

February 21, 1946
**Reception of Prime Minister of Iran Qavam
os-Saltaneh by Cde. I. V. Stalin**

Citation:

"Reception of Prime Minister of Iran Qavam os-Saltaneh by Cde. I. V. Stalin", February 21, 1946, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 317, ll. 0020-0028.
Translated by Gary Goldberg.
<https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/209073>

Summary:

Stalin and Iranian Prime Minister Ahmad Qavam discuss the future of the Soviet-Iranian relationship, Qavam's slim majority in the Majlis, the withdrawal of Soviet troops, the possibility of a Soviet oil concession in Iran, and the risks of Azerbaijani autonomy.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from MacArthur Foundation

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

TOP SECRET

RECEPTION OF PRIME MINISTER OF IRAN QAVAM OS-SALTANEH BY Cde. I. V. STALIN
21 February 1946 at 2100

V. M. Molotov and Zudin (the interpreter) were present

Cde. Stalin asks Qavam about [his] health and how he endured the trip to Moscow.

Qavam in reply expresses gratitude and declares that he endured the trip well.

Cde. Stalin asks Qavam whether it's cold for him in Moscow.

Qavam replies that the weather in Moscow is cold, but tolerable, and that this year the winter everywhere is cold, including in Tehran, too.

Cde. Stalin asks, how is the Shah doing [?]

Qavam replies that Cde. Stalin knows better.

Cde. Stalin asks, where would he know this, and is informed when the authority of the Majlis ends.

Qavam replies that the authority of the Majlis ends in 20 days.

Cde. Stalin asks the question, about what will the conversation be {?}

Qavam replies to this that he is not a diplomat and will speak sincerely and openly. He did not come to talk about treaties and agreements. He, Qavam, is a friend of the Soviet Union. During the presentation of his cabinet to the Majlis 104 deputies were present, 53 of them voted for his cabinet and 51 against. With such an insignificant majority of the Majlis he has to work to improve Soviet-Iranian relations. These are Iranian matters. As regards international questions then the Generalissimo himself know better. Some countries which reckoned themselves friends of the Soviet Union before the War did not suppose that the Soviet Union would finish the War victorious. These countries are beginning to envy the Soviet Union right now. Manifestations of such envy are observed in Iran. A certain country opposes the establishment of friendly ties between the USSR and Iran and their strengthening, in spite of the fact that the Iranian people desire the establishment of a firm friendship with the Soviet Union. The fact that although Qavam left Tehran for the USSR at a late hour numerous representatives of the Iranian population came to see him off points to the desire of the Iranian people desire to establish friendly relations with the Soviet Union

Cde. Stalin comments; "Good"

Qavam continues that he came to Moscow with the intention to establish firm and friendly ties with the Soviet Union. He won't be able to achieve this goal right away. The current Majlis, Qavam continued, is a Majlis of opponents, and therefore he is thinking of changing the regime, to enlist trusted people to cooperate, and to hold new elections to the Majlis, ensuring his supporters election to it. Right now Qavam would like to discuss the question of the evacuation of Soviet troops from Iran.

Cde. Stalin asks Qavam, are there British and American troops in Tehran [?]

Qavam replies to this that there are no British and American troops in Tehran. There was only a group of British officers who have already had to leave Tehran right now. The second question, Qavam continued, which he would like to discuss is the Azerbaijani question. Although the Soviet Government declares that this question is a domestic matter of Iran, nevertheless Qavam is asking for help and assistance to solve this problem in order to preserve the [territorial] integrity and unity of Iran.

In addition, Qavam would like to discuss the question of the possibility of obtaining economic aid from the Soviet Union and to begin economic discussions.

Cde. Stalin says that talks can be started and asks how things are going with an oil concession.

Qavam says in reply to this that a concession can be given to the Soviet Union after new elections and the creation of a new Majlis favorable to Qavam. Qavam adds that, besides the concession, it might have other economic matters.

Cde. Stalin asks, which matters are Qavam speaking about [?].

