

July 20, 1946

**Record of a Conversation Between Cde. I. V. Stalin
and Iranian Princess Ashraf Pahlavi**

Citation:

"Record of a Conversation Between Cde. I. V. Stalin and Iranian Princess Ashraf Pahlavi", July 20, 1946, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 317, ll. 0075-0082. Translated by Gary Goldberg.
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/209095>

Summary:

Princess Ashraf, the Shah's sister, professes her desire to learn from the Soviet Union and secure Stalin's support for her brother. She and Stalin argue over the degree of agency the Shah retains in light of intrigues in the Iranian government.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from MacArthur Foundation

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

TOP SECRET

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN Cde. I. V. STALIN AND IRANIAN PRINCESS
ASHRAF PAHLAVI
20 July 1946 at 2000

Present at the conversation: V. M. Molotov, B. F. Podtserob (interpreter)

Greeting the Princess, Cde. Stalin asks, is her trip throughout Russia going well [?]

Ashraf replies that her trip has gone very well, beginning from the moment of [her] arrival in the Soviet Union to this day. She is satisfied with everything, has seen much of interest, and is excited by the Soviet Union. Everything that she has seen in the Soviet Union is all good.

Cde. Stalin notes that far from everything is good with them and much needs to be done.

Ashraf says that she is struck by what patience and courage the Soviet people combat those difficulties which the war produced. She, Ashraf, is most of all struck by three [SIC] things in the Soviet Union, first, the discipline and, second, the patience which the Soviet people display. She saw brilliant examples of this in Leningrad, Kiev, and everywhere she was. She considers the Soviet Union a country which has a great future. The Soviet people are good people.

Cde. Stalin notes that all peoples are good.

Ashraf says that she agrees with this, but in her country much is being done badly. She would like to find out in the Soviet Union what exactly needs to be done so that the Iranian people can live better. She asks for Generalissimo Stalin to help her in this.

Cde. Stalin replies that, in his opinion, a reform movement should be started in Iran. If there is no such movement then Iran will perish. Iran has every chance of becoming the initiator of a progressive movement in the Near and Middle East. It should not miss this opportunity. If such a movement develops Iran will be strong and ensure its own independence. Every leader of Iran could do his bit for this movement, including the Princess and the Shah.

Ashraf says that when Generalissimo Stalin was in Iran several years ago he talked with her brother. Such he knows [her] brother and knows his morale. This is a young person, who received his education in Europe, and who is a democratic king, a supporter of reforms in his country. However, the situation in the country is so serious that the king has no power to carry out these reforms, power has been taken from him, and he can do nothing. The people are divided. People such as Syed-Ziya-Uddin and others, have done much blundering. There are no forces which could lead a movement of the Iranian people along a path of progress, no forces on which the Shah could rely in his progressive activity. Therefore the situation in Iran is very difficult.

Cde. Stalin points out that the situation in Russia in the 17th century was even worse, but Peter the First was not afraid of this and took the initiative on himself to carry out reforms. The Shah is not so weak, continues Cde. Stalin, as the Princess depicts him right now. He is stronger than she thinks. Why can the Shah not rely on Qavam's

government? This government wants to lead the Iranian people along a path of progress and democracy. Or might it not be the case?

Ashraf replies that there are people around the government whom she does not want to name who are not allowing progressive reforms to be implemented in Iran. They have taken power from the Shah and the only thing he has left is the army, but they want to deprive him of the army, too. The Princess says that Generalissimo Stalin was in Iran and knows that there are many tribes in Iran and the situation is becoming even more difficult from this. The Princess says that he and her brother are ready to give everything for the good of the people. They are ready to sacrifice the throne, too, for this. However, she, Ashraf, thinks that the throne is the only symbol around which the tribes gather. If there was no throne, the tribes would disappear. The throne is the only symbol of the unity of Iran.

Cde. Stalin notes that it is not clear to him who is shaking the throne of the Iranian Shah.

Ashraf says a demonstration was held in Iran before her arrival in the Soviet Union during which people shouted, "Down with the king! Long live a republic!"

Cde. Stalin says that in many countries there are numerous groups who are dissatisfied with the government but these groups cannot decide things. Who exactly is preventing the Shah from implementing reforms?

