

FDR'S HURLEY MEMORANDUM

## Free Iran from British Imperialism

by Anton Chaitkin

As the second Obama Administration, under control of its British imperial masters, takes shape, continuing its illegal wars and murderous drone attacks, it is well to recall that exactly 69 years ago, another U.S. Administration, that of Franklin D. Roosevelt, was engaged in plans to liberate the world, especially the nations of Asia, Southwest Asia, and Africa, from the deadly grip of that same British Empire. A key part of that effort was FDR's plan for post-war Iran.

Following the war-time Tehran Conference, Nov. 28-30, 1943, of the "Big Three"—President Franklin Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin—FDR circulated a proposal to bring modern conditions to Iran, and thereby free that country from the oppression of the British Empire.

The memorandum was drawn up on Roosevelt's instructions by his personal representative, Gen. Patrick J. Hurley, in December 1943, and has lain in archives, unpublished since it was declassified in the 1970s.

General Hurley had made the arrangements for the meeting in Tehran, to agree on plans for completing the



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*Following the Tehran Conference in November 1943, in which Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill outlined the strategy for the conclusion of the war, FDR determined to free Iran from the oppression of the British Empire. Churchill was furious.*

World War II victory over the Axis powers.

Following the conference, Roosevelt asked Hurley to compose a report on how the United States could help Iran to overcome its terrible backwardness; how we would then use Iran's success as the model for how America would aid poor countries everywhere. Hurley traveled through Iran for three weeks, interviewing people of all ranks and conditions. His report con-



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*Following FDR's death, Truman (left) and his Secretary of State Dean Acheson, operating on behalf of British imperial interests, schemed to restore Britain's control of Iran's oil. They are shown here in 1947.*

demned British tyranny over Iran, looking forward to an American global showdown with the British imperialism in the post-war period.

Roosevelt proudly circulated the Hurley memorandum in the State Department, with a cover letter affirming it as his policy. He was "thrilled with the idea of using Iran as an example of what we could do by an unselfish American policy," and ending the "bondage" of "99% of the population to the other 1%."

The President also copied the memo to Churchill, as a merry form of torture. The fuming Churchill waited three months to reply with outrage over the insult.

British Empire supporters within the United States, led by Dean Acheson, attacked Roosevelt's proposal inside the State Department, labeling it "hysterical messianic globaloney."

The pro-British Vice President Harry Truman, who became President upon Roosevelt's death on April 12, 1945, elevated Acheson to the post of Secretary of State. In 1951, when Mohammed Mossadegh became Prime Minister of Iran, and nationalized the British Petroleum company, Acheson coordinated with the British ambassador and a joint CIA-British Intelligence team, to plan a coup d'état against Mossadegh, and restore British control of Iran's oil. The coup was implemented in 1953 during the Eisenhower Presidency, under CIA Director Allen Dulles, whom

Truman and Acheson had previously put in charge of CIA covert action.

In 1945, and again in 1951, Hurley testified at Senate hearings, exposing Acheson's treachery in wrecking Roosevelt's plan for cooperation and friendship with a sovereign Iran.

Here are the Hurley memorandum; Roosevelt's cover letter circulating it; and excerpts from the exchange between Roosevelt and Churchill.

## FDR's Memorandum to Secretary Cordell Hull

*President Franklin Roosevelt sent the following memorandum, dated Jan. 12, 1944, to Secretary of State Hull. Following the memo, is the President's cover letter, forwarding the Hurley memo to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Churchill's reply.*

### Memorandum for the Secretary of State

Enclosed is a very interesting letter from Pat Hurley. It is in general along the lines of my talk with him.

Iran is definitely a very, very backward nation. It consists really of a series of tribes and 99% of the population is, in effect, in bondage to the other 1%. The 99% do not own their own land and cannot keep their own production or convert it into money or property.

I was rather thrilled with the idea of using Iran as an example of what we could do by an unselfish American policy. We could not take on a more difficult nation than Iran. I would like, however, to have a try at it. The real difficulty is to get the right kind of American experts who would be loyal to their ideals, not fight among themselves and be absolutely honest financially.