Qavam replies that he means other concessions, the construction of mills and factories for Iran by the Soviet Union.

Cde. Stalin says that there is no way without an oil concession. Right now there are British, American, and Soviet troops in Iran. The Russians have the right to introduce troops on the basis of the 1921 treaty. How did this treaty arise? There are two reasons for its appearance. The first reason is that Soviet Russia abandoned a zone of influence and gave the Iranian government property, a railroad, etc. belonging to it without compensation. This was done to defend Baku, without which we cannot live. The second reason is that we knew well that during the conclusion of the Versailles Treaty the Iranian delegation headed by Minister of Foreign Affairs Moshaver al Mamalek made an appeal with a declaration which demanded the incorporation into Iran of Derbent, Temirhanshura, Russian Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the territory beyond the Caspian. This was a serious aggressive intention of Iran with respect to Soviet Russia.

Qavam shrugs [his] shoulders, thereby expressing his doubt.

Cde. Stalin confirms that this was actually so. After this the 1921 treaty was signed in which the right of Soviet troops to enter Iran was stipulated. At that time Britain stood behind Iran.

Qavam declared that he was in the government in 1921. He remembers that the Majlis discussed article 6 of the 1921 treaty for a long time. As a result of the debates the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs turned for explanation to Soviet Ambassador Rothstein, who reported in writing that this concerned a threat from a third party.

After receiving Rothstein's explanation the treaty was approved. Qavam added that he is making this statement by way of information.

Cde. Stalin asks, "But what of the declaration?"

Qavam replies to this that possibly it was something insignificant.

Cde. Stalin continues, that before the war the Dutch and the Americans sought an oil concession in the north of Iran. Iran should not give an oil concession to third countries and should give it to the Soviet Union, especially as the Russians want a more advantageous concession for Iran. Refusing the Soviet Union a concession would be discrimination on the part of Iran.

Qavam replies that he agrees to give a concession, but he cannot do this for 20 days. It is dangerous for him to raise such a question in the Majlis right now since he has only has an insignificant majority in it.

Cde. Stalin declares that right now the issue is not about timeframes, it is about Qavam's agreement in principle to give an oil concession to the Soviet Union.

Qavam expresses his agreement in principle to give an oil concession to the Soviet Union and adds that he can accomplish the transfer of an oil concession to the Soviet Union after the election of a new Majlis.

Cde. Stalin states that question of the autonomy of Iranian Azerbaijan is an internal matter of Iran, but if Qavam asks for his advice and assistance then, to tell the truth, the Azerbaijanis need to be given something. Times have changed. Separatism can be killed with autonomy. The Iranian Azerbaijanis see that in Soviet Azerbaijan they have their own schools and courts. This prompts a natural desire in them to have the same things at home. Autonomy in no way threatens Iran. Everything will belong to Iran. Cde. Stalin says that he would think it correct to give Azerbaijan autonomy. Of course this is, his, Cde. Stalin's, advice since [you're] asking him. It's Qavam's business to agree with him or not. Cde. Stalin adds that he thinks that the Azerbaijanis ought to be given something to pacify them.

Qavam does not agree with the offer of autonomy to Azerbaijan, declaring that a similar movement would arise in other points of the country and Iran would fall apart.

Cde. Stalin replies to this that there was a time when Georgia and Armenia separated from Soviet Russia, concessions were made to them, and now they do not want to leave. Cde. Stalin asks Qavam, who else might demand autonomy, the Kurds? Or someone else? The Czar didn't give anyone anything, and died. Something needs to be given to others. Iran will be stronger as a result of this.

Qavam asks, how can Iran become stronger if each province demands autonomy for itself [?] An autonomy movement might move to the south of Iran, to Khuzestan and Fars.

Cde. Stalin asks, what language does the population of Khuzestan speak [?]

Qavam replies, Arabic. In Qazvin and Saveh there lives a population which speaks Turkish.

Cde. Stalin replies that he did not know this. [He] needs to think about this. He asks Qavam to believe him that the Russians want Iran to become strong and they do not want the division of Iranian Azerbaijan. Even if the Azerbaijanis ask to join the USSR this will be refused.

