The Soviet Union supports the revolution (and tries to makes sense of it) (January 1979).

On January 16, 1979 the Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi left Iran, and on February 1 his main adversary Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Tehran in triumph. The Soviet Union in its official reaction hailed the toppling of “the reactionary monarchy”. Later, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrey Gromyko wrote in his memoirs: “It’s not us, not the Soviet Union, who should have regretted that the holder of the Shah’s crown fled abroad with enviable speed and ended his days in exile. We sincerely greeted the Iranian revolution and never hid our desire to maintain friendly, and only friendly, relations with Iran.” ⁵⁸

This was quite a testimony from one of the top Soviet leaders who had been engaged in a flirtation with the Shah for over a decade in the pre-revolutionary years. Gromyko wrote this paragraph almost a decade after the Iranian revolution. By contrast, in early 1979, the Soviet leadership was trying to make sense of Iranian events. Chernyaev’s disappointment about the lack of reaction to the situation in Iran from the International Department and other competent organs was soon compensated. In January 1979, the Politburo established a special Commission on Iran. The commission included Gromyko, Ustinov, Andropov and Ponomarev. Working in this new format they were supposed to “attentively follow events in Iran, study and analyze processes going on there and take measures accordingly if necessary”.⁵⁹ Leonid Shebarshin remembered that it was this commission that he was supposed to report to after his appointment as the KGB resident in Tehran.⁶⁰ At this point the way that the Commission on Iran functioned remains unclear. We do not know any

⁶⁰ Shebarshin, Ruka Moskvy, 144-145.
document produced by the commission, and thus have no documental proof that any of decisions about Iran made by the Soviet leaders were taken in the framework of this commission. However in Chernyaev’s diary, the commission is mentioned in the context of Ponomarev’s active involvement in its initial work:

He [Ponomarev—D.A.] gathered a group of consultants. Set their tasks. During this briefing I burst out with reproaches: “A revolution in Iran is going on for almost a year, while we pretend that we do not see anything happening. It is the duty of consultants to provide the Central Committee with our analysis”. B.N. ignored my attack. Next day he informed me that the PB [Politburo—D.A.] made a decision to establish a Central Committee commission on Iran following Brezhnev’s note. And now he is so busy with Iranian revolution, which he did not want to hear anything about from me.

Most probably the commission was nothing but another bureaucratic form for this narrow circle of elders who had plenty of ways of formulating the Soviet position on Iran even without this commission. However, in the bureaucratic state that the late Soviet Union was, its very existence, even if only on paper, certainly raised the status of the Iranian revolution among other foreign policy issues.

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61 One of the most researched Central Committee foreign policy commissions is the one on Afghanistan and it is fair to assume that the commission on Iran functioned similarly. The Afghanistan commission also included Andropov, Ustinov, Gromyko and Ponomarev, but also Suslov and Kosygin. These six men made key decisions in the foreign policy while sick Brezhnev was informed about the situation via his assistant Aleksandrov-Agentov. The trio Andropov-Ustinov-Gromyko was a group of key decision makers even in this narrow circle whereas Ponomarev’s influence was limited. A good example is the decision to invade Afghanistan which was passed despite Ponomarev’s objections. See more about the Politburo commission on Afghanistan in Artemy Kalinovsky, “Decision-Making and the Soviet War in Afghanistan: From Intervention to Withdrawal”, Journal of Cold War Studies 11, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 46-73; Odd Arne Westad, “Concerning the Situation on ‘A’. New Russian Evidence on the Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan”, CWIHP Bulletin, nos. 8-9 (Winter 1996/1997), 128-132.

62 Chernyaev, Sovmestniy Iskhod, 352
Five days after the Shah’s departure from Iran, on January 21, *Pravda* published an article that decisively supported the revolution. Among other things the journalists touched upon the role played by the religious leaders. According to the article, protests had acquired “a religious coloring” because the political opposition (e.g. the political left) was drained by repression and was incapable to lead the masses.\(^{63}\) Even before the Shah’s departure, Gromyko mentioned to his subordinates that “the religious coloring” of the Iranian revolution was discussed among the Politburo members. For the Politburo, the Shah’s fall was a chance to get rid of American intelligence and military advisors next to Soviet borders—that alone was a reason to build contacts with Khomeini and support him. Gromyko also explained that it was important to keep the Americans busy in Iran (although preventing their direct interference) in order to keep them away from Afghanistan.\(^{64}\)

Thus overall the Soviet leadership had a shared perception that “the most important progressive forces of Iran, including the Tudeh, must stand “for” Khomeini”.\(^{65}\) It did not mean, though, that there was an absolute consensus among Soviet leaders. In fact there were two visions represented by Boris Ponomarev and Yury Andropov respectively. According to Ponomarev’s International Department, the revolution in Iran in its next stage could reach the point where it would be led by the political left. Andropov was more skeptical: he assumed that religious authorities were not going to give up power in the near future, whereas the political left, especially the Tudeh, were too divided to lead the revolution.\(^{66}\) One of the consequences of Andropov’s skepticism about the temporary nature of religious rule was the appointment of Leonid Shebashin as the new KGB resident in Tehran. Among other things, the choice of Sherbashin was determined by Andropov’s desire to form a more consistent strategy in a search for long-term compromises with

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\(^{63}\) V. Ovchinnikov, “Mezhdunarodnoe obozrenie”, *Pravda*, January 21, 1979, 5  
\(^{64}\) Grinevsky, *Tayny Sovetskoy diplomatii*, 104.  
\(^{65}\) Westad, *Global Cold War*, 297  
Khomeini. Shebarshin recalled that in his pre-departure meeting with Andropov, the head of the KGB expressed his doubts about the idealistic expectations of some of his comrades. In Andropov’s opinion, a swift interception of the revolutionary initiative in Iran by the Tudeh or some other “progressive” opposition group was not feasible in the nearest future:

He [Andropov — D.A.] received me on the eve of my departure and also few times during my appointment. ’Look, brother’, — he mentored me before my departure, — ‘the Persians are such people, they can easily make a fool of you, and you will not even notice how it happened!’ As if he was continuing some argument, Yury Vladimirovich warned me against illusions about the fragility and temporality of the place of the Shi’a clergy in power (at that point Khomeini had just returned to Iran). He also added that we needed to pay more attention to the potential of the democratic movement: “I think the political left do not have perspectives in Iran”. Yury Vladimirovich turned out to be right. 68

As Andropov was reading the situation in Iran differently than the International department, one has to ask on what principles he relied in making his assessments. It is tempting to argue that while the International department was building up its illusions about the left taking over the revolution in Iran (or at least about the anti-imperialist regime that would take the non-capitalist path of development), a pragmatic Andropov saw the picture through a cold “unideological” lens. Yet Shebarshin’s memoirs reveal that Andropov’s pragmatism was deeply rooted in his ideological worldview, too. Shebarshin remembered that

67 Westad, Global Cold War, 297
68 Shebarshin, Ruka Moskvy, 191. Shebarshin’s account, written in retrospect, could be designed to make his ex-boss look smarter and more perspicacious than the rest of the Politburo and it is important to keep that in mind. There are not many other sources that deal with Andropov’s attitude to the revolution in Iran on its early stages. Grinevsky’s memoirs also point out his skepticism but Grinevsky could be influenced by Shebarshin’s book whereas Odd Arne Westad in his chapter on the Iranian revolution also relied on his interview with Shebarshin. Thus while the Politburo archives remain classified we cannot verify for sure the precise positions of the Politburo members, including Andropov, on this matter.
Andropov advised him to read Marx’s “The Eighteenth of Brumaire” in order to get a full understanding of events in Iran. And Shebarshin claimed that he was stunned by the fact that Andropov (unlike most in Brezhnev’s Politburo including the Secretary General) knew Marx well and applied this knowledge to understand world events. Andropov might have been skeptical about Ponomarev’s fantasies about the upcoming leftist revolution in Iran, but his own thinking was also based on an understanding of Marxist-Leninist ideology and thus represented just another interpretation of the ideological worldview.

The Soviet Union, the Tudeh and formation of a new regime (January-February 1979).

In January 1979 the information that was coming from Iran to the Soviet Union was very limited and contradictory. The regime, to which Andropov promised a long reign, was yet to be formed, Khomeini was only planning his return to Iran and despite the formal existence of the provisional government of Shapour Bakhtiar, there was an evident vacuum of power. In that period of ambiguity the International Department concentrated its activities on reactivating its old and well-known ally, the Tudeh party.

For the Tudeh leadership, which resided in exile in East Germany, the revolution in Iran came as a huge surprise. Since the banning of the party in Iran, its headquarters was located in Leipzig and all the financial support of the Party became the burden of the CPSU International Department and the KGB. The latter served as a mediator to transfer money from Moscow to the Tudeh leadership. The development of the situation in 1978 caused great excitement among exiled Iranian communists. Despite a long absence on the political map of Iran, the Tudeh still had supporters in the country. Most of them were either workers, primarily in the oil region of Abadan, or students in big cities — mostly Tehran. However, the

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69 Ibid.
70 MITN 1/2, 5
leadership of the Tudeh was detached from the situation on the ground and for decades had been unable to maintain close connections with its supporters in Iran. Two years prior to the revolution it lost one of its last tools of influence: the clandestine radio station *Peyk-e-Iran*. For years after the ban of the Tudeh it had broadcasted from Bulgaria to the territory of Iran. In 1976, as a gesture towards the Shah, the Bulgarian government shut down the broadcasts. The Tudeh leader Iraj Iskanderi had to petition Brezhnev in order to find a way to continue *Peyk-e-Iran* activity. Initially the International Department considered using the short-wave transmitter in Mongolia. But later due to the technical complexity of this plan Vadim Zagladin, the deputy head of the International Department raised this issue at the Central Committee Secretariat and got an approval to maintain negotiations with fraternal parties in Eastern Europe in order to help the Iranian comrades.\(^71\) However by 1979 none of the Eastern European countries agreed and transmissions were restored from Bulgaria only following the collapse of the Iranian monarchy.\(^72\)

Revaz Uturgauri, a young intern at the Sector of the Near East of the Soviet Foreign Ministry in the late 1970s and later the Soviet Consul in Isfahan, remembered how after the revolution many Tudeh emigrants who were his Persian language teachers at the university started to plan their return to Iran.\(^73\) Although in the Tudeh leadership the general mood was the same, the growing turmoil in Iran unleashed a struggle for power. This struggle became evident already in July 1978. One of the struggling groups supported Iraj Iskanderi, the Tudeh First Secretary who had led the party for decades, while the other stood behind the younger Nureddin Kianuri.\(^74\) The lifting of the ban on the party’s activities in Iran only


\(^{72}\) Friedman, “The Enemy of My Enemy”, 10

\(^{73}\) Uturgauri, *Pokers Ayatolloy*, 46-47.

deepened this struggle, but the final decision about the party leadership in the period of revolution was eventually taken in Moscow.

Relatively moderate in his attitude to religion, Kianuri was chosen by the Soviets over a vehemently anti-clerical Iskanderi. Already in 1976, Kianuri had published an article in the *World Marxist Review* calling for all forces including the religious opposition to form a united front against the suppressive regime.75 Kianuri also presented himself as a more active and dynamic figure. While Iskanderi’s strategy consisted in building temporary alliances with the National Front and potentially some of the moderate representatives of the clergy, such as Ayatollah Shariatmadari, Kianuri quite early announced his support of Khomeini as the most radical and revolutionary of the opposition leaders.76 Thus, in choosing Kianuri, the International Department also made a bet on a more radical course of the revolution in Iran personalized by the figure of a religious leader—Ayatollah Khomeini.

Iskanderi blamed his loss on the exiled leadership of the Azerbaijan Democratic Party that expressed its support for Kianuri. However, this support was a result of a deal made with mediation of the CPSU International Department.77 On January 6, 1979, few weeks before his election as the First Secretary, Kianuri visited Baku on the invitation of Vadim Zagladin. His objective was to secure support of the leadership of Soviet Azerbaijan, personally First Secretary Heydar Aliev, and emigrants from Iran, in particular that of the former leaders of the Azerbaijan Democratic Party.78 In his conversation with Aliev, Kianuri stated the need to unite forces of the Tudeh with Khomeini against the Shah and the United States. Quoting a number of Shi’a religious leaders close to

Khomeini, Kianuri stressed their positive attitude to the Soviet Union as a potential ally in a struggle against the Shah. Kianuri’s voyage to Baku was an absolute success—the party of Azeri emigrants fully supported his idea of cooperating with the religious opposition. Three days before Kianuri’s visit, one of the ADP leaders, Gholam Daneshchian, had met with Heydar Aliev, who recommended the ADP to support Kianuri, claiming that unprecedented popular support of Khomeini is a requirement to be his allies. Although the details of the deal remain unclear, most probably it was not only the pressure of Heydar Aliev and the International Department that made the ADP leaders agree to support Kianuri. A week later, when Kianuri was elected the First Secretary, two leaders of the ADP were also approved to become members of the Tudeh executive committee. One of them, Anuschirawan Ebrahimi, was also appointed the Secretary of the party’s Central Committee. It is fair to assume that it was a concession made by Kianuri and the Soviets to the ADP leadership.

On January 15-17, 1979, the executive committee of the Tudeh elected Kianuri First Secretary. Kianuri was nominated by Gholam Daneschian who arrived to the meeting of the executive committee straight from Moscow. According to other executive committee members, he motivated the nomination of Kianuri in a very abstract way: “The work of the party in Iran must be led by comrades who are in direct contact with comrades in Iran and who are active.” Even more revealing was a statement by another member of the executive committee, Ehssan Tabari.

79 “Stenogramma razgovora Pervogo Sekretarya Kommunisticheskoy Partii Azerbaidzhana G. A. Alieva i chlena ispolnitelnogo komiteta Narodnoy Partii Irana Nureddina Kianuri.” January 6, 1979 cited in Hasanli, At the Dawn of the Cold War, 392
82 Ibid.
When asked about the procedure (according to the party’s statute the leadership must have been elected by the Plenum, not only the executive committee), Tabari said: “At some point the Tudeh Party of Iran’s Central Committee will meet and confirm the draft as has occurred other times. That is common in all Communist Parties. The Soviet authorities have already confirmed those who were drafted.”

This quote supports the argument that the real elections of the new leader of the Tudeh had happened not in Leipzig but in Moscow. The Tudeh Central Committee and the party plenum approved the decision of the executive committee a month and a half later. Immediately after his election as the First Secretary, Kianuri received Soviet financial aid. On January 16, Rostislav Ulyanovsky sent a note to the Central Committee asking to approve the exchange of fifteen thousand rubles “collected by the exiled Tudeh members in the Soviet Union” to the West German marks in order to fulfill Kianuri’s request. The new leader of the Tudeh also immediately became very active in public. In his first statements as the Tudeh First Secretary, Kianuri repeatedly confirmed the readiness of the Tudeh to cooperate with the religious leaders and Khomeini in particular. According to Kianuri, Khomeini’s movement and ideology contained “objectively progressive elements”, thus the Tudeh was willing to look for “a common ground” in its relations with radical religious opposition.

Kianuri’s position was apparently not supported by everyone in the Tudeh leadership. The dissatisfaction within the Tudeh’s top level leaders can be gathered from Kianuri’s requests to the International Department. In those requests he petitioned Soviet comrades to apply pressure on some “authoritative members” of the Tudeh in order to make them publicly support his position in favor of Khomeini.

83 Ibid.
85 Yodfat, The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran, 56.
86 Friedman,” The Enemy of My Enemy”, 11.
The religious component in the nature of a forming Iranian regime at that point worried the Soviet leadership much less than the perspective of American intervention or a rapprochement between the United States and the new leaders of Iran. A good example of this anxiety is the conversation of Boris Ponomarev with Hermann Axen, the SED Politburo member and the head of the SED International Department. This conversation took place in East Berlin in January 1979. During the meeting Ponomarev expressed his enthusiasm about events in Iran, claiming that the Iranian revolution could become one of many other successes of the International Communist Movement in developing countries. He also expressed his concerns about the threat of American intervention. Admitting the controversial nature of Khomeini as a political leader, Ponomarev insisted that the real danger was coming not from him but from the other side of the Atlantic. He told Axen that the threat of a military coup was very vivid and the Americans could rely on the internal forces of “reaction”. Ponomarev also brought up the most painful and meaningful example of the 1973 coup in Chile, claiming that the only reason for the Iranian military not to follow the path of Pinochet was their uncertainty about their success.87

The threats discussed by Ponomarev with his East German colleague were not completely fictional or imaginary. From what we know about American decision making during the Iranian revolution, there was a solid group of high-ranked military officers in the Pentagon that insisted on the suppression of the revolution with violent intervention and a stabilization of the Iranian society by means of a military dictatorship. This position did not find support at the highest levels of the American leadership at that point.88 Years later Leonid Shebarshin remembered that the KGB did not expect a full scale U.S. intervention but rather a covert action similar to those that had happened in 1953. Stan Turner and Gary Sick, who

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were the CIA director and the NSC member respectively in 1979, in their discussion with Shebarshin in Lysebu confirmed Shebarshin’s memories of the CIA unofficial missions to Tehran designed to maintain contacts within the Iranian military and make connections in the new government. They, however, denied the existence of any US plans for a coup.89

In the eyes of Moscow Khomeini was a new anti-imperialist leader of Iran—a new Mosaddeq. Despite the lack of detailed knowledge about his political program, and seeing his aspirations to build a state based on the principles of Islam as purely propagandistic, Soviet officials praised his “anti-imperialist” convictions. Khomeini was even expected to support the young communist regime in Afghanistan—as a fraternal anti-imperialist movement.90 Even if he was not to become friends with the Afghani communists Khomeini provided an indirect “support” for the Soviets by keeping the Americans busy and away from Afghanistan.

Another factor that contributed to calming the Soviet leadership’s fears of American intervention was the appointment of Mehdi Bazargan, a religious-liberal leader of the Freedom Movement of Iran, as head of the provisional government for the transition period. By doing so, Khomeini rejected any chance to negotiate with the government of Shapour Bakhtiar appointed by the departed Shah. In many ways Bazargan positioned himself as an ideological heir of the National Front of the Mosaddeq times but was a greater critic of westernization than contemporary leaders of the National Front.91 Despite all ideological differences, Bazargan’s anti-Westernism was what must have given the relief to Moscow as at that point the potential for an American counterblow remained the main concern of the Soviet leadership.

In March 1979 the Iranians voted in a referendum for the establishment of the Islamic Republic. The Soviet Union supported these

89 “The Intervention in Afghanistan and the Fall of Détente”, 39-52.
90 Vinogradov, Diplomatiya: Lyudi i sobytiya, 443-444.
91 Nikki Keddie, Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution (New Haven: Yale University Press. 2006), 233-234.
developments, as evident from Brezhnev’s election speech\textsuperscript{92} in March 1979:

We…welcome the victory of this revolution which put an end to the despotic oppressive regime…We wish new revolutionary Iran success and prosperity, and hope that relations of good neighborliness between the peoples of the Soviet Union and Iran will be fruitfully developed on the firm basis of mutual respect, goodwill and non-interference in each other’s internal affairs.\textsuperscript{93}

The archives reveal an interesting timeline of this paragraph’s appearance in Brezhnev’s speech. Speeches of this kind in the late Brezhnev era were prepared well in advance, edited and signed by the Politburo members. A draft of Brezhnev’s speech was sent to the Politburo members in late January 1979. A paragraph on Iran was absent there and in all following drafts. Moreover, none of the Politburo members, whose editing notes are available in the archival collection, added this paragraph or mentioned Iran in some other way. The Iranian revolution had been mentioned in the original draft of the speech but only in the sequence of other international events. Yet between January and March 1979 someone in the Politburo decided to include a full separate paragraph to state Soviet position on new Iranian regime. Unfortunately the archives do not reveal to us the name of “the editor” who dared to insert this paragraph \textit{after} the text of the speech was agreed on by all the Politburo members. Yet apparently the situation in Iran was important enough to the Soviet leadership (and was changing too fast) that the paragraph bypassed the traditional procedure of approval.\textsuperscript{94} The rhetoric used by

\textsuperscript{92} Brezhnev’s formally held the post of the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and thus needed to be regularly reelected to the Supreme Soviet.


\textsuperscript{94} The original drafts with notes of the Politburo members are available in RGANI F. 80 Op. 1 D. 968 L. 19-126. The archival collection also contains a number of responses to Brezhnev’s speech, in two of which (by the International Department and the KGB) the reaction to the paragraph on Iran is specified as positive inside Iran and alarming for all “potential aggressors”, see RGANI F. 80 Op. 1 D. 968. L. 187, L. 192.
Brezhnev in public was not different from the one used in his private messages to the new Iranian leadership. In his telegram to Khomeini, in which Brezhnev congratulated the Ayatollah on the creation of the Islamic republic, the wording was almost exactly the same as in the public speech cited above. Thus it was not mere rhetoric — the Soviet leadership truly believed that new Iranian regime was anti-imperialist and consequently the one they could make deals against their common enemy.

Soviet attempts to please the new Iranian leaders with their positive depictions found little appreciation on the Iranian side. The leaders of the Iranian revolution — Ayatollah Khomeini and Prime Minister Bazargan at that period made numerous statements about the unique path of the Islamic revolution independent from both the United States and the Soviet Union. Moreover, in a number of interviews Bazargan openly expressed his antipathy to the communists and the USSR, stressing his efforts to minimize Soviet influence on the internal affairs of Iran. Similarly to the Soviet leadership, Bazargan remembered well the lessons of 1953 and the position taken by the Tudeh and the Soviet Union towards Mosaddeq. Bazargan made clear that he did not trust the communists and did not see a way to cooperate with them as they had betrayed Mosaddeq once, and could betray the national cause of Iran again.

**Conclusion.**

The revolution in Iran came as a vast surprise for Moscow. None of the available pre-revolutionary reports on and from Iran stated the perspective of such a massive popular movement. Even though the Soviet press occasionally criticized the Shah for his military spendings and noted the deepening social inequality, none of the publications even implied the possibility of the collapse of the Shah’s regime. When the protests reached an alarming scale, there was no expert close to the Soviet leadership that could explain this crisis. Thus the ultimate decision makers, the Politburo

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96 Yodfat, *The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran*, 56.
elders, were left on their own to assess the situation. Evidently they were not well informed about social roots of Iranian protests, hardly realized the composition of Iranian opposition groups and surely underestimated the role of religious leaders.

The Party’s eyes and ears abroad—the KGB First Chief Directorate—was also in an uneasy position in Iran. It had a network of informal collaborators (primarily consisting of Soviet citizens working in Iran) but simultaneously by the late 1970s it had lost most of its contacts at the court and in the elites. Even if the memoirists that claim that the KGB predicted the fall of the Shah as early as in August-September 1978 are right, the KGB failed to bring up all the gravity of events to the attention of the Soviet leadership. The latter stayed very passive towards Iranian crisis at least until November.

Unable to explain the revolution, the Politburo resorted to the logic of the global Cold War that suggested that the Americans were not prone to accept the loss of their main ally in the Middle East easily. The recent example of the Chilean coup was an important reminder for the Soviets that the United States were willing to defend their positions in strategic areas of confrontation. Iranian history had also provided an example of American interventionism with the 1953 coup. Although there is no direct evidence that the history of Mosaddeq shaped the assessment of Soviet leaders, some of them (e.g. Gromyko, Suslov) remembered well their 1953 miscalculation that had shaped Soviet relations with Iran for years. In addition the history of the 1953 crisis was often referred to in the Soviet press during the revolution, sometimes as an alarming example of the possible scenario of an imminent American covert action.

This anxiety about the possibility of American interference led to Brezhnev’s November statement in Pravda that immediately alarmed the Americans, who believed it to be a pretext for Soviet intervention. Thus in classic Cold War thinking both superpowers expected their adversaries to actively react to the Iranian crisis while neither of the two did. The Soviet leaders remained alarmed about the perspectives of the American
interference later as well but at certain moment (December-January) they probably realized that it was not to happen immediately.

News from Washington about the indecisiveness of Carter Administration supplanted expectations about U.S. intervention. This understanding caused moderate euphoria as it suggested that the Americans were to lose their primary ally in the Middle East similarly to how the Soviets had lost theirs when Sadat had expelled them from Egypt. Oleg Grinevsky remembered that emotionally, the Iranian popular revolution felt like an unexpected present, like an act of historical justice before their eyes. Ideological statements aside, in this short period the Soviets simply gloated over the American failure, not paying much attention to the future of their own relations with new Iranian regime.97

Despite this anti-American euphoria, the Soviet leaders knew very little about the victorious Iranian opposition. In December 1978 it was already evident that the clergy played one of the primary roles and that needed explanation. In the vision presented by the International department the revolution was supposed to be overtaken by truly progressive forces—primarily the pro-Soviet Tudeh party. Later this self-conviction based on the ideological worldview was also supported by the Tudeh leadership that gradually became the main source of information for the International department.

Despite skepticism of some Politburo members (e.g. Andropov, Gromyko), the Soviet strategy was now to charm the new Iranian leaders while simultaneously prepare the Tudeh for a triumphant return to Iranian politics. The International department initiated changes in the Tudeh leadership and put in charge Nureddin Kianuri, who immediately expressed the support of the Tudeh to Khomeini. By supporting Khomeini and trying to build a bond with his regime the Soviets tried to warrant the anti-American stance of new regime in Iran. In doing so, they hoped to not only deprive the Americans of a possibility to return Iran to their sphere of influence, but also to distract the U.S. attention from other parts

97 Grinevsky, Tayny Sovetskoy diplomati, 101.
of the region, primarily Afghanistan. It is also fair to assume that this way they thought to compensate for their historical miscalculation about Mosaddeq. Now this mistake was corrected by providing unrestricted verbal praise for the new independent anti-imperialist leader of Iran. However, Khomeini was not Mosaddeq and although his mistrust of the Soviet Union was very similar to the Mosaddeq’s, Khomeini’s plans for Iran’s future were entirely different. The Soviet leadership was soon forced to recognize this new reality.

In the next chapter I will discuss the attempts of the Soviets to maintain mutually beneficial relations with new Iranian regime and the gradual disillusionment about failure of the Iranian revolution to transform into a pro-Soviet movement. I will also try to explain how ideology and the Cold War thinking motivated the Soviet leadership to continue its support for Khomeini’s “anti-imperialist” rule despite the failing attempts to court the religious leadership of Iran. This line was continued even after Soviet economic interests in Iran came under threat by Khomeini leadership.
Chapter 4
THE SOVIET UNION AND
THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC.
SOVIET MODELS OF INTERACTION
WITH THE ISLAMIC REGIME.

On April 1, 1979, the day after a referendum took place to determine Iran’s political future, Ayatollah Khomeini triumphantly proclaimed Iran an Islamic republic. For the majority of experts all over the world, including most Soviet professionals, the meaning of this new concept remained unclear. What did the word “Islamic” mean in the case of Khomeini’s Iran? Not many experts were familiar with the *Velayat-e Faqih* principle (the rule of Islamic scholars). It was also not implemented immediately. It took time for religious laws to make their way into the Iranian legal system. For Soviet leaders, this state of affairs must have confirmed their sense that religious rule was a temporary phenomenon. The fully functioning secular government of Mehdi Bazargan, a conservative but democratic politician, which stayed in place until November 1979, seemed to provide further proof that theocracy was not destined to become reality.

However, despite the support for Khomeini initially expressed by the Soviet leadership, and based on Khomeini’s anti-Americanism, the ideologues from the International department expected the revolution to enter a new phase—a progressive one. Unlike the Shah’s Iran that was a controversial exception from the coherent doctrinal concepts because it was not fitting the model of the state of national democracy and was allying with the United States, yet maintaining partner relations with the USSR, the new Iran was finally considered to be entering a “non-capitalist
The Iranian revolution, now remembered as one led by the clergy, could hardly succeed without active support of the left-wing guerilla groups. Thus, along with the expected temporariness of religious rule, the active position of the Iranian left also raised Soviet expectations that the non-capitalist phase would not last too long in Iran. Consequently, in order to facilitate the transition from the non-capitalist phase of the revolution to its “progressive” phase the International department tried to do all in its power to support the return of the Tudeh leadership to Iranian high politics.

In this chapter I will address some of the Soviet attempts to negotiate a formation of a joint left-wing opposition in the hopes of shaping the transition of power leftwards. The initial strategy of the International department was to bring together most active leftist groups (primarily the *Fadaiyan-e-Khalq* and to a lesser degree the *Mojahedin-e-Khalq*) under the leadership of the Tudeh. The KGB residency became the main tool of the International department for these attempts. Eventually most of these efforts failed to achieve their goals. There were various reasons for this failure but the most important one was the unwillingness of the Soviets to risk their relations with Khomeini for the dream of bringing Iran firmly into the Soviet sphere of influence. The fact that Iran was out of American hands was good enough for most in the Politburo. Unlike the leading figures of the Politburo, Rostislav Ulyanovsky and other leaders of the International department were much more convinced in the potential of the Iranian left to hijack the revolution. The difference between these visions can at least partly be explained through the analysis of the ways the Soviet leaders were informed about developments in Iran. The Tudeh leadership, following

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1. For more on the concept and its origins see Chapter 1 of this dissertation. For more on the unusual position of the Shah’s Iran in the Soviet doctrinal constructions see Chapter 2 of this dissertation.
2. The Organization of Iranian People’s Fedai Guerillas, further referred to as the OIPFG or the *fadaian*
3. The People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran, further referred to as the PMOI or the *mojahedin*
its return to Iran, constituted a new source of information for the Soviet leaders along with the previously existing ones—the KGB residency and the news correspondents. In fact the KGB now served not only as mediators to pass the directives from Moscow to the Tudeh but also as intermediaries in passing messages in the opposite direction. A long history of relations between the Tudeh and the International department made these overviews of the situation in Iran sent from Nureddin Kianuri and his comrades the most credible source of information in the eyes of people like Rostislav Ulyanovovsky. Clearly the Tudeh leaders did not hesitate to use this trust to their advantage, feeding the International department with bright perspectives of the upcoming progressive revolution and the Tudeh in its forefront.

The unexpected revolution provoked discussion in the Soviet scholarly community. Although within the community those discussions were allegedly hot and passionate, their published analysis at that point went in line with the official position, presenting Khomeini as an anti-imperialist leader with no deep study of his religious ideology. Semyon Agaev in one of the first scholarly reviews of the Iranian religious authorities (for internal use only) argued that “traditionalist foundations [of Khomeini’s ideology] were not filled with exclusively archaic content”. Salekh Aliev, a Soviet expert who was one of the first to prepare his analysis of the Iranian revolution, highlighted the flexibility of Khomeini who was willing to join forces with some of his ideological

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4 Nina Mamedova remembered that in IV AN some of the arguments about the nature of the revolution in Iran were close to turning into fights. See: Nina Mamedova’s interview (Part One) to Izvestnaya Istoriya, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hVAVczr_OGQ. First public scholarly overview of the revolution was prepared by Salekh Aliev, see: Salekh Aliev, “Antimonarkhicheskaya i antiimperialisticheskaya revolutsiya v Irane”, Narody Azii i Afriki, no. 3 (1979): 45-57. Simultaneously there was issued an edited volume on contemporary Iran (for internal use only) where the key analytical article was prepared by Semyon Agaev, see: Semyon Agaev, “Nekotorye osobennosti istoricheskogo razvitiya Irana i antimonarkhicheskaya, antiimperialisticheskaya revolutsiya 1978-1979 gg.” in Sovremennyi Iran. Istoriko-sotsiologicheskie problemy revolutsii, ed. Sofya Kuznetsova (Moscow:INION, 1979), 8-91.
5 Agaev, “Nekotorye osobennosti istoricheskogo razvitiya Irana”, 47.
foes, such as radical leftist groups and Karim Sanjabi’s National Front. Aliev also stressed the decisive role of the Iranian left in the shaping of the initially chaotic protests into an organized movement. Islamic slogans, according to Aliev, were employed by the left to mobilize a critical mass of protesters but yet remained merely a tool of mobilization of anti-imperialist sentiment. Thus first Soviet expert opinions stated that religion was just a cover for the progressive anti-imperialist content of the revolutionary movement. Contrary to this mainstream opinion, Elena Doroshenko in her first post-revolutionary articles argued that the Shi’a clergy of Iran had a long tradition of involvement in the political life of the country. Moreover she stressed that most Iranians from the lower and middle classes firmly believed in Islam as a foundational element of Iranian statehood. Yet, only in 1980, following the invasion of Afghanistan, did the Soviet leadership ask the scholars to study Islam as a political force, while in 1979 the experts were still catching up with the developments in Iran and simultaneously were not extensively consulted by the leaders. The latter remained mostly informed by the people on the ground.