Ashraf states that she cannot say everything. She only wants to tell Generalissimo Stalin so that he knows that two Iranian patriots live in Iran, she and her brother, who endured much during the five years of war. They could abandon the throne and the country and live a life of leisure, but they haven't done this because they still hope to bring benefit to their country. They think that the king is the symbol of authority in Iran. She, Ashraf, says this not as the sister of the Shah, but as an Iranian woman who is ready to give her life for the good of the people. Once, about 20 years ago, Generalissimo Stalin said in one of his speeches, that a people should not be backward, they beat the backward. She, Ashraf, does not want Iran to be beaten, and she does not want it to be backward. She considers Stalin's words her slogan. She has travelled much, been in many countries, and is convinced that Iran is in a terrible situation. Iran will perish if steps are not taken. Ashraf says that she is asking Generalissimo Stalin as a friend to advise her how to save the country.

Cde. Stalin replies that, of course, it is impossible to do much in a year. He, Cde. Stalin, thinks that it is necessary to have patience and begin with the development of public education. The people need to be literate, and for there to be more schools so there is a strong intelligentsia. Without education Iran will perish like any other country perishes. It is necessary to build more schools instead of palaces. These are elementary things.

Then Cde. Stalin says that he does not know what relations exist between the Shah and Qavam's government. Cde. Stalin says that it seems to him that the Shah could rely on Qavam's government and move the country along the path of progress.

Cde. Stalin notes that possibly he, Stalin, is mistaken, but it seems so to him. What else can be done? If this concerned the Soviet Union then the Soviet Union could help Iran so that it would not be concerned from without and that Iran would be given an opportunity to revive itself. How else can we help? Let the Princess say it.

Ashraf replies that her brother wants to rely on Qavam's government, but there are other elements who do not want this since it is not in their interests. There are groups who do not want the Shah to have close relations with the Soviet Union. The position

of a king is insecure. Ashraf continues, Generalissimo Stalin just spoke about education. This is important, but it is not everything. Public health services still have great importance, and they are completely absent in Iran. The Princess would like to deal with these two things - public education and public health services, but they are preventing her from dealing with this. If she is allowed to do her part then she can do much, but the schemers are preventing her.

Cde. Stalin says the Shah can help her.

Ashraf says that the Shah can't do anything. They write about him in the Tehran newspapers that he doesn't have any rights. Five newspapers in Tehran speak against the Shah and he can't respond to them.

Cde. Stalin says that the Shah should be protected against such newspapers.

Ashraf says he can do nothing since if he wants to try anything in reply to him they will refer to freedom of the press, to that each writes what he wants. The Shah himself cannot have his own newspaper to reply with articles in response to newspaper articles.

Cde. Stalin notes that the Shah should have trusted people who could deal with this.

Ashraf says that the Shah has no such people. Ashraf says that she wouldn't like to name the people here who are especially harming Iran and who are sowing intrigues. The existence of the tribes makes the matter easier for the intriguers. These tribes are strong, and in the south they are armed.

Cde. Stalin notes that the Shah has an army.

Ashraf says that the Shah does not have authority over the army.

Cde. Stalin says that the tribes need to be given some rights. This should be included in the reform program in Iran. In the event these reforms are carried out sooner the [territorial] integrity of Iran can be defended. The unity of Iran cannot be preserved only by force, reforms are needed, the tribes need to be given privileges, and then the centrifugal forces, which these tribes are, will fade away and their place will be taken by centripetal forces. The unity of a country cannot be built on force alone. If reforms are carried out then the tribes will be for the Shah and for Iran. In Russia there are also many ethnic groups and at one time they wanted to leave Russia, but they were given reforms and now they are for Russia. The same thing can also be done in Iran.

Ashraf says that if the tribes are strong then the government will become weak.

Cde. Stalin says that it is hard to hold the tribes with force alone. Does the Princess not want to give the tribes rights [?]. What outcome is then sought?

Ashraf says that the essence of the matter is not in the tribes. The problem is that the general situation in Iran is unstable. The Shah would take the initiative in carrying out reforms but they won't let him do this. The schemers are very strong, they sow fear of Russia in the Shah, they tell him it is not necessary to one thing or another since Russia won't like it. The schemers say that it is not necessary to have better relations with Russia and the Russians.

Ashraf states that if someone here says to Generalissimo Stalin that the Shah is an

enemy of the Soviet Union let the Generalissimo not believe this.

Cde. Stalin replies that no one told him this before now. Cde. Stalin points out that he is not so easily convinced of anything. He usually verifies those reports which come to him.

Cde. Stalin says that we have not noticed manifestations of hostility to Russia from the Shah recently, but that some hostility was manifested some time ago.

Ashraf asks when this was.

Cde. Stalin replies it was when the Shah approved the government of Hakimi, which was hostile to the Soviet Union.

Ashraf declares that the Shah did not form the government of Hakimi.

Cde. Stalin notes that the Shah approved this government.

Ashraf replies that after he was convinced what the government of Hakimi represented he dismissed it. The Shah was ready to rely on the government of Qavam, which came to power after Hakimi. However, the Qavam government also has many enemies since it passed in the Majlis with only a 52% majority.