If we could get this policy started, it would become permanent if it succeeded as we hope during the first five or ten years. And incidentally, the whole experiment need cost the taxpayers of the United States very little money.

Would you let me know what you think I should reply to Hurley? He is right that the whole lend-lease administration should take complete control of the distribution of our own lend-lease supplies in the Middle East.

[signed] F.D.R.

*Here is FDR's cover letter to Churchill...*

Private

February 29, 1944

Dear Winston:

The enclosed memorandum was sent to me by Major General Patrick Hurley (former Secretary of War) whom you saw at Teheran.

This is for your eyes only. I rather like his general approach to the care and education of what used to be called "backward countries." From your and my personal observation I think we could add something about cleanliness as well.

The point of all this is that I do not want the United States to acquire a "zone of influence"—or any other nation for that matter. Iran certainly needs Trustees. It will take thirty or forty years to eliminate the graft and the feudal system. Until that time comes, Iran may be a headache to you, to Russia and to ourselves.

You will remember that I suggested to Stalin that a free port could be set up at the head of the Persian Gulf, the management of the railroad internationalized, providing a through route for Russia and for the developing areas of Iran herself.

Would you let me have this copy back, as I have no other?

With my warm regards,  
As ever yours,  
[signed] F.D.R.

*and Churchill's reply to Roosevelt, nearly three months later...*

10, Downing Street,  
Whitehall.  
May 21, 1944.

My dear Mr. President,

Many thanks for letting me see General Hurley's memorandum on Persia, which I am returning to you herewith as requested.

I am sorry to have delayed answering it, but sev-



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*FDR forwarded the Hurley memo to Churchill, who strongly objected to Hurley's characterization of the British Empire, claiming that under the Empire, "democracy" was flourishing.*

eral Departments of State had to be consulted on the points which it raised. The General seems to have some ideas about British imperialism which I confess make me rub my eyes. He makes out, for example, that there is an irrepressible conflict between imperialism and democracy. I make bold, however, to suggest that British imperialism has spread and is spreading democracy more widely than any other system of government since the beginning of time.

As regards Persia, however, I do not think that "British imperialism" enters into the picture. It is true that we, like the United States, are inevitably concerned about our strategic supplies of oil, the more so because, unlike the United States, we have no metropolitan sources. From the same security point of view, we have responsibilities which we cannot at present abandon for the western frontier of India and the eastern frontier of Iraq. Apart from this we have the same wartime interest as the United States in the safety of the trans-Persian supply route to Russia. For all these reasons we want a strong and friendly Government in Persia, and have no wish to see the establishment of foreign "zones of influence..."

Yours sincerely,  
Winston S. Churchill

# Gen. Patrick Hurley To President Roosevelt

*General Hurley sent this letter to President Franklin Roosevelt from Tehran, Iran, on Dec. 21, 1943.*

Honorable Franklin D. Roosevelt  
President of the United States  
The White House  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President:

On your departure from Tehran you outlined to me, during our conversation at the airport, a tentative basis for American policy in Iran which might be used as a pattern for our relations with all less favored associate nations. In response to your suggestion and the directive which I received from the Secretary of State, I wish to submit the following for your consideration.

## Part I

It is the purpose of the United States to sustain Iran as a free, independent nation and to afford the Iranian people an opportunity to enjoy the rights of man as set forth in the Constitution of the United States and to participate in the fulfillment of the principles of the Atlantic Charter.

The policy of the United States toward Iran, therefore, is to assist in the creation in Iran of a government based upon the consent of the governed and of a system of free enterprise which will enable that nation to develop its resources primarily for the benefit of its own people. Iranian resources are adequate to sustain a program to help Iran to help herself. By this program of self-government and well directed self-help Iran can achieve for herself the fulfillment of the principles of justice, freedom of conscience, freedom of the press, freedom of speech, freedom from want, equality of opportunity, and to a degree freedom from fear.