Thus there were several overlapping frames through which Soviet officials saw their policy in Iran. On the one hand, there was ideological doctrine (particularly strong among some in the International department) which shaped their perception of the Iranian events, not the least influenced by the Tudeh. On the other hand there was Cold War zero-sum thinking about Iran’s international position. Although these views were contradictory at times, they could also be mutually reinforcing. For instance, the desire of many in the Soviet leadership to align with

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8 For more on the developments in the study of political Islam in the Soviet Union in 1980 and later see Chapter 5 of this dissertation.
Khomeini’s anti-Americanism fitted greatly the doctrinal explanation of Khomeini as a progressive anti-imperialist leader.

During the course of 1979 most in the Soviet leadership were getting disillusioned about Khomeini and his alleged progressiveness. In the summer the first signs of his future conflicts with the Tudeh became evident. The Islamic republic was turning more and more conservative. However, it was still anti-American. For the Soviet leadership this was a sufficient reason to keep supporting the religious rule despite ideological differences. With the growing instability in Afghanistan, stable relations with new Iran were seen as essential, especially in the context of Khomeini’s hostile attitude towards the communist government in Kabul. Throughout this early period of the Islamic republic the Soviet leadership made different attempts to approach Khomeini and his circle. Apart from traditional diplomatic channels, the Soviets even attempted establish some kind of dialogue between Khomeini and the Shi’a clergy of Soviet Azerbaijan. Like other attempts to befriend new Iranian leadership, this effort hardly achieved its goal. Yet these failures still did not prevent the Soviet leadership from continuing their support for Khomeini. A part of the ideological worldview manifested in Cold War thinking, where Washington’s loss was Moscow’s gain and vice-versa, led Soviet officials to ignore Khomeini’s reserved but openly formulated negative attitude towards the Soviet Union, as well as his domestic policies that in other circumstances would have been labeled “reactionary” in Soviet doctrinal terms. Yet Khomeini continued to be perceived in Moscow and represented in the Soviet press as a progressive anti-imperialist leader.

The Soviet Union and the Iranian left (spring 1979)

Amidst the fluidity of the early days of the Islamic republic, the Tudeh remained indispensable for Soviet political strategies in Iranian politics. Despite a long period of exile, when most leaders of the Tudeh were disconnected from Iranian political life, the party managed to survive as a political force. By May 1979 most active Tudeh leaders and the
majority of functionaries returned to Iran.\textsuperscript{9} In a situation when the Soviet intelligence network at the top level of the Iranian politics was very scarce, the Tudeh became one of the principal sources of information for the Soviet leadership about the developments in the Iranian domestic situation. Although the International department clearly had higher expectations for the future when the Tudeh could become a vehicle to advance Soviet interests, initially the Tudeh leadership was primarily used almost exclusively as the source of information.

One of the most intensly debated questions among researchers of the Tudeh party’s history is how much independence the Tudeh exercised in defining its position and formulating the strategy. Many specialists agree on the image of the Tudeh as exclusively a provider of decisions made in Moscow.\textsuperscript{10} However some of the recent findings in East German archives (the Tudeh leadership lived in exile in East Germany, and even after their return to Iran many of the meetings with the International Department representatives took place in East Berlin) show that often in the late 1970s the Tudeh leadership used its position as one of the few direct sources of information for Moscow and tried to influence Soviet decisions pushing its own agenda.\textsuperscript{11}

Boris Ponomarev and Rostislav Ulyanovsky regularly held meetings and telephone talks with the Tudeh leadership while the latter were in East Germany. After the election of Nureddin Kianuri as the Tudeh First Secretary, the International department supported the strategy of the new Tudeh leader to subordinate party’s activities to the revolutionary supremacy of Khomeini.\textsuperscript{12} For the Soviet leadership at that point the

\textsuperscript{10} See Behrooz, \textit{Rebels with a Cause}.
\textsuperscript{11} Many of the archival findings that shed light on the details of these interactions between the Tudeh, the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc are presented in Friedman, “The Enemy of My Enemy”.
\textsuperscript{12} Friedman, “The Enemy of My Enemy”, 11
main objective was to make sure that the American influence in Iran was
gone forever and that the Americans could not get a chance to restore it.
For the Tudeh, the destruction of old Shah’s elites and bureaucracy was
probably a more important consideration but either way Khomeini was
seen as a suitable ally in both Moscow and Leipzig.\textsuperscript{13}

As mentioned in the previous chapter, historical experience also
played a significant role in the decision to side with Khomeini. In the
context of Soviet anxiety about the potential coup organized by the
Americans, supporting Khomeini was seen as the lesser evil and as
a compensation for the mistakes of 1953. Despite that, the worries that
the new revolutionary regime could find a way for a rapprochement with
the United States was in place until the late 1979. Only after the attack on
the American embassy and start of the hostage crisis did chances for the
Iranian-American rapprochement became evidently low.

Ideological commitments also added to the joint support of
Khomieni by the Tudeh and the Soviets. In the 1960s, Soviet specialists
and party leaders had argued that national liberation revolutions were to
form “states of national democracy” through coalitions between leftist
forces and national bourgeoisie. Later the left flank of the coalition was
to achieve the leading role, and the progressive forces were to dominate
the national coalition, slowly moving the liberated “state of national
democracy” towards socialism. History did not prove this model to work
ideally (with Anwar Sadat’s split from the Soviet Union being the most
painful example for the Soviets) but in revolutionary Iran both the Tudeh
and the International department initially expected this model to work.\textsuperscript{14}

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\textsuperscript{13} Ibid, 7
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 13. Interestingly the initial analysis of some of the Soviet scholars suggested
that revolution intensified the capitalist development of Iran. For example this
position was presented in the introduction to the collection of articles on the Iranian
revolution published by INION (Institute of Scientific Information on Social Sciences).
See: Kuznetsova, ed., \textit{Sovremenniy Iran}, 5. Later this assumption was harshly criticized
as the position of the leadership and most scholars was that Iran was moving towards
the non-capitalist path of development. See the example of criticism in: Artyom
Arabadzhyan, “Ekonomicheskie, sotsialnye i politicheskie predposylni revolutsii 1978-
The phase of the revolution between the Shah’s departure and the establishment of the Islamic republic contributed to Soviet expectations that the popularity of religious authorities could be short-lived and “the progressive forces” could overtake the revolutionary initiative. The chapter dedicated to the events of this period in the memoirs of Ambassador Vladimir Vinogradov is titled “Dvoevlastie” (“The Dual Power”). This term, familiar to every Soviet student, suggested parallels between the situation in Iran and the history of the 1917 Russian revolution. The use of terms that were referential to the Russian revolution became a common trend in Soviet publications of that period. The press even made references to Prime Minister Shapour Bakhtiar as “the Iranian Kerensky”, to SAVAK and the army as “the Black Hundreds”, to their actions as “Bloody Sunday.” Such rhetoric pushed the reader to conclusions that current events in Iran were “the Iranian February” and according to the logics of the history of the Russian revolution it had to be followed by “the Iranian October”. It is interesting that parallels with the Russian revolution that were naturally drawn by the Soviet officials and publicists also appeared in the West. For instance in his conversation with a British colleague in June 1979 Deputy Director of the CIA Frank Carlucci stated that he shared the view of the British Ambassador to Iran Sir Anthony Parsons that the situation in Iran “had many parallels with Russia in 1918 (sic!) and the revolution had a long way to go”.

15 Vinogradov, Diplomatiya. Lyudi i sobytiya, 410. Vinogradov was not the only one to use this term. In the aftermath of the revolution it became a blueprint of the Soviet scholarship to refer to the events of January-March 1979 as the period of dvoevlastie. The term was traditionally used in Soviet historiography to describe the formation of two competing centers of power in the aftermath of the 1917 February revolution in Russia (the Provisional government and the Soviets) that ended in October 1917 when the Bolsheviks exploited the Soviets to overthrow the Provisional government.

16 “Iran: Chernosotentsy protiv demonstrantov”, Trud, January 24, 1979, 4; “Krovavoe voskresenye v Tegerane”, Pravda, January 30, 1979, 5; Pravda Vostoka, January 25, 1979, 3

17 Most probably Carlucci intended to compare events in Iran to the situation in Russia in 1917 but in the record it is “1918”, see: R. J. Carrick. UK Embassy in Washington to Foreign and Commonwealth Office. “Mr.Bullard’s call on Mr. Carlucci at CIA”. 25 June 1979. The National Archives of the United Kingdom. FCO 8/3371, P. 46-48.
However, Soviet expectations of the left forces overtaking the initiative in the Iranian revolution were not purely based on ideological dogma as there were at least two left-wing revolutionary organizations that played a significant role in the revolution. *The mojahedin* and *the fadaiyan* managed to gather well-coordinated and organized paramilitary armed forces. These forces were the primary actors in the neutralization of the Shah’s army and the SAVAK remainders in January-February 1979. The *mojahedin* and the *fadaiyan* were also important for the mobilization of the working class. Despite being few in numbers in comparison to other social groups of the Iranian society, the workers were one of the most active groups in the revolution.\(^{18}\) For instance, the workers’ strikes at the oil refinery plants in Abadan in the fall of 1978 were among the turning points after which the Shah’s chances to stay in power almost evaporated. At that point the oil industry workers successfully managed to establish many local strike and revolutionary committees. Although initially the presence of the organized political left in their leadership was weak, the role of the *mojahedin* and the *fadaiyan* grew in the course of the strikes. It is worth noting though that the inability of these local committees to build a nation-wide movement eventually contributed to Khomeini’s success. Unlike the left, the adherents of Khomeini already had mass popular support and soon took over the control of the oil strikes. Yet despite that the role played by the workers of the oil industry in the revolution was very significant and the two abovementioned left-wing movements had their part in this success.\(^{19}\)

Following the fall of the Iranian monarchy radical leftist movements remained active participants in revolutionary developments; Soviet


analysts believed that they significantly contributed to the quick fall of Shapour Bakhtiar’s caretaker government. In his memoirs, ambassador Vinogradov wrote that Bakhtiar and his circle were anxious that left radicals could take power by force and consequently Bakhtiar and his government ceased the struggle in order to avoid this overwhelming violence. In the analytical notes produced by the East German embassy in Tehran in March 1979, Vinogradov’s speculations were partly confirmed. According to East German papers Khomeini and his supporters expected a much longer struggle for power with Bakhtiar while the decisive actions of the well-organized *mojahedin* and *fadaiyan* facilitated and quickened the fall of his government.

The Tudeh, *the mojahedin, the fadaiyan* and other left-leaning revolutionary groups were not the only ones to use the language of social justice and inequality. The religious leaders, including Khomeini, did not limit themselves to religious and anti-American rhetoric in their statements. In many of their proclamations and promises they were competing with leftist groups, capitalizing on the slogans of social justice. This was not a secret for Moscow either. The KGB informed Moscow that the social agenda had been taken over from the political left by the religious opposition. The religious leaders urged the Iranian people to abandon Western values in order to return to the golden age of equality and social justice. After the establishment of the Islamic republic they introduced new taxes to assist the poor and limited the rights of foreign companies to own property in Iran. In the Mitrokhin papers there is a note from the KGB residency in Tehran mentioning that “the priests overran the communists” in the field of populist slogans. Yet some in Moscow saw these developments as a positive sign. Semyon Agaev, one of the most authoritative Soviet experts on Iran, argued that Khomeini’s socio-

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20 Vinogradov, *Diplomatiya: Lyudi i sobytiya*, 418-419.
21 Friedman, “The Enemy of My Enemy”, 9
22 MITN 1/2, 38
economic program only proved his anti-imperialism and made him the most progressive of all new Iranian leaders.23

While the religious authorities were capturing ground on the left, the International department instructed the KGB to assist the Tudeh in forming a joint leftist coalition. The primary task of the KGB was to start building connections with the political left other than the Tudeh. With a full legalization of all political parties in Iran the left-leaning groups and factions started to appear all over the country both on national and regional levels. By 1982 TASS correspondent Mikhail Krutikhin estimated around 200 parties of communist or left-leaning orientation active in Iran.24 However in the early period of the Islamic republic, when the possibility of hijacking the revolutionary initiative still seemed feasible, the primary targets of the Soviet ideologues were the mojahedin and the fadaiyan.

These operations were coordinated by Lev Kostromin, deputy head of the Eighth Department of the FCD KGB and acting resident after the withdrawal of Ivan Fadeykin in November 1978 and before the arrival of Leonid Shebarshin in May 1979.25 The KGB made the first attempt to build stable contacts with the fadaiyan and the mojahedin in February, soon after it became evident that the monarchy was not to be restored. Vladimir Kuzichkin remembered that after February 12, when the police and the army disappeared from the streets of Tehran, armed young leftists were the ones who kept maintaining some order in the capital. Two days later Kuzichkin, along with other KGB officers, was ordered to make contacts with some rank and file left-wing revolutionaries. He remembered that most of the young leftists he met that day expressed their sympathy to the Soviet Union. Kuzichkin even assumed that it was a unique unused opportunity of the Iranian revolution when the capital city was full of armed young

23 Agaev, “Nekotorye osobennosti istoricheskogo razvitiya Irana”, 47
24 Mikhail Krutikhin, Leve sily Irana i problema ikh edinstva (1978-1983 gg.), (Candidate of Sciences Diss.: AON TsK KPSS, 1985), 6
25 Kuzichkin, Inside the KGB, 266
pro-Soviet rebels. However, most of them expected very real and fast support from the Soviets—primarily a stable delivery of weapons. The KGB received a similar request from the leadership of both movements. Neither the mojahedin, nor the fadaiyan were ready to compromise themselves by making deals with the Soviets unless the latter were ready to supply them with weapons immediately. According to Kuzichkin the only agreement that they reached was to maintain contacts but to have them outside of Iran, in Europe. 26

By April, the KGB residency was tasked by the International department to start forming a united left-wing opposition bloc under the Tudeh leadership for the future struggle for power. On April 18, 1979 the Iraqi communist party representative in Iran, Abdel Haba, was instructed by the KGB to conduct negotiations with two members of the Fadaiyan-e-Khalq executive committee members. However, Soviet proposals did not spark immediate interest of the fadaiyan leadership; they refused to join the bloc led by the Tudeh. From their point of view the Tudeh did not have enough support of the working class and intelligentsia and had a reputation of being Moscow’s stooges, which could influence the reputation of the fadaiyan as well. However, the fadaiyan expressed their readiness “to build practical relations” with Moscow reemphasizing their quest for arms and money. 27 This quest remained without a response from Moscow as the Soviet leadership was not willing to appear as interfering in the internal affairs of Iran. Thus the contacts between the fadaiyan and the Soviet representatives produced no practical result, and an attempt to bring the OIPFG into a united left-wing opposition failed.

Only a year later, by the summer of 1980, Soviet intelligence and the Tudeh managed to achieve some success in their work of bringing the fadaiyan in to an alliance. In the fall of 1979 at the first post-revolutionary plenum of the fadaiyan Central Committee, the split between the two

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27 MITN 1/2, 39
factions in the organization’s leadership became evident. Half a year later it became official. In the situation of immense pressure of the religious regime, the majority of the OIPFG Central Committee made a decision to agree with the Tudeh strategy to support the regime of Khomeini. They were willing to define the latter as a petty-bourgeois, yet progressive and anti-imperialist. The minority that remained in opposition to the regime highlighted its other characteristics, accusing the regime of supporting the industrial and commercial grand bourgeoisie.28 Certainly the alliance of the OIPFG majority with the Tudeh in the summer of 1980 was a success for the Tudeh and Soviet foreign policy but it did not result in formation of truly wide left opposition front.29 Thus the strategy to transform the “Iranian February” into an “Iranian October”, still dominant in 1979, had disappeared by 1980.

The negotiations with the mojahedin were conducted directly by the KGB agents in Iran. The main Soviet contact in the organization was one of its leaders—Reza Saadati. Acting KGB resident Lev Kostromin managed to organize the recruitment of Saadati and convinced him that the contacts between the mojahedin and the Soviet intelligence were to remain in secret. A contact with Saadati was organized through meetings between him and Soviet agent Vladimir Fisenko. According to Kuzichkin’s memoirs, during a number of meetings Saadati passed “some amount of interesting information” to the Soviet residency.30 However, in April 1979 Fisenko and Saadati were ambushed during one of their meetings.31 Fisenko was immediately evacuated to the

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28 Friedman, “The Enemy of My Enemy”, 28
29 Behrooz, Rebels with a Cause, 126
30 Kuzichkin, Inside the KGB, 266
31 Both Kuzichkin and Shebarshin argued in their memoirs that the ambush was organized by the CIA and the remainders of SAVAK. There is no proof of any CIA activities of this kind. It is even hard to establish if the CIA had resources in Tehran in the spring of 1979 to organize such an operation. Even if the CIA had no part in it, the fact that both Kuzichkin and Shebarshin were convinced, that it was the CIA behind their failure, reveals some aspects of the KGB way of Cold War thinking.
USSR whereas Saadati was executed for treason a few months later. The negotiations with the *mojahedin* also did not bring the desired alliances.32

Thus the activities of Soviet intelligence in Iran in 1979 encountered some serious obstacles. The objective to form a unified leftist front stated by the International Department was not reached. However, that was not the only task of the KGB in Iran. One of the main functions of the KGB representatives in Tehran was to serve as mediators in money transfers from the International department to the Tudeh. In return the KGB passed on the reports of the Tudeh leadership. Every two weeks the residency received encrypted messages from Kianuri and transferred them to Rostislav Ulyanovsky. Apart from technical and day-to-day information, Kianuri was sending to Moscow some general reports about the political and revolutionary situation in the country. Kuzichkin remembered that in describing political circumstances Kianuri was quite objective but all his modesty disappeared when he described the achievements and perspectives of his party. These exaggerations must have contributed to the prolonged conviction of the International Department into the potential of the Tudeh to hijack the revolutionary initiative.33

Initially the International department and the Tudeh leadership saw their support for Khomeini as a temporary measure. Basing their ideological position on the theory of non-capitalist path of development, Ulyanovsky and others defined Iran as a state of national democracy in the process of formation. The archaic image and radical

32 Shebarshin, *Ruka Moskvy*, 108; Kuzichkin, *Inside the KGB*, 266-268. Another task of the KGB in Iran was to do all in its power to prevent a rapprochement between Iran and the United States. In particular Mitrokhin claimed that the KGB tried to use Abdel Haba, the leader of the Iraqi Communist Party, and Yassir Arafat, the leader of the PLO, to feed misinformation to Khomeini and his circle about the alleged American underground actions to restore the monarchy and organize attacks against the Iranian leadership. However, as many claims in the Mitrokhin file, this one is not supported by other sources for now. For more see: MITN 1/2, 39-40, 54.

public rhetoric of the religious leaders in power even somewhat supported this conviction. The radicalism of religious rule added to the perception of its temporary nature. In his discussions with East German comrades, senior Tudeh member Jila Siassi claimed that Khomeini and his “petty bourgeois forces” were not capable of solving socio-economic issues posed by the new stage of the revolution. He even claimed that religious fanaticism and devotion of the masses made it “objectively impossible” to reach solutions in the interests of Iranian people.34

Thus in the spring of 1979 there was a certain difference between the Tudeh perception of the situation and the KGB analysis. As mentioned earlier, the KGB warned Moscow about the ability of the religious authorities to hijack the socio-economic agenda. The Tudeh, as it is evident from the Siassi’s statement, stressed the opposite: the inability of the regime to fulfill social demands of the Iranian people. Similar discussions were also going on in the diplomatic circles. Ambassador Vinogradov in his conversation with his East German counterparts stressed how important it was not to underestimate “the theocratic regime”. According to Vinogradov this regime could not have “an eternal duration” but was capable of diverting the “backward” masses from their class interests.35

At the February plenum of the Tudeh Central Committee, Kianuri stressed that the main threat to the revolution was the establishment of the “bourgeois-democratic” system of rule that could interrupt the progressive transformation of the Iranian society. Thus from the Tudeh point of view “the liberal bourgeoisie” was a much more significant threat than the religious regime. Consequently, one of the stated aims of the Tudeh leadership was to prevent the regime from a rapprochement with “the liberal bourgeoisie”. For the Tudeh, Soviet attempts to build a united left opposition front were simultaneously a way to join forces of all the

35 Ibid.
“progressive opposition” with Khomeini in order to crush the bourgeois liberal opposition.\(^{36}\)

However the Tudeh leadership was not ready to make compromises to achieve the unity on the left flank. In March 1979 the *mojahedīn* and the *fadaiyān* called for a boycott of the referendum on the establishment of the Islamic republic. The Tudeh refused to support this call and stood in favor of the Islamic republic. Moreover, in his interview to Reuters two months after the referendum Kianuri explicitly stated that the decision of the *fadaiyān* to boycott the referendum was a mistake and a result of their radicalism, youth and inexperience. Kianuri also mentioned the *mojahedīn* in the same interview but made clear that unlike the *fadaiyān*, the *mojahedīn* were not even Marxists-Leninists.\(^{37}\) When in June 1979 Ayatollah Khomeini presented his new constitution for referendum, the Tudeh had a second chance to join its forces with other opposition forces that included not only two abovementioned groups but also the National front and moderate religious faction of Ayatollah Shariatmadari. The Tudeh again refused to join this opposition front. The Tudeh leadership soberly assessed its positions on the left flank of the political spectrum: joining forces with the *mojahedīn* or the *fadaiyān* could only happen on equal terms whereas the Tudeh could only agree on an alliance being the leading force. This was not only the Tudeh’s obstinacy but also the position of the USSR that relied on the Tudeh. Mikhail Krutikhin, who later criticized the Tudeh for shortsightedness, at that point in his article in *Novoe Vremya* supported the position of the Tudeh and vehemently criticized the *fadaiyān* and

\(^{36}\) Ibid, 17. One of the key aspects in the Tudeh’s 1979 program was the destruction of alliance between “progressive” Khomeini and “bourgeois” Bazargan. See: Milani, Harvest of Shame.

\(^{37}\) A copy of Kianuri’s interview to Reuters correspondent Richard Wallis was used in the internal discussions of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office and thus its copy can be found in the UK National Archives: “Interview with the Secretary-General of the Tudeh party of Iran, Nur-e-din Kianouri”, Teheran, May 3, 1979”. The National Archives of the United Kingdom. FCO 8/3371, P. 38
the mojahedin for “leftist adventurism” which labeled their short-lived alliance with bourgeois liberals. 38

**The Soviet Union, Iran and the situation in Afghanistan (spring 1979).**

One of the important lenses through which the Soviet leadership looked at the situation in Iran was the ongoing instability in Afghanistan. In March 1979 the situation in Afghanistan was deteriorating, transforming the country into a civil war battlefield with the Kabul communist government losing control over much of the country’s territory. Specifically in March 1979 the government of Nur Muhammad Taraki started to bombard Moscow with requests for aid and assistance. The main reason for that was the failure of the Afghan army to resist the insurgency in the region of Herat, allegedly supported by the Iranians. In his messages and conversations with the Soviet leadership, Taraki explicitly insisted on the role of the Iranians in the provocations in the western part of Afghanistan.

In his conversation with Kosygin on March 18, Taraki stated that the Iranian government was interfering in the internal affairs of Afghanistan and was sending troops dressed in civilian clothes. Kosygin’s moderate reaction to these passionate entreaties from Taraki reveals certain reservations of the Soviet Prime Minister about the authenticity of Taraki’s information. Kosygin tried to calm the Afghan leader down, proposing to negotiate with “Iran’s progressives” in order to convince them that there was a common enemy—the United States. Taraki in return used the alleged Iranian intervention among his arguments trying to convince the Soviet Union to send a limited group of military professionals:

TARAKI. [...] Iran is sending military men to Afghanistan in civilian dress. Pakistan is also sending their people and officers in civilian dress. Why can’t the Soviet Union send Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Turkmens in civilian clothing? No one will recognize them. We want you to send them.

KOSYGIN. What else can you say about Herat?

TARAKI. We want you to send us Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Turkmens. They could drive tanks, because we have all these nationalities in Afghanistan. Let them don Afghan costume and wear Afghan badges and no one will recognize them. It is very easy work, in our view. If Iran’s and Pakistan’s experience is anything to go by, it is clear that to do this work, they have already shown how it can be done.39

Kosygin’s response is not only revealing to us in terms of Soviet unwillingness to send troops to Afghanistan, it can also serve as an important evidence of how the Soviet leadership assessed the Iranian revolution as Kosygin made a reference to it, arguing that no foreigners should intervene in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. Of course the Soviet Prime Minister simply needed a polite way to refuse Taraki’s proposal but the choice of an example is still revealing:

KOSYGIN. You are, of course, oversimplifying the issue. It is a complex political and international issue, but irrespective of this, we will hold consultations again and will get back to you. It seems to me that you need to try to create new units since it’s impossible to count only on the strength of numbers that are coming from elsewhere. You see from the experience of the Iranian revolution how the people threw out all the Americans there and everyone else who tried to paint themselves as defenders of Iran.40

Although Kosygin and the rest of the Politburo were clearly unwilling to fully believe in state-sponsored Iranian interference in the

40 Ibid.
Afghanistan affairs, Iran and Pakistan as sponsors of the insurgency groups within Afghanistan regularly appeared in the Politburo discussions throughout 1979. However the records of the Politburo meetings reveal that the Soviet leadership was confused and lacked information about the situation in Herat. They must have had different sources of information about the Herat insurgency, but in their talks they only referred to the information provided by Taraki and apparently fully relied on it. Thus their knowledge about the insurgency groups in Herat was scarce and one-sided—it was unclear how many of the rebels truly crossed to Afghanistan from Iran and how many were locals that supported the anti-government insurrection. Yet, the traditionalist slogans of the rebels who allegedly fought in the name of Islam against “the apostate government” were well-known in Moscow and caused certain anxiety, which was stoked further by Taraki.

Leonid Bogdanov, the KGB representative in Kabul, remembered a telephone conversation that his colleague had with the Defense Minister Dmitry Ustinov in the days of the Herat crisis. When he informed Ustinov that the situation was very serious and complicated, the Minister responded: “In this case raise and arm the working class!” 41 While for Bogdanov this exchange primarily underlined the complete ignorance of the Politburo about the social composition of Afghanistan, for us it confirms the influence that the ideological worldview had on people like Ustinov. In the situation of “counterrevolutionary crisis” his natural reaction was to call to arms the main revolutionary force—the proletariat.

Despite their vague understanding of the situation, the Politburo reassured Taraki that it would apply pressure on the Iranian government. In the sequence of meetings on March 17-19, the Politburo agreed that Iran, Pakistan and China were genuinely hostile to the Afghan communist government and would “do everything in their power and means to contravene the lawful government and discredit its actions”. The Politburo decided to send warning notes to Iran and Pakistan insisting on the unacceptability of interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan

41 Bogdanov, Afganskaya tetrad, 53.
and confirmed this to Taraki who was summoned to Moscow a day later, on March 20.42

The role of the Iranian government in the Herat insurgency remains unclear to this day. However it is highly unlikely that Iranians constituted the majority of rebels and that the order to cross the border came from the Iranian government. Many of those who could cross in Afghanistan from Iran may have been the Afghans who had been staying in Iran for seasonal jobs. In the revolutionary situation many of them lost these jobs, while others were expelled due to the new Iranian legislation that allowed to force out foreign employees.43 For all of these reasons they could cross the border to their homeland and join forces with the domestic insurgency against the communist government. Recent research on the Herat insurgency suggests that the majority of the rebels represented local rural population that marched to the city and managed to inspire the Herat city garrison to mutiny. Moreover, in contradiction of Taraki’s accusation of the rebellion being supported by the Islamists, the mutiny of the city garrison was led by the Maoist and nationalist officers.44 Thus for now there is no evidence to support Taraki’s claims about the insurgency being supported by the Iranian government or from across the Iranian border at all.


There is no evidence that the warning that the Politburo decided to send to the Iranian authorities had any particular influence on the Soviet-Iranian relations. Due to the limited access to the Russian Foreign Policy archive the exact wording of the document is unfortunately not available.

43 The issue of the new Iranian law that allowed expelling foreign workers was raised as an explanation for massive border crossings from Iran to Afghanistan a number of times by Gromyko and Kosygin during the Politburo meeting and the conversation with Taraki.

Describing the situation in Herat during the Politburo meeting on March 18, Kosygin once again made a reference to the Iranian revolution, now explaining to the rest of the Politburo what was happening in Afghanistan: “...the situation is basically the same as in Iran: manifestos are circulating, and crowds of people are massing. Large numbers of people are flowing into Afghanistan from Pakistan and Iran, equipped with Iranian and Chinese armaments...” 45

Thus the Iranian revolution became an important reference point for the Politburo members (evidently Kosygin used it twice as an example for two different occasions). It would be an overstatement to argue that it could have been an important factor in the Soviet Afghanistan policies, too, but as an example of a recent popular rebellion under traditionalist slogans in the region it echoed in the minds of Soviet decision-makers. There is no clear evidence of that, but Iranian revolution probably did indirectly influence Soviet decisions in Afghanistan through a bigger framework of the Cold War. In a superpower way of thinking the loss of Iran by the Americans could be expected to be compensated elsewhere. With the instability growing in Afghanistan and the Soviets being more and more nervous about it, this kind of thinking could prevail and influence a fear of “losing Afghanistan”. Eventually it was this fear that happened to be the main trigger for the Soviet invasion in December 1979.46

The Soviet Union, the Tudeh and national minorities in Iran (spring 1979).

