The Council of Fear ...

Mesamarat al-Gayb, 7 April 1946

A word one of my own friends spoke, when we came to discuss this council now convening in New York — a council that has genuinely troubled itself, and troubled the world besides, for no short while, throughout its own study of the Iranian question.

Nothing proves the genuine, general sentiment international problems stir up, in these very days, more clearly than exactly this word — one that came out, spontaneously, from people's own tongues, with no real preparation, no real forethought whatsoever behind it. There may well be another word, too, that comes out just as spontaneously, from people's own tongues, with no real preparation, no real forethought behind it either, pointing toward another variety of the same general sentiment international problems stir up in these very days: "the theatre council." The truth of the matter is that people look upon the Security Council in two entirely different ways: one genuinely serious, the other genuinely frivolous. And from these same two different ways of looking, two kinds of sentiment arise, both stirring real anxiety — one, though, genuinely gloomy, the other genuinely smiling, spreading real mockery, and real indifference.

People expected far more from the Security Council than it could ever genuinely give them, and, once it faced real trial, once problems arose before it, people's own hopes in it were genuinely disappointed. This same disappointment produced echoes varying according to people's own varying temperaments and inclinations: some grow genuinely pessimistic, seized by real fear, since their own temperament leads them toward pessimism; some grow genuinely optimistic, their own hearts finding real reassurance in confidence, and in awaiting the future; and some mock everything, content with the very hour they find themselves in, laughing at news that genuinely troubles everyone else.

A man genuinely given to deliberation and reflection, preferring patience and measured thought, might well wish to determine exactly the true, precise position of the Security Council — and I fear his own reflection might well prove genuinely disappointing.

This same Iranian story is a genuinely wounding tragedy, with respect to Iran herself — yet a genuinely amusing comedy, with respect

to those who look upon present-day world politics with a measure of real philosophical detachment.

The Allies genuinely needed Iran, and so occupied her, giving themselves pledges and covenants to evacuate her, once the war ended. Once the war did end, it became clear their own need of her had never truly ceased, that they would remain in genuine need of her for a long time yet, since she possesses abundant sources of petroleum, and since the strong find, within her, countless other benefits besides. Some among the Allies had already secured themselves beforehand, guaranteeing their own interests before the war, seizing petroleum sources here and there, organizing their own political, economic, and military relations with Iran too — being, as they were, already victors after the First World War, and having faced no revolutions genuinely occupying them with themselves. Once the Second World War ended, then, their own evacuation from Iran, their own fulfilment of these same pledges, proved genuinely easy, genuinely simple: they evacuated, and never delayed their own evacuation. And so, before the second day of March even arrived, the British had already evacuated Iran, and the Americans had beaten even them to evacuation — since both had already secured their own interests, guaranteed their own benefits, long before.

The other allies, though, found themselves occupied with their own revolution, between the two wars, never crossing their own own borders, never extending their own hand beyond those same borders. They then triumphed in the Second World War, exactly as the British and Americans triumphed, and so grew genuinely eager to cross their own borders somewhat, to extend their own hand beyond those same borders, securing petroleum sources of their own in Iran, exactly like their own British and American allies.

But they triumphed only after justice had already been settled, fairness already established upon the earth, the world already having guaranteed small nations their own sovereignty and independence — so they came demanding benefits once the time for them had already passed, seeking expansion once the age of expansion had already ended. Injustice had been permissible, before the Second World War; it became forbidden, after this same war. Exploiting international influence had been permitted, up until the year 1945; once this same year had advanced, exploiting international political influence became something genuinely hateful, something genuinely prohibited. This is exactly why no one objected to Britain and America securing their own interests in

Iranian petroleum benefits — all of that, after all, had occurred before justice's own dawn had risen, before its own radiant, beautiful light had flooded the earth. Everyone, though, objects to Russia's own attempts — since Russia makes these same attempts only after the light of justice has already shone forth, and injustice already been driven from the earth, in the most disgraceful manner imaginable.

What is genuinely strange is that the Russians — genuinely intelligent people — fault Britain for occupying Egypt, Palestine, and Transjordan, forgetting that Great Britain never occupied these same countries after the San Francisco Charter was established, but occupied them, and other countries besides, well before this same Charter ever came into existence, by intervals varying in length. Her own occupation, then, stands entirely beyond reproach, entirely beyond criticism — since it occurred in the age of Jahiliyya [pre-Islamic ignorance], when injustice was permissible, and aggression permitted.

The genuinely naive, those of sound and innocent heart, believed the light of justice would erase the darkness of oppression, whether that same darkness was old or new; believed this same light of justice would prevent injustice from occurring at all, and erase whatever injustice had already occurred, restoring to wronged nations their own right to freedom, sovereignty, and independence, and preventing great nations from ever subjecting small nations to fresh injustice.

