

Two Crises

Mesamarat al-Gayb, 10 March 1946

It is not, in this modern phase of the world's own development, an easy matter to pinpoint exactly where the afflictions besetting international politics actually lie — any crisis, raised anywhere, for any reason whatsoever, produces its own immediate effect on the political life of this new world, one in which time and space have effectively been abolished, and which has become, whether it likes it or not, a single organism, affected in its entirety by whatever afflictions and ailments strike any single one of its own parts.

There is no doubt whatsoever that one of the two crises I wish to speak of now arose in the Asian East, nor any doubt that the second crisis arose in Western Europe — but it stands entirely certain that the whole world remains, in these very days, genuinely, deeply affected by both these same crises, and that the very centres of this same effect lie in Moscow, in London, in Washington, in Paris, and in whatever other capitals might hold some real significance in world politics, whether near or far.

The first crisis is exactly the one raised in Iran, ever since the independence movement first appeared in Azerbaijan. It would only have been natural for this same crisis to remain within its own reasonable bounds — one region of Iran wishing to secure its own internal autonomy, genuinely dissatisfied with the political and social order, both within her own particular homeland, and within the whole of the Iranian homeland; the central government in Tehran resolved to bring this region back into obedience; and the very nature of Iranian sovereignty would require exactly this matter to be left to the Iranians themselves, to manage exactly as they wish, or as they are able — either the central government proves genuinely powerful, genuinely formidable, restoring matters to their own proper order, compelling the rebels toward submission, or this same government proves genuinely weak, genuinely slack, and the rebels secure exactly what they want instead.

This is the natural order of things — but Iran was never left entirely to herself, when the discontented among the people of Azerbaijan rose up: the Russians, after all, occupied her own north, while the British and Americans occupied her own south.

This same occupation was itself an effect of the war, organized under a treaty concluded between the Allies and the Iranian Empire — a treaty explicitly stipulating that this occupation would never touch national sovereignty, and stipulating, too, that this same occupation would end six months after the world war laid down its own burdens. When Tehran's own government resolved to send her own forces to bring the people of the north back into obedience, Russia refused to permit this same action — one of the very clearest expressions of national sovereignty imaginable — then went beyond mere refusal to actual physical prevention, standing in the way of Iranian forces, turning them back from Azerbaijan, forcing these same forces to retreat, exactly as the forces already stationed in Azerbaijan found themselves forced to surrender. The treaty was thereby violated: the Russian occupation had come to contradict national policy itself, preventing it from manifesting even in its very simplest form — the establishment of order upon the homeland's own soil.

Real debate over this same problem intensified, between Iran and Russia on the one hand, and among the Allies themselves on the other.

But this same debate accomplished nothing whatsoever: Russia held firm to her own position, protesting that the central government's own intervention might well produce genuine disorder, and real bloodshed, and that she wished to prevent exactly that, within the part of Iran she herself occupied. America proved the quickest of the allied powers to prefer her own well-being: she washed her own hands of the occupation of Iran, withdrawing her own forces ahead of the very deadline set for it, thereby becoming free to speak without any real stake in the matter, and without exposing herself to any real doubt or suspicion.

Great Britain, meanwhile, supported Iran in her own position, retaining her own occupying force in the south, and it became entirely clear, entirely evident, to people that there lay, beneath all of this, a genuinely significant rivalry between the British and the Russians — the former unwilling to evacuate unless the latter evacuated too.

The reasons behind this same rivalry are far too obvious to require any real explanation: rivalry between these two powers is genuinely old, owing to Iran's own position with respect to India, on the one hand, with respect to the Arab East, on the other, and with respect to Turkey and Russia, on a third; owing, too, to the position of Iran's own petroleum sources, and to the fact that the English and Americans have already

monopolized a share of Iranian petroleum — it is only natural, then, that the Russians should covet a share of it for themselves as well.

And so this same rivalry has proven genuinely fierce between the two allied powers, at a time when it was believed such rivalry had already had its own day — the British, for their part, taking to accusing the Russians of expansionism and greed, exactly as the Russians took to accusing the British of domination, oppression, and propping up reactionary regimes, in Iran and elsewhere besides.

The United Nations Assembly then convened in London, and the Security Council was elected, and the Iranians raised their own problem before both bodies. The Russians believed the English had themselves driven them to raise it, and so repaid their own allies in kind, raising, in turn, the Greek problem, and the Indonesian problem, themselves.

Readers already know the debate that followed over these same problems, and know that experience has shown these two international bodies have not yet reached the age of genuine maturity, nor managed to overcome whatever difficulties are raised before them. Neither, for this reason, actually settled the Iranian problem — they merely asked the two disputing parties to negotiate, and to keep the Security Council informed of however the negotiations themselves developed.