The revolutionary instability naturally sparked the revival of political life among the Iranian Kurds, Azeris and Turkomans. The old and painful issue of national minorities arose every time in Iran’s


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20th century history when the central government seemed to not be strong enough to suppress those national movements. The Soviet Union and the Tudeh also had a long history of their own relations with Iranian national minorities and a number of historical debates on this matter.47 Since the times of Russian revolution, and especially after the 1946 crisis around Iranian Azerbaijan, the Soviet Union was perceived in Iran as the protector of Iranian national minorities. Although in reality the USSR did very little in this sphere between the 1950s and the 1970s, the image persisted and was also perpetuated in Moscow. This image did not serve Soviet-Iranian relations well, however, as it always raised suspicions in Tehran. Trying to stay within the Soviet framework of support for national minorities, the Tudeh leadership had to deftly maneuver, combining the rhetoric in favor of the autonomy for minorities with a strong support for Iran’s territorial integrity. The history of the 1946 Azeri and Kurdish movements, supported by the Soviet Union and institutionalized in quasi-independent “democratic republics”, left a significant blot on the Tudeh’s reputation. Under pressure from Moscow and Baku in 1946, the Tudeh had been forced to support the separatist movements, which resulted in serious reputational consequences and loss of many supporters.48

Yet, when the first signs of national movements stirring up appeared in the spring of 1979, the Soviet reaction was ambivalent and unsupportive. On April 4, Pravda published an article that blamed the reactionary forces, former SAVAK and pro-Shah imperialists of the misuse of genuine movements for national autonomy among the masses of Kurds and Turkomans, serving their own narrow class interests. The article also vehemently denied any Soviet involvement in the movements, mentioning the false nature of such rumors spread by the BBC.49 The article insisted that the Soviet Union supported the

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47 For more on the role of the Soviets and the Tudeh in the history of Iranian national minorities see Chapter 2 of this dissertation.
48 Yodfat, The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran, 57-64.
49 In the analytical note produced by the British Embassy in Moscow for the Foreign Office the analyst also mentioned a publication in Ettelaat — the biggest Iranian
aspirations of national minorities for autonomy but believed in the ability of Iranian central government to deal with national minorities “on the basis of meeting their main demands”. This statement certainly did not mean that the Soviet Union abandoned its connections with the political activists among the minorities but the Soviet leadership decided to give them as a low profile as possible in favor of better relations with the revolutionary government in Tehran. Such flexibility in its relations with Iranian national minorities also was not something new for the Soviet foreign policy. Throughout the 20th century it was often the function of Soviet relations with Iran’s central government and greater geopolitics—the 1946 eventual crisis resolution being the most illustrative example.

The position of the Tudeh thus did not contradict the Soviet view of the situation. In his interview with Reuters, Kianuri confirmed that the Tudeh supported administrative and cultural autonomy of national minorities. He insisted, however, that this autonomy could only be formed within the framework of national unity and within the present frontiers of Iran. Kianuri stressed: “We are against all forms of separatism”.

newspaper where the radio station of Soviet Turkmenistan “Radio Ashkhabad” was accused of calling on Iranian Turkomans “to show steadfastness and determined armed opposition to the central powers”. However the Soviet article denied any broadcasts of that kind from the territory of the Soviet Union, claiming that Ettelaat mixed BBC for Radio Ashkhabad. It is noteworthy that the analyst of the British embassy agreed and confirmed that “the Soviet Union was coming down clearly on the side of the central authorities”. “S. Wordsworth The British Embassy in Moscow to the Middle Eastern Department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. “Separatism in Iran: Soviet press comment” 4 April 1979. The National Archives of the United Kingdom. FCO 8/3371, P. 31.

51 “Interview with the Secretary-General of the Tudeh party of Iran, Nur-e-din Kianouri”, Teheran, May 3, 1979”. The National Archives of the United Kingdom. FCO 8/3371, P. 38. In his statement Kianuri also stressed that the Tudeh was the first party in Iran to ever acknowledge the rights of national minorities in its official program. Here he referred to an official statement produced by the Tudeh in 1973 where this position reiterated. For more on this statement and the most important excerpts see Yodfat, The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran, 57.
Cold War thinking prevails (May-November 1979)

In May, a new struggle for power began in Iran in which the religious authorities tried to secure their leading positions and to get rid of dangerous opposition groups. This new approach was manifested by the growing activity of the Revolutionary Guards. The armed leftist revolutionaries such as the fadaiyan and the mojahedin became first targets of this activity. The Revolutionary Guards were secretly ordered by the Revolutionary Council to start disarming the armed forces of the left-wing revolutionaries.52

In these circumstances, the Tudeh reaction, surprisingly for many, was positive towards the actions of the regime. The inability of the Tudeh to form a united left opposition front (despite Soviet aid and support) meant the continuing competition on the left flank in which the Tudeh was far from being an undisputed leader. It seems fair to assume that with the attack of the regime on its competitors, the Tudeh could expect to conquer the support of the progressive majority in the country. For this or for other reasons, the Tudeh continued to express its full support for the Khomeini regime during this period.

In the Soviet Union the attack on the leftist groups in Iran was analyzed in the context of growing anti-communist rhetoric expressed by the religious leaders including Ayatollah Khomeini and thus caused the rise of voices that were critical of the Soviet strategy to support Khomeini. The situation in Iran was discussed on official public level in 1979 in two issues of the main Party organ the Kommunist.53 Such attention to an international event with no direct involvement of the USSR on the pages of the Kommunist was quite a rare occasion. Partly it was a result of tough discussions about the nature of the Iranian revolution within the editorial board of the journal. The records of these discussions reveal to us substantial contradictions between theory and reality that

52 Friedman, “The Enemy of My Enemy”, 19.
existed within the Soviet expert community and bothered many within it. One of the most emotional points was made during the discussion by one of the Kommunist editors, Boris Likhachev. He noted that the Iranian revolution received unprecedented attention from Kommunist and proposed to postpone one of the publications about it scheduled for July. Likhachev stressed that the main Party organ was not yet ready to provide a firm analysis of the revolution because its nature was not yet clear: “… I need to note that there are weak points in our analysis of the revolution in Iran. If we just report the news — then maybe we can avoid the questions, but if we provide analysis we need to analyze the driving forces of the revolution — and in this text such analysis is lacking…” 54

More importantly, in this private conversation of Party ideologues, Likhachev did not hesitate to express doubts about the progressiveness of the Iranian revolution. In fact, he pronounced what many were probably thinking: if this is a popular revolution, why is it led by the clergy? And if it is not, why do we support it? Likhachev’s statement gives us some insight on the confusion that existed among people who were supposed to make sense of the Iranian revolution and despite all the flexibility of Soviet doctrine, some of them still had troubles to do that: “…And where is the revolution? There was a clerical revolution under the banner of one of the most religious movements. I am not against the coverage of such events. But some painful questions arise. We need to make a political assessment of the revolution.” 55

Such confusion and anxiety was largely kept out of public statements, including those in the press, which expressed only mild criticism of “radical reactionaries” staying overall in favor of the Khomeini’s regime.56 Socio-economic policies of the Islamic regime also received very positive assessments in the Soviet press. The draft constitution that was proposed

55 Ibid.
56 Some of the commentaries in Pravda, on Soviet television and in regional press are cited in Yodfat, The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran, 58-59.
for the referendum in June 1979 was described as essentially anti-capitalist and filled with ideas of social justice and redistribution of wealth. Soviet officials supported the refusal of the Tudeh to join the boycott of the constitutional referendum. In these circumstances Khomeini was probably once again seen as a lesser evil and the only representative of truly anti-imperialist forces who enjoyed wide popular support. Kianuri at that point exercised his influence on Moscow, trying to convince the International Department that the Tudeh already had attained a very respectful position through its support of the regime. He even assumed that the continuation of this strategy could result in gaining influential posts for the Tudeh members in the government or secret services.\(^\text{57}\) None of this was ever achieved and there is no evidence to prove that a possibility like this ever existed. However, such promises were certainly appealing to the Soviet leadership and added up to the reasons the Soviet had to continue their support for Khomeini despite all the disturbing signs.

The transformation of the Kurdish movement for autonomy into an armed revolt in August-September 1979 had very serious implications for the positions of the Tudeh and consequently Soviet-Iranian relations. Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, the leader of the left-leaning Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan and the Kurdish revolt, repeatedly made statements that the aim of the Kurdish struggle was to gain the autonomy, not independence, and that the Kurds were not receiving any aid from the Soviet Union.\(^\text{58}\) The Tudeh representatives insisted that there could be no support for the Kurds. They even claimed that Ghassemlou (despite his alleged progressiveness) was an agent of Western intelligence and that the revolt was stirred up by the imperialists.\(^\text{59}\) The Tudeh leadership clearly decided not to repeat old mistakes and distanced themselves from the Kurdish rebels. Despite

\(^{57}\) Friedman, “The Enemy of My Enemy”, 21.

\(^{58}\) Some of these statements are cited in Yodfat, The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran, 63-67.

\(^{59}\) Friedman, “The Enemy of My Enemy”, 20.
this, the unrest in Kurdistan was used by the central government in Tehran to widen its attack on the Iranian political left.

Although the regime’s attacks were mostly concentrated on the mojahedin and the fadaiyan, the Tudeh did not remain completely untouched by the campaign. Already on August 1, 1979 Kianuri sent a letter to Moscow describing the growing instability and foreseeing “armed clashes between the progressive adherents of revolutionary transformations and counterrevolutionaries and right extremists”. In his letter Kianuri raised the question of arming the Tudeh so that the party could be ready for a potential civil confrontation. As Kianuri claimed to his East German interlocutors, Boris Ponomarev and Rostislav Ulyanovsky reassured him of their support for the Tudeh but confirmed the necessity to keep supporting Khomeini in order to prevent an undesirable turn of events (i.e. the pro-American coup) and simultaneously to gain more influence.

On August 20, 1979 the Revolutionary Guards sealed off the editorial office of the Tudeh newspaper Mardom. The alleged support of Kurdish separatism was used as a pretext despite the intentional distancing of the Tudeh leadership from the Kurdish issue. This development speeded up the consideration of Kianuri’s petition at the Central Committee Secretariat. On August 27 Vadim Zagladin proposed the Secretariat to instruct the KGB and the General Staff to look into Kianuri’s request and consider sending non-Soviet made weapons such as automatic rifles and grenades to the Tudeh for self-defense purposes. On August 30 the Secretariat approved Zagladin’s proposal and sent instructions to the

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60 “N.Kianuri to CPSU Central Committee “Prosba Tsk Narodnoy partii Irana” August 1, 1979. RGANI F. 89 Op. 32 D. 10 L. 4. Later, In September, Kianuri admitted to his interlocutors among East German diplomats that the Tudeh was fully ready to go underground and start partisan activities. See: Friedman, “The Enemy of My Enemy”, 22.

61 Friedman, “The Enemy of My Enemy”, 21

KGB and the General Staff.\textsuperscript{63} Eventually, with the pacification of the situation the decision to arm the Tudeh was not approved; the Politburo returned to this petition only a year later. In July 1980 Kianuri arrived in Moscow to meet the Soviet leadership and brought with him some proposals of arms delivery roots by land or by air. But Andropov and Ponomarev, who received him, advised the Central Committee not to rush with a decision to arm the Tudeh: “Taking into account a critical political importance of this issue, the situation in the country and the condition of the Tudeh and the left forces in general, we propose to study Kianuri’s petition more thoroughly and return to it later…”\textsuperscript{64} The Central Committee never returned to this issue. By 1980, when Andropov and Ponomarev addressed their letter to the Central Committee, the global and regional situation was much more complicated than a year earlier.

In the Soviet Union, discussions in the Central Committee were simultaneously accompanied by a critical, though cautious, campaign in the press. At the end of August \textit{Pravda} published Kianuri’s protest letter to the Islamic Revolutionary Council. In that letter, however, the Tudeh First Secretary was careful enough not to accuse Khomeini of hostile actions towards the Tudeh. He concentrated his criticism on “the reactionary circles of the clergy”\textsuperscript{.65} In one of his interviews to the Western correspondents, Kianuri stressed that the Tudeh did not see this crisis as generated by Khomeini but on the contrary saw one of the party’s main goals as preventing Khomeini from being influenced by the far right.\textsuperscript{66}

On September 4, 1979 Aleksandr Bovin published a new article on Iran. It was probably the most critical article published in the Soviet press throughout the period of the revolution and early Islamic republic. In the article Bovin accused the revolutionary regime of censorship and


\textsuperscript{65} “Pismo Tsk Narodnoy Partii Irana”, \textit{Pravda}, August 29, 1979, 5.

\textsuperscript{66} Yodfat, \textit{The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran}, 62.
suppression of freedom of speech, referring to closures of the press that presented the views differing from the official “religiously-theological doctrine”. Bovin also touched upon the issue of national minorities, noting that the accusations of “betrayal” directed at those who supported the minorities should have been considered as the repressive acts of the regime. He eventually summed up all these arguments in support of the Tudeh in a paragraph that reflected what many of the Party intellectuals such as Bovin (and maybe not only them) thought of what was going on in Iran:

It is obvious to me that the feeling of religious fanaticism, anti-communist hysteria and a desire to misinterpret the policy and intentions of the friendly country [i.e. the Soviet Union—D.A.] will not benefit the Iranian people…The coalition of political movements, forces and groups that secured victory for the revolution has already disintegrated… Repression of the left automatically strengthened the extreme right and created favorable soil for the outside pressure…All this is making the situation in the country unstable and fraught with conflicts and unexpected surprises.67

In the internal communications of Soviet leaders we can find arguments and rhetoric similar to Bovin’s. Brezhnev himself during his meetings with Erich Honecker in East Berlin in October 1979 very directly pointed out all the imperfections of the Islamic regime and argued why despite those imperfections the Soviet Union still considered it necessary to support Khomeini. Brezhnev admitted to Honecker that the Soviet leadership noticed the increasing persecution of “the progressive forces” and suppression of national minorities. He stressed that Soviet initiatives for the development of good neighborly relations with Iran “had thus far found no practical echo in Tehran” but despite that, the revolution turned Iran away from the alliance with the United States

and thus Khomeini’s anti-Americanism was more important than all the disadvantages of his regime.\footnote{Brezhnev’s statement was made on October 4, 1979, see Friedman, “The Enemy of My Enemy”, 22.}

**Soviet cultural diplomacy and attempts at inter-Islamic connections.**

Since the 1950s the Soviet Union had relied on the “Soviet East” to appeal to anti-colonial movements and newly decolonized countries in Asia and Africa. Particularly important for Soviet diplomacy in the Foreign East was that many parts of “the Soviet East” were traditionally Muslim. Central Asian republics were often used as an example of progressive development under the Soviet rule with elements of cultural preservation and respect for the national heritage of the Central Asian peoples.\footnote{For more on Central Asia as a model for development see: Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of socialist development*, 19-42; 199-218.} In the aftermath of the Iranian revolution this diplomatic approach was called upon again. In the situation when the Soviet leadership had very few channels of communication with the new leaders of Iran, the attempt to approach the latter through Soviet Islamic authorities was a logical step.

The official muftiate, a hierarchical structure created by the Soviet state in order to oversee the Islamic clergy, was one of the main allies of the Soviet authorities in realization of these cultural diplomacy initiatives. Although traditionally the muftis from the SADUM in Central Asia were the main mediators in this policy of cultural diplomacy, for the case of Iran it was more appropriate to rely on the Shi’a clergy of Soviet Azerbaijan.\footnote{For more on the role of muftiate see: Tasar, *Soviet and Muslim*, 242-297.} In April 1979 mufti Kazanfar Ibragimov, the head of the Transcaucasian Muslim Spiritual Administration, was instructed by the Council of Religious Affairs of the Azerbaijani SSR to send a telegram to Ayatollah Khomeini congratulating the latter with the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in February 1979.\footnote{Brezhnev’s statement was made on October 4, 1979, see Friedman, “The Enemy of My Enemy”, 22.}
of the Islamic republic. 71 In August 1979, Moscow through the All-Union Council of Religious Affairs requested Ibragimov to send another message and to invite some official representatives of Khomeini to visit Baku in order to “pray together”.72 Neither message elicited a response.

Simultaneously, in April 1979 the Iranian government finally appointed its ambassador to the Soviet Union. Dr. Mohammed Mokri, a professor of Persian literature, had worked for the Mosaddeq’s government and had been arrested and imprisoned after the 1953 coup. Later he went into exile to France and worked as a professor of Islamic history at Sorbonne. Mokri combined his work at the university with the position of the Secretary General of the National Front in Europe and played an important role in connecting Ayatollah Khomeini to his supporters in Iran during the latter’s exile in France.73

In October 1979, during Mokri’s official visit to Baku, Ibragimov was instructed by the Council of Religious Affairs to ask the ambassador about the last message the mufti had sent to Khomeini. Ibragimov asked Mokri if the Iranian leader had considered his idea to organize a visit of the Iranian clergy to Baku. In return, Mokri proposed not to limit the connections between two religious communities to official visits but to organize instead a joint Soviet-Iranian group of Shi’a pilgrims to Mecca—a joint hajj. Mokri requested to have an answer to his inquiry immediately and even stayed in Baku extra day waiting for Ibragimov’s response. Eventually, after waiting in Baku for two days,

73 A detailed report on the new Iranian ambassador was produced by British diplomats, see: “Miss C. M. Laidlaw from the British Embassy in Tehran to the British Embassy in Moscow “Iranian ambassador to the Soviet Union” April 18, 1979 The National Archives of the United Kingdom. FCO 8/3371, P. 33.
the ambassador received a call from Ibragimov with a polite refusal. This episode produces many questions and yet also reveals a lot, too. Was it a planned provocation to undermine Soviet attempts of cultural diplomacy? Could the ambassador not have know the way such issues were bureaucratically solved or was he naïve enough to believe he could arrange an international group of pilgrims in one day? Or was it an attempt to check the boundaries of Soviet efforts to use cultural diplomacy? Mokri was hardly an experienced diplomat and could misunderstand the way the Soviet bureaucracy in the religious sphere worked. However, combined with the silence in response to Ibragimov’s previous messages, Mokri’s proposal looks very much like a provocation. The new Iranian leadership refused to play cultural diplomacy by the Soviet rules. On the contrary, they attempted to take the initiative and force the Soviets to go all the way to bilateral religious cooperation. Of course it was unacceptable for the Soviets, who were ready to flirt through religious channels but could never allow joint religious activities.

Soviet attempts to maintain some contact between Soviet and Iranian religious authorities continued in the next few years. The reports of the Soviet imams that were invited to visit Iran reflected a role played by religion very new and unusual for the bureaucrats of the Council of Religious Affair, a role of a unifying political force for Muslims beyond borders. Although not fully realized by the Soviet ideologues at that moment, the revolution in Iran signified the end to Soviet attempts to construct an image of Soviet Islam attractive to the Foreign East. Moreover, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the USSR

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75 Evidently, the Soviets could send a group of pilgrims to Mecca with political goals. The best example is Bobodzhan Gafurov who was allowed to make a Hajj shortly before his death. However the Iranian proposal was to make a mixed group of Soviet and Iranian pilgrims — we can assume that was the reason the proposal was never accepted.
acquired an image of aggressor against Muslims, and that terminated the thirty years of Soviet attempts to attract the Muslim Third World with the model of the Soviet East. When in 1980 the Iranian leadership allowed the Council of Religious Affairs to organize an exhibition in Tehran about the life of Muslims in the Soviet Union, most questions and impressions of the Iranian visitors reflected negative perception of the Soviet Union and distrust towards the shining image of Muslim secular life in the USSR.\textsuperscript{77}

By the mid-1980s the contacts between the Soviet clergy and Iranian officials had ceased. The overall nadir in bilateral relations after 1983 was to a certain degree combined with elements of Soviet anxiety about the harmful potential of political Islam. Although overall the Soviets were not too preoccupied about the potential spread of Islamic revolutionary ideas to the Soviet Union, some initiatives of the Iranian officials were nevertheless blocked even in the early years of the Islamic republic. Ambassador Mokri regularly stressed that Iranian government did not seek to spread the revolution to the Muslim regions of the Soviet Union. Yet he insisted that official Tehran sought to build and maintain an ongoing dialogue with the Soviet Muslims.\textsuperscript{78} As a sign of this spirit, in August 1980 the Iranians petitioned Soviet government to allow the opening of a new Iranian consulate in Dushanbe. The request was rejected. A fear of the Khomeinist influence on the Muslims of the Soviet Union could be one of important considerations for this decision, although there is no clear evidence of that.\textsuperscript{79} Nevertheless the prospects changed, now political Islam was an ideology that could potentially attract Soviet Muslims, while the image of the Soviet East was no more a picture attractive to the Muslims abroad.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid, 144-151.
\textsuperscript{78} Yodfat, The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran, 75
\textsuperscript{79} The connection between the refusal to open a consulate and a potential threat of Khomeinism is assumed by Yodfat in Ibid. There is no reason to believe that in 1979 the Soviet leadership understood the mobilizing potential of Islam as a political ideology, and there are no signs of serious measures taken to prevent the spread of such ideas to the USSR. However the overall understanding of religion as a backward, yet powerful and dangerous political instrument was encrypted in the Soviet ideological worldview.
Conclusion.

Most of the Soviet attempts to make ideological sense of the Iranian revolution and to capitalize on it in 1979 ended up unsuccessful. The expectations of the International department that “the Iranian February” would become “the Iranian October” encountered a variety of obstacles. Soviet ideologues seriously underestimated the religious authorities and their political abilities. Throughout 1979 the concept of temporariness of the religious rule was gradually turning to be less and less realistic. On the contrary, Khomeini and his supporters were consolidating their power capitalizing on the enormous popularity of the Ayatollah. Khomeini’s anti-communism was not yet translating into decisive actions but the Islamic regime evidently was preoccupied with the reduction of the leftist influence.

The failure of the Soviet Union and the Tudeh to join forces with influential guerilla groups such as the Mojahedin-e-Khalq and the Fadaiyan-e-Khalq made this objective of the Islamic rulers even easier. On the one hand, the International department was influenced by the Tudeh that was not ready to make concessions and willingly let go its imaginary leadership on the left flank. On the other hand Soviet pragmatism did not allow investing too much effort in practical support of leftist opposition. Khomeini was not the Iranian leader the Soviets dreamt of but he was anti-American and risking the relationship with him for the questionable possibility of a truly pro-Soviet Iran was not worth it for the Soviet leadership. This thinking was supported by the growing instability in Afghanistan that became one of the main focuses of the Soviet foreign policy after the 1978 April revolution. In the context of growing anti-communist insurgency the Soviet leadership was not willing to risk alienating Khomeini, who explicitly was not happy about the pro-Soviet regime in Afghanistan.

Instead, the Soviets were trying to flirt with Khomeini and use all available channels to establish contacts with him. However in this part they were also not ready to go too far. The attempts to build connections
between the Shi’a clergy of the Soviet Union and the Iranian authorities did not reach their goal whereas Iranian proposals to strengthen connections between the believers met cold response already from the Soviet side. The Soviets were willing to use informal channels of communication including through religious officials but were afraid of exciting religious feeling among Soviet Muslims. Thus most contacts with new Iranian leadership remained formal. Khomeini never trusted the Soviets, and their attempts to flirt with him reflected the wishful thinking of the Soviet leadership. Although Moscow’s illusions about Khomeini persisted for the next few years, it was gradually evaporating, especially following the developments in the end of 1979. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan resulted in a harsh reaction from the Iranian leadership. Khomeini continued to consolidate his power gradually pushing the left-wing groups, including the Tudeh, out of the Iranian political life. All this could not pass unnoticed by the Soviets. However the seizure of the American embassy and a decisive break of relations with the United States reconciled the Soviets with many of these unpleasant developments—Khomeini was still worth Soviet support. In the next chapter I will elaborate on this continuing support and its explanations in the changing circumstances.
Chapter 5

AFGHANISTAN, IRAQ, THE HOSTAGE CRISIS AND REDEFINITION OF POLITICAL ISLAM IN THE SOVIET UNION.

By the end of 1979 the strategy chosen by the Soviet leadership in its relations with the new Iranian regime started to gradually fall apart. The illusions of the International department that Iran could be pushed leftwards and become the ally of the Soviet Union were crushed by Khomeini’s uncompromising consolidation of power. The seizure of the U.S. embassy was certainly a decisive moment in Iran’s radical break with the West that was still welcomed in Moscow, despite public condemnation of the hostage situation. Yet the Soviet Union was not getting any closer to taking the place of the United States in Iran. On the contrary, Soviet invasion of Afghanistan enforced anti-Soviet feeling in different layers of the Iranian society, including among some of the leftists. But more importantly, it confirmed Khomeini’s claim that the USSR was “the lesser Satan,” but a Satan nonetheless. The Soviet Union was no less “Western” in the view of the Iranian traditionalists, and its influence was no less dangerous and corruptive in term of its ideology. Afghanistan restored the image of the USSR as an imperialist power and revived memories of Russian imperialist attempts to take control of parts of Iran. Thus, following the invasion of Afghanistan, it was not hard for Khomeini to gradually turn the Iranian popular opinion against the Soviets. However the Soviet leadership that centered its attention on Afghanistan was continuously interested in supporting Khomeini due to his ongoing conflict with the United States. Apart from general Cold War considerations, this ongoing crisis in U.S.-Iranian relations distracted both the U.S. and Iran from the Soviet course of action in Afghanistan. From Soviet perspective it was desirable to last as long as possible.
The Tudeh leadership remained genuine supporters of Khomeini as well, playing along with the regime’s policies even when those strategically threatened the Tudeh positions. In the previous chapter I already discussed the inability of the Tudeh to cooperate with other forces on the left flank instead accepting every possible compromise with Khomeini. In 1979-1981, when the fadaiyan disintegrated and the mojahedin were first pressured and then crushed by the regime, the Tudeh again took the side of Khomeini, at the same time sending requests to Moscow to arrange training programs for underground work for the Tudeh members. Most probably by then there was no one left in the Soviet leadership (maybe apart from Rostislav Ulyanovsky) who believed in the Tudeh’s chances to become an influential player in Iranian revolutionary politics. Yet through these political crises Kianuri kept sending inspiring messages to Moscow, which at that point hardly convinced anyone apart from some International department officials.

Simultaneously, the Soviet scholarly community was undertaking its own re-evaluation about the nature of the Islamic regime in Iran. Even more so, in the years that followed the invasion of Afghanistan we can note the growing activity of Soviet research centers with many scholars turning towards a study of political Islam. These developments can be associated with the active position of Evgeny Primakov, since 1977 the director of Institute of Oriental Studies, and an example of an expert with wide political connections, including in the Politburo. While the preceding director of the Institute, Bobodzhan Gafurov, had tried to turn the Institute activities towards studying contemporary issues, Primakov wanted it to give operative answers even to certain day-to-day developments in the Islamic world, and in particular in Iran. Although it is hard to measure the influence of these scholarly activities on the decision-making, the amount and the polemic nature of the materials for internal use produced by experts on political Islam and on Iran mean that by 1981-82 Soviet expert community finally acknowledged the changing reality in the Islamic world and was ready to produce its proposals for dealing with it. Simultaneously the war in Afghanistan and
its uneasy course motivated the decision-makers to formulate a demand for this kind of expertise.

Although Soviet support for Khomeini at that point remained a function of geopolitical thinking, the anti-Soviet rhetoric of the Iranian officials gradually pushed the Politburo to include Iran on the list of potentially hostile countries which were supporting the anti-Soviet forces in Afghanistan. The seemingly stable anti-American Iran became even more problematic for the Soviet Union following the start of the Iran-Iraq war in the fall of 1980. While stuck in Afghanistan, the Soviets were forced to choose between their old ally and arms buyer Iraq and geopolitically important but theocratic Iran. Trying to stay neutral and to convince both sides to stop the conflict, the Soviets alienated both Iran and Iraq in the early stages of the war. The geopolitical framework was getting more complicated and the Iranian regime seemed less and less attractive to the Soviets. However, the regime’s anti-Americanism still seemed worth Soviet support.

The hostage crisis, the fall of the Bazargan government and Soviet invasion to Afghanistan.

On November 4, 1979 the U.S. embassy in Tehran was seized by a mob of “enraged students”. Kianuri, in his conversation with Hermann Axen, the head of the SED International Department, stressed that Khomeini had approved of the attack. The KGB and the Soviet Embassy reached the same conclusions, reporting that the attackers had been a team of trained servicemen rather than an unorganized mob of students. Although there is still no full agreement among scholars whether the Iranian religious leadership officially ordered the attack, it certainly did nothing to prevent it and used the hostage crisis for its own benefit. One of the direct implications of the embassy seizure for the Iranian domestic affairs was the resignation of Mehdi Bazargan and his government. The alliance that had been convenient for Khomeini in the early days of the

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1 Friedman, “The Enemy of My Enemy”, 23.
revolution, by the fall of 1979 was rather a burden for the radical plans of the Supreme Leader.

Three days before the seizure of the U.S. embassy, Bazargan attended the celebrations of the Algerian revolution anniversary in Algiers and met there with Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter’s National Security Adviser. Along with Bazargan’s refusal to accept the hostage situation, the meeting with an “enemy” happened to be a formal reason for Khomeini’s dissatisfaction. Outmaneuvered, Bazargan resigned. His resignation was met with satisfaction in conservative circles. The Keyhan newspaper published an article stating that “the liberals had to go because they had strayed from the Imam’s line”.²

During the fall of 1979 all the attention of the Soviet foreign policy was directed towards Afghanistan, where Hafizullah Amin had overthrown and killed Nur Muhammad Taraki. In these circumstances the main fear of the Soviet leadership was Amin’s willingness to conduct an independent policy, including negotiations with the West. The seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran was, on the one hand, a sign that a potential rapprochement between the Americans and Khomeini that had been concerning the Soviets throughout 1979 was now surely off the table. On the other hand, the attack on the embassy could become a trigger for American military operation: be that a covert action or a full scale invasion. As Vladimir Kuzichkin described popular feeling in Tehran after the seizure of the embassy: “Many people in Tehran, and many of us, believed in our hearts that one fine morning we should wake up to see American soldiers’ helmets on the streets…”.³ Combined with the instability in Afghanistan this perspective severely concerned the Soviets. Oleg Grinevsky, then the Head of the Near Eastern department of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, remembered how Andropov once said about the hostage situation: “The Americans do not let things like this simply go”. According to Grinevsky, there were also hot heads in the Soviet

³ Kuzichkin, Inside the KGB, 325.
leadership (primarily the Defense Minister Dmitry Ustinov) who saw American interference in Iranian affairs as a great pretext for the Soviet military to be sent to Afghanistan.⁴

Through different channels Soviet and Eastern Bloc diplomats started to warn the Americans and reaffirm the same position that the Soviet Union took a year before in Brezhnev’s interview to a Pravda correspondent: “the Soviet Union would not tolerate a foreign intervention in Iran.” For example, the Bulgarian ambassador to Tehran paid a visit to the Turkish embassy on November 27, 1979 and during the conversation with his Turkish colleague talked about “the gravity of the situation in Iran and the possibility of American military intervention”, in the event of which “the Soviet Union would not have stood idly by”.⁵ Similar warnings were also sent through public channels. On December 5, 1979 Pravda published an article by A. Petrov. Although the article stressed the necessity to obey international conventions and particularly diplomatic immunity, the United States were warned against any aggressive actions. The article reiterated the position of the Soviet Union stated by Brezhnev a year earlier though it carefully avoided any direct threats of Soviet response in case of American actions.⁶

For the United States, the controversial Soviet position towards the hostage crisis was not a surprise but soon became an obstacle in their planning of the response. In November-December 1979 the Carter Administration had hoped to resolve the crisis while not alienating the Soviets, and consequently to save the SALT II, the new strategic arms limitations treaty signed by the superpowers but not yet ratified. Yet Soviet support of Khomeini’s actions (although not pronounced

⁴ Grinevsky, Tayny Sovetskoy diplomatii, 106-107.
⁵ “J. L. Bullard to Permanent Under-Secretary of State of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Sir Michael Palliser “Iran: Soviet attitude” November 29, 1979 The National Archives of the United Kingdom. FCO 8/3372, P. 93
⁶ A. Petrov, “Proyavlyat blagorazumie i sderzhannost”, Pravda, December 5, 1979, 5.
directly) made the destiny of the treaty questionable and it evidently concerned the U.S. leadership. Simultaneously the CIA and the affiliated experts supplied the administration with analytical notes that reaffirmed the growing Soviet threat in the context of the hostage crisis. In one such note, while predicting a near collapse of Khomeini’s “tenth century theocracy”, the CIA analysts insisted that the vital interests of the United States included the denial of Iranian oil to the Soviet Union, keeping Iran out of the Soviet sphere of influence and avoiding serious confrontation with the USSR. Moreover the most senior U.S. officials (such as Zbigniew Brzezinski) in the middle of the hostage crisis were preoccupied with the strategic outcome of the Iranian revolution. Expecting the upcoming fall of Khomeini, Brzezinski predicted the division of Iran and argued that “a unified anti-Soviet Iran” was preferable to a divided Iran but the latter was preferable to “a unified pro-Soviet Iran”. Thus the hostage crisis for many in the U.S leadership (and especially in the intelligence community) was a minor episode in the big framework of the global Cold War, and although Khomeini was an adversary tactically, strategically the main adversary remained the Soviet Union.

