

the course of the elections. As for sending troops under a plausible excuse, in any case, it is contrary to the agreement of 13 June; therefore the provincial council is lodging a vigorous protest to this. The provincial council is confident that Your Excellency will not insist on dealing a crushing blow at friendly relations between the parties.¹⁰

At the same time, touching upon the situation around Azerbaijan, I. Sadchikov sent a cipher telegram on 30 November to M. J. Baghirov which said that the situation was utterly critical.

Responding to recommendations of Baghirov and some Soviet Foreign Affairs Ministry officials, Pishavari, Shabustari, Javid, and Padegan sent a jointly signed letter to Baku on 1 December. The authors of the letter told Baghirov,

We have made great concessions to the Iranian government to settle the dispute peacefully. For all that, after ten months of hesitation and in an effort to deprive us of all the rights, Qavam cancelled the agreement we had reached with him. If we agree with him, he will never let our representatives into the Majlis and will demand to punish those involved in the democratic movement. We are sure about this; suffice it to refer to the Zanjan atrocities, where Democrats, their families