But it became clear all of this was nothing but pure illusion — that whatever has already passed has passed, and what matters, rather, is only that no fresh injustice should occur, while the persistence of old injustice remains something genuinely natural, entirely beyond reproach. This, precisely, is the very point of disagreement between the Russians and their own British and American allies — and this, precisely, was the very point of disagreement between the Germans and Italians, on the one hand, and their own democratic enemies, on the other.

The democratic states arrived first at colonialism; Germany and Italy came late, attempting to seize their own share of this same divided plunder called the small nations. Hence the First World War; hence the Second World War; and the League of Nations was lost, somewhere between the two wars. The British and Americans arrived first at securing their own interests, guaranteeing their own benefits, while Russia remained occupied with her own revolution — and, once Russia resolved to catch up with her own two allies, the Security Council told

her, in effect: forbidden, absolutely forbidden.

There is no doubt whatsoever that Russia did indeed resolve to wrong Iran, and it seems most likely she feels no real hesitation in wronging other weak nations like Iran either. There is no doubt whatsoever that the Security Council would do genuine good, should it manage to prevent Russia from wronging this or that nation — but there is no doubt either that the Security Council would do equally genuine good, should it manage to turn the great colonial powers back from colonialism itself, and secure for small nations their own complete right to sovereignty and independence.

The Security Council did concern itself with the Iranian question, while it was still meeting in London, but managed to accomplish nothing whatsoever, finding itself compelled to leave the matter to the two disputing states, to resolve it through negotiation. It was here that a genuinely, thoroughly complex problem arose — though its own complexity proves genuinely amusing.

Did negotiations, then, reach genuine agreement between Russia and Iran? Russia said: yes. Iran said: no. And, strangely enough, all of this was said before the Security Council itself, which stood genuinely bewildered, not knowing whether to believe the wrongdoer, or believe the wronged! The world itself stood equally bewildered, not knowing whether to believe the wrongdoer, or believe the wronged! In the midst of all this, Russia grew genuinely angry, and withdrew from attending the Security Council; in the midst of all this, Iran grew genuinely satisfied, and her own representative attended the Security Council instead.

In the midst of all this, warnings issued forth from every direction: those inclined to fear grew genuinely afraid, those inclined to worry grew genuinely worried, those inclined to mockery mocked freely — until evening fell, on Wednesday, the third of April, and matters had reached a genuinely strange, genuinely suspicious resolution. Russia had been demanding postponement to the tenth of April; Britain and America had strongly resisted any postponement whatsoever. Then, on Wednesday, the case was postponed to the sixth of May instead — Russia thereby securing far more time than she had originally requested, and Iran herself being the one to actually set this same sixth of May date. In fairness, Russia did declare she would evacuate Iran unconditionally, without any real restriction — but, in fairness too, she made this same declaration in London, while declaring exactly the opposite between the

Security Council's own two sessions.

What admits of no doubt whatsoever is that the Security Council did genuinely triumph — over itself, though, not over Russia. It mastered itself, firmed its own resolve, and guarded itself against reaching any genuinely critical point with no way out. Mediators worked between the two disputing sides; Russia said what she said, Iran asked what she asked, and the case was postponed a full month, after Russia had originally wanted only a matter of days. And so those inclined to fear feared to no real purpose, and those inclined to mockery mocked to no real purpose either, and matters at the Security Council proceeded exactly as one might have expected them to proceed — exactly as our own ancient poet once put it:

How often the heart despises some matter,
only to find in it relief, as swift as untying a hobbled camel's own rope.

What matters now, then, once the Security Council has triumphed over itself, and some measure of real calm has returned among the great allies, is knowing exactly what will happen with the Iranian case, over the coming month, between the fifth of April and the sixth of May: agreement between Russia and Iran will most likely be reached — Russian forces will evacuate Iranian soil, Russia will secure whatever concessions she wants within that same soil, and the Security Council will be informed, by both states, that the problem has been settled between them by mutual consent, exactly as another problem was settled by mutual consent between Great Britain and Transjordan, exactly as another problem is being settled by mutual consent between Holland and Indonesia, and exactly as a third problem is likewise being settled by mutual consent between Great Britain and the Greek people. And whenever the strong allies reach mutual consent among themselves, everything becomes easy, everything becomes simple — and nothing, indeed, proves easier, once the great powers have agreed among themselves, than reaching agreement between themselves and the small.

And so the world's own affairs proceed, easy at times, genuinely difficult at others, always shadowed by a wall of contrived justice — its own outer face showing mercy, its own inner core harbouring nothing but torment.