While Moscow was very concerned with risks of American intervention, the Tudeh leadership was full of optimism. For the Tudeh

7 Carter’s Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan stated this concern quite directly in his note to the President: “I do not believe that SALT II will be ratified unless we have a politically satisfactory resolution of this [hostage] crisis”, see: “Memorandum From the White House Chief of Staff (Johnson) to President Carter”, n.d., Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980, Volume IX, Part 1, Iran: Hostage Crisis, November 1979 — September 1980, Document 56. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v11p1/d56


leadership the seizure of the embassy and the resignation of Bazargan were inspiring. In their view, the defeat of the bourgeoisie opened possibilities of socio-economic development concordant with the ideals of the leftist movement. In turn the progressive reforms could support the development of class consciousness among Iranian proletarians and peasantry that could eventually bring the Tudeh to power. In his conversations with Hermann Axen, Kianuri even called Khomeini and his supporters “the Iranian narodniki”, who similarly to the Russian 19th century revolutionaries inspired by intellectuals like Alexander Herzen, could wake up the Iranian working class.10

Despite the Tudeh’s optimism, the decisive break between the Americans and the Iranian regime led at least some Soviet officials to reevaluate their analysis of Khomeini and his allies. For instance, in a meeting with colleagues from the Eastern Bloc, a representative of the Soviet Foreign Ministry stressed the growing rupture between Khomeini and the left democratic forces against the background of the Iranian national bourgeoisie’s defeat.11 Clearly, for some among Soviet officials the resignation of Bazargan signified not the victory of revolutionary democracy but rather a dark omen of future attack on the left flank. Already in October 1979 the Central Committee received a KGB note from Tehran that described a meeting of the top Iranian officials two months earlier, in August 1979, attended by the Prime Minister (Bazargan), the Ministers of Internal and Foreign Affairs and commanders of Iranian military. According to the KGB, the Iranian leadership saw one of its aims as “breaking the path of penetration of communism in the region” and believed that “strengthening of the Islamic republic would lead to

10 “Information about a Conversation of Comrade Hermann Axen, Member of the Politburo and Secretary of the Central Committee, with Comrade Nureddin Kianouri, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Tudeh Party of Iran,” November 08, 1979, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, BStU, MfS, HA II, 29577, 5-16. Obtained by Roham Alvandi. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/209046
11 Friedman, “The Enemy of My Enemy”, 23
a weakening of the pro-Soviet regime in Afghanistan”. 12 The Iranian leadership was sure that the Soviet Union had a long-term strategic plan for Iran and saw the revolution as a way to bring a leftist government to power. The KGB reported that the participants stated that the Soviet Union “might organize ‘provoking’ activity among Iranian Kurds, Azeris, Turkmen, Baluchis, support leftist forces, create economic difficulties, resort to a military threat on the basis of the 1921 agreement”.13 A note like this, referring to an authentic meeting of the Iranian leadership, must have destroyed any illusions about the future of cooperation with the Iranian regime that the Soviet leadership could still have harbored at that moment.

The situation was also alarming for Soviet representatives in Tehran. Leonid Shebarshin, in his conversation with David Miers, a Consul at the British embassy, stated that the Soviet embassy was disquieted by the unsettled security situation and by the threats against it. They even requested additional protection from the Iranian Foreign Ministry during the Ashura. In that conversation, Shebarshin could not skip the reference that every Russian could think of after the attack on the American embassy. A century and a half before, in 1829, the Russian embassy in Tehran had been stormed in a similar manner and the ambassador killed. He incidentally happened to be one of the greatest Russian literary figures, Aleksandr Griboedov. Thus every Soviet high school student knew the story of his death. The comparison of the contemporary situation at the Soviet embassy with the 1829 events revealed Shebarshin’s level of security concerns.14

13 Ibid.
14 “H. D. A. C. Miers to HM Ambassador John Graham “Russia/Iran: the conversation with Mr. Shebarshin” December 3, 1979 The National Archives of the United Kingdom. FCO 8/3372, P. 95.
Additional security measures proved to be useful on January 1, 1980, when a mob of protesters broke into the premises of the Soviet embassy and made an attempt to seize it but was stopped by the Revolutionary Guards. As the officials made clear to the personnel of the embassy, the protesters had been Afghans who organized the attack in protest against the Soviet invasion that had started 5 days earlier.\(^{15}\) The invasion of Afghanistan had an enormous effect on all Soviet foreign policy and Soviet relations with all major counterparts. But for Soviet-Iranian relations the issue was especially delicate. Firstly, Iran was a neighbor of both Afghanistan and the Soviet Union, and many of the military maneuvers were to happen in the proximity of the Iranian borders. More importantly, though, for Khomeini and the Iranian leadership the invasion of Afghanistan was not only an act of illegal interference in the affairs of an independent state, it was also an attack on a Muslim nation. The Soviet leadership evidently had this in mind and made an effort to soften the reaction of Iranian authorities as much as possible.

Ambassador Vinogradov remembered that on the eve of December 27, 1979 he received instructions from Moscow to personally inform Khomeini about the start of the Soviet operation, which he did immediately, driving to Qom for an audience. The reaction of Khomeini was moderate, he even agreed to restrain from public criticism for three months should the Soviet operation fit in this time limit. Vinogradov also remembered that Khomeini asked him to lobby the Soviet veto on the UN sanctions on the Iran resolution proposed by the United States in response to the hostage crisis.\(^{16}\)

The potential Soviet veto on the sanctions that the U.S. Administration hoped to pass through the UN Security Council had been a concern of U.S. officials since the breakout of the hostage crisis in

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\(^{15}\) Kuzichkin, *Inside the KGB*, 320-324.

November 1979.\textsuperscript{17} However, until the very last days before the vote, the Carter Administration expected that if the Soviets would not support the sanctions, they would at least abstain.\textsuperscript{18} Yet already on January 3, 1980 Brezhnev received a note from his foreign policy advisors (led by Andrey Aleksandrov-Agentov) with arguments against abstaining at the Security Council vote. This note is among the few documents available to us immediately explaining the motivation behind the Soviet decision making. In the note the authors pointed out five main arguments for the imposition of veto. First, the sanctions would have served as a punishment for Iran’s anti-imperialist position while the lives of hostages would have remained in even bigger danger. Second, Soviet support for the economic blockade of Iran would not have found understanding among other progressive Third World countries (many of which expressed support for the Soviet operation in Afghanistan). Third, the reaction within Iran could have caused a crisis in Soviet-Iranian relations, which was considered especially untimely in the context of restrained public reaction of the Iranian officials to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Moreover it could have prevented economic negotiations, in particular on the matter of natural gas. Fourth, the Soviet Union would have needed to be a part of the economic blockade, i.e. play by the U.S. rules—a position that was per se unacceptable. Fifth, while a veto would have surely caused a negative reaction by the United States, the authors of the note argued that, following the invasion

\textsuperscript{17} The issue was raised for the first time on November 28, 1979 during the Special Coordination Committee Meeting, and one of the main implications of the Soviet veto foreseen by the U.S. Leadership was the death of SALT II. See: “Summary of Conclusions of a Special Coordination Committee Meeting”, November 28, 1979, \textit{Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980, Volume IX, Part 1, Iran: Hostage Crisis, November 1979 — September 1980, Document 67. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v11p1/d67}

\textsuperscript{18} For example on January 10, 1980 (three days before the voting) the Special Coordination Committee only noted that “the chances of the Soviet veto have noticeably increased”, still hoping that the Soviets could abstain. See: “Summary of Conclusions of a Special Coordination Committee Meeting”, January 10, 1980, \textit{Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980, Volume IX, Part 1, Iran: Hostage Crisis, November 1979 — September 1980, Document 139. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v11p1/d139}
of Afghanistan, bilateral relations were at their lowest point already and there was not much damage that a Soviet veto could inflict. The Soviet Union vetoed the anti-Iranian sanctions on January 13, 1980.

It is evident from the note that most of the arguments behind the Soviet decision to veto the sanctions against Iran were driven by the mixture of doctrinal and geopolitical considerations that constituted the ideological worldview of the Soviet leadership. On the one hand, the Politburo needed to secure its trade with Iran and maintain decent relations not only with Iran but also with those countries that did not condemn the invasion of Afghanistan, which evidently and logically was the centerpiece of the Soviet foreign policy at that point. On the other hand, they needed to maintain the image of the Soviet Union as a leader of the global anti-imperialist movement that did not support the U.S. “punishment of anti-imperialist Iran” and was not willing to take part in a game played by the American rules.

While the public Iranian reaction to the Soviet invasion was indeed moderate, the new regime let its frustrations with Moscow be known. On December 30, 1979 the Revolutionary Council addressed the Soviet Union with a note, harshly criticizing Soviet actions in Afghanistan, accusing the USSR of colonial ambitions and attempts to divide the world along with the United States, not considering the interests of other countries. From that point on Afghanistan started to be another divisive factor in the uneasy relations between Iran and the Soviet Union. The U.S. Administration was trying to do all in its power to exploit this new division, and use it as an argument for the resolution of the hostage crisis. The goal that the U.S. leadership tried to achieve was to convince the Iranians that the real danger was not the United States

20 Yodfat, The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran, 78.
but the Soviet Union with Afghanistan as an evident example.\footnote{See, for example: “Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting,” December 28, 1979, \textit{Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980, Volume IX, Part 1, Iran: Hostage Crisis, November 1979 — September 1980}, Document 122. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v11p1/d122} As is well known, none of these arguments convinced the Iranian leadership. Yet it is noteworthy that both superpowers tried to influence Iran, having in mind the Cold War logics: while the U.S. officials hoped to present the Soviet Union as an aggressor against the Muslims, the Soviets tried to persuade the Iranians that the United States was preparing for an invasion.

In reality, Soviet-Iranian relations were entering a phase of crisis even without the American effort. In the new Iranian government that was appointed after the resignation of Bazargan, there was one figure that played an especially important role in the growing divergences in the Soviet and Iranian outlook: the new Iranian Foreign Minister Sadegh Ghotbzadeh. Kuzichkin, in his memoirs, claimed that the roots of Ghotbzadeh’s hostility to the USSR were laid in his younger years when as a student he had supposedly been recruited by the GRU. Kuzichkin argued that the GRU had planned for Ghotbzadeh to become their illegal agent in the United States, whereas he wanted to move to the USSR and continue his studies there. After his petitions were declined, Ghotbzadeh broke all relations with Soviet intelligence and “hid his resentment for later”.\footnote{Kuzichkin, \textit{Inside the KGB}, 302-303.} Despite the primitivism of this assessment and lack of any proof for its veracity, we have to note that after his appointment as a minister, Ghotbzadeh was consistent in his anti-Soviet policy.

One of the first actions attributed by the Soviets to Ghotbzadeh was the announcement of the Revolutionary council made on November 10, 1979 and sent in an official form to the Soviet embassy a day later.\footnote{English translation of the letter sent to the Soviet embassy was preserved in the British diplomatic archives and is available in The National Archives of the United Kingdom FCO 8/3580, P. 31}
document touched upon the destiny of the 1921 Soviet-Iranian Treaty and in particular upon articles 5 and 6. Although Ghotbzadeh actively pushed the passing of the abrogation through the Majlis in 1980, the initial proposal to start the process of articles’ nullification had already been made by the Bazargan government on November 3, 1979, three days before the latter’s resignation.24 The reason was not only the hostility towards the Soviet Union but mostly concerns that following the seizure of the American embassy some kind of American rescue operation could become a pretext for Soviet intervention.

In the following months, with the danger of American military intervention decreasing especially after the failed hostage rescue mission in April 1980, the issue of the treaty articles lost some of its immediate political salience but remained politically important. However, it took Soviet foreign policy makers a while to accept the new reality. Even in September 1980, Rostislav Zhavoronkov, an official of the Middle East Department of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, confirmed to his British colleagues that despite the reception of Iranian notification of the abrogation of articles 5 and 6, the Soviet Union still considered the 1921 treaty to be fully in force as the changes had been made unilaterally without consultations with the Soviet side.25

Ghotbzadeh also turned out to be one of the harshest critics of Soviet campaign in Afghanistan. It added up to his negative image in the USSR as or the Soviets Afghanistan was the main regional concern and their policy toward Iran were often instrumental for their strategy in Afghanistan. During the Politburo meeting on January 27, 1980, Soviet leaders quite openly discussed the necessity of provoking a crisis in Iranian-American relations and to making it continue as long as possible in order to distract the Iranian leadership from active support of anti-Soviet forces in Afghanistan. This is how this decision,

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24 Yodfat, *The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran*, 68.
25 “S. J. Worsworth British Embassy in Moscow to D. G. Manning Foreign and Commonwealth Office “Soviet-Iranian relations” September 24, 1980, The National Archives of the United Kingdom FCO 8/3580, P. 33
one of several measures to sustain the “offensive nature of measures in relation to the Afghan events,” was formulated in the Politburo meeting resolution:

Bring into life measures directed at the preservation of the anti-imperialist, primarily anti-American, elements in the foreign policy of Iran, insofar as the continuation of the crisis in Iran-American relations limits the potential possibilities of the Khomeini regime to inspire antigovernment uprisings on Moslem grounds in Afghanistan. 26

Thus Afghanistan, being the centerpiece of the Soviet Third World policy in that period, largely defined Soviet-Iranian relations in Moscow’s perception. The hostage crisis and the nadir in the U.S.-Iranian relations was seen in Moscow as a positive development from this point of view as it distracted both the Iranians and the Americans from Afghanistan. Consequently, its effects were to be prolonged as much as possible. Although there is no record of the Soviets actively engaging in the situation with hostages, this vision explains why Soviet criticism of the Iranian actions on the hostage crisis remained moderate and reserved.

In July 1980 this grand strategy was also formulated in terms of certain practical actions. On June 30, 1980 the Head of the Foreign Propaganda Department of the Central Committee Leonid Zamyatin and the Deputy Head of the International Department, Rostislav Ulyanovsky, submitted a joint proposal to the Central Committee Secretariat “On the propaganda situation in Iran”. In their proposal Zamyatin and Ulyanovsky described the ideological situation in Iran as contradictory, claiming that a fierce anti-Americanism coexisted in Iran with an anti-Soviet sentiment imposed under the banner of Islam and with reference to the events in Afghanistan. In order to prevent the growth of anti-Soviet

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sentiment in the Iranian society and, although Zamyatin and Ulyanovsky omit this part in the document, clearly to enforce the anti-American one, they proposed a list of propaganda efforts to be considered. On July 8, 1980 the Secretariat agreed with Zamyatin and Ulyanovsky and accepted their proposed measures. Those measures included the strengthening of “informative work” from Baku to Iranian Azerbaijan, an increase in the number of radio broadcasts in Persian from Tashkent, a translation of Soviet movies to Persian, the publishing of propaganda brochures and books and a widening of their distribution channels, and so on.

However, in order to better understand the Soviet reading of the Iranian regime in 1980 the motivational part of the Secretariat resolution is more important than the particular measures. Unlike before, the criticism towards the religious regime was expressed openly in the bureaucratic documents. It reveals the disillusionment of some decision-makers in the Soviet leadership:

Recently the ideological and political situation in Iran has become more acute and contradictory. It is characterized by a growing anti-imperialist and anti-American sentiment but also by persistent attempts to implement anti-Soviet sentiment, to draw Iran into the armed struggle against Afghanistan under the banner of Islam. A wide offensive is launched on the progressive and democratic forces, the national minorities are being repressed. The clergy that seized the key positions in the country is trying to consolidate its dominance, to transform Iran into a theocratic state. The population of Iran is exposed to mass propaganda indoctrination. In this respect the clergy that controls almost every domestic radio and television station is in a more advantageous position in comparison to other social forces.

This direct reference to Islam as a political force that was capable to unite people under its banner and to indoctrinate masses reveals Moscow’s new understanding of the nature of the Iranian regime and Islam as a political ideology. This quote leaves no doubt that by mid-1980 the Soviet leadership started to realize much better what kind of regime and ideology it was facing in Iran. Consequently Soviet policy towards Iran started to transform to a more cautious and pragmatic mode while the assessments of the regime became more negative, especially against the backdrop of the events in Afghanistan. Yet, despite this trend, the Soviet leadership tried to save good relations with the Iranian regime. This is very noticeable in the commentaries of Rostislav Ulyanovsky to the report about the implementation of the statement quoted above:

The representatives of the APN (“Novosti” news agency—D.A.) and the organizations from the Azerbaijani SSR that have connections with Iranian organizations were instructed to be cautious not to give the religious circles of Iran a pretext to accuse the Soviet Union of the interference in the internal affairs of Iran, especially in the region of Iranian Azerbaijan. 30

Indeed the statement especially stressed propaganda opportunities that, according to the Soviet embassy in Tehran, emerged in Iranian Azerbaijan. It is important to note though that during the revolution the strategy to play the national minorities’ card was used much less by the Soviets than in the periods of crises in Soviet-Iranian relations in the 1940s and the 1950s. Yet the return to attempts to use propaganda among the Iranian Azeris reveals the growing tensions in Soviet-Iranian relations in 1980-1981. Similarly, in the spring of 1980 rumors about Soviet arms delivered to the Kurdish rebels appeared in the Iranian press. Although both Soviet representatives and the Kurdish leader Ghassemlou vehemently denied these rumors it is evident that Soviet public coverage

of the Kurdish movement was much more positive and open than a year before. Aleksandr Bovin, speaking on central television, even referred to the statement of Hashemi Rafsanjani, then acting Iranian Minister of the Interior, who had said that “in Iran there were no national minorities at all”. Bovin interpreted this statement as a sign of extremism from the Iranian central government and called for “the satisfaction of just demands of the Kurdish people”. Even having in mind the degree of freedom that was allowed to Bovin, a statement like this has to be seen as a message to the Iranian authorities that the Soviet Union kept cherishing its image of a defender of national minorities and was willing to play this card if necessary.

The Kurdish issue became one of the topics of the open letter that the Iranian Foreign Minister Ghotbzadeh sent to the Soviet Foreign Minister Andrey Gromyko in August 1980. Throughout the spring of 1980 tensions between Iran and the Soviet Union were growing, and Ghotbzadeh (clearly supported by Khomeini) was the engine of these tensions. In May 1980 he became the co-chair of the committee on Afghanistan of the Islamic Conference Organization. The committee passed a resolution to expel Afghanistan from the organization and petitioned all members to cancel diplomatic relations with the pro-Soviet government of Afghanistan.

In June 1980 a Soviet diplomat at the Rasht Consulate was expelled from Iran on alleged espionage accusations. The expulsion was followed by a number of demands from the Iranian Foreign Ministry — in particular to reduce the number of Soviet diplomats in Iran and to allow the opening of the Iranian consulate in Dushanbe. These demands were initially met with cold silence whereas simultaneously the Soviet press published a series of articles that were critical of both Minister

31 Yodfat, The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran, 86-87.
33 Yodfat, The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran, 75
Ghotbzadeh and the Iranian leadership in general. Some even criticized Iran for allegedly allowing the U.S. intelligence to operate from its territory into Afghanistan and to prepare the Afghani *mujahidin* on the Iranian soil. Keeping in mind the state of US-Iranian relations at that time, accusations of this kind were absolutely nonsensical. Even if at that point there were training camps on the Iranian territory, they were surely not maintained by the CIA. Nonetheless, listing Iran and the United States together as forces interfering in Afghanistan soon became a pattern of the Soviet press.  

The abovementioned letter from Ghotbzadeh to Gromyko went in line with the principle of revolutionary open diplomacy proclaimed by the Iranian leadership but it also had propaganda purposes, building an image of the Iranian regime as fearless in defending its interests even faced with the might of the Soviet superpower. The letter that was written in a rather frank and undiplomatic manner signified the peak of the conflict that could burst out into a full break between the countries. In the letter Ghotbzadeh not only condemned Soviet policy in Afghanistan, but also assessed Soviet-Iranian relations as unequal and developing not in the interests of Iran. His special criticism was dedicated to the denial of the Soviet Union to accept the Islamic nature of the Iranian revolution:  

…At the time when Imperialist America and allies were blowing the Islamic revolution with an unkind wind, not even once did you through your media utter the attribute of our revolution, that is Islamic. You spoke of it as “the democratic revolution of the people of Iran” and you did not permit your fostered paper even outwardly to give the “Islamic” attribute to our revolution.  

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As I noted earlier, in 1980 the Soviet leadership only started to look into the political Islam as an ideology that could be more than just a cover but rather a content of the revolution and the following changes in Iran. Yet even so their ideological worldview hardly allowed them to fulfill Ghotbzadeh’s demands and truly believe that they had witnessed the Islamic revolution. Thus here Ghotbzadeh’s accusations were simultaneously precise and unjust as the Soviet leadership genuinely could not imagine Islam as a deep meaningful driver of the revolution.

Nevertheless this is just one example out of a long list of accusations that Ghotbzadeh made in his letter. The list included Soviet contacts with rebels in Kurdistan (arms supplies, financial support, intelligence activities), the history of Soviet aggressive policy towards Iran (intervention in 1941, silent acceptance of the 1953 coup), Soviet disregard of the abolition of articles 5 and 6 of the 1921 Treaty and, on top of everything, Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. More important than the accusations themselves was “the revolutionary frankness” (as Ghotbzadeh himself proudly named it few times in the text) of the letter. The tone of the letter was beyond provocative, almost insulting. Formally the letter was a response to the Soviet diplomatic note in which the Soviet Foreign Ministry had requested to reinforce the security of the Soviet embassy in Tehran as the calls for seizure of the Soviet embassy were widespread in Tehran in the aftermath of the January 1 attack. Ghotbzadeh responded to these petitions in his own way:

Concerning the security of your embassy in Tehran, it is very fortunate that it has not up to this moment been attacked. The existence and activities of various embassies in Iran are welcomed very much by us. But it is obvious that we will not tolerate espionage centers, and we hope that not only your government but also other governments pay rapid attention to this reality. 36  

Here Ghotbzadeh implied the seizure of American embassy that was attacked on a pretext that it was “a center of espionage”. He clearly hinted

36 Ibid.
that the Soviet embassy could have had the same destiny, threatening rather than pacifying the Soviets.\footnote{Moreover according to the memoirs of Ambassador Vinogradov, this was not a mere rhetoric but Ghotbzadeh had proposed to organize a provocation against the Soviet embassy. In January 1980 he proposed to put the USSR in the situation identical to the hostage crisis in the American embassy. See: Vinogradov, “Tegeran. 27 dekabrya 1979 goda”, 93} The letter ended with a \textit{de facto} ultimatum for the Soviet Union to withdraw from Afghanistan, refrain from the intelligence activities, stop supporting the Tudeh party and decide on the reduction of the diplomatic personnel, should the Soviet Union reject Iran’s proposal to open a consulate in Dushanbe.\footnote{“Pismo ministra inostrannykh del IRI S. Ghotbzadeh”}

Although there was no harsh reaction from the Soviet side, the letter must have infuriated Gromyko and the entire Politburo. Unfortunately there are no sources to support this assumption as the formal response of the Soviet Minister was very moderate. He only commented on the part of the letter referring to Afghanistan claiming that the Soviet troops were invited by the legitimate government of Afghanistan and it was up to the Afghan people to decide their future.\footnote{Yodfat, \textit{The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran}, 86-87.} Brezhnev himself made a comment in one of his speeches without mentioning Ghotbzadeh but clearly meaning it as an answer to his message. Brezhnev mentioned Iran as a country that was under unacceptable American pressure while the people Iran were the only ones who could choose their destiny. This lip service Brezhnev finished with a hidden dig that was a clear reference to Iran’s invested interest in the situation in Afghanistan: “We expect the leadership of Iran to apply the same approach [i.e. non-interference—D.A.] to other states, \textit{especially Iran’s neighbors}” (emphasis mine—D.A.).\footnote{“Rech tovarishcha L. I. Brezhneva”, \textit{Pravda}, August 30, 1980, 2.} In his conversations with British diplomats, Rostislav Zhavoronkov gave a more detailed response in regards to the Soviet position on Ghotbzadeh’s demands. Zhavoronkov confirmed that the Soviet Union was ready to reduce its diplomatic staff at the embassy by 25% and close the consulate in Rasht. However, the Soviet Union...
still considered the 1921 treaty fully in force and refused any allegation
of its support to the Tudeh — according to Zhavoronkov, the Tudeh had
similar political views but that was all that the USSR and the Tudeh had
in common.41

Yet by the time Brezhnev and Zhavoronkov made their comments,
Ghotbzadeh had already left his office at the Iranian Foreign Ministry.
It is still a debatable question if his letter to Gromyko had anything to
do with his resignation. According to Mitrokhin’s notes, this sudden
dismissal was a result of the successful KGB operation. Through Hassan
Rouhani, back then Khomeini’s representative in Paris, disinformation
was passed to Tehran about Ghotbzadeh having private meetings with
American representatives and even with Shapour Bakhtiar, the former
Prime Minister of the Shah’s toppled government. Simultaneously
the Tehran press was fed information about Ghotbzadeh’s connection
to the successful escape of six American diplomats, previously
hidden in the Canadian embassy.42 However, this version is not
supported by other sources. Kuzichkin, for example, in his coverage
of Ghotbzadeh’s resignation did not connect it with any activities of
the KGB.43

The Soviet leadership may have overestimated the negative
influence of Ghotbzadeh on the Soviet-Iranian relations, as the
controversies did not end with his dismissal. There were other objective
factors that influenced the deterioration of Soviet-Iranian relations.

41 “S. J. Worsworth British Embassy in Moscow to D. G. Manning Foreign and
Commonwealth Office “Soviet-Iranian relations” September 24, 1980, The National
Archives of the United Kingdom FCO 8/3580, P. 33
42 MITN 1/2 , 56
43 Kuzichkin, Inside the KGB, 303. Recently declassified U.S. documents imply that
Ghotbzadeh’s resignation was a result of a deadlock in the hostage crisis and internal
struggle for power in Iran rather than his policies towards the USSR. See: “Briefing
Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian
Affairs (Saunders) to Acting Secretary of State (Christopher). July 11, 1980, Foreign
Relations of the United States, 1977-1980, Volume IX, Part 1, Iran: Hostage Crisis,
https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v11p1/d317

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One of the obvious reasons could be the shrinkage of economic cooperation that had blossomed under the Shah. Sir John Graham, British Ambassador to Iran, in a January 1980 message to London cited a conversation between Vladimir Vinogradov and the Italian Ambassador. In that conversation Vinogradov claimed that despite the stagnation in many joint projects, there were 2,400 Soviet citizens (apart from diplomats and trade representatives) still permanently present in Iran; 1,500 of them were working at the power station in Ahwaz and 500 at steel factories in Isfahan. Schools for the children of Soviet workers were, however, closed and thus most families had to be sent back to the Soviet Union. The situation with natural gas trade was less optimistic. In February 1980 a landslide caused an explosion at the IGAT I – the only natural gas pipeline between Iran and the Soviet Union (the construction of IGAT II was frozen after the revolution). The interruption of natural gas trade served as a pretext for new price negotiations initiated by the Iranian side. In March 1980 Soviet attempts to maintain old volumes of natural gas trade collapsed after Iran requested unreasonably high prices (3½ times the price the Soviet Union had paid before). Natural gas supplies from Iran to the Soviet Union ceased permanently which resulted in the necessity for the Soviet Union to develop new own natural gas reserves in order to maintain supplies to Western Europe and have a stable currency flow back.

In response to the failed negotiations the Soviet Union forbade Iranian merchandise to be transited through its territory. It took Iranians

45 Soviet sources claimed the price was 5 times the previous one, see: Yodfat, The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran, 73. The number 3,5 times previous price is based on the report of the British Embassy in Tehran, see: “A. H. Wyatt, British Embassy in Tehran to T. L. Richardson, Foreign and Commonwealth Office East European and Soviet Department. “Iranian Gas Supplies to the Soviet Union”, March 25, 1980. The National Archives of the United Kingdom FCO 28/3987, P. 11.
five months to convince the Soviets to sign a transit agreement, so that Iranian traders could use Volga-Don channel to transit their goods to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean region. The agreement that was signed in September 1980 was a result of a visit made by Semyon Skachkov, the Chairman of the Soviet State Committee for Foreign Economic Relations, to Iran. There, in June 1980, Skachkov and the Iranian representatives agreed to establish Soviet-Iranian Permanent Commission on Economic and Technical Cooperation. One of the outcomes was the agreement that permitted Soviet experts could stay in Iran and continue working at the Ahwaz power plant, Isfahan steel factories, Arak machine factory, coal mines, etc.46

In Soviet-Iranian relations, economics was fully dependent on politics and the Iranian side was the one dictating its conditions as overall the Iranian leadership did not see the economic relations with its Northern neighbor as vitally important. The Islamic republic was willing to develop its economic relations with the Soviet Union but only to a certain degree, limited by the ideology. The Soviets understood this approach probably better than any other country and thus were disappointed with the deterioration of economic relations that had seemed mutually beneficial before. A British expert from the East European and Soviet department of the Foreign Office claimed that failure to get any concessions from the Iranian side, despite all the efforts of the Soviet Union to pose as the friend of Iranian regime, must have been indeed disappointing for Moscow.47

However, the Soviet presence in Afghanistan remained a primary factor of mutual distrust. Throughout the year of 1980 Iran remained on the list of countries that were discussed at the Politburo meetings as the ones supporting the anti-Soviet guerilla in Afghanistan. In October 1980 Soviet Defense Minister Dmitry Ustinov presented a report on foreign

46 Yodfat, The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran, 73-74.
interference to Afghanistan to the Central Committee. Iran received special attention of the Minister. Ustinov stated that Iranian leadership was not only verbally supporting the Afghan insurgency. Soviet intelligence estimated 13 training camps for Afghan rebels on Iranian soil with around 5,000 people undergoing training, 3,000 of which had been sent directly to fight the Soviet army in Afghanistan. Thus for both sides Afghanistan became one of the key factors in the gradual deterioration of relations, Soviet disillusionment and Iranian anxiety. The Tudeh however was stuck in between: passionately supporting the regime, yet unable to express solidarity with the regime’s growing anti-Soviet sentiment.