Qavam suggests taking Iran under his own leadership and removing the word "autonomy".

Cde. Stalin says that Iran should be under Iranian rule, but we can help if needed.

Qavam says that he would like to send a special mission to Iranian Azerbaijan for talks with the Azerbaijani government. He, Qavam, is ready to carry out some reforms, declare an amnesty, and not persecute Azerbaijanis, remove the word "autonomy," eliminate ministries, and replace them with institutions giving Azerbaijan the opportunity to deal with its own internal affairs. In addition, autonomy is not envisioned by the Iranian constitution. Right now the Azerbaijanis have organized their own government and have their own ministers.

Cde. Stalin asks, do the Azerbaijanis have their own Minister of War [?]

Qavam replies affirmatively.

Cde. Stalin asks, is there a Minister of Foreign Affairs [?]

Qavam replies there is also a sort of Minister of Foreign Affairs right now.

Cde. Stalin declares that the Azerbaijanis had way too much. They don't have autonomy. They shouldn't have a Minister of War, a Minister of Foreign Trade, and a Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Qavam suggests eliminating the ministries and replacing them with institutions, and removing the word "autonomy".

Cde. Stalin asks, how [things] are with language.

Qavam replies that the Azerbaijani language is not the native language of the population of Iranian Azerbaijan, but brought in by the Seljuk conquerors. Right now the Azerbaijanis write letters to Tehran to the Iranian government in Azeri, which Tehranis do not understand, and consequently [they] have to have special interpreters. Qavam suggests imagining being in his place. He has an estate in Azerbaijan, and the manager writes him letters in Azeri.

Cde. Stalin replies that this is a personal matter, and Qavam could also have a Frenchman as a manager.

Qavam clarifies that the Azerbaijanis do not have their own language.

Cde. Stalin notes that previously in Russia they also said that the Belorussians and Ukrainians did not have their own language and that their language was Russian. However, [we] made concessions to them and right now Ukrainians and Belorussians have their own languages, although they have much in common among themselves as Slavs. It is necessary to give a concession to the Azerbaijanis in this regard.

Qavam asks, in which language does the Turkmen government write letters to Moscow [?]

Cde. Stalin replies that they write in Russian, but in the republic the intelligentsia, workers, and women speak in Turkmen. The Russian language is taught in schools as a subject and serves as communications between the republics so that an Estonian can explain himself to a Turkmen, [or a] Ukrainian to an Azerbaijani.

Qavam expresses agreement to introduce the Azerbaijani language in schools, but objects to correspondence in the Azerbaijani language.

Cde. Stalin replies that it is stupidity to conduct correspondence in the Azerbaijani language. Some time ago Abkhazia, which is part of the Georgian Republic, conducted correspondence in French, but this was abolished. The Azerbaijani question ought to be thought over and discussed again together.

Qavam nods his head.

Cde. Stalin states that they sent him what Qavam discussed with the Soviet representative about a desire to establish a republican regime in Iran. Is this correct?

Qavam confirms that he had such a discussion.

Cde. Stalin notes, this is a serious question.

Qavam explains that he has two ways to change the existing situation. Qavam suggests convening a constituent assembly under a plausible pretext with the aid of which he would establish a republican regime, or to put the son of Ahmed Shah on the throne in place of the current Shah.

Cde. Stalin says that the establishment of a new regime in the country is a serious matter. Support in both the Majlis and in the people is necessary for this. Cde. Stalin asks, what is better, a republic or a Shah [?]

Qavam replies that he is personally inclined to establish a republican regime in Iran.

Cde. Stalin notes that a Shah is good when he exhibits independence: what he said, that he did. The current Shah does not have independence.

Qavam replies that Cde. Stalin know about this better.

Cde. Stalin objects, from where [would] he know this [?]

Qavam warns that none of the members of his delegation know about his plans to establish a new regime in Iran, and asks that they be kept secret.

Cde. Stalin agrees with this.