To accomplish the above, the United States will furnish, upon invitation of the Iranian Government, expert advisors in any or all of the fields of government. All experts and advisors furnished to Iran by the United States will be paid by the Iranian Government and im-



*Gen. Patrick Hurley was tasked by FDR to develop an American plan to aid the nation of Iran to overcome its economic backwardness; FDR intended that Iran would become a model for U.S. foreign policy throughout the world.*

plemented in their operations by authority of Iranian law, and will not be a financial responsibility of the American taxpayer. The United States will not ask or receive any special privileges for these services.

American advisors will be fully indoctrinated in the policy of our own government toward Iran and shall make regular progress reports to our State Department. This indoctrination and requirement of reporting will provide a vital element of coordination which is essential to direction of our policy and protection of our interests.

[The] [m]odern history of this country shows it to have been dominated by a powerful and greedy minority. The people have also been subjected to foreign exploitation and monopoly. In extending American assistance to the building of an improved society in Iran there must be imposed a sufficient degree of supervision and control over free enterprise and personal aggression to protect the unorganized and inarticulate majority from foreign and domestic monopoly and oppression.

Inauguration in Iran of the American pattern of self-government and free enterprise will be an assurance that proceeds from development of Iranian resources will be directed substantially to the building of schools, hospitals, sanitary systems, transportation and communication systems, irrigation systems and improvement of all facilities contributing to the health, happiness and general welfare of the Iranian people.

This plan of nation building may be improved through our experience in Iran and may become the criterion for the relations of the United States toward all the nations which are now suffering from the evils of greedy minorities, monopolies, aggression and imperialism.

The American people, single-mindedly devoted to independence and liberty, are fighting today not to save the imperialisms of other nations nor to create an imperialism of our own but rather to bestow upon the world the benevolent principles of the Atlantic Charter and the Four Freedoms.

## Part II

The foregoing is a rather simple plan designed to promote the building of free nations. The job that confronts us is not an easy one. The success of the recent conferences in Moscow, Cairo and Tehran indicates that the major powers can cooperate in the prosecution of the war. The reaffirmation of the Atlantic Charter indicates that there is a basis for post-war cooperation. Notwithstanding these evidences of good will I think that now is the time for us to attempt to analyse the opposition that the building of free nations will be likely to encounter.

Without any opposition from other nations and with the co-operation and support of the intelligent and patriotic leaders of Iran it will take generations to achieve in Iran free enterprise and a government based on the consent of the governed. The population of Iran is approximately 90% illiterate and it is composed, to a large extent, of disorganized and separated tribes. The intelligence and vigilance which will support liberty of the masses must be created. The education of the tribesmen and the establishment of a unity of purpose will require



National Archives

*In his letter to FDR, Hurley noted that the British were highjacking America's Lend-Lease program, even using its supplies to establish a trade monopoly in Iran. Shown: A U.S. bomber is loaded onto a ship bound for Allied ports, ca. 1943.*

time, patience, diligence, efficiency, and a crusading spirit on the part of our advisors. Above all, the advisors must have the continuous support of the American people which in itself may be difficult to assure.

In addition to the obstacles within Iran, the principles of the above formula are in conflict with the principles of imperialism. Free enterprise may also come in conflict with any forced expansion of communism. Advocates of both of these doctrines may resist the proposed spreading of democracy.

In all the nations I have visited, I have been told, usually by British and Americans, that the principles of imperialism already have succumbed to the principles of democracy. From my own observations, however, I must say that if imperialism is dead, it seems very reluctant to lie down.

The imperialisms of Germany, Japan, Italy, France, Belgium, Portugal, and The Netherlands will, we hope, end or be radically revised by this war. British imperialism seems to have acquired a new life. This appearance, however, is illusory. What appears to be a new life of British imperialism is the result of the infusion, into its emaciated form, of the blood of productivity and liberty from a free nation through lend-lease. British imperialism is also being defended today by the blood of the soldiers of the most democratic nation on earth.