The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan caused a complicated reaction among leftists in Iran. Two days after the invasion a demonstration initially organized by the *fadaiyan* in order to protest in front of the seized U.S. Embassy ended with the crowd shouting anti-Soviet rather than anti-American slogans. As Ambassador Vinogradov put it in his conversation with the British Ambassador Sir John Graham, this manifestation served as the best proof that being progressive and anti-Islamic did not mean being “a Soviet lackey”. The Tudeh was clearly put in the ambiguous situation: it could not openly support the invasion in light of Iranian government’s position but it could not condemn the Soviet Union too. Thus the Tudeh leadership mostly had to refrain from any commentaries on the foreign policy and concentrate on domestic struggles.


In light of the Islamic regime turning more and more against the revolutionary left, the Tudeh stood firmly alongside the government and supported the growing repressions against the *fadaiyan* and the *mojahedin*. In response to concerns about the future of the progressive movement expressed by Hermann Axen to Kianuri during their meeting in November 1979, the Tudeh leader stressed that repressions were threatening neither the firm alliance between the Tudeh and the Soviet Union, nor the Tudeh’s stable position vis-à-vis Khomeini. According to Kianuri, repressions were directed against “pro-American communists, Maoists and other leftist groups charged with an anti-Soviet sentiment”. Moreover Kianuri in his conversations with his Soviet and East European comrades repeatedly exaggerated the influence of the Tudeh on the Iranian domestic politics. He claimed to Axen that the growing class and revolutionary consciousness of the Iranian proletariat (that could not be clouded by the religious covering in which Khomeini used to present his socially just initiatives) was the foundation of the Tudeh’s future stable positions.

The Tudeh leadership seemed to be sincerely convinced of the future success of socio-economic policies implemented by the Islamic regime. However, the situation in the Iranian economy in 1979-1980 was appalling, especially with most international trade and business connections torn apart, primarily those with the United States. The East German Ambassador wrote in his report to Berlin in May 1980 about the pitiful situation in the Iranian economy and lack of signs for Iran to take “a non-capitalist path of development”. On the contrary, from the Ambassador’s point of view only the alliance between the religious regime and the remainders of Iranian national bourgeoisie could stabilize the country devastated by the months of revolution. Kianuri’s position on the matter was completely opposite—he considered measures taken by the regime following the resignation of Bazargan government as the most efficient way to build a prosperous future for Iranian people. In the series of conversations that he had with Hermann

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51 Ibid.
52 Ibid, 25.
Axen in 1980, he continuously repeated that the nationalization of industry and social benefits announced by Khomeini characterized the progressive nature of the regime whereas the negative elements of its policies were exaggerated by the Western press. Of course, Kianuri expected even more radical measures to be taken, and presented the Tudeh as a potential vehicle of those changes. In his conversations with Axen he described his plan to create kombedy (committees of landless peasants) to push the land reform. He also remained an evangelist of “the non-capitalist path” and considered Iran to be already well on the way of adapting it.

Hermann Axen was not Kianuri’s only interlocutor in this period. Boris Ponomarev and Rostislav Ulyanovsky received encouraging messages of a similar kind. Convincing the Soviets that things were going according to the doctrine was essential to maintain Soviet support and material aid. In the summer of 1980 Kianuri was repeatedly sending messages to the International department with requests to cover travel expenses for the Tudeh members visiting the Soviet Union. At least twice his messages were forwarded to the Central Committee by Ulyanovsky and both times the Secretariat approved the aid and ordered the KGB to make transfers. In July 1980 Kianuri requested permission to send

53 Ibid.
54 The term kombedy (komitety bednoty) is borrowed from the realities of the Russian Revolution and Civil War, where kombedy were the organs of peasant “self-government”. Organized by the Bolsheviks in order to suppress the wealthy part of the peasantry, the kombedy consisted exclusively of landless poor peasants, who were supporting the Bolsheviks. This experiment soon proved inefficient as it caused massive discontent among the rest of the peasantry and after the first year of the Civil War the Bolsheviks dissolved the kombedy.
three Tudeh members to the Soviet Union to study technical aspects of “underground work” (konspirativnaya rabota). Moreover, Kianuri asked his Soviet comrades to make the training program as short and dense as possible because the specialists of this kind were in great need for the party. It is unclear what kind of specialists were in need and what exactly was the study program. However a message like this could have implied the ongoing preparation of the Tudeh to go underground in case it was necessary. It could also mean preparation for propaganda campaigns or other revolutionary actions. Thus the Tudeh stayed on high alert despite the encouraging image for the Soviet comrades, in reality the party had every reason to expect the necessity to go underground. Although fewer Tudeh activists were arrested than members of other leftist groups, the headquarters of the Tudeh was shut down in July 1980. In mid-1981 the daily newspaper *Mardom* was closed — it caused first mild protests by Tudeh activists but did not elicit even a public expression of concern from the Tudeh leadership. Although the available sources do not provide any coherent explanation for the passivity of the Tudeh leadership, it would be fair to assume they still hoped to maintain decent relations with the regime. Kianuri was sober enough in assessing the weaknesses of the Tudeh and thus had to maneuver politically trying to find a balance in the relations with the regime.

In January 1980 Abolhassan Banisadr was elected the first President of the Islamic republic and although initially he was supported by Khomeini and the two leaders seemed to think alike, very soon their differences became evident. The conservative clergy was suspicious of Banisadr from the very beginning of his term, primarily because he was not a cleric himself (though his father had been a respected ayatollah). In emigration he had received a doctoral degree in law at Sorbonne and simultaneously became one of the closest advisors of Khomeini. Yet after his election Banisadr actively supported the preservation of ideological

58 Yodfat, *The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran*, 122-123.
pluralism in the leadership and resisted the consolidation of all power in the hands of Khomeini and his Islamic Republican party.\textsuperscript{59}

The controversies within the Iranian leadership once again posed a question for the Soviets: whom to support? On the one hand, there was Khomeini who did not look as appealing as he had been a year before, especially in the light of his continuous criticism of the Soviet war in Afghanistan. On the other hand, there was Banisadr—a more pragmatic leader and possibly a weaker one, who could possibly be influenced through the Tudeh and other leftist forces. Yet for the Soviets Banisadr, just like Bazargan before him, was a figure that did not reflect the image of a national liberation leader, instead many in the Soviet leadership saw him as a potential American asset. Despite a growing dissatisfaction with the direction of Khomeini’s policies, the perception of the Soviet leadership was still largely dominated by the framework of the Cold War. He was also seen in Moscow as a strong leader (something that the Soviets had once considered lacking in Mosaddeq’s position in 1953) who had a real potential to bring people to streets. And once again—a lesser evil.\textsuperscript{60} The Tudeh leadership was even more dismissive in its attitude to Banisadr. During the meeting with Axen, Kianuri called Banisadr an “Islamic Franco-Maoist” who was “pathologically egocentric, aggressive and dangerous”.\textsuperscript{61}

As mentioned in the previous chapter, by the summer of 1980 the government pressure on the \textit{fadaiyan} forced one part of the revolutionary group (further: \textit{fadaiyan (majority)}) to finally join forces with the Tudeh


\textsuperscript{60} Banisadr was perceived a representative of petty-bourgeoisie unlike Khomeini whose socio-economic policies that reflected the popular masses of peasantry and proletarians. An explanation of this kind was proposed for instance by Aleksandr Baranov, the International department consultant, to his East German colleagues, see: Friedman, “The Enemy of My Enemy”, 27

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
whereas the rest of the faction (further: *fadaiyan (minority)*) remained in opposition to an alliance with the pro-Soviet forces. The conflict between Khomeini and Banisadr deepened this rift: the Tudeh and the *fadaiyan (majority)* allied with Khomeini whereas the *mojahedin* and the *fadaiyan (minority)* opposed the regime and supported Banisadr. East German interlocutors warned the Tudeh against this decision and proposed to shift their position towards supporting Banisadr. Their main argument was the potential dissolution of the *mojahedin* as the last armed and well-organized force on the left flank. Should the regime have decided to go after the Tudeh, the party was to be left alone to face the attack. Nevertheless, the Soviet International department fully supported the strategy of the Tudeh, considering support to the regime as a way to secure the Tudeh’s influential positions (which people like Ulyanovsky seemed to believe in).62

Similar expectations are found in the reports of the East German intelligence. In May 1981, the *Stasi* reported that despite the continuous proclamations about the desire to form a united front of progressive forces, the Tudeh kept losing its supporters due to its inability to join forces with the *mojahedin*. According to the East German intelligence at that time the Tudeh had around 30 000 members and sympathizers concentrated in Tehran, Abadan and some parts of the North. The *Stasi* report also noted some arrangements of the Tudeh leadership to go underground in view of constant attacks on the Party.63

In the Soviet Union by 1981 there also were experts who criticized the strategy of the Tudeh, and those in the Soviet leadership (i.e the International department) who supported it. For example, this criticism was publicly pronounced during one of the first public discussions about the Iranian revolution between Aleksandr Bovin and Evgeny Primakov, at that time the director of the IVAN, that appeared on Soviet

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62 Ibid, 28

Central television in January 1981. Since his September 1979 article in *Izvestia*, Bovin had been one of the most active commentators on Iran. He was also one of the few who expressed his moderate criticism of Khomeini’s regime publicly. During his debate with Primakov, Bovin stated directly that Iran was retreating from its revolutionary achievements. He argued that the shutdown of the Iranian universities was one among many other signs of reaction. Primakov argued in return that the shutdown of the universities was clearly a measure directed against Western influence, while Bovin insisted that Iranian anti-Westernism did not mean solely anti-Americanism but also included attacks on communism as a Western concept. 64 This discussion is noteworthy because it showed that the debates that existed behind closed doors of the Soviet expert community (but also in the leadership) were now getting to the general public.

The development of the Iranian domestic situation inspired the continuation of similar debates in the Soviet Union. On June 22, 1981 Ayatollah Khomeini dismissed Banisadr from the post of the President. This decision started a period of volatility and uncertainty at the top of Iranian politics. Six days later a bomb exploded at the headquarters of the Islamic Republican Party. The attack caused 64 casualties among which was the IRP leader and the Chief Justice Ayatollah Beheshti. On July 24, 1981 Mohammad Ali Rajai was elected new President of the Islamic republic. On August 30 he and the Prime Minister were killed by the explosion at the Prime Minister’s office. The Soviet press commented on both attacks and blamed the CIA, referring to the analogies with the Chilean coup against Salvador Allende. 65 These accusations find some support in the reports of the Stasi. Their source among Iranian immigrants in West Berlin claimed that the attack was organized by a counterrevolutionary monarchist group. The Tudeh, according to the source, was also supposed to become the target of the attack, but such a simultaneous attack failed for unclear reasons. The Tudeh was allegedly

64 Yodfat *The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran*, 115
under surveillance, particularly its leadership, apparently due to their contacts with the Soviet Union. However, the Iranian official position was that the attacks were organized by the Mojahedin-e-Khalq. This accusation resulted in a harsh response of the regime and severe police offensive against the mojahedin. While the regime was destroying the mojahedin network, the Tudeh continued their uncompromising support for the Islamic leadership, condemning the attack as hazardous and counterrevolutionary attempt by the mojahedin. This certainly raised additional questions for discussion among Soviet experts with regards to the Soviet support of the Iranian regime.

One of the Soviet experts that called for a reevaluation of the political situation was Georgy Mirsky. Mirsky was not only one of the leading Soviet experts on the Middle East, but he was also a notable representative of the “systemic liberals” in the Soviet scholarship. He worked at the IMEMO, where Nikolay Inozemtsev formed a dynamic group of “enlightened experts” that along with Georgy Arbatov’s US and Canada Studies Institute were the main citadels of knowledge and alleged liberalism. Evgeny Primakov defined this community of scholars as “the dissidents within the system”.


67 Vladimir Kuzichkin even claimed that the Tudeh leaders were well aware of the underground infrastructure of the mojahedin and helped the Revolutionary guards to uncover the underground arms storage facilities and other properties, see: Kuzichkin, Inside the KGB, 291.

68 This “liberal” image was rather a result of the attempts of the conservative part of the Party bureaucracy to present these institutes as “pro-Western”, which took the form of numerous attacks on the IMEMO from the CC Department of Science. See more in Cherkasov, IMEMO.Ocherk istorii, 489-504.

69 Evgeny Primakov, Gody v bolshoy politike (Moscow: Sovshennno sekretno, 1999), 11-45. Although by the time of the described discussion Primakov was a recently appointed director of the IVAN, before that for almost a decade he had been Inozemtsev’s right hand. Thus when referring to this “systemic dissent” in the first chapter of his memoirs, he proudly accepted this definition to himself as well.
From Mirsky’s point of view, Soviet support for Banisadr’s dismissal was an example of shortsighted policies that could end up with complete destruction of the progressive opposition to Khomeini. At one of the closed expert roundtables organized by Georgy Arbatov’s US and Canadian Studies Institute, Mirsky argued that the elimination of the national bourgeoisie from the Iranian political map could be a positive development, but simultaneously it resulted in the defeat of the mojahedin. As Mirsky put it: “we lost the only power that was standing in the way of obscurantism”. Mirsky also criticized Soviet resistance to accepting the changing reality:

The problem is that it [the destruction of the mojahedin—D.A.] will start the campaign for destruction of all leftist forces and establishment of unlimited clerical dictatorship. So you can continue repeating that “a revolution without a revolution” is developing and keep praising it. But it was 1979 when you formulated this thesis—now it is 1981 and it is clear that all the political left are threatened. And of course what is happening now is not a revolution—it is a counterrevolution.

Eventually he even touched the “sacred cow” of Soviet foreign policy: its main adversary. According to Mirsky the blindness of Soviet ideologues was a result of a binary thinking: “everything that is bad for the Americans is good for us”. Mirsky claimed this approach was deeply wrong as some processes could first hit the United States and later turn towards the Soviet Union:

Was it not Khomeini who proposed the slogan: “Death to Israel, death to the United States and the USSR”? So maybe tomorrow they will massacre the political left in Iran. And if the communists start to object, they will have the pleasure of executing them too.

71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
Mirsky’s prophesy, as we know, eventually ended up being absolutely correct. At the time, however, it was met with a more moderate response from Evgeny Primakov, who also took part in the same roundtable where Mirsky had expressed his view of the situation. Primakov agreed with Mirsky in regards to the paranoia in Soviet search for “the hand of Washington” in every event in the Middle East. He stressed, though, that it was impossible to ignore pro-imperialist stand of Iranian politicians like Banisadr. However, he admitted that “it was ideologically wrong to support the position of the Islamic fundamentalists”.

Hence it is evident that by 1981-82 in both Soviet leadership and expert community there was growing dissatisfaction and disappointment with the direction of Iranian political development. Yet for the leadership Iran remained a secondary arena with the main focus concentrated on Afghanistan that defined Soviet Third World policy and Cold War strategy at that time. This lack of detailed attention from the Politburo allowed the Tudeh to keep feeding the International department (and consequently the rest of the Soviet leaders) with promises and optimistic perspectives of cooperation with the Iranian regime. Unwilling to shake the existing balance in which both the United States and the Islamic republic were primarily preoccupied with the hostage crisis and the conflict between each other (and thus less attracted to interfere in the Afghani affairs), the Politburo elders were happy to accept this game of the Tudeh and keep supporting Khomeini.

However, this continuing support did not mean that the Soviet leadership by 1981-82 stayed completely in darkness about the nature of the Iranian regime. Although some of them kept certain illusions about the progressiveness of Khomeini in comparison to the alternatives, the

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73 Pyotr Cherkasov, who had access to the IMEMO archive in the early 2000s claimed that Mirsky also wrote the analytical note to the Central Committee, in which he argued that “there is no reason to see the signs of the course towards revolutionary democracy in the policies of Ayatollah Khomeini”. See: Cherkasov, IMEMO.Ocherk istorii, 450.

74 “Stenogramma zasedaniya sektii vneshney politiki”, L. 78-79.
Afghan war served as a stimulus for the Soviet leaders to pay more attention to the expert community. Growing resistance under the banner of political Islam in Afghanistan along with the developments in Iran revitalized the activity of the scholars and some (though still quite reserved) demand from the decision-makers. And the expert community, although still slowly, was catching up with the developments in “the Foreign East”. The appearance of critical statements that provoked discussion on political Islam like those quoted in the previous paragraphs could only become possible following these changes in the attitude of both experts and leaders to researching Islam as a political ideology. In the following part of this chapter I will examine more closely the structure of these changes.

**Soviet expert community and political Islam (1980-1982).**

In 1981, Evgeny Primakov was probably better informed than anyone in the Soviet expert community about the variety of views on political Islam. Since his appointment as a director of the Institute of Oriental Studies he administered a deeper reorientation of the Institute to contemporary political analysis than his predecessor, Bobodzhan Gafurov, had done. The reassessment of the role of Islam in the politics of the Middle East was naturally one of the directions the Institute pursued. In order to improve the research methodology and exchange of scholarly opinions Primakov and his colleagues developed a new analytical tool: *sitanalizy* (situational analyses)—a method that was later awarded the State Prize for its efficiency. A certain situation in the international relations was discussed according to possible scenarios of development. An interdisciplinary group of 20-25 experts was brought together and discussed proposed scenarios on different levels: from global to regional using the expertise of different specialists. A final document contained a joint opinion of the expert group and individual opinions of experts who did not agree with certain points of joint position. In the final document none of the experts was mentioned.
by name in order not to have the name influence the reader.\textsuperscript{75} This method facilitated a democratization of discussions within the expert community and consequently a certain degree of pluralism that allowed the researchers to produce more grounded reports and predictions.

However, the Institute of Oriental Studies was not on its own in studying Islam. In late 1979, following the revolution in Iran and in the context of developing insurgency in Afghanistan, Soviet officials started to pay more attention to the study of Islamic political movements, too. In particular in November 1979, the Academic Institute of Scientific Atheism was instructed by the Central Committee Department of Science and Education to organize a roundtable dedicated to the contemporary problems of studying Islam. The report that was sent to the Central Committee after the roundtable problematized the role of religion in the anti-imperialist movements and admitted the unpreparedness of the Soviet expert community to analyze it ideologically:

The situation in “the Muslim world” is very complicated. On the one hand, religious arguments are used by democratic forces in anti-imperialist struggle; on the other hand, forces of reaction consolidate under the banner of Islam. Unfortunately these problems are understudied; a deep Marxist analysis of role and place of Islam in the socio-political life of the Foreign East has not yet been applied.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{75} For more on the methodology of situational analyses see: Evgeny Primakov and Mark Khrustalyov, \textit{Situatsionnye analizy: metodika provedeniya. Ocherki tekuşey politiki. Vypusk 1.} (Moscow: MGIMO MID Rossii, 2006). First methodological brochure on the situational analyses was publisheb by Primakov and his IMEMO colleagues in 1974 for internal use only, see: Evgeny Primakov, Vladimir Lyubchenko, and Vladimir Gantman, \textit{Metodika situatsionnogo analiza mezhdunarodnykh otnosheniy} (Moscow: IMEMO, 1974). For more on the history of situational analyses and their first applications see: Cherkasov, \textit{IMEMO.Ocherk istorii}, 395-411. For Primakov’s own memories about the process of development of this new methodology, see Primakov, \textit{Gody v bolshoy politike}, 44-45.

Consequently, on February 7, 1980 the Section of Social Sciences of the Academy of Science gathered a meeting of representatives of the academic institutes, regional research centers, the Foreign Ministry, the Council of Religious Affairs and other organizations that were relevant to the topic of contemporary studies of Islam. Following this gathering, the Institute of Oriental Studies, as the main research coordination center, was tasked to develop a multidisciplinary complex strategy of studying contemporary Islam in the following years.\textsuperscript{77} In March 1980 the Academy of Sciences organized a coordinating conference “Islam and its role in contemporary ideologically-political struggle” in Tashkent. Evgeny Primakov summed up the main ideas discussed at this gathering in his concluding report. In this report Primakov argued that the role of the religious element in the revolutionary movements in the Third World was alarmingly significant. Its rise could provoke the appearance of movements “of Muslim type revolutions similar to the one in Iran”. But simultaneously the attempts of “the imperialist powers and the PRC” to use Islam in their struggle against the USSR and “prevent the transformation of Muslim political movement in the reserve of the revolution” also appeared more and more worrisome.\textsuperscript{78}

It is evident from Primakov’s summary that in 1980 the revolution in Iran was still considered by the majority of Soviet experts as a positive development in contrast to the hostile activities of the strategic adversaries (the United States and the PRC), which is a clear reference to the American and Chinese support of Pakistan and overall anti-Soviet activities in Afghanistan. The Tashkent conference resulted in a resolution that suggested to coordinate the research activity of different institutes and departments of the Academy in order to study the role of Islam in the ideological and political struggle in developing

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, L. 34.
countries. According to the resolution, in the following years all the research produced by institutions across the USSR had to be submitted to the Institute of Oriental Studies and Section of Social Sciences of the Academy of Sciences.\textsuperscript{79} Thus Institute of Oriental Studies under Primakov became the centerpiece of Soviet studies of political Islam once and for all.

Consequently under Primakov the Institute of Oriental Studies started to publish a series of collective volumes on the topic of political facets of Islam: \textit{“Islam i politika”}.\textsuperscript{80} The volumes were partially a result of discussions within the situational analysis groups whereas the reports on the discussions were sent to the decision-makers at the Central Committee. The volumes had a restricted access and were marked “for internal use only” (\textit{dlya sluzhebnogo pol’zovaniya}). Although many of the publications were in fact juggling different definitions and terms, some points in regards to Islam in general and the situation in Iran in particular provided some new insights to the topic. In the first volume published in 1980, the Iranian revolution and its Islamic ideology certainly occupied one of the central places but was defined through the prism of events in Afghanistan. Viktor Korgun, a specialist on Afghanistan, emphasized in his article on the role of Islam in Afghanistan the negative influence of the Khomeini’s regime. He even claimed direct participation of Iranian armed forces in the Afghan insurgency.\textsuperscript{81} Salekh Aliev, a senior researcher at the Sector of Iran of the Institute of Oriental Studies, disagreed on that point and even blamed the Communist government of Afghanistan for the worsened relations with Tehran. More importantly, Aliev raised certain doubts about the future of the leftist movement, including the Tudeh, even

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid, L. 35.

\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Islam i politika. Sbornik informatsionnykh materialov}, Vol. 1, ed. Yury Pankov (Moscow: ION TsK KPSS, 1980). Following volumes were published in 1981, 1984 and 1986. The number of printed copies was extremely limited — the copy I had a chance to work with is № 222 (courtesy of Dr. Alexey Malashenko).

\textsuperscript{81} Viktor Korgun “Rol i mesto Islama v protsessse obshestvennogo razvitiya sovremennogo Afganistana” in \textit{Islam i politika}, 104-120.
assuming the upcoming clash with the regime.\textsuperscript{82} Similarly, in April 1980 in a conversation between himself, the representative of the Foreign Ministry Nikolay Kapustin and British diplomat Stephen Wordsworth, Aliev insisted that the Tudeh was weak whereas the \textit{mujahedin} were supported by the Iranian youth. Although Kapustin agreed with Aliev, he was much more moderate in his assessments in front of a foreign diplomat whereas Aliev predicted a power struggle soon to begin.\textsuperscript{83}

In his own publications of the early 1980s Evgeny Primakov summed up many points that Soviet experts were arguing about during this wave of interest to the role of Islam as a political force.\textsuperscript{84} Although Primakov continued the existing Soviet scholarly tradition of defining religion as a force that could have both positive and negative social meaning in the Third World revolutionary movements, he insisted that the role of religion in the case of Iran had changed since the beginning of the revolution. While it initially had played an objectively progressive role enforcing the anti-imperialist struggle, it was later at least partially employed by the reactionary forces and used to develop utopian concepts such as “the Islamic economy” and “the Islamic state”. Primakov was very careful in his analysis: discussing the role of Islam in Pakistan he was straightforward in marking it as reactionary, while in the case of Iran he never directly attacked the regime or personally Khomeini, resorting to abstract criticism of “some reactionary forces”.\textsuperscript{85} Yet he stressed that the Iranian political model was “ambiguous” as it

\textsuperscript{82} Salekh Aliev “Islam i revolutsiya v Irane” in \textit{Islam i politika}, 49-68. Hanna Jansen and Michael Kemper in their analysis of the article suggest that the last note could have been a result of censorship due to its inconsistency with the rest of the article, see: Jansen and Kemper. “Hijacking Islam”, 148.
\textsuperscript{84} Primakov’s analysis was published in the form of an article in 1980, see: Evgeny Primakov, “Islam i protsessy obshchestvennogo razvitiya stran zarubezhnogo Vostoka”, \textit{Voprosy filosofii}, no. 8 (1980): 60-71. Later parts of this analysis were published in Primakov’s influential monograph on the post-colonial Foreign East, see: Evgeny Primakov, \textit{Vostok posle krakhya kolonialnoy sistemy} (Moscow: Nauka, 1982), 68-87.
\textsuperscript{85} Primakov, “Islam i protsessy obshchestvennogo razvitiya”, 61-62.
“reflected radical anti-imperialist, anti-exploitative and simultaneously conservative trends in the Islamic movement”. Most importantly Primakov insisted that it was impossible to keep ignoring the “growing politicization of Islam”.86

The particular case of Iran and its Islamic regime became the topic of a closed annual conference organized by the sector of Iran of the Institute of Oriental Studies. In the aftermath of each conference a Special Bulletin was issued for internal use only, with printed versions of papers that were presented at the conference. These bulletins show the evolution of analysis offered by the Soviet experts throughout the first half of the 1980s. In 1981, at a conference dedicated to the second anniversary of the Iranian revolution, Artyom Arabadzhyan presented a paper in which he discussed the socio-economic and political direction of the Iranian leadership.87 His analysis was unprecedentedly critical in comparison to the publications of the preceding years. Noting the anti-imperialist achievements of the Islamic republic, Arabadzhyan labeled the socio-economic program of the regime along with its foreign policy strategy as “an adventurism that reflected the peculiarities of Khomeini’s personality”.88 Arabadzhyan went as far as to proclaim Khomeini’s regime “having no future” due to its brutal violation of its own principle: not to concentrate all the power in one pair of hands. Yet Arabadzhyan offered no feasible alternative to the Islamic regime. Highlighting the role of the Iranian left in the revolution, he admitted low probability for the creation of the united left front that could “overthrow the exploitative regime”.89

Salekh Aliev also stressed authoritarian and reactionary trends in the Iranian leadership.90 Yet simultaneously his analysis of the regime’s

86 Ibid, 65.
88 Ibid, 10
perspectives was much milder. Aliev stressed that anti-Westernism of the Iranian leadership did not exclude a shift of Iran to the non-capitalist path of development and reinforcement of the progressive forces, primarily the Tudeh. Natalia Kuznetsova argued that while in 1979 Khomeini’s slogan “Neither East, nor West” hardly resonated in its anti-Soviet part with the majority of the Iranians, by 1980-81 it was implemented in the state propaganda and turned into a much more accepted concept in the Iranian society. Noting this growing anti-Sovietism of the Iranians, Kuznetsova carefully avoided mentioning the war in Afghanistan as one of the principal reasons for that (though mentioning it as one of the unjust accusations distributed by the Iranian leaders). Yet the most skeptical of all was the presentation by Elena Doroshenko, who only briefly mentioned Khomeini’s anti-imperialism in her introduction and then moved on to characterizing him as “a contradictory figure”, “a fanatical believer, convinced in his mission of a spiritual leader, called to establish in Iran an ideal Muslim state and society according to the principles of the early Islam”. Doroshenko did not hesitate to state that Islam “constituted the foundation of the Iranian state, its ideology, domestic and foreign policy, official propaganda and culture”. Listing the measures taken by the Iranian authorities in the direction of Islamization, Doroshenko concluded that there were no reasons to believe that the role of Islam would decrease in the near future.

Thus it is evident that despite differences in tone and nuances of their analysis most Soviet experts were pessimistic in their assessments of the Iranian regime, the perspectives of the Iranian left and prospects of Iran’s relations with the Soviet Union. It would be fair to assume that new methods of research and scholarly interactions applied by

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91 Ibid, 20.
92 Natalia Kuznetsova, “Proyavleniya antisoivezyma rukovoditeley Islamskoy respubliki Iran”, Spetsialniy byulleten, no. 4 (217), 107-126.
93 Elena Doroshenko, “Rol shiizma v Islamskoy respublike Iran”, Spetsialniy byulleten, no. 1 (219) (Moscow: Nauka, 1982), 75
94 Ibid, 80.
Evgeny Primakov in the Institute of Oriental Studies revitalized the discussion among Soviet Iranian studies experts and built the foundation for the multidimensional analysis of the Islamic regime in Iran. Simultaneously the intensification of the studies of contemporary political Islam contributed to a new level of expertise on the processes going on in Iran. It is noteworthy that the abovementioned opinions of the experts from the Institute of Oriental Studies strikingly stood in contrast with the publications of Semyon Agaev, who in his articles of that period continued to focus on the anti-imperialism of the Iranian regime. While Artyom Arabadzhyan in his article argued that the hostage crisis was a mistake and a failed adventure, Agaev stressed its importance as a unifying factor for the revolutionary forces. While most experts from the Institute of Oriental Studies (maybe apart from Salekh Aliev) agreed that the Tudeh had low chances to hijack the revolution, Agaev argued that shift to the left was the only option for the Iranian revolution to overcome its crisis. 95 If we agree with Muriel Atkin that Semyon Agaev was close to Rostislav Ulyanovsky, we can assume that defending the Iranian regime Agaev pushed the line of his patron from the International department. 96 However there were also some points in Agaev’s analysis that contradicted Ulyanovsky’s position. In particular Agaev, continuing his argument with Artyom Arabadzhyan, kept insisting in his 1982 publication that Iran was pursuing the capitalist path of development, though in an exotic Islamic form, while, as it is evident from Ulyanovsky’s own publications of the time, he was still a firm believer in Iran to be taking a non-capitalist path. 97 From this

96 Atkin, “Rethinking the Iranian Revolution”, 89-91. See also Chapter 1 of this dissertation for more on the biography and career of different experts, including Semyon Agaev.

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point of view we could argue that Salekh Aliev was much closer to Ulyanovskiy than Semyon Agaev.

Unfortunately there is no hard proof that the scholarly opinions influenced Soviet decision-making at that period. However, Primakov’s situational analyses method would not have received a State award for nothing, while the intensification in the studies of political Islam could not happen without a demand and a sanction from above. Thus, we can conclude that there was a certain shift in the perceptions of the Soviet leadership that must have been primarily stimulated by the growing disaster in Afghanistan which simultaneously furthered the analysis of Iran and of the future of its Islamic regime. It certainly did not cause decisive changes in the policies but it must have contributed to certain minor adjustments in the ideological worldview of some of the Soviet leaders. For most of the latter, the following worsening of the Soviet-Iranian relations could hardly have come as a surprise.

With or without a help of the experts by 1981 the role of Islam as a political factor forced some in the Soviet leadership to become more suspicious about the Islamic republic and its ideology. While some of the Soviet commentaries of the previous years had touched upon the position of the Iranian clergy on the export of revolutionary ideas, it had usually been a very abstract concern never presented as threatening to the Soviet Union. By 1981 the KGB leadership realized that such a threat existed. While at the 26th CPSU Congress in late 1980 Leonid Brezhnev once again endorsed the Iranian revolution and stressed its unique nature and role in the international anti-imperialist struggle, Yury Andropov at the National Consultation Meetings with the KGB leadership following the Congress was less optimistic. He claimed that “subversive centers” were striving to use the most fanatical part of Muslims to destabilize situation in Central Asia and Transcaucasia. According to Andropov “the enemy stepped up its Pan-Turkist and Pan-Islamist propaganda using the events in Iran and Afghanistan”. Andropov insisted on counter-intelligence measures in order “to detect
their hostile activities not in Moscow or Kiev, but over there, across the border”.  