One ministry in Iran resigned, and another took its own place; the new Prime Minister travelled to Moscow, and negotiations began. But time itself never settles, never cares to stand still — it proceeds, rather, always along its own course, forever ahead of events, never behind them, forever ahead of people's own will, never behind it. And so the second day of March arrived, before negotiations had been completed, or reached their own proper conclusion, and it became genuinely incumbent upon the Allies to honour their own pledge, and evacuate their own troops from Iran. The British duly evacuated; the Russians, meanwhile, showed themselves ready to evacuate, then decided, instead, to remain.

It became clear, then, that one of the two allies had genuinely honoured the treaty — Great Britain — and that the other had not — Russia. From this arose exactly what the British themselves call the gravest crisis raised since the war's own end, and this is entirely understandable: people had believed the victors would never dare violate concluded treaties, nor break formally ratified pledges. Russia's own daring in doing exactly what she has done destroys all real trust — not merely in mere promises made, since trust in mere promises had already

been lost long ago — but in formally concluded treaties themselves. And once trust in treaties themselves is lost, the entire international order becomes a genuine absurdity.

For this reason, the British and Americans have asked Moscow to clarify for them the true nature, and the true extent, of the Russian position; the British and American Foreign Ministries still await this same clarification. Let us wait alongside them — Russia may well have something genuine to say for herself, and it would be genuinely premature for us to pass judgment on the matter without real knowledge.

But this same Iranian story, and other stories besides, have demonstrated entirely clearly that matters do not proceed smoothly, or easily, among the three Allies. Nothing proves this more clearly than that same warning the American Secretary of State issued, only days ago, declaring that America would never sanction aggression, nor permit it — nor than this same warning Mr. Churchill issued, in his own speech in America, on Tuesday, calling for a political and military alliance between the British Empire and the United States of America, to safeguard the Christian world from the danger of international communism.

Mr. Churchill's own speech is genuinely significant — and, at the very same time, genuinely flawed. Significant, since this same alliance is directed against Russia, without any doubt whatsoever; flawed and weak, since Mr. Churchill wants the United Nations Assembly to grow genuinely strong, wants it to possess a shared army guaranteeing world security, while wanting, at the very same time, to withhold from that same Assembly the secrets of the atomic bomb — as though he wanted this same Assembly to become nothing but a tool in the Anglo-Saxons' own hands, one they might use to dominate the entire world.

It stands entirely clear Russia will never sanction anything of this kind, that Europe herself may well have her own say in the matter, however weak that same voice might prove, and that other, non-European nations find themselves genuinely compelled to regard all of this — and the United Nations Assembly itself — with real suspicion, an Assembly that recalls, to our own minds, those ancient ages when backward peoples fashioned their own gods with their own hands. The United Nations Assembly holds no real value whatsoever, unless it draws its own strength from hearts genuinely sincere in their own love of truth, justice, and equality...

This is one of the two crises; the second crisis, as I have said, lies in Western Europe, where the fascist order still stands in Spain — and everyone knows the fascist revolt in Spain was itself what drove Europe toward the Second World War. The war has ended, and it would only have been natural for the fascist order in Spain to collapse, exactly as it collapsed everywhere else. Yet General Franco still dominates the affairs of the great Spanish people, whose own finest elements remain scattered across the countries of the earth... most wishing for a return to democratic republican rule, a smaller number wishing for a return to democratic monarchical rule.

The Allies attempted to change this same order through genuinely gentle means, and failed. France has now resolved to adopt some measure of genuine firmness, seeking to bring Great Britain and America into sharing that same firmness with her — but has managed to secure from them nothing more than the very lightest measure of shared opinion. Russia's own hatred of Franco, meanwhile, is well known, and she holds no political ties with him whatsoever. All that democracy, in Western Europe and in America, has managed to achieve is warning the Spanish people that it will not sanction their own present order, and asking them to establish, for themselves, a democratic government — and it is precisely at this point that British-American intervention stops.

France, though, her own government genuinely swayed by public opinion, has already closed her own borders with Spain, and it seems most likely she will eventually sever political relations entirely.

As for this same British-American hesitation, its own explanation is genuinely simple, tracing back to material interests on the one hand, and to a real apprehension over Spanish democracy hastening toward the left, and toward the formation of a genuinely significant communist bloc in Western Europe, on the other.

And so we observe, once more, that the victors' own love of democracy, however powerful, however genuinely fervent, still finds itself, in the end, genuinely tempered by economic interest, and by real fear of extremism, both of which know precisely how to cool that same fervour, and bring it back to measure and moderation.