Cde. Stalin says that the Majlis could have been dissolved. The Shah had the right to this. However, he didn't do this. At one time he inquired of us whether we would support him if he dissolved the Majlis. We replied affirmatively, but the Shah didn't dissolve the Majlis.

Ashraf replies that it needs to be borne in mind that there are also schemers in the Majlis, and they are very strong. The situation in Iran is increasingly worsening.

Cde. Stalin says, we don't have information which says that the situation in Iran is increasingly worsening. The situation is not so bad as the Princess depicts. The foreign troops have been withdrawn from Iran, trade can be developed, and Azerbaijan is calm. All these are pluses and the situation in Iran right now is better than it was six months ago.

Ashraf says that the withdrawal of the troops brought a certain easing in the domestic situation, but all the same the situation remains serious. The Shah has no power, all of it has been taken from him.

Cde. Stalin says that, in his opinion, Qavam's government would like to maintain good-neighborly relations with the Soviet Union. The Shah could rely on this government. We had tensions in relations with Iran, but these tensions disappeared when the Hakimi government left. We could not repay the Hakimi government with good and we cannot be blamed for this. But now, when the past has been liquidated and the Qavam government is displaying a good-neighborly attitude toward the Soviet Union the tensions in Soviet-Iranian relations have disappeared and we do not harbor unfriendly feelings toward the Shah. We have no grounds for this.

Ashraf says that she wants to recall that when Generalissimo Stalin was in Iran he offered her brother aid and [her] brother accepted this aid. However, later he, the Shah, declined this aid after schemers began to tell him that the Russians would send instructors and try to snatch control of the Iranian army.

Cde. Stalin says that he does not consider the Shah's refusal to accept the gifts of the Soviet government a hostile act. His refusal was unpleasant to us, and that's all. The formation of the government is another matter.

Ashraf says that the government in Iran can leave in several minutes, but the king always remains. She, Ashraf, wants to say with an open heart that her brother and she are friends of the Soviet Union. If Generalissimo Stalin and the Soviet Union would support the Shah, then he could do much more than he is doing now. He is ready to cooperate with the Qavam government. If the people understand that Russia and Generalissimo Stalin are in good relations with the Shah, then much of the bad in Iran will dissipate.

Cde. Stalin says that we are well-inclined to Iran and the Shah. We don't eat people and don't plan to eat Iran. Czarist Russia intended to seize Iran, but the Soviet Union is not Czarist Russia.

Ashraf replies that she believes this. To everyone who says otherwise she replies that if the Soviet Union wanted to destroy Iran then it would have done so long ago. The Soviet Union is a great country and Iran is a small country. Iran has to maintain good relations with its great neighbor and be satisfied with these relations.

Cde. Molotov says that we have not yet managed to maintain such relations, but it is not our fault

Ashraf says that she does not know how the Hakimi government came to power, but she thinks that the Shah cannot be blamed for approving this government.

Cde. Stalin says that the Shah is not so simple as the Princess depicts him. He has played on relations between the great powers. He has made eyes at Britain. it was like that.

Ashraf says that the Shah was not involved and that he simply approved that government which was proposed to him by the Majlis.

Cde. Stalin says that the Princess is a militant woman and if the Shah is like she, then he can do much.

Ashraf shakes [her] head negatively and says that the Shah can do nothing.

Cde. Stalin that the Princess is being too modest, that [her] brother is not such a weak-willed person as she depicts him.

Ashraf says that there are many intrigues around the Shah which, when the Shah wants to take some step forward, they tell him that Russia won't like this.

Cde. Stalin says that the Shah could ask us whether the Soviet Government would like a particular step of his.

Ashraf says that he tried to do this.

Cde. Stalin replies that this did not happen. The Shah could invite the Soviet Ambassador to raise questions of interest to him to the Soviet Government.

Ashraf says that she does not know why he has not done so.

Cde. Stalin says that he is sorry but the time which he devoted to the conversation with the Princess has run out.

Ashraf says that also is sorry that she delayed Generalissimo Stalin so long. She is very grateful to him for the conversation and asks the Generalissimo to accept a letter from her brother.

Ashraf says that she has learned a lot in the Soviet Union and will try to use the knowledge [she] has received in her country.

Cde. Stalin says that the Princess is a militant woman and of course she can do much for her people.

Ashraf replies that she will be proud if she can do even a part of what a woman does in the Soviet Union.

Cde. Stalin accepts the letter and bids the Princess goodbye.

The conversation lasted one hour and 10 minutes.

Recorded [by] [signature] (Podtserob)