Real counter-propaganda, however, was mostly limited to the measures proposed by the Central Committee statement from 1980: printing of brochures and intensification of radio broadcasts from Azerbaijan. When local authorities requested harsher measures, the Central Committee usually disapproved, trying not to create trouble in relations with Iran. For example, in April 1982 the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Turkmen SSR Muhammednazar Gapurov requested the Central Committee to conduct more active counter-propaganda measures against Iran. According to Gapurov, the Iranian radio station “The Voice of the Islamic Revolution” in Gorgan covered with its broadcasts in Turkmen language all the territory of the Turkmen SSR. Gapurov argued that the station was widely popular not only among believers but also among “peasant intelligentsia and youth”. Gapurov insisted that Gorgan radio influenced the growth of religiosity, the revival of the “self-proclaimed clergy” and ideas of Pan-Islamism. He proposed a number of measures to counter this Iranian activities including hiring more reporters to the Turkmen state television and radio station and the jamming of radio broadcasts from Iran. Although the Department of Propaganda of the Central Committee approved some of the measures including hiring of new reporters, it decisively refused to start jamming the Gorgan radio station. According to the statement sent in response to Gapurov’s request, such jamming could result in reception problems for some of the border regions of Iran. This in turn could cause grave


dissatisfaction of Iranian authorities. Clearly the influence of Iranian propaganda on Soviet “Muslim” republics was considered in Moscow not to be serious enough as to cause potential dissatisfaction of the Iranian regime by eventual countermeasures.

**Soviet-Iranian relations in the context of the Iran-Iraq war.**

Indeed, the export of revolutionary Islamic ideology was directed primarily at Shi’ites, whereas most Muslims of the Soviet Union were Sunni. In a predominantly Shi’a Iraq, the issue of revolutionary ideas import from Iran was much more concerning for the Sunni minority in power. Iraq was also a country with a number of the holiest Shi’a shrines including the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala and thus was close to Iran not only geographically but also spiritually. Iraq in the 1970s was nominally led by the nationalist Ba’ath party whereas in reality this decade saw the rise of a new Middle East strongman who was de facto ruling Iraq in person, Saddam Hussein. The relations between Iraq under Hussein and Iran were uneasy even before the revolution. In 1975, the two countries were on the brink of war over the disputed islands and waters of Shatt al-Arab and the Gulf. The revolution in Iran provided Saddam Hussein with new challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, fundamentalist Iran could become an attraction for the Iraqi Shi’a majority and consequently a threat to the stability of Hussein’s power. More importantly, though, Saddam Hussein considered the Iranian military weakened due to the revolutionary purges primarily among officers and wanted to seize this opportunity to realize his territorial claims.

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101 For more on the tensions between Iran and Iraq in the early 1970s and Soviet position at that time see Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

102 Some of his thoughts on Iranian perspective and personally on Khomeini expressed during his meeting with his diplomats in January 1979, see: “Saddam and High-Ranking Officials Discussing Khomeini, the Ethiopian-Eritrean conflict, the Potential for Kurdish Unrest, and the Iranian Economy,” February 20, 1979, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Conflict Records Research Center, National Defense University, SH-SHTPA- 000-851 http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111640
Evgeny Primakov remembered that during one of the situational analyses at the Institute of Oriental Studies the research group considered most of the abovementioned factors and predicted a conflict between Iran and Iraq. This achievement is often mentioned in both Primakov’s biographies and most textbooks on situational analyses methodology. Yet even if the analysis truly predicted the Iran-Iraq war (of which there is no proof apart from Primakov’s own account), it hardly helped Soviet policy-makers. The Iraqi aggression in September 1980 came not as a complete surprise for the Soviet leaders. They had been warned not only by academics, but by the intelligence, as well. Oleg Grinevsky remembered that the GRU was aware of Saddam Hussein’s plans prior to the attack. Yet Afghanistan distracted all the attention of the decision-makers at that point and they simply did not pay much attention to the intelligence reports.103

After the collapse of Soviet–Egyptian cooperation in 1972, Iraq had become the primary ally of the Soviet Union in the Middle East. In the same year, the two countries signed the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. Iraqi Communists were included in the Ba’athist government of national unity while the Iraqi military became a primary buyer of the Soviet arms. Saddam Hussein’s personality, his rhetoric for Arab unity, nationalization of oil industry, the contemptuous characteristics he gave of Sadat—all that also attracted the Soviets. However throughout the 1970s these flourishing bilateral relations started to deteriorate. Evgeny Primakov remembered that the dictatorial power obtained by Saddam Hussein caused his evolution to conducting more hazardous and risky policies in both domestic and foreign affairs. His repressions of the Kurds and the Shi’ites that started after 1975 dissatisfied Moscow.104 By the end of the 1970s, Iraq also managed to diversify its arms imports, lowering the share of the Soviet arms from 95% to 63%. In 1978 Hussein launched a campaign against the Iraqi Communists. For the Soviet leadership, especially for Boris Ponomarev

103 Grinevsky, Tayny Sovetskoy diplomati, 113.  
104 Primakov, Konfidentsialno: Blizhniy Vostok, 309.
and his International department, the anti-communist campaign was an insult that was hard to swallow. However a desire to have a strong ally in the Middle East and a stable currency cash flow forced the Soviet leaders to ignore these unpleasant developments. Yet, of course, by the time of the Iran-Iraq war the relations between two countries were hardly as cordial as they had been in the early 1970s.105

Already in May 1980, four months before the outbreak of the war, the Iranian Ambassador in Moscow, Mohammed Mokri requested the Soviet Union to stop selling arms to Iraq. In his interview to Ettela’at on May 12 he quoted the response of the Soviet Foreign Ministry official. According to Mokri, Soviet diplomats reassured him that the Soviet Union was far from happy about the developments in Iraq and especially about the persecution of communists. However, the Ministry official stated that it was an Iraqi domestic matter and the Soviet Union was not going to interfere. In regards to the arms deals, Soviet diplomats responded that the USSR was not the only arms supplier to Iraq and should it have ceased its arms supplies Iraq could have substituted it with arms from other sources. The response clearly did not satisfy the Ambassador. Mokri described Iraq as a new regional policeman chosen by the United States in place of Iran and thus blamed the Soviet Union for helping the imperialists.106

Iran’s dissatisfaction with the Soviet Union was much harsher in the days following the Iraqi aggression. On September 22, 1980, when Iraq started its military operation, the Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz was in Moscow. Combined with continuing arms supplies it created the impression in Tehran that the Soviet Union supported the Iraqi aggression. However, Aziz’s visit had been planned in advance and

Soviet leadership did not expect the war to break out with Iraqi Foreign Minister being in Moscow. By September 22 the upcoming war had already been evident for some time: five days earlier Saddam Hussein had abrogated the 1975 agreement with Iran. Yet few days prior to the invasion Hussein had promised to Soviet Ambassador Barkovsky that Iraq had not been planning to start a military conflict. On September 22 Gromyko was in New York at the UN General Assembly, and Ponomarev had to substitute for him at the negotiations with Aziz. Ponomarev spent much of his time with Aziz explaining how the conflict between Iran and Iraq could be beneficial for the imperialists and harmful for both countries and the USSR. Ironically, while Aziz was bowing his head in response, Iraqi tanks were already crossing the Iranian border.

On the next day President Banisadr told the press that he had met with the Soviet Ambassador and had told him that Soviet support to Iraq had revealed the true attitude of the Soviet Union to revolutionary Iran. In Moscow, Ambassador Mokri was received by the Deputy Chairman of Supreme Council, Inamadzhan Usmankhodzhayev, and was reassured of Soviet neutrality. However, Mokri also demanded once again to cease Soviet arms supplies to Iraq and protested Tariq Aziz’s presence in Moscow. The Iranian leadership was clearly under impression that the Soviet Union had authorized Saddam Hussein’s actions. In fact not only the Iranians but also Soviet adversaries in the West were preoccupied with the same assumption in the first days of the conflict. Hussein thus achieved his goal, creating the impression of Soviet support.

107 Yodfat, The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran, 91.
110 Yodfat, The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran, 91-92.
111 In the first days of war both British and American representatives in Moscow informed their governments about high probability of the Soviets to take the Iraqi side in the conflict. See: British Embassy in Moscow to Foreign and Commonwealth Office Telegram no. 584“On Iran/Iraq”, September 25, 1980, The National Archives of the United Kingdom FCO 28/4042, P. 4.
In reality the initial phase of the conflict sharply highlighted differences between Soviet power centers in relation to the Iranian revolution. Although the Politburo did not discuss this issue before late October, the informal discussions were going on in the narrow group of Soviet elderly decision makers. One side was represented by the International department: Ponomarev and Ulyanovsky were clearly unhappy about Hussein’s attack on communists and simultaneously they were significantly influenced by the Tudeh and consequently charmed by the Iranian revolution more than others. Thus they proposed to support Iran and to strictly warn Iraq about further aggressive actions. Dmitry Ustinov and his Ministry of Defense favored the Iraqis as Soviet support to Iran could make Hussein flip to the Americans—a risk that no one in the Soviet leadership wanted to take being traumatized by Sadat and Amin. The position that eventually prevailed was favored by Gromyko and Andropov. They insisted that the Soviet Union had to remain neutral as the victory of neither side would have been beneficial for the USSR. The defeat of Iraq could mean the loss of an ally and also the humiliation for the Soviets who had been training and arming the Iraqis for almost a decade. It could also mean an unrestrained strengthening of Iran and create the appearance of a powerful state with ambitions to be protector of all Muslims, which could be a potential threat for the internal stability of Soviet Muslim republics. The defeat of Iran could cause the counterrevolution or some other development leading to the restoration of the pro-American regime. Following this discussion, the International department prepared a draft of the Politburo statement that was accepted on October 24, 1980. The Politburo stated that the Soviet Union was to remain neutral and to stop arms supplies to either side.112

A few weeks before this decision a scandal had unsettled Tehran. The Pars news agency published the text of a conversation between Soviet Ambassador Vinogradov and Iranian Prime Minister Raja’i,

112 Grinevsky, Tayny Sovetskoy diplomatii, 116
according to which Vinogradov hinted to Raja’i that the Soviet Union was not happy about Saddam Hussein and was willing to sell arms to Iran. Raja’i allegedly rejected this proposal, pronouncing his distrust of the Soviet Union in the context of its military support to Iraq and invasion of Afghanistan. The publication caused an immediate Soviet protest and a denial published by TASS. It is hard to say whether Vinogradov had really made such a proposal or whether this was a propaganda trick of the Iranians. From all that we know about the reaction of the Soviet leadership and in particular the Foreign Ministry it is hard to believe that Vinogradov could have received directions to approach Iranians with a deal proposal. Vladimir Kuzichkin in his memoirs went even further, claiming that not the Soviets but the Iranians initiated the arms deal discussion and were refused by Vinogradov. This claim is also hardly verifiable and does not seem probable in the context of distrust to the Soviet Union that most Iranian leaders openly expressed in that period. However the Iranian version made its way to the CIA secret report on the Soviet position towards the Iran-Iraq war and among other factors brought American intelligence to a conclusion that at that point the Soviets favored Iran over Iraq.

Saddam Hussein was fiercely disappointed with the Soviet decision to cut arms supplies to Iraq. Throughout the fall of 1980, the Iraqi press was employing increasingly anti-Soviet rhetoric. Iraq was however dependent on Soviet advisers and technical specialists in both military and industrial projects. Also despite Hussein’s temporary

113 Yodfat, The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran, 94-95. Similar protests Soviet representatives also expressed in their private conversations with their foreign counterparts. For example Leonid Shebarshin confirmed to his British colleagues that the meeting between Vinogradov and Raja’i took place but categorically denied any discussions on arms deal, see: S. M. J. Lamport Foreign and Commonwealth Office Middle East Department to Miss M. Beckett, Department for International development, October 7, 1980, The National Archives of the United Kingdom FCO 28/4042, P. 36.

114 Kuzichkin, Inside the KGB, 343-344.

alliance with the conservative regimes of the Gulf against Iran, the break with the Soviet Union could leave Iraq completely defenseless against the United States and their proxies. Thus a definitive break was not among the choices for Hussein. However he made sure to tease Soviet fears with public presentations of freshly purchased French Mirage jets and private communications with the Americans.116

Only in the summer of 1982 did Iraq and the Soviet Union start negotiations on a new arms deal. There were a number of factors that led to this rapprochement, with Iranian military successes and another rapid deterioration in Soviet-Iranian relations being among the most important ones.

Iran was also not satisfied with Soviet decision to take a neutral stance. Iranian authorities expressed their gratitude for the cut of arms supplies to Iraq but remained unhappy about lack of Soviet official condemnation of Iraq as an aggressor. Although Khomeini and the Iranian government did not attack the Soviet Union directly more than before (the condemnation of the Soviet Union as “a lesser Satan” was continuously practiced, primarily at the Friday prayers), in their incriminatory speeches they refrained to euphemisms such as “the superpowers” or “another superpower”. For example, during the visit of the Iranian official delegation to East Germany the Minister of Education, Dr Mohammed Javad Bahonar, in his statements to the East German interlocutors used this euphemistic phrasing with virtuosity. On the situation in the Gulf region he stated that Iran would not want “another power to take the place of the USA” in the Gulf region. On Afghanistan Bahonar stated that the Islamic Republic condemns any imperialist interference, particularly the American but it does not

mean that they accept “the presence of another country’s military” in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{117}

Overall Soviet attempts to stress Moscow’s neutrality or even its readiness to lead the pacification process in order not to disappoint either side ended up dissatisfying both Iran and Iraq. Combined with the developing struggle within Iranian ruling class and continuing Soviet presence in Afghanistan it resulted in a new decline in the Soviet-Iranian relations. By 1982 the Tudeh was left virtually alone and defenseless on the left flank of the Iranian politics, the Iranian regime was barely hiding its antipathy towards the USSR, and the Soviet leadership itself was much less charmed by the anti-imperialist stance of the Islamic republic.

**Conclusion.**

By 1982 Iran was neither a Soviet ally nor likely to become one. Even the International department that had previously transmitted the illusions of the Tudeh to the Soviet leadership had to cope with this reality.\textsuperscript{118} In fact, Iran was not even neutral—it was hostile to the Soviet Union and some of the Soviet reactions discussed above prove that this was also not a secret for Moscow. This hostility was particularly evident in the case of Afghanistan. The Soviet leadership believed that the Iranians directly supported the anti-Soviet forces in Afghanistan. As mentioned earlier, Defense Minister Ustinov even reported to the Politburo that Iran was hosting training camps form the Afghani mujahedeen. The expansionist ideology of political Islam was studied in the centers of expertise, acknowledged by the KGB and the Politburo as a real danger, though, judging by the modest counterpropaganda measures adopted, a minor


\textsuperscript{118} However it took Rostislav Ulyanovsky some time to get used to this new reality — his 1982-1985 publications that will be addressed in the next chapter show this evolution vividly.
one. Hence the Iranian regime was considered with suspicion from this point of view as well.

Internal political developments also did not give the Soviet leadership much hope. Despite internal struggles, the consolidation of power around Ayatollah Khomeini and his circle was practically a done deal. Over the first three years of the republic the Supreme Leader managed to get rid of the liberal opposition as well as of the most active left-wing forces. The beginning of the Iran-Iraq war facilitated this task. In a patriotic spirit the majority of the Iranians rallied under the banner of Islam, manifested in the personality of Khomeini. The Tudeh, which kept supporting the regime, despite a tactical success in joining forces with the fadaiyan (majority), was left virtually alone on the left flank. The pressure that it started to experience in 1981 indicated that the situation was not to stay this way for much longer.

More importantly, the Soviet Union did not express much interest in active support for the fraternal party. In reality, by 1982 the Soviet leadership had lost its interest in Iran. It was evident that the revolution was not going “their way”. Khomeini was an uneasy strongman to deal with, even if he was building a bastion of anti-Americanism. It was impossible to attract him to the Soviet sphere of influence but the Soviet leadership was willing to accept the status quo. The Tudeh was still important as an information source and as sleeping asset that could be activated in case of instability. But the Soviet Union was not willing to become the engine of this instability. The course of the Iran-Iraq war also did not allow the Soviets to make any long-term prognoses. Nevertheless, the USSR soon restarted its arms supplies to Iraq. This decision had a lot to do with the unwillingness to continue flirting with Khomeini. He clearly was not to flip to the Americans and similarly was not to be charmed into the Soviet bloc. Thus disappointing him by supplying arms to his enemy was no longer a problem for the Soviet leadership. It was, however, for the Tudeh.
The image of the Tudeh as a Moscow stooge was very persistent despite all the denial statements in the press made by Kianuri. The Soviet Union’s support for Iran’s enemy made it easier for Khomeini to attack the party. The crushing of the Tudeh, addressed in the final chapter of this dissertation, did not change the trend of the Soviet-Iranian relations that had been deteriorating for three previous years but it widened the abyss. In fact relations basically froze. The crushing of Tudeh was not the only factor—Soviet leaders were preoccupied with Afghanistan and the growing political crisis that followed the death of Brezhnev. Only following Mikhail Gorbachev’s election as the CPSU Secretary General were there some mutual attempts to find new ground for communication. These aspirations and their limited results among other things will be touched upon in the final chapter.
Chapter 6


Domestic developments in Iran by the end of 1981 destroyed most remaining hopes that the International department and theoreticians like Rostislav Ulyanovsky had fostered for the future of the Iranian revolution. The attacks on different opposition groups (including the most powerful of the leftists) left no chance that the Tudeh could survive despite its consistent loyalty to the regime. That much was obvious for the Soviets and it was no less clear for the international observers; most importantly it must have been crystal clear for the Tudeh itself. The context of the Iran-Iraq war added to the general feeling of suspicion in the Iranian leadership and society overall. The continuing Soviet presence in Afghanistan kept irritating the mullahs while the stream of Afghanistani refugees made it easy for the regime to portray the USSR as a “Satanic” power.

Nevertheless the strangulation of the Tudeh took time to unfold. It went on throughout 1982 and ended with mass arrests of the Tudeh leadership and members in February 1983. Simultaneously the channels of communications between Iran and the Soviet Union were also shrinking while the Soviets dropped most of their attempts to please the Iranian leadership. After the defection of Vladimir Kuzichkin, the KGB started to shut down most of its operations in Iran and to extricate agents and informers that had been put in danger by Kuzichkin’s betrayal. In the wake of the Tudeh arrests, Leonid Shebarshin was recalled to Moscow, while a year earlier “the political” ambassador Vinogradov was substituted by a career diplomat Vil Boldyrev. Soon after the arrests of the Tudeh leaders, they were forced to make public confessions about espionage for the Soviet Union. As a result a number of Soviet diplomats
were expelled from Iran. The relations between the two countries were de facto frozen.

Although it was hardly a positive development, the Soviet leadership led by new Secretary General, Yury Andropov, was satisfied with minimal gains it had in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution: Iran was consistently anti-American, it was dragged into a war with Iraq, which on its own was not ideal for the Soviet leadership but it kept distracting Khomeini from Afghanistan and created a stable demand for the Soviet arms from Iraq. In the context of new escalation of the global Cold War in the first half of the 1980s, it was good enough for the Soviets not to be concerned about Iran too much.

The recovery of Soviet-Iranian relations from this lowest point started only in the aftermath of election of Mikhail Gorbachev as the CPSU Secretary General in 1985. Gorbachev’s changes in foreign policy shook its foundations. The new Soviet leader, along with his new foreign policy team, which included many of those enlightened experts that were once trained under Khrushchev, gradually abandoned the revolutionary-imperial ideology that characterized Soviet foreign policy after the Second World War. They substituted it with their own ideological worldview that preferred globalism and integration to isolation and confrontation. Destroying the old ideology they rejected both the revolutionary doctrine and the imperial ambitions and this rejection soon led to the grand retreat of the Soviet power that ended the Cold War and caused grave disappointment and disillusionment for many of those who believed in this new idealist worldview.

For the Soviet role in the Third World and for the Soviet-Iranian relations in particular this ideological shift created an opportunity that the Soviet Union and Iran made an attempt to use, reviving the economic cooperation and other forms of interactions. But the fall of the USSR soon changed the paradigm and posed new challenges and new opportunities for Iran and the countries of the post-Soviet space.
The Soviet Union and the crush of the Tudeh (1982-1984)

In 1982 the deteriorating trend in the Soviet-Iranian relations became evident even for most international observers. In January, the British representative in Tehran, Nicholas Barrington, informed London of rumors about the increasingly sharper debates in the IRP on the relations with the Tudeh and the Soviet Union. Barrington even mentioned that there was a high probability of the upcoming nationwide purge of the Tudeh as the party was considered by Barrington’s sources in the Iranian leadership as “dangerous and recognized as such by the regime”.¹

Similar expectations clearly existed in Moscow. Continuing the trend of the previous months, Soviet public statements remained very cautious and moderate. A good example is a Pravda article on the Soviet-Iranian relations published in March. It touched on some problematic issues of the bilateral relations in the preceding years. The issues included reductions in Soviet diplomatic personnel in Iran, visa obstacles for Soviet journalists and other minor problems. The article also addressed some of the “misunderstandings” of the Iranian side such as wrongful marking of the Soviet Union as equally evil as the United States, incorrect statements of the Iranian side about incompatibility of Islam and communism and prejudicial reading of the situation in Afghanistan by the Iranian leadership. Pravda blamed reactionary the right-wing clergy for erecting obstacles to mutual understanding between Iran and the Soviet Union.²


It is noteworthy that the article completely ignored the Tudeh and its fragile position. From 1981 until the destruction of the Tudeh by the regime in 1983, the Soviet press significantly reduced the number of references to the Iranian fraternal party. It is very probable that this way the Soviets tried to distance themselves from the Tudeh. Nevertheless, some international analysts claimed that the appearance of the abovementioned “critical” article was a modest Soviet warning to the Iranian leadership and a move to protect the Tudeh. The assumption that the article was not only directed at an internal audience but also to “various groups in the Iranian leadership”, was confirmed by one of the Soviet Foreign Ministry representatives in a private conversation with foreign diplomats in Moscow.

Another sign of changes in the Soviet policy was the sudden recall of ambassador Vinogradov to Moscow for consultations, which surprised the ambassador himself. After a brief return Vinogradov was permanently recalled to Moscow. Although the five years that Vinogradov had worked in Tehran were not an unusual term for rotation, the deteriorating trend in bilateral relations must have played its role. At that point the Soviets needed a career diplomat to deal with the situation in Iran rather than a politician such as Vinogradov who made his career in the Party. In August 1982, Vil Boldyrev, a diplomat who specialized on Iran, spoke Persian (unlike Vinogradov) and headed the relevant Foreign Ministry department before the appointment, arrived in Tehran as the new ambassador.

5 Vinogradov was supposed to organize a party for the departing Norwegian ambassador but instead was recalled to Moscow. Apologizing to a Norwegian colleague he confirmed the unexpected nature of that recall. For details see: N. Barrington, British Interests Section in Tehran to Foreign and Commonwealth Office “Iran/USSR Relations”, March 10, 1982, The National Archives of the United Kingdom FCO 8/4574, P. 18.
6 Some Boldyrev’s personal and professional characteristics can be found in Revaz Uturgauri’s memoirs, see: Uturgauri, Poker s ayatolloy, 60; 106-109.
In July 1982 Rostislav Ulyanovsky published an article in *Kommunist* that was dedicated to the situation in Iran.\(^7\) It was one of the most authoritative Soviet statements of the time in a public source. It is important to keep in mind, though, that Ulyanovsky could not speak for the whole of the Soviet leadership but rather for a part of it—primarily, the International department. However, even Ulyanovsky who had been the most passionate supporter of the “progressive” nature of the Iranian revolution and bright perspectives of the Iranian left, turned out to be rather skeptical in his analysis.

In the article Ulyanovsky elaborated on some “unpleasant developments” in Iran’s domestic situation. He vehemently criticized “the illusory searches for a third path between capitalism and socialism and attempts to impose social, economic and moral ideals borrowed from the Quran”.\(^8\) While describing positively some of the revolutionary socio-economic reforms, Ulyanovsky noted “the intensification of the class struggle” due to the active role of “the conservative wing of the clergy reflecting the interests of the feudal landlords and big capital”.\(^9\) Elaborating on this notion of multifaceted social and political profile of the clergy, Ulyanovsky even moved on to modestly criticize the Iranian “progressive forces” because of their inability to make alliances with the progressive circles of the clergy. Addressing the issue of dissociation of the Iranian left, he criticized them for being “estranged by disagreements over strategy and tactics, which they sometimes artificially dramatized”.\(^10\) It remains unclear who was the addressee of this particular criticism. It is noteworthy that the Tudeh was not mentioned in the text at all. Thus it is fair to assume some dissatisfaction of the International department, the main advocates of the Tudeh in the Soviet leadership, with the inability of the Tudeh to transform itself into a meaningful political force.

\(^7\) Ulyanovsky, “Iranskaya revolutsiya i eyo osobennosti”, 106-116.  
\(^8\) Ibid, 112.  
\(^9\) Ibid.  
\(^10\) Ibid, 115.
Ulyanovsky called for all the left-wing forces in Iran to form a United (Ediniy with capital “E”—D.A.) front to carry on the revolution. This confirmed his continuous belief that the revolution was still going on and that it was possible to take advantage of it. Admitting the existing stagnation of the revolutionary process, Ulyanovsky insisted on the bright perspectives of the anti-imperialist struggle:

…Here is the question: was the Iranian revolution over when the armed rebellion achieved its victory in February 1979? From our point of view this victory finished the anti-Shah phase of the revolutionary struggle. It was followed by the struggle within the revolutionary camp for the choice of future development. As this struggle was going on in the situation of an exclusively advantageous position of the clergy, who had political and military support and the administrative resources, it could gradually direct the revolution to the path where the Islamic organizational bases and ideological forms defined the main content of anti-imperialist popular movement. Thus the post-February phase of the revolution can be defined as critical point of the revolution, as its temporary crisis. But the crisis of a revolution is also a revolution. It either retreats or moves forward (emphasis mine—D.A.).

Some researchers assume that the article was addressed to the Tudeh leadership to which Ulyanovsky gave this way a public instruction to maintain the alliance with the regime by emphasizing the role of the “progressive clergy” and to include other left-wing forces into the alliance. As we know from other sources, Ulyanovsky had a well maintained channel of communication with the Tudeh through the KGB residency and there was no sensible reason for him to pass this message through public channels. The article could also be a desperate attempt to attract the attention of “the progressive clergy” to the Tudeh and the proposed alliance. If so, it had no effect on the Iranian leaders. Since 1979, the International department had been pushing the Tudeh

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11 Ibid, 111
12 Behrooz, Rebels with a Cause, 128
towards the strategy of allying with most radical and “progressive”
elements of the regime but by 1982 this strategy failed to prove its
consistency and evidently turned out to be an illusion. For some
international observers Ulyanovsky’s article confirmed the willingness
of the Soviet Union to sacrifice the Tudeh whereas the researchers
from the Institute of Oriental Studies, who discussed the article with
foreign diplomats, confirmed that, based on it, the Soviet leadership was
probably ready to accept that the religious rule was to stay for “a long
time”.13

While Ulyanovsky believed that the revolution in Iran was not
over and that it could still lead the country to the non-capitalist path
of development, most Soviet experts by late 1982 agreed that Iran did
not fit in the concepts of the non-capitalist path of development and
the state of national democracy. Some, like Salekh Aliev, argued that
the Iranian revolution revealed its “petit-bourgeois character”.14 Others
directly stated that Iran was way beyond the point of entering the non-
capitalist path of development as it was already far on the capitalist stage.
15 Overall, despite the continuing arguments over details, the expert
community admitted the formation of political dictatorship in Iran and
lack of perspectives for the Iranian revolution to turn towards a more
“progressive” direction.16

Another key event of the summer of 1982 was the defection
of Vladimir Kuzichkin. On June 2, 1982 he left the Soviet embassy
in Tehran, drove to the Turkish border and crossed to Turkey using
a British passport under the name of Michael Rod. Until this day the

13 Most probably the article was discussed by Salekh Aliev during the meeting at the
U.S. Embassy but the report of the British embassy lacks names. See “A. M. Thomson,
British Embassy in Moscow to D. S. Manning, East European and Soviet Department,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office. “Kommunist Article on Iran”, August 12, 1982, The
National Archives of the United Kingdom FCO 8/4574, P. 49.
14 Salekh Aliev, “Vazneyshiy vopros Iranskoy revolutsii na nyneshnem etape”,
15 Valentin Tsukanov, “K voprosu o predposyolkakh nekapitalisticheskogo puti razvitiya
Irana”, Spetsialniy Byulleten, no. 1 (223), 46-56.
circumstances and reasons of Kuzichkin’s defection remain unclear. Leonid Shebarshin and other KGB veterans insisted that he had been recruited by the British intelligence long before the defection.\textsuperscript{17} Nicholas Barrington, who represented British interests in Tehran, on the other hand, described Kuzichkin’s appearance at the British interests section at the Swedish embassy as a total surprise.\textsuperscript{18} As the documents of both intelligence services on this matter remain classified to this day, we cannot be sure if Kuzichkin had been a double agent for some period of time and, more importantly, if he had been passing information about Soviet contacts with the Tudeh to the British before his defection.

Kuzichkin’s defection was repeatedly connected to the Tudeh’s destruction by the regime in various sources. In 1991, an anonymous KGB officer gave an interview to Moskovskie Novosti in which he blamed Kuzichkin for trading information about Soviet connections with the Tudeh to the British intelligence, which in turn passed it to the Iranian regime and thus facilitated the destruction of the Tudeh.\textsuperscript{19} This version became popular even before this anonymous revelation. It was mostly discussed in the circles of Iranian emigration and had proponents

\textsuperscript{17} Shebarshin, \textit{Ruka Moskvy}, 221.
\textsuperscript{19} Natalia Gevorkyan, “Kryuchkovskiy dom s chyornogo khoda”, \textit{Moskovskie novosti}, October 6, 1991, 11. It is important to note the timing of the publication. It was made in the aftermath of the unsuccessful August 1991 coup against Mikhail Gorbachev. The head of the KGB, Vladimir Kryuchkov, was among the leaders and main organizers of the coup. Along with the policy of glasnost that uncovered many of the historic crimes of the KGB and its predecessors, this fact contributed to an unprecedented outburst of negative public opinion towards the KGB. At that period the Soviet press published sensations about crimes and mistakes of the KGB daily and weekly. Not all of those sensations ended up being supported by evidence. This particular publication was refuted by Leonid Shebarshin in his interview to Izvestia, where he claimed that mentioned accusations were nothing more but a revenge of one of his former subordinates, whom Shebarshin had earlier fired from the KGB, see: V.Skosyrev, “Razvedchik vernuvshiysya s kholoda”, Izvestia, October 12, 1991, 4.
among some former high ranking SAVAK generals.\textsuperscript{20} Known debriefs of Kuzichkin after his defection do not prove this theory—in the two lengthy conversations he had with British diplomats there is no sign of him passing information about the activities of the Tudeh.\textsuperscript{21} However, there is certainly a chance that those were not the only debriefs he had after the defection. Overall the probability of Kuzichkin’s influence on the strategic decision of the Iranian regime to destroy the Tudeh seems very low. He could, however, have passed on some information about the Soviet emergency extraction plans for the Tudeh leadership as he himself admitted in his memoirs his involvement in the doctoring of fake

\textsuperscript{20} Mehrdad Khonsari provides in his thesis testimonies of former SAVAK generals Mohsen Mobasser and Manouchehr Hashemi, who apparently knew about the connection between Kuzichkin’s defection and the crush of the Tudeh directly from the Head of the Soviet Division of new Iranian counterintelligence service SAVAMA, with whom they maintained contacts. See: Mehrdad Khonsari, “The National Movement of the Iranian Resistance 1979-1991: The role of a banned opposition movement in international politics” (PhD diss., London School of Economics, 1995). This version also made its way into the press, appearing for the first time in April 1985 in Washington Post (“Defection Hurt Iranian Communists”, \textit{Washington Post}, April 3, 1985) and for the second time in the same newspaper, though with new details about the alleged CIA involvement. (“CIA Curried Favor with Khomeini”, \textit{Washington Post}, November 19, 1986) The timing of the second publication was hardly occasional as it was published in the middle of the Iran-Contra crisis.