The names of the imperialistic nations are sufficient to indicate that a large part of the world's population is still committed to the principles of imperialism. These names also indicate the opposition that will be encountered by any effort that has for its purpose the establishment of democracy in nations that are now subjected to the rule of imperialistic nations. We are approaching the irrepressible conflict between world-wide imperialism and world-wide democracy. It is depressing to note how many of our real friends in the world seem to be irrevocably committed to the old order of imperialism.

Woodrow Wilson's policy for America in the first world war was designed "To make the world safe for democracy" and to sustain Britain as a first-class world power. Sustaining Britain as a first-class power has for many years been the cornerstone of America's foreign policy. Personally I have supported that policy. I have long believed and have many times stated publicly that the ultimate destiny of the English-speaking peoples is a single destiny.

We did sustain Britain in the first world war as a first-class power but we did not succeed in making the world "safe for democracy." Instead, when we backed away from the League of Nations and failed to make the peace terms an instrument of democracy, we made the world safe for imperialism. In the quarter of a century which has intervened the processes of both eastern and western imperialism set the stage for this new world war.

An effort to establish true freedom among the less favored nations, so many of which are under the present shadow of imperialism, will almost inevitably run counter to the policy of sustaining Britain as a first-class world power. This leads us to the conclusion that Britain today is confronted by the same condition that confronted our nation when Lincoln at Gettysburg said "That this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom." Britain can be sustained as a first-class power but to warrant this support from the American

people she must accept the principles of liberty and democracy and discard the principles of oppressive imperialism.

Soviet Russia has earned for herself an assured place as a first-class world power. Friendship and cooperation between the United States and the U.S.S.R. are essential to peace and harmony in the post-war world. There must, therefore, be a mutual understanding and acceptance of the post-war patterns for freedom which the great powers among the United Nations are to offer to their less powerful associates. Without such agreement there would be jealousy, suspicion and conflict.

### **Part III**

In considering the present status of relations between Iran and the United States it must be remembered that although American troops have been here more than a year their presence has not yet been officially recognized by the Iranian Government. Many Iranian officials believe that American troops are in Iran on the invitation and for the purpose of serving as an instrumentality of Britain. For a year or more we have had under negotiation with Iran a treaty wherein Iran would recognize the presence of American troops as an American operation. The ineffective presentation of the treaty has not been helpful to American prestige with the Iranians.

It is the responsibility of the State Department to effect the consummation of the treaty. The necessity for promptness in the negotiation of this agreement was pointed out by me in my report to you of May 13, 1943. I have not personally participated in any of the treaty conferences with the Iranians.

I think it important that we understand that since our troops entered Iran on the invitation of the British without advance notice to the Government of Iran, it was natural for the Iranians to look upon us as a British instrumentality. In addition to this the United Kingdom Commercial Corporation which was first engaged in preclusive purchasing in Iran has since been selling American lend-lease supplies to civilians and to the Government of Iran. Largely through our lend-lease supplies, paid for by the American taxpayer, the United Kingdom Commercial Corporation has been attempting and, to a considerable degree, succeeding in establishing a complete trade monopoly in Iran. The United Kingdom Commercial Corporation achieved this position by virtue of being on the scene when American lend-lease supplies began entering Iran. United States

representatives in Iran engaged the British Corporation, government-owned but profit-making, to serve as handling agent and middleman for the American goods. This arrangement, which evidently had the approval of the Lend-Lease Administration and the State Department, has been profitable to the British Corporation.

There has been a United States Commercial Corporation, government-owned, with offices in Tehran. When I was here a year ago, Mr. Philip Kidd was in charge of the corporation. Later Mr. Erik Eriksen was in charge. If we were going to enter the commercial field with lend-lease goods, I do not know why we did not use our corporation instead of the British Corporation. I refer again to my report to you on Iran dated at Cairo, May 13, 1943 and my report on lend-lease in the Middle East dated at Delhi, November 7, 1943. Your Minister, Mr. Landis, has made great improvement in the administration of lend-lease in the Middle East. Notwithstanding this I am still of the opinion that the present debate between the Americans and British on lend-lease will be ended only when America has taken complete control of the distribution of our own lend-lease supplies in this area.