Qavam asks that the future Soviet ambassador be instructed to advise him on questions of mutual interest.

Cde. Stalin asks how to presumes to accomplish the plan to establish a republican regime.

Qavam replies that he will develop propaganda through trusted people and prepare the ground for this.

Cde. Stalin recommends that Qavam not participate in this matter personally, but act through trusted people.

Qavam asks how to carry out the plan if [he] does not personally participate in its execution [?]

Cde. Stalin replies that in other countries, in particular in Iran, hirelings might appear who might kill Qavam. Work to establish a new regime needs to be done through trusted people.

Qavam shows that he wants to say something.

Cde. Stalin continues that possibly he is giving Qavam elementary advice, and asks pardon, but he would like to warn Qavam.

Qavam agrees with these statements and adds that he is able to carry out his plan.

Cde. Stalin states that he would like to have a firm and positive answer about the oil concession.

Qavam replies that he cannot raise this question in the Majlis right now. The Majlis issued a law to imprison any Prime Minister for discussions about the oil question while foreign troops are in Iran. In practice the question of a concession might be realized after the election of a new Majlis. The authority of the present Majlis ends in 20 days. Qavam mainly agrees to give a concession. The details can be arranged in the future. Right now a situation has been created that on the basis of the Majlis law it is impossible to begin elections to the Majlis until the foreign troops leave Iran, but the question of oil cannot be decided without a new Majlis.

Cde. Stalin declares that he believes Qavam, and promises to talk with his colleagues about the questions that Qavam touched on, expressing a fear that Qavam might be removed from power with the departure of Soviet troops.

Qavam asks for help in the solution of the Azerbaijani question. A favorable solution of the question will strengthen his, Qavam's, position.

Cde. Stalin notes that that national question is a very serious and complex question in the current conditions. The Azerbaijani question cannot simply be crossed out, things have gone too far. The population of Azerbaijan is seized by a feeling of freedom and they are afraid of nothing right now. But we will think over this question and hold a second meeting in two or three days.

Qavam declares that the movement began in 1921 in Gilan. Qavam turned for assistance to Rothstein, who recommended the Gilanites be mollified. Soon after this Qavam introduced Iranian troops into Gilan. Qavam asks that the Azerbaijanis be given similar advice.

Cde. Stalin replies that there is a big difference between Gilan and Azerbaijan. In Azerbaijan the matter is more serious than in Gilan. The national question is a very critical question. Right now there is a national movement going on everywhere. Czechoslovakia constituted one country, [but] now two countries have been formed from it, in Indonesia the population wants to establish its own government.

Qavam expresses the hope of corresponding help from the Generalissimo.

Cde. Stalin replies to him that it is necessary to think about it, to make inquiries, and check.

Qavam asks, how are things with the withdrawal of Soviet troops [?]

Cde. Stalin replies that the troops will be withdrawn when Qavam's position strengthens.

Qavam declares that the Majlis has issued a law prohibiting the holding of elections while foreign troops are in the country.

Cde. Stalin says that the Soviet troops will remain in Iran. The USSR is not afraid of either Britain or America. It will be better for Qavam this way. He asks Qavam about a desirable date for him to appoint an ambassador to Iran.

Qavam replies that he would like to return to Tehran with an ambassador.

Cde. Stalin replies that this can be done and asks whether Qavam has any more questions.

Qavam replies that he has no more questions.

Standing up behind the table Qavam notes that not one of his questions has found a favorable solution.

Cde. Stalin says that the question of the presence of an army has been solved in accordance with Qavam's interests. There is no guarantee after the withdrawal of Soviet troops that the Shah will leave Qavam in power. Qavam remains in power while the Soviet army is in Iran.

Qavam notes that if the Soviet troops do not withdraw from Iran he might be replaced.

Cde. Stalin says that the Shah will not do this since he needs Qavam. As regards the Azerbaijani question he [Qavam] ought to think about it and talk again.

The conversation lasted two hours.

Recorded [by] [signature]

□□□(Zudin)