\textsuperscript{21} Kuzichkin was debriefed by high-ranking officials of the Foreign Office: firstly, by Sir Julian Bullard, at the time Deputy Permanent Under-Secretary of State and Political Director of the FCO, famous for his uncovering of KGB spy network in the UK in 1973, and, secondly by Alan Goodison, at the time Assistant Under-Secretary of State. Although minutes of the debriefs are still classified in The National Archives of the United Kingdom, file FCO 49/1041, the reports of Bullard and Goodison about the conversations are available and give the idea about the course of the debriefs. In the conversations both Bullard and Goodison mostly enquired Kuzichkin about the domestic situation in the Soviet Union, including the national minorities issue and the possibility of the Muslim uprising in Central Asia or Caucasus. Kuzichkin was also queried about Soviet foreign policy and some KGB operations in the previous years. Overall both debriefs did not touch on the issue of the Tudeh, though in his conversation with Bullard, Kuzichkin discussed Soviet position towards Iran and Iran-Iraq war in particular, claiming that in case of the necessity to choose between the two, Moscow would have chosen Iraq over Iran, though with grave reservations. See Bullard’s report at “Bullard to Broomfield, “Kuzichkin”, December 16, 1982, The National Archives of the United Kingdom FCO 28/5181, P. 32. and Goodison’s report at “Goodison to Broomfield, “Kuzichkin”, December 17, 1982, The National Archives of the United Kingdom FCO 28/5181, P. 33.
documents and planning extraction routes. Kuzichkin could also have passed on the names of the KGB servicemen working under diplomatic cover and thus influence the decision of the Iranian regime to expel some of the Soviet diplomats in May 1983.

Shebarshin, whose career was threatened by Kuzichkin’s defection, always denied any connection between Kuzichkin’s betrayal and the crush of the Tudeh. Shebarshin insisted that the sad destiny of the Tudeh had been inevitable due to the political circumstances in Iran. It is hard to argue with this statement as since 1981 both the Tudeh leadership and Soviet representatives in Iran experienced significant pressure from the regime that intensified in the spring of 1982. In June, in a private conversation with American colleague, Evgeny Primakov asked not be quoted when he admitted that “if the Iranian regime continued to oppose ‘progressive transformation’, maintained its repression of the Tudeh, and persisted in taking Iran back to the 16th century, there would come a point where the Soviet Union could no longer support it”.

If in January 1982 Nicholas Barrington needed his source in the government to tell him about the planned purge, by the early spring the Iranian press was brimmed over with incriminating publications about the Tudeh. The most serious accusation was the support of Soviet presence in Afghanistan expressed by the Tudeh, and the attempts to promote Soviet interests. In July the authorities banned the last Tudeh publication, the weekly newspaper Ittehad-e Mardom. The prosecutor’s

22 Kuzichkin, Inside the KGB, 356-359.
23 See, Skosyrev, “Razvedchik, vernuvshiysya v kholod.”
office commented that the newspaper “had opposed the laws of Islam and created obstacles for the ‘Neither East nor West’ policy of the government”.26

After that Kianuri addressed the party leadership and announced that the Tudeh was soon to be banned despite its support of the regime.27 Leonid Shebarshin remembered that in June-July 1982 and in the following six months the KGB managed to save some of its agents.28 The Tudeh leadership, though, was not among the ones who escaped. When the arrests started, in February 1983, Shebarshin was recalled to Moscow and permanently left Iran. In his later interviews he insisted that he was recalled in order to prevent his expulsion by the Iranian authorities, and this decision had nothing to do with Moscow’s dissatisfaction about Kuzichkin’s betrayal.29

Despite long preparations to go underground and developed extraction plans, the arrests came as a surprise for the Tudeh leadership. Starting on February 6, 1983 and in the days that followed, around six thousand Tudeh members, including Kianuri and all the leadership, were arrested.30 The repressions were directed exclusively at the Tudeh and allowed the leadership of the allied group of the fadaiyan (majority) to

27 Friedman, “The Enemy of My Enemy”, 34.
28 Shebarshin, Ruka Moskvy, 222.
29 See, for example: Leonid Shebarshin’s interview to Andrey Razbash, Chas Pik TV Show, May 15, 1996, https://www.net-film.ru/film-68444
escape to the Soviet Union and establish its new headquarters in Tashkent. According to Soviet documents, some of the *fadaiyan* continued their half-legal or illegal activities in Iran, at least until 1986 when, following a new wave of repressions, they asked for the permission of the Soviet authorities to join their comrades in the USSR. In the following months the arrested Tudeh members were tortured and forced to publicly confess to espionage activities for the USSR. Kianuri appeared on Iranian national television on April 30 and read out a confessional statement. For the rest of 1983 and part of 1984 these televised confessions of the Tudeh members became a regular ritual. Five days after Kianuri’s television appearance, Soviet ambassador Boldyrev was summoned to the Iranian foreign ministry and presented with a note that demanded immediate expulsion of 18 Soviet diplomats allegedly involved in the espionage activities.

The public reaction of the Soviet authorities to the arrests and confessions of the Tudeh leadership was reserved and moderate. On February 19 *Pravda* published a note, in which it reported the arrests and blamed the reactionary circles of the Iranian clergy and bourgeoisie. The note also expressed disappointment with attacks of the Iranian regime on the Soviet Union and pronounced the USSR a staunch supporter of Iranian anti-imperialism. Clearly intended for the Iranian audience,

31 For the petition of the remaining in Iran *fadaiyan* and the Central Committee Secretariat resolution see “Postanovlenie Sekretatia TsK KpSS “O razmeshchenii v Uzbekskoy SSR gruppy aktivistov Organizatsii fedainov iranskogo naroda (bolshinstvo)”, December 12, 1986, RGANI F. 89 Op. 13 D. 7 L. 1-7. The resolution also refers to the earlier TsK resolution from 1983 (Postanovlenie St-113/81gs OP) that permitted the establishment of the OIPFG (majority) headquarters in Tashkent and provided 130 activists and members of their families, who had earlier crossed from Iran, with housing in Uzbek SSR.


the note was also transmitted to Iran through the National Voice of Iran radio station and republished in the international communist press.34 There should be no surprise that the Soviet reaction was so mild. This course of action had been expected in Moscow. Saving Tudeh was not worth risking losing the anti-American leadership of Iran. Karen Brutents remembered how he repeatedly petitioned the Politburo with a proposal to leak information about the tortures of the Tudeh leadership to the Western press but always received negative reactions. The Politburo decided not to antagonize Iran.35 By 1983 the Soviets had for a while been prepared, as Nicholas Barrington put it, “to play it cool and ditch the Tudeh party, if necessary”.36

Nevertheless the Soviets made some clandestine attempts to influence the Iranian regime through mediation of their East European and Middle Eastern allies. In April Syrian president Hafez al-Assad approached the Iranian leaders and Khomeini himself at the request of the Syrian communist party and advocated a release of the arrested Tudeh leadership.37 In July Soviet ambassador to Hungary, Vladimir Bazovsky, addressed the Hungarian leadership with a petition to exercise some influence on the Iranian leadership.38 These attempts, though, did not bring any significant results. Following the trial, organized in 1984, most Tudeh leaders and activists received long sentences. The whole Tudeh

34 Yodfat, The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran, 143.
leadership, except for Kianuri and few others, was executed during a new wave of repressions in 1988.39

The biggest disappointment was expressed by Rostislav Ulyanovskyy, who naturally felt betrayed by the Iranian regime that he had been advocating for during the previous years. While Ulyanovskyy dedicated much of his new article in Literaturnaya gazeta in June 1983 to the evil role of the United States and their immoral politics towards Iran, he also for the first time in public statements openly criticized the Iranian regime. Ulyanovskyy even applied the term “Islamic despotism” to the political regime that was installed in Iran as a result of “the Islamic revolution”.40 Thus, even the main proponent of the view that the Iranian revolution had a “progressive nature” finally admitted his misinterpretation. It took Ulyanovskyy another two years to admit that what happened in Iran “was not a revolution at all”, “the spirit of freedom” was from the very beginning “chained by Islamic despotism”, whereas the regime was “reminiscent of the darkest times of the Middle Ages”.41 Semyon Agaev in his 1984 publication (for internal use) went even further and argued that while in 1979 Islamic slogans had served only as a cover, by 1984 the religious leadership transformed the core of the revolutionary changes and made the Iranian revolution truly “Islamic”.42

40 Rostislav Ulyanovskyy, “Moralnye printsipy v politike i politika v oblasti morali”, Literaturnaya gazeta, June 22, 1983. With small corrections the article was later republished as a preface to Semyon Agaev, Iran skaya revolutsiya, SShA i mezhdunarodnaya bezopasnost (Moscow: Nauka, 1984.)
42 However, Agaev kept insisting on his original 1979 point that despite the political domination of Islam, Iran was evidently going through the capitalist stage of development. See: Semyon Agaev, “Preface” in Sovremenniy Iran, etapy i osobennosti revolusionnogo protsessa, eds. Sofya Kuznetsova and Semyon Agaev (Moscow:INION, 1984), 5-33.
In terms of chronology, the rapid developments in the Iranian domestic situation coincided with epochal changes at the very top of the Soviet leadership. Following the death of Leonid Brezhnev on November 10, 1982, Yury Andropov inherited his position as the Soviet leader. Simultaneously the former First Secretary of the Azerbaijani Communist party, Heydar Aliev, was promoted to become full Politburo member. Earlier that year Aliev had made a controversial statement during his meeting with foreign diplomats visiting Baku. Presenting the great achievements of Soviet Azerbaijan he asked his guests to compare them to the backwardness of Iranian Azerbaijan. He had remarked that “the two Azerbaijans ought to be united”.43 Although Aliev’s statements remained private they must have reached some ears in the Iranian leadership and triggered additional distrust of Soviet intentions. In late 1982, the Soviet Union also reached an agreement with Iraq on a renewal of arms supplies deal. After losing hope of improving the relations with Iran and realizing their inability to push Iran further towards Soviet sphere of influence, the Soviets returned to aiding their old partner, Saddam Hussein. However, despite its loss of neutrality, the Soviet Union remained a true supporter of peaceful and prompt resolution of the Iran-Iraq war.44

At the same time, the Soviets were trying to use their position as arms supplier to the conflicting parties in order to pressure the Iranians. In July 1983 in an official statement Soviet ambassador in Hungary hinted that they could shut down the transit of Iranian export through the Soviet territory and called the Iranian side “to comprehend that their hostility toward the Soviet Union, in some way, influences Soviet practical relations with the parties participating in the Iran-Iraq war”. The statement also announced the termination of military supplies to Iran.45 Thus, even

the remainders of the economic cooperation that were still functioning started to shrink. The Soviet-Iranian relations reached their lowest point from which they were to improve only following Gorbachev’s ascend to power.

In the meantime, the Soviets needed to accommodate the remainders of their Iranian allies. Following the arrest of all the Tudeh leadership, the new Central Committee was established in East Germany under the leadership of the new First Secretary, Ali Khavari. Although admitting certain mistakes in the tactics of their predecessors, the new party plenum in December 1983 still insisted in its resolution that strategically the line chosen by Kianuri to support the regime had been correct. Khavari tried to convince his Soviet and East European allies that the Tudeh had to continue its struggle in Iran and needed the financial and operative support of the socialist bloc. During his meeting with Ulyanovskiy in Moscow, he predicted the return of imperialist rule or a resurrection of the bourgeois liberal regime, denying the viability of the existing anti-imperialist theocratic regime. In his conversation with Hermann Axen, Khavari insisted in a similar manner that popular dissatisfaction against the Islamic despotism was soon to burst out. Neither Moscow nor Berlin were ready to keep on supporting the illusions of the new Tudeh leadership. Axen had to explain to Khavari that the Warsaw Pact countries were to continue the strategy of peaceful coexistence with the Iranian regime and thus could not openly support revolutionary plans of the Tudeh. After negotiations with Moscow in February 1984, Axen declared that the Tudeh was not welcome in East Berlin anymore.

Unlike Axen, Ulyanovskiy still seemed to have some hopes for the Tudeh’s future or at least felt more compassionate for Khavari. In April 1984 he passed on Khavari’s message petitioning the Central Committee to allow the Tudeh leaders to temporarily move to Moscow, allowing

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46 Friedman, “The Enemy of My Enemy”, 34.
47 Ibid, 35.
48 Ibid.
them to participate in special program on “illegal party work”.\textsuperscript{49} In the meantime, the East Germans revised their initial harsh measures and after a series of internal discussions provided the Tudeh leadership with housing in Berlin and some financial aid.\textsuperscript{50} By the end of 1985, Khavari apparently managed to convince Ulyanovksy that the Tudeh could influence the situation in Iran through illegal underground work and the latter petitioned the Central Committee to approve Khavari’s request to illegally send 10-15 Tudeh members, trained for underground work, to Iran. Although the petition was approved by the Central Committee and the KGB was ordered to organize the deployment, the destiny of those partisans remains unclear. However, this adventure most certainly had no effect on the domestic situation in Iran.\textsuperscript{51}

In 1985 the Tudeh and the \textit{fadaiyan (majority)} finally called for the overthrow of the Islamic regime, proclaiming it “a medieval

\textsuperscript{49} “Postanovlenie Sekretariata TsK KPSS “O prosbe rukovodstva Narodnoy partii Irana”, May 22, 1984, RGANI F. 89 Op. 15 D. 12 L. 1-4. It is noteworthy that later that year Khavari petitioned the Central Committee to accept another Tudeh leader H. Forugian to the similar studies course. In a supporting letter to the Central Committee Ulyanovsky mentioned that Forugian was soon to be deployed in Afghanistan. Thus this document indirectly implies that the Soviets were using the underground experience of the Tudeh members in Afghanistan. It is though unclear for which purposes. For the TsK resolution on Forugian and Ulyanovsky’s supporting letter see: “R.Ulyanovsky to the Central Committee “O prosbe rukovodstva Narodnoy partii Irana”, January 14, 1985, RGANI F. 89 Op. 15 D. 14 L. 3; “Postanovlenie Sekretariata TsK KPSS “O prosbe rukovodstva Narodnoy partii Irana”, January 17, 1985, RGANI F. 89 Op. 15 D. 14 L. 1


theocracy”. This call and rhetoric was in line with Ulyanovsky’s new article on the Iranian revolution in Kommunist. In contradiction to his earlier publications and statements, Ulyanovsky blamed the Tudeh leadership for their strategy of cooperation with the reactionary regime. According to Ulyanovsky, the Iranian revolution had been a progressive movement only until 1981, when following the repressions against the Mojahedin-e-Khalq the conservative setback took off. In this context it is noteworthy that later that year the Soviet leadership was approached by the mojahedin. The leader of the PMOI, Massoud Rajavi, sent a long (16 typewritten pages with attachments including pictures, newspapers and the official document of the organization) personal letter to Mikhail Gorbachev. The letter was delivered in person by one of the PMOI leaders, Farhad Olfat. In a very detailed manner Rajavi described the horrors of the situation in Iran. He also insisted that by the time of the next (28th) CPSU Party Congress, there will be no Islamic despotism in Iran and the Soviet Union could play its role in these developments supporting the national uprising that the PMOI was to initiate in Iran. Following these lengthy details there was of course a part in which Rajai asked for favors. In an accompanying letter Rostislav Ulyanovsky described Rajai’s requests in a nutshell:

Olfat brought two letters addressed to the CPSU Central Committee, containing the following requests:

1. To provide funds in the form of a loan for the preparation of an armed uprising in Iran against Khomeini’s regime (the request is for a sum on the order of [Handwritten: “100 million”] dollars).

2. To provide cooperation to ensure PMOI members crossing the Iran-Soviet border because of repression by the Iranian authorities have the

52 Friedman, “The Enemy of My Enemy”, 36.
possibility of obtaining temporary refugee status in the Soviet Union, and then to leave and go to other countries.\textsuperscript{55}

Rajai’s letter was also accompanied with Olfat’s oral explanations that contained another set of minor petitions.\textsuperscript{56} In fact in a letter that Olfat wrote to the Central Committee while waiting for Gorbachev’s response, the sum of a loan rose up to 300 million dollars with an obligation to return it as soon as possible.\textsuperscript{57} Overall the request was unprecedented by its impudence, especially for an organization that had distanced itself from the Soviet Union as much as possible at the peak of the revolution. Gorbachev’s response, prepared by Ulyanovsky and ordered to be passed orally via the KGB channels, indicated the readiness of the Soviet Union to maintain contacts with the \textit{mojahedin}, but only to the extent that they could avoid upsetting the Iranian regime. For example, Rajai’s proposal to organize a visit of the PMOI official delegation to Moscow was rejected. Instead the meetings were proposed to be conducted in East European capitals. Of course no loans were approved but the \textit{mojahedin} were allowed to cross into the Soviet Union from Iran if they needed asylum.\textsuperscript{58} Even the form of the response—passed orally via the KGB, implied the desire not to leave paper trail of these clandestine communications. It was especially important in the light of shifting situation in the bilateral relations.

\textbf{Iran and \textit{Perestroika} in the Soviet Union.}

Around the time when Farhad Olfat departed from Moscow, First Deputy Foreign Minister Georgy Kornienko was preparing for his visit to Tehran. It was the first official visit of such high-ranking Soviet diplomat to Iran.


\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.


since the revolution. Kornienko’s mission in February 1986 turned out to be the starting point of a new improvement in bilateral relations. It also was a sign of strategic changes in the Soviet relations with the Third World. The initial phase of Gorbachev’s reforms in this sphere consisted in gradual de-ideologization in order to reset the relations with some key regional powers, with Iran being one of them.\(^{59}\)

Gorbachev’s first years as the Secretary General were also full of gradual change of faces in the leadership of the Soviet foreign policy. Gromyko’s support for Gorbachev’s election as the Secretary General was almost immediately rewarded with a promotion-like de facto retirement. He was promoted to the highly ceremonial, yet prestigious post of the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet — the formal head of the Soviet state, a post he had been aspiring for since 1982. In the year preceding Gorbachev’s election, under the leadership of the terminally ill Konstantin Chernenko, Gromyko had eventually concentrated most of the foreign policy prerogatives in his hands, bypassing the party’s International department.\(^{60}\) This was especially true for the relations with Iran which shrank to formal exchange of notes, other routine issues and after the crush of the Tudeh lacked elements of interparty communications that had been the privilege of the International department.

Yet Gorbachev’s change of cadres in foreign policy was not limited to Gromyko’s promotion/retirement. Willing to get rid of Brezhnev’s old cadres, the new Secretary General attempted to surround himself with loyalists who shared his ideological worldview that, as I will try to show, was in the process of change from the one that characterized Gorbachev’s predecessors (and partly his earlier self) to something very new and different. Consequently many of “the enlightened apparatchiks” that were trained under Khrushchev and formed the circle of intellectuals in the Party and research institutes were now called into Gorbachev’s service.


\(^{60}\) Chernyaev, *Sovmestniy Iskhod*, 609
Also unwilling to accept the remainders of Gromyko’s influence in the Foreign Ministry, Gorbachev surprised and even shocked most in the Politburo when he proposed the First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party, Eduard Shevarnadze, as his candidate to the post of the Foreign Minister. Despite being taken aback by Gorbachev’s choice, the Politburo, loyal to bureaucratic culture, supported the choice of the Secretary General. As argued by Archie Brown, the inexperience of the new Minister in the foreign affairs also allowed Gorbachev’s to be more personally involved in the foreign policy.  

The International department also went through a radical change of cadres in the aftermath of the 27th Party congress in February-March 1986. Most importantly, 81-year old Boris Ponomarev, who had been the head of the department since 1957, was forced to retire. The main ideologue of the Soviet perspective on the Iranian revolution, 82-year old Rostislav Ulyanovsky, followed his old Comintern comrade into retirement. Another of Ponomarev’s deputies, Anatoly Chernyaev, was invited by Gorbachev to become his foreign policy assistant, replacing Brezhnev’s long-serving adviser Andrey Aleksandrov-Agentov, who had also retired in late 1985. The dominance of the Foreign Ministry in Soviet foreign policy was supported by the transfer of two high-ranking diplomats from the ministry to the International department which practically deprived the department from its agency as a unique party institution for foreign affairs, transforming it into de facto just another Ministry department. Simultaneously these transfers supported Shevarnadze’s authority in the Foreign Ministry, as both appointees were Gromyko’s protégés. The long-serving Soviet ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Dobrynin, was appointed to chair the department, whereas Gromyko’s aforementioned former deputy Georgy Kornienko started his service as Dobrynin’s first deputy. From the pool of Ponomarev’s deputies, only Vadim Zagladin and Karen Brutents retained their positions.

The experience and professionalism of former consultants of the International department did not vanish after these changes. What changed was the ideology behind the department’s policies. As I tried to show in previous chapters there was no Soviet high-ranked official untouched by the ideology that constituted the foundation of the Soviet leadership’s worldview. However the retirement of the bearers of old Comintern spirit such as Ponomarev and Ulyanovsky along with Gorbachev’s willingness to challenge old ideology for the sake of his “new thinking”, started to undermine this foundation.

This development did not mean the evaporation of ideology from the Soviet foreign policy. On the contrary, both Gorbachev and his foreign policy apparatus were driven by their own ideological worldview based on the deeply contradictory (one may argue, even mutually exclusive) combination of their understanding of Marxist-Leninist doctrine and their specific (and evolving) vision of universal humanitarian values. For the first time in Soviet history, the idea of eventual global victory of communism (with or without a global revolution) was put aside for the sake of no less abstract idea of global peace and strategic stability. This shift destroyed one of the pillars of Soviet foreign policy ideology—its revolutionary component.

However the extraction of revolutionary element from the Soviet foreign policy ideology alone does not explain its fundamental change that eventually led to the end of the Cold War. As argued by Vlad Zubok, this eradication of revolutionary component could go much slower and much less radically (reenacting the Chinese scenario) and the Soviet Union could have saved at least some of its power positions even without the revolutionary doctrine. But Gorbachev and his team were, after some initial reluctance, willing to simultaneously shake the second pillar of the ideology—Soviet imperialism.

What was the reason for this willingness to retreat and fully dismantle the foundations of the Soviet foreign policy ideology? Besides a variety

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62 Zubok, A Failed Empire, 309-310.
of other reasons, including the economic situation often mentioned as the dominant, Gorbachev’s sacrifice of Soviet imperialism was a result of a new ideological worldview that had been slowly developing in the cradle of the old one since the 1950s. As noted by Robert English, for Gorbachev and his crew of advisors that were raised on the ideals of the 20th Party Congress, the empire did not have value while it was isolated and confronted by the West. It does not mean that they expected the Soviet Union to lose its status, and even less so to collapse, but they were willing to risk the empire for the sake of reintegration of the Soviet Union into the family of European nations. In fact the concession of Soviet imperial ambitions was for them only first step towards the acceptance of the USSR to the Western world as the partner to build “common European home” with. 63 Today we can argue that it was too idealist and many among Gorbachev’s own foreign policy team (e. g. Kornienko, Dobrynin) criticized this voluntary retreat. The political elite in contemporary Russia use harsher terms, arguing that it was a “betrayal of national interests”. But for the sake of this research, it is more important that this ideological transition with hindsight highlighted the meaning of the old ideological worldview for the integrity of the Soviet foreign policy. Once two of its foundational pillars, the revolutionary element and imperialism, were shaken, the Soviet Union’s positions as a global superpower and an equal side in the Cold War confrontation collapsed.

For the Third World this ideological shift primarily meant that Gorbachev was gradually reducing references to Soviet support for “the national liberation movements”. Instead he preferred to use the term “regional conflicts”, thus being vague about the side of those conflicts that the Soviets were eager to support. This gradual extraction of old ideology from Soviet Third World policy naturally led to a reorientation towards important regional powers such as Iran. 64 One of the main objectives of Gorbachev’s policy in the Third World was the search for options to extricate Soviet military from Afghanistan as fast as

63 English, Russia and the Idea of the West, 194.
64 Savranskaya, “Gorbachev and the Third World”, 22.
possible. During the 27th Party congress he expressed this desire publicly. Consumed by the conflict with Iraq, Iranian leaders never invested too much effort in supporting Afghan rebels. Iran hosted millions of refugees from Afghanistan and supported some minor Shi’a groups of insurgents fighting against the Soviets. In this context the improvement of Soviet-Iranian relations was simultaneously more probable and desirable for Moscow.

Kornienko’s visit was Gorbachev’s first attempt to approach the Iranian leadership and although the relations did not improve immediately, there were some developments that became visible soon. Primarily it was the reset of the Soviet-Iranian economic cooperation. A year earlier, in 1985, most Soviet specialists were withdrawn from Iran on the pretext of the dangers of the Iraqi air raids. Following Kornienko’s visit in February 1986 and a meeting of Soviet-Iranian Commission for Economic Cooperation in December 1986 in Tehran, the decision was made to return some of the Soviet technicians. The Commission that had not met since 1980 also approved the decision to start negotiating new joint projects such as construction of power plants and oil refineries in Iran with Soviet help.

Another sign of Gorbachev’s attempts to appease the Iranians was the shutdown of the National Voice of Iran (NVOI) radio station in June 1986. The clandestine radio station had been founded in 1959 in the aftermath of failed Soviet-Iranian secret negotiations and was dedicated to the anti-Shah propaganda and destabilization of the Shah’s regime. Despite a later rapprochement between the Shah and the Soviet Union, it kept on following the same agenda in the 1962-1978 period. Its staff consisted predominantly of Iranian and Azeri emigrants, most of whom were members of the Tudeh or the ADP, and the radio station

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transmitted its propaganda in the name of “the Iranian national-patriotic forces”. After a short period of pro-Khomeini propaganda, following the crush of the Tudeh the rhetoric of the NVOI changed to fierce criticism of “the reactionary Islamic circles”. In June 1986, Gosteleradio (Soviet State Agency for Radio and Television) petitioned the Central Committee to shut down the NVOI and substitute it with hours of broadcast in Persian and Azeri languages within the structure of the radio station “Mir i Progress”. Although the petition proved the necessity of changes with the fact that the NVOI had been discredited by the arrests of some of its collaborators in Iran, new propaganda broadcasts were not supposed to be clandestine and were to be aired in the name of the Soviet Union rather than “Iranian patriots”. This way these propaganda efforts did not look as partisan activities but rather as another broadcast of Soviet position to the Iranians (along with Radio Moscow in Persian). The petition was supported by Georgy Kornienko and approved by the Central Committee Secretariat.

In the following year Gorbachev and his foreign policy advisors had a chance to show their revised attitude to one of the traditionally most problematic issue in the Soviet-Iranian relations, the historic Soviet support of national minorities in Northern Iran. In August 1987 an exiled leader of the Iranian Kurds, Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, sent a telegram to Mikhail Gorbachev. In his message Ghassemlou asked Gorbachev for permission to send a Kurdish delegation to Moscow in order to discuss Soviet aid to the movement of the Iranian Kurds. In his note to Ghassemlou’s message, Georgy Kornienko characterized the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan as “a bourgeois nationalist force”. This very party in the early years of the revolution and even before had been pronounced in the Soviet press as a progressive force

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that had been representing Kurdish national liberation movement. However after July 1985 the CPSU had shut down all official contacts with the Iranian Kurds, leaving some informal closed contacts to the KGB. In his letter Kornienko advised the Central Committee to reject Ghassemlou’s petition as it could negatively influence the reviving Soviet-Iranian relations.69 Soon Kornienko’s proposal along with the text of Gorbachev’s response to Ghassemlou was approved by the Central Committee Secretariat. Similarly to the case of Gorbachev’s contacts with the *Mojahedin-e-Khalq*, the KGB was ordered to pass the response orally. 70

By 1987, Gorbachev had become very engaged with the idea of “conflict resolution”, in particular in the Third World. This also contributed to Soviet attempts to normalize their relations with Iran. In the first years of Gorbachev’s rule Soviet position towards the Iran-Iraq war did not change much: the Soviets continued to supply Iraq with arms, Soviet military advisors were working in Baghdad, whereas in rhetoric the Soviet Union kept on calling for negotiations. In 1987-88 Gorbachev’s foreign policy circle got engaged much more actively in genuine attempts to achieve the resolution. In those years the Soviets started to regularly turn to the UN as a principal actor on the matter of international conflicts. It was especially evident in the case of Afghanistan but also in the Soviet approach to Iran-Iraq war.71 In fact, the Soviets tried to link both issues. Gorbachev was trying to persuade President Reagan to facilitate the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in exchange for Soviet mediation in resolving Iran-Iraq war. Despite lack of success in these attempts, it is noteworthy that Gorbachev was

71 Kalinovsky, “The Soviet Union and the Iran-Iraq war”, 239.
in a position to propose Soviet mediation, which signified evident improvement in Soviet-Iranian dialogue.\textsuperscript{72}

Although the Iran-Iraq war was resolved without major Soviet involvement in the negotiation process, the Soviet Union was soon able to reap the fruits of Gorbachev’s attempts to improve the situation. With the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan completed by the early 1989, the major obstacles that prevented the renewed dialogue on the highest level had been resolved. This new opening was manifested by Ayatollah Khomeini’s personal letter to Gorbachev that caused a lot of confusion and debate at the time and remains one of the most controversial documents in the history of late Soviet-Iranian relations. Praising Gorbachev for his willingness to reform the Soviet system and approach to the international relations, Khomeini urged the Soviet leader not only to abandon Marxism but also to consider Islam as the new ideology for the peoples of the Soviet Union. It is hard to say if it was an actual proposal or a philosophical exercise of an old cleric but the political meaning of the letter was very evident. The letter opened a sequence of mutual visits on the highest level. The response that politely ignored Khomeini’s proposal of conversion to Islam but accepted the initiative to intensify the contacts was crafted by Gorbachev’s advisors. Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze personally delivered it to Tehran. A month later Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati paid a return visit and made arrangements for the visit of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the Speaker of the Majlis.\textsuperscript{73}

The symbolic and practical meaning of Rafsanjani’s visit should not be underestimated. Prepared in advance it was scheduled for June 1989. Despite the death of Khomeini in early June and the forty-day mourning period announced in Iran, Rafsanjani decided not to cancel his visit to the USSR, which alone signifies its importance for the Iranians. The negotiations in Moscow went in good spirit and resulted in an agreement

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid, 240
\textsuperscript{73} Rubinstein, “Moscow and Tehran”, 34-35.
to extend “economic, commercial scientific and technical cooperation” and develop a long-term strategy until the year 2000. After Moscow, Rafsanjani was allowed to travel to Baku and give a speech at a mosque, which showed the good will of the Soviet government towards the revival of the Shi’a Islam in Azerbaijan and trust to the Iranian leadership. In the fall of 1989, Shevardnadze travelled to Tehran again and signed an agreement to restore rail service between the two countries and to restart pumping of natural gas from Iran to the Soviet Union after almost ten years of stoppage.  