The Iranians believe that the post-war monopoly plans of the United Kingdom Commercial Corporation now have the support of the United States Government.

In addition to all this there have been conflicts between the British and American Ministries that have been evident to the Iranians. This situation has been damaging to both American and British prestige. To offset this impression the Iranians have witnessed the efficiency of the American operations of railroad and road transportation in passing war supplies to Russia. Finally they have been deeply impressed by your masterful handling of the three-power conference and especially by your skill in procuring from the conference the declaration of policy of the United Nations toward Iran.

Meanwhile, Soviet prestige has benefited from their own well ordered conduct and by their direct and positive relations with the Iranians.

#### Part IV

In a conversation with his Majesty, the Shah and certain of his ministers a few days ago, I was informed that from one source or another the tribesmen in the



FDR Library

*Hurley spent three weeks in Iran, assessing conditions and gathering material for his report; while there, he met with Shah and his ministers. Here, FDR meets with Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi during the Tehran conference, Nov. 30, 1943.*

outlying provinces of Iran have acquired at least 50,000 rifles and ammunition. This the Shah thought made it imperative that our advisors to the Iranian Army and to the Iranian Police Force hasten the organization of the forces for security against internal disorder. He stated that certain foreign influences are being brought to bear on the tribesmen to cause internal disorder in Iran. While on this subject I informed His Majesty that I had heard that Russia had agreed to furnish the Iranian Army with a number of tanks, rifles and airplanes. The Shah admitted that there was such an offer but how much equipment Russia would give he was unable to say. I remarked that we were furnishing Russia equipment under lend-lease because Russia did not have enough equipment for her own war necessities. His Majesty said that he understood that fact but that Russia had offered to give his government this much needed equipment. He said he had hoped to acquire the equipment from the United States but had been unable to obtain satisfactory action. In my opinion Iran is able to pay for the equipment which she needs for both her Army and her Police Force.

It is a fact, however, that Britain is furnishing lend-lease material to other nations at a time when she is being sustained in her war effort by American lend-lease. Now Russia seems to be about to embark on a

similar program. Britain has been giving and now Russia is about to give our lend-lease supplies, or supplies that have been replaced or released by our lend-lease supplies, to other nations in return for concessions or to strengthen their own ideologies in the countries to which the supplies are given. The least we should demand is that we be permitted to do our own giving.

## Part V

Iranian officials have expressed a desire to establish a closer commercial relationship with the United States.

Under conditions now prevailing there will no doubt be a great rush on the part of American businessmen to get oil, mineral and other concessions in Iran. I suggest that the State Department, with the assistance of the other agencies of our government should be prepared to advise the Government of Iran definitely concerning the character and other qualifications of every applicant for a concession.

In proposing to commit you to a world-wide plan of building associated free nations, I am not unmindful of the problems that confront you on the home front.

We should, of course, consider the effect of the present and future high taxes and of the expenditure of great

amounts of our economic reserve. Our greatest danger, however, lies in the creation of a stupendous bonded indebtedness. If the war and our post-war reconstruction and rehabilitation commitments continue for a long period this indebtedness may become so overwhelming that it will create hopelessness, lethargy and dependency on the part of the world's freest and most resourceful people. We may again have soldiers being mustered out to disillusionment and unemployment. We may again have people shouting that "We can't eat the Constitution." They may even add to the non-edibles the Atlantic Charter and the Four Freedoms. This might lead to panic, bankruptcy and revolution. It is needless to add that if anything of this nature occurred at home, all our plans for the future of the world would be futile. Tyranny and oppressive imperialism would again be dominant.

I think the broader aspects of your world diplomacy are now in excellent form. But we can damage that position if we fail to be realistic in whipping the details into conformity with your general plan.

Respectfully yours,  
Patrick J. Hurley  
Brigadier General, U.S.A.

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