However, despite this thaw in the Soviet-Iranian relations, by 1989 Gorbachev’s policy in the Third World was more and more subordinated to Soviet relations with the West. The harsh economic crisis in the Soviet Union added up to the Soviet unwillingness to keep supporting its allies in the Third World. The balanced regional policy that Gorbachev had initially planned was falling apart. This trend did not influence Soviet-Iranian relations directly but had a tremendous influence on the general Soviet approach to the Middle East. The Soviet reaction to the Gulf war was the brightest example of this new reality. In the last years of the Iran-Iraq war Gorbachev was seeking for renewed neighborly relations with Iran that would not have destroyed the established cooperation with Iraq. By contrast, in 1990 the Soviet Union condemned the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and supported the UN sanctions against Iraq. However, for the Soviet-Iranian relations this renunciation of an old ally was a good sign that resulted in regular consultations between Soviet and Iranian leaders, both concerned about the advantage that the United States could have taken of the military operation.

The domestic crisis and new foreign policy approaches even made the International department reduce the living and travel allowance of the Tudeh and fadaiyan (majority) members residing in exile in the

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74 Savranskaya, “Gorbachev and the Third World”, 32; Rubinstein, “Moscow and Tehran”, 35.
75 Savranskaya, “Gorbachev and the Third World”, 22.
Soviet Union. Nevertheless, despite all new initiatives throughout the Gorbachev years, the Soviets spent thousands of rubles on their exiled Iranian comrades until the last day of the Soviet Union. However, this last day was soon to come. After the failed coup in August 1991 and his safe return from Crimea, Gorbachev sent a personal envoy, Evgeny Primakov, on a Middle Eastern voyage. Primakov’s task was to reassure the leaders of the region that the Soviet Union was still functioning and fulfilling its responsibilities. In Iran, Primakov also had a delicate mission to request a postponement of Soviet payments for natural gas due to the economic difficulties the Soviet Union was going through.

Primakov’s reassurances soon proved to be unfounded. The Soviet Union was swiftly disintegrating, with Gorbachev being unable to exercise his presidential power over virtually anything. When in November 1991 Iranian Foreign Minister Velayati came to Moscow he paid a ritual visit to Shevardnadze but his more substantive discussions were with Egor Gaidar, the deputy chairman of the Russian government. Velayati then continued his tour of the sovereign Soviet republics, visiting Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan and establishing diplomatic ties with these new geopolitical entities. This way the history of the Soviet-Iranian relations came to its logical end.

Conclusion

Mikhail Gorbachev’s transformation of the Soviet foreign policy was the first point in Soviet history when the old revolutionary-imperial ideology was gradually but willingly and consciously excluded from the decision-making process. It gave way to a new outlook that was

78 Rubinstein, “Moscow and Tehran”, 36.
79 Ibid.
based on a combination of Marxism-Leninist ideals with Western-oriented humanitarian idealism. Unlike Khrushchev’s slogan of peaceful coexistence that had been defined as “a new form of class warfare”, Gorbachev and his team seemed to believe in the literal meaning of “peaceful coexistence”. Although retrospectively this position might be assessed as naïve, Gorbachev’s years can be defined as the most fruitful period for the relations between the Soviet Union and the post-revolutionary Iran

Another definitive sign of the new era was eventual ability of scholars and regional specialists to directly influence state policies. The generation of Central Committee consultants and researchers from the academic institutions that had been raised on the ideals of the 20th Party congress had spent decades trying to change phrasing and punctuation of Brezhnev’s speeches. With deaths and retirements of the Politburo elders, this generation was finally in charge and trusted by the leadership. For them the necessity of reforming the Soviet approach to relations with the Third World was evident already in the late 1970s. From the Soviet perspective, post-revolutionary Iran was not an easy partner to understand ideologically but Gorbachev’s ideological worldview allowed Iran to be at the top of the list of the countries to normalize the relations with.

With the Soviet Union planning its withdrawal from Afghanistan and with the Iran-Iraq war ending in a stalemate, the principal obstacles in the way of the Soviet-Iranian rapprochement were removed. It took significant mutual efforts, though, to rebuild the deteriorated relations. While for the Soviet Union this effort was motivated by a new strategy of reliance on regional powers, for Iran the improvement of relations with the Soviet Union was a way out of the international isolation. By 1989 the stage was prepared for planning big economic projects during the summits of the top leadership.

The domestic crisis in the Soviet Union and Gorbachev’s gradual turn away from the Third World cut this period of successes short. The
Soviet leader started to gradually subordinate his Third World policy to the Soviet relations with the West. In particular this resulted in the inability to maintain stable relations with Iraq. Initially Gorbachev’s plan was to have balanced relations with both Iran and Iraq. But by the time of the Gulf war the Soviet Union had much better connections with Tehran than with Baghdad. With the new approach to foreign policy and its renewed relations with the West, the Soviet Union could hardly afford to support Saddam, which resulted in Soviet condemnation of Saddam’s actions and Soviet backing for the sanctions. It is important to note that in so doing, Gorbachev parted ways with most of his foreign policy advisors. Their window of opportunity for those advisors’ expertise and experience to influence Soviet foreign policy was closing again. And soon it should be beyond Gorbachev’s power to reopen it.
After the collapse of the USSR, Russia and Iran no longer shared a common border, as they had for almost 200 years. Now they were separated by the independent republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia. The Russia of the early 1990s faced an economic disaster that made it dependent on financial and humanitarian aid from the West. Russian foreign policy was thus limited in its means and resources to keep Russia’s presence and influence in the Third World. Moreover, the idea of Third World interventions and active “superpower politics” was largely rejected by Russian society and considered morally bankrupt. Consumed by its economic troubles, the new Russian leadership rejected the superpower idea and was willing to pursue its foreign policy in accordance with the interest of the joint “West”. An ideological shift towards Western liberalism was partly a result of the economic troubles but also a genuine belief of many in the new Russian elite that the end of the Cold War meant “the end of history”.¹

For the Soviet expert community the collapse of the Soviet Union was a disaster. Lack of government funding forced most of the experts to look for better paid jobs outside of academia and state service, while those who stayed had to survive on the brink of poverty. A change of cadres in diplomacy was less radical, yet many in the Russian foreign policy leadership were ready to radically break with the Soviet past. As remembered by Dimitri Simes, the political scientist and advisor to former U.S. President Richard Nixon, when asked by Nixon Russian Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev had no answer about the national interests of new Russia. Instead he proposed to concentrate on “universal human values” and asked for

Nixon’s advice on identification of new Russian national interests. 2 Nevertheless, as often in the previous decades, Iran stood out as a striking exception from the general situation in the Russian foreign policy. A positive trend in Russian-Iranian relations set by Gorbachev was continued under Yeltsin administration, despite a U.S.-Russian rapprochement. Russian leadership now looked at Iran through a prism of Russia’s willingness to maintain its influence on the post-Soviet space (including in Transcaucasia and Central Asia) — a strategy that some researchers referred to as Russia’s Monroe doctrine. 3 As Russia focused on its internal problems and regional geopolitical and security concerns, it was no longer seen as a threat in Iran. This, along with the involvement of both countries in conflict resolution in the post-Soviet space (e.g. in Nagorno-Karabakh crisis and the civil war in Tajikistan) and containment of the Taliban in Afghanistan, contributed to a continuing intensification of mutually beneficial relations. 4 Despite growing concerns and expressions of dissatisfaction by the United States, Russia kept extending its arms exports to Iran and, most

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importantly, its nuclear technologies, constructing a nuclear power station in Busher.

Thus in addition to mutual benefits from bilateral cooperation, for Russia its relations with Iran was a way to show its foreign policy sovereignty. This trend of a firm stance in defense of Russian geopolitical interests only intensified following 1996, when Evgeny Primakov replaced Kozyrev as Russian Foreign Minister. Primakov, whose political career skyrocketed during Perestroika, was among those whom many in the new elite considered old Soviet conservatives but whose expertise was still in great demand from the Yeltsin administration. Throughout the 1990s in the posts of the head of the Foreign Intelligence Service, the Foreign Minister and eventually the Prime Minister, Primakov pushed for the restoration of Russia as a sovereign great power. Along with Boris Yeltsin (and despite their differences) Primakov laid the foundation for a new structure of Russian foreign policy ideology at which Russian geopolitical interests were central.

This thesis set out to ask a number of questions concerning the Soviet reaction to the Iranian revolution and, more broadly, religion in Soviet foreign policy and the roles of ideology and knowledge in Soviet decision-making. First, engaging in a historiographic discussion about the role of the ideology in the late Soviet foreign policy making, I used the example of the Iranian revolution to show the limitations of the supposed pragmatism of the Soviet leaders, particularly when confronted with a social transformation unknown and uncovered in the Marxist-Leninist theory. Simultaneously I sought to stress that the ideological worldview of the Soviet leaders did not a priori exclude a degree of pragmatism, if being pragmatic meant advancing the interests of the Soviet state that in the vision of the Soviet leadership led the way on the global path to communism.

Second, while the role of experts in the late Soviet foreign policy decision-making process was evidently limited, I argued that it must not be neglected completely. Influenced by their personal
and educational background, ideological limitations and institutional obstacles, members of the Soviet expert community had a number of privileges that allowed them to understand a political situation in their regions of expertise but also within the Soviet foreign policy making in a wider context than was possible for the rest of the Soviet people. Simultaneously the case of the Iranian revolution proved that in moments of crisis and when it could not come up with a clear understanding of the situation abroad, the Soviet leadership encouraged the expert community to seek new explanations and allowed investments in new areas of studies. Of course, the expert community was not firmly separate from the leadership. There were no foreign policy regional experts in the Politburo but they were well represented in the Central Committee, the International department, the Foreign Ministry, and even those who were only working at the research institutes were often connected to the decision-makers.

Third, the establishment of stable theocratic regime in post-revolutionary Iran evidently was one of the most important reasons for the Soviet confusion about the revolution. Consequently, the Soviet attitude to religion in its Third World foreign policy was naturally among the issues that were aimed to be elaborated on in this thesis. Although this attitude evolved over time, the leadership of the formally atheist Soviet Union was often quite flexible when dealing with the issue of religion in the Third World. The case of the Iranian revolution did not initially seem to challenge Soviet ideological constructions but the enduring grip on power by the religious authorities and their unwillingness to engage with Soviet cultural diplomacy confronted the Soviets with a thorny ideological issue. The question of religion highlighted the contradictions within the Soviet ideological worldview and allowed experts to discuss the matter of political Islam as an ideology.

Viewed against this background, the structure of the new Russian foreign policy ideology makes perfect sense. Neither Kozyrev nor Primakov needed to balance the geopolitical and theoretical concepts within an over-arching ideology anymore as they had no Communist
party behind their back to watch it over. Stripped of the old dualist revolutionary-imperial ideology, Russia of the 1990 started its gradual shift towards the hegemony of the imperial element in its new post-Soviet ideology. The revolutionary element that had been essential for the Soviet foreign policy was now abandoned and subdued to the reviving imperial one. More importantly, this shift of worldview went relatively smoothly even for veterans like Primakov. Alexey Yurchak argues that for most Soviet people this smooth transition from genuine belief in the communist future to the clear understanding of its fakeness was a result of the collapse of the authoritative discourse. According to Yurchak, when Mikhail Gorbachev started Perestroika, he admitted to the Soviet people that the Party did not have answers to all questions and that it needed experts to find these answers. For Yurchak this empowerment of external expert knowledge also empowered the critics of the Soviet system who could now not only challenge the decisions of the Party within the Marxist-Leninist discourse but also question Marxism-Leninism itself.5

However, Yurchak ignores that the need for the external (“scientifically objective”) expert knowledge existed in the years that preceded Gorbachev, which better explains its suddenly important role during Perestroika. This brings us to one of the questions that I tried to highlight, using the example of Soviet reaction to the Iranian revolution, namely the relations between expert knowledge and ideology in the late Soviet Union. Similarly to Yurchak’s respondents, who generally constitute a group of people born in the 1950s-1960s, mostly from Leningrad that Yurchak refers to as “the last Soviet generation”, Soviet mezhdunarodniki were raised with a firm belief in the communist idea. However those of them who were mature enough under Brezhnev and became influential under Gorbachev belonged to a generation that had already been intellectually formed in the years of the Khrushchev’s Thaw. The ideological worldview set in the late Stalin period, which combined the revolutionary theory promising the advent of communism

5 Yurchak, Eto bylo navsegda, 572-574.
with imperial ambitions and geopolitical security concerns, had been the creed of their professional upbringing. The example of Anatoly Chernyaev, who saw the 1905 Russian revolution blueprint in the Iranian events (see Chapter 3) can serve as a good example of this tendency. However, for some of them (like Arbatov, Bovin, Chernyaev) this ideological worldview merged with the idea of universal values adopted during the Thaw. Others, like Primakov and his experts from the IVAN, built on the traditions of Russian Oriental Studies in their field of expertise, in this particular case, the works of earlier Iranian studies specialists.

Contrary to Yurchak’s argument of the authoritative discourse being frozen in the late Soviet years, experts tried hard to engage with it and modify the theoretical foundations of the Soviet ideology, although after Khrushchev these attempts were often fruitless. Yet when the external circumstances (revolution in Iran and quagmire in Afghanistan) demanded certain modifications (e.g. intensification of studies concentrated on political Islam) the experts were willing to fulfill this task (see Chapter 5). This partially explains why, with Gorbachev’s call for expertise, there were many responses to questions the “Party could not answer” rapidly ready—most of them were developed long before Gorbachev’s ascent to power. The background and education of many Soviet foreign policy experts along with the privileges they had (e.g. access to spetskhran, foreign trips) naturally forced them to consciously or subconsciously diminish the importance of the revolutionary element of the Soviet foreign policy ideology as knowledge that they received empirically often contradicted what they learned in terms of theory.

Yet in the late 1970s—early 1980s this revolutionary theory was not an empty form for the “pragmatic” content for the Soviet decision-makers as it often seemed to be for Yurchak’s respondents. Brezhnev’s elite belonged to an even older Soviet generation formed under Stalin and thus was taught to genuinely believe in the revolutionary future of the world. Of course not everyone at the top of Soviet ruling hierarchy was equally engaged with the revolutionary element of the Soviet
ideology—personal and institutional differences mattered. Odd Arne Westad argued that within the Soviet leadership of the 1970s there existed a certain dualism (or even competition) between the International department that represented the revolutionary side of the ideology and the Foreign Ministry that was acting according to geopolitical interests and supporting an image of the Soviet Union as “a normal state”. The Soviet reaction to the Iranian revolution and the first years of interaction with the Islamic republic show that to a certain degree this dichotomy truly existed. While for most Soviet leaders it did not take long to put aside the fantasies about the Iranian revolution taking the pro-Soviet turn, Rostislav Ulyanovsky and the International department were among the passionate defenders of progressiveness of the Iranian revolution and remained convinced of the notion that Iran was taking the non-capitalist path of development as late as in 1982. However, the Soviet approach to the Islamic republic is simultaneously an example of the limitations of Westad’s argument. Neither the Foreign Ministry, nor the “pragmatists” in the Central Committee were free from the ideological worldview that predicted communism to eventually take over the world. It is no accident that Yury Andropov, whom Westad rightfully presents as an opponent of Ponomarev in the matters of ideology and biggest “pragmatist” in the Soviet leadership, advised Leonid Shebarshin to read Marx before going to Iran (see Chapter 4). Just like other leaders of the Soviet Union, Andropov believed that the works of Marx, Lenin and other theoreticians of communism could give answers and explanations and that was where he looked for decisions. These decisions could be motivated by other aspects of his ideological worldview but the element of Marxist-Leninist revolutionary theory was never absent in them.

In addressing the question of the role of the ideology in Soviet foreign policy I researched the changing positions, opinions and actions of a number of actors. While the most important decision-makers in Soviet foreign policy were the members of the Politburo (and an even more narrow circle within it), our source base about their process of

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decision-making and influential factors is quite limited. However, even the available notes, speech drafts, resolutions on propaganda campaigns and money transfers declassified from the state archives show that the ideological worldview of the Soviet leaders consciously or subconsciously was a major factor in their decision-making process. This argument becomes even more solid when one looks at the personal sources. While analyzing Anatoly Chernyaev’s diary or Leonid Shebarshin’s memoirs we find episodes (e. g. Andropov’s advice to Shebarshin to read Marx in order to understand the situation in Iran) that hint at the way these influential decision-makers were thinking. Of course, it is hard to disagree with the proponents of the strictly pragmatic view of late Soviet foreign policy that direct and coherent application of revolutionary theory to the Third World foreign policy was a rare phenomenon among the Soviet leadership, not lastly due to their incompetence in the theoretical constructions of Marxism-Leninism. Yet the elements of the ideological worldview popped up throughout the decision-making process. Simultaneously even when the ideology seemed to be absent, the grand goals of the Soviet foreign policy remained to be defined by the ideology as the geopolitical achievements of the Soviet state equated the success of its communist ideology.

Highlighting the ideological worldview of the Soviet leaders, the Iranian revolution also challenged it and showed the limitations for the abilities of most of them to go beyond their Marxist-Leninist beliefs while analyzing international situation. The primary challenge that events in Iran posed in front of the Soviet leaders was the role of religion as one of their driving forces. The very idea of religious movements being progressive in certain circumstances was not new or alien to the Soviet ideology. The issue of religion playing a positive and modernizing role in certain developing societies was widely discussed in the Soviet Marxist-Leninist scholarship of the 1950s-1970s with clear references to Lenin (see Chapter 1). In Iran, however, things went too far from the Marxist-Leninist point of view—the religious authorities not only joined the “anti-monarchic and anti-imperialist” revolution but became its main
leaders and eventually managed to get rid of all competing political groups and established a stable theocratic regime.

How could Soviet leaders explain these developments through their ideological worldview? The answer is that they could not and thus avoided diving into such an analysis. What we see in Moscow in the formative years of the Islamic republic is a conscious decision on the part of the top leadership to avoid public discussion of the development of Iranian events from the Marxist-Leninist point of view. A fixed formula that the revolution was “anti-imperialist” (e.g. progressive and positive) was reprinted in most mass publications on the matter without deeper analysis and explanation, while the number of these publications significantly decreased from 1980 to 1983. However this decision to avoid the problematic ideological question was not manifested in an official ban on public or scholarly discussions. While in 1979 voices of those in doubt about the progressiveness of the Iranian revolution (such as Boris Likhachev, the editor of Kommunist) were in a relative minority, by 1980-1981 they could be heard not only in the closed scholarly discussions, such as Mirsky-Primakov discussion at the 1981 roundtable or on the pages of Special Bulletins, but also on central television and in the all-Union press where Aleksandr Bovin did not hesitate to openly proclaim the Iranian regime “reactionary” (see Chapters 3 and 5).

Why could Brezhnev, Andropov and other members of the Politburo not join Bovin in this assessment? The primary reason was that their ideological worldview was not limited to the Marxist-Leninist theory but also included the geopolitical element. As in the ideological worldview the interests of the international communist movement equated the state interests of the Soviet Union and the faith of the world communism depended on the successful realization of Soviet imperial ambitions, the situation in Iran was inevitably looked at from Moscow through a Cold War lens. The Shah’s regime represented a unique example of an American ally that managed to maintain mutually beneficial relations with the Soviet Union whereas the Shah himself had personal respect of the Soviet leaders despite his own anti-communism (see Chapter 2). Yet
the collapse of a regional policeman and American ally, its overthrow by the popular revolution did not only fit the Marxist-Leninist theory but was simultaneously a geopolitical gift that the Soviet leaders could not resist to accept. The imaginary geopolitical gains that this radical shift brought overshadowed the real benefits that the Soviets had in their relations with the Shah.

Of course, in the early days of the Iranian revolution it was impossible to predict that the religious authorities could manage to consolidate power and get rid of all the political opponents and former allies. Seeing religion as a backward cover for the progressive movement, the Soviet leadership tried to deal with this cover through old cultural diplomacy techniques. However the attempts to approach religious leaders of Iran through the Soviet religious authorities and through propaganda of Soviet Muslims’ lifestyle had no success and no real results in building contact with the Iranian authorities (see Chapter 5).

Nevertheless, the rise of Islam as a political ideology boosted the studies of political Islam in the Soviet centers of expertise. While in the early 1970s Elena Doroshenko needed to go through a complicated bureaucratic process to be permitted to study the Shi’a clergy of Iran, after the Iranian revolution and the invasion of Afghanistan the topic of political Islam became fully legitimate and even encouraged. While partially these studies were initiated to find a way to use these movements for the Soviet benefit in the Cold War framework, simultaneously they significantly improved the level of expertise in the Soviet centers of knowledge.7

Religion as a political ideology whose adepts were capable of not only gaining power but also maintaining it through successive crises

7 For the importance of the turn towards the study of political Islam in the early 1980s see: Martha Brill Olcott, Islam and Ideology: IVAN’s political agenda (Report to National Council for Soviet and East European Research, Colgate University, 1989). For the importance of the academic discourse on political Islam for post-Soviet Russia’s foreign policy see: Roland Dannreuther, “Russian discourses and approaches to Islam and Islamism” in Russia and Islam, 9-25.
was evidently the main element that puzzled most in the Soviet political establishment. The existing historiography of the Soviet attitude to religion within the Cold War framework shows that the Soviets were often ready to use religion for their tactical goals in the Third World: to make temporary alliances with local religious leaders that were labeled progressive or to use Soviet Islam as a showcase in order to attract “the religious masses of the Foreign East”. Following the establishment of religious rule in Iran these exact tactics were used by the Soviet foreign policy makers to build stable relations with the new Iran. Yet, as I show using the materials from the archives of the Soviet Committee for Religious Affairs, Brezhnev’s communication with Khomeini, discussions among Soviet officials, all these attempts practically failed. It proves that most of the Soviet engagements with religion and religious authorities in the Third World were meant to be tactical whereas in the long run religion was meant to evaporate under the pressure of development and enlightenment. The revolution in Iran was the first event to highlight the religious challenge to the foundations of the Soviet ideological worldview, the war in Afghanistan was soon to follow. This challenge forced Soviet leaders and experts to rethink religion and its political meaning for the Soviet Third World policies and forced Soviet policy makers to turn to experts.

Using the available documents from the Russian academic archives (e.g. proceedings of the roundtables, conference statements), the Special Bulletins and other publications for internal use only but also published works, memoirs and interviews of experts, I tried to define not only the role of the expert community in the Soviet foreign policy making but also to understand better the way this community functioned. My findings do not contradict the point once made by Karen Brutents and later supported by many researchers of the late Soviet foreign policy that the role of the expert community was often marginalized and many decisions of the Politburo were made without consultations with experts or without serious considering of such consultations. However, the Iranian revolution revealed that the encounter with the movement that
was paradoxical, as their ideological worldview forced Soviet leadership to allow the development of research fields that could shed light on the nature of this paradox. Simultaneously it showed that the experts, who were themselves significantly influenced by an ideological worldview, were more flexible in their ability to reject certain dogmas and accept the imperfections of this worldview.

By 1982-83 the religious leaders of Iran managed not only to maintain their power but also to destroy all meaningful opponents and survive the Iraqi intervention. None of the prospects built by the International department about the Iranian revolution taking a progressive turn and Iran stepping on the non-capitalist path of development came true. The persistence of Rostislav Ulyanovsky, who continued to insist that the revolution was about to go “the correct way” in 1982 despite frank criticism of this position from the expert community (including from analysts like Semyon Agaev who was supposedly close to Ulyanovsky), hints that it was actually part of Ulyanovsky’s beliefs. However it was not only a result of Ulyanovsky’s extreme attachment to the theoretical concepts (some of which he also authored), it was partly a result of close relations with the representatives of the fraternal foreign communist parties that the officials of the International department were exposed to more than any other Soviet officials. In the case of Iran, the Tudeh party, which bore the stigma of being a Soviet client throughout its history, was in fact influencing the International department by feeding Ponomarev and Ulyanovsky with bright hopes for a progressive revolution.

Yet the example of the Tudeh’s fate also shows the limits of the International department’s influence the decision-making. When the Tudeh came under attack, the Soviet press criticized the Iranian regime but the Soviet leadership remained silent. Despite its evident reactionary content from the Marxist-Leninist point of view, Moscow continued to proclaim the progressive character of the regime led by Ayatollah Khomeini. The crushing of the Tudeh could not but crush the still existing hopes in Moscow about the economic and political benefits from retaining relations with revolutionary Iran as well. However, neither the crushing of
the Tudeh, nor the de-facto freezing of bilateral relations led to any public condemnation of the Iranian regime by the Soviet leaders. The Cold War was more important. The Tudeh was sacrificed to the geopolitical interests of the Soviet Union in a striking continuity with Soviet behavior during the Iranian Azerbaijan crisis and many other cases when the Soviets preferred the geopolitical gains to the revolutionary support of their comrades. One could debate whether the Soviet Union truly achieved any geopolitical gains, especially with Iran turning more and more hostile to the USSR in light of Soviet arms deals with Iraq and continuing war in Afghanistan. It is frankly hard to think of any real benefit for Moscow. Yet the Soviet leaders were willing to forgive Khomeini anything for his fierce anti-Americanism and consequent policies that destroyed American security belt to the south of the Soviet borders. In the circumstances of the early 1980s, when the renewed tensions between the superpowers that threatened to turn the Cold War into an open conflict, it was good enough for the Soviets to have Iran being anti-American Iran, regardless of the domestic situation.

A further rapprochement between the USSR and Iran that became possible only after Mikhail Gorbachev’s election as the CPSU Secretary General set a trend in Soviet/Russian–Iranian relations that despite some rifts continues to this very day. In Gorbachev’s times the extraction of the revolutionary element from the ideology gave way to a mix of communist and humanitarian idealisms that allowed bringing the Cold War to its end. Although the new ideology was primarily designed to find a common ground with the West, it simultaneously allowed to neglect the unpleasant history of the 1983-84 de facto break of Soviet-Iranian relations. Of course, the geopolitical changes that followed, primarily the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, contributed to a rapprochement. It is ironic that, as in the times of Khrushchev and Brezhnev, Iran again occupied an exceptional place in the Soviet foreign policy. Just like in the 1960s-1970s the case of Iran as an American ally that had fruitful relations with the USSR was almost unique, now in the late 1980s when the Soviet Union was improving its relations
with the West largely neglecting its earlier allies, Iran stood out as a unique example of the openly anti-American state that the USSR had a rapprochement with.

I started this conclusion with arguing that the post-Soviet Russia largely relies on the geopolitical considerations when building its mutually beneficial relations with the Islamic republic of Iran, and although last years show more attempts of the Russian leadership to formulate the theoretical aspect of its foreign policy ideology, it is far from being similar to the level of importance that Marxist-Leninist theory had for the ideological worldview of the Soviet leaders. The remainders of the old Soviet ideological worldview keep influencing today’s decision-makers, and people like Evgeny Primakov served as transmitters of this set of thinking. Surely the universal idea of Soviet communism (or anything similar to it) is long forgotten by today’s Russian leaders. Yet the other two aspects that are brought out in the title of this dissertation, the role of expert knowledge and the importance of religion as a political ideology, were revolutionized in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution, and once again after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Actualized in the 1980s, these factors keep playing a role in contemporary foreign policy and decision making in Russia.

The Iranian revolution fueled many expectations among Soviet leaders and brought very few actual benefits. The Islamic regime that came to power as a result of this revolution was one of the strangest allies the Soviet Union was trying to make. Yet for the last truly Soviet generation of leaders that Brezhnev and his Politburo have been, the decisions made in the late 1970s—early 1980s seemed obvious rather than paradoxical. An ideological worldview, a Cold War lens, a place that they dedicated to the expert knowledge in their decision-making system—all of that almost inevitably brought them to support the Iranian revolution and the Islamic republic. The more it looks to us like a paradox, the more it proves the limitations of the late Soviet regime to conduct a cold hearted realpolitik and the more evident are the foreign policy changes that came with the Perestroika.
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Fund 1731 Section of Social Sciences
Fund 2113 Research Council on Economic, Political and Ideological Issues of the United States

**AVPRF**—*Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, Moscow, Russia*
Fund 174 Soviet Embassy in Iran

**RGANI**—*Russian State Archive for Contemporary History, Moscow, Russia*
Fund 3 Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee
Fund 5 Papers of the CPSU Central Committee
Fund 52 Nikita Khrushchev
Fund 80 Leonid Brezhnev
Fund 89 Declassified documents, 1922-1991

**RGASPI**—*Russian State Archive for Socio-Political History, Moscow, Russia*
Fund 558 Joseph Stalin
Fund 599 Editorial papers of *Kommunist* journal, 1946-1986

**GARF**—*State Archive of the Russian Federation, Moscow, Russia*
Fund P6991 Council of Religious Affairs

*Churchill College Archives Centre, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK*
GBR/0014/MITN The Papers of Vasily Mitrokhin
National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew, UK
FCO 8 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Middle East Department
FCO 28 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, East European and Soviet Department

Electronic Archives

Dokumenty Sovetskoy Epokhi (Documents of the Soviet Era)—RosArkhiv
Personal collections of the prominent figures of the Soviet Era, available online at: http://sovdoc.rusarchives.ru/sections/personality/

National Security Archive, George Washington University (NSA-GWU)
Anatoly Chernyaev Diary, available online at: https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/anatoly-chernyaev-diary

Ronald Reagan Presidential Library Electronic Archive

Wilson Center Digital Archive Collections
Iran-Iraq War, available online at: https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/collection/48/iran-iraq-war
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U.S. Central Intelligence Agency Electronic Reading Room
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———. *Shiitskoe Dukhovenstvo v Sovremennom Irane* [Shi’a clergy in contemporary Iran]. Moscow: Nauka, 1975.


Mikhail Krutikhin in an interview with the author, Moscow, November 2017

Nina Mamedova in an interview with the author, Moscow, May 2016

Harvard University Iranian Oral History Collection, available online at: https://library.harvard.edu/collections/iranian-oral-history-project
Interview of Sir Denis Wright


Part 1, available online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hVAVczr_OGQ ; Part 2, available online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vt3PGrVb0c


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Pravda Vostoka
Problemy Mira i Sotsializma
Trud
The New York Times
Washington Post
World Marxist Review

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Pechatnov, Vladimir. “Na Etom Voprosе My Slomaem Ih Antisovetskoe Uporstvo…” (Iz Perepiski Stalina s Molotovym po Vneshnepoliticheskim Delam v 1946 godu).” [“On this issue we will break their anti-Soviet stubbornness…” (From the correspondence between Stalin and Molotov on foreign policy matters in 1946)]. *Istochnik*, no. 3 (1999): 92-104.


Freedman, Robert O. “Russian-Iranian Relations in the 1990s.” *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 4, no. 2 (June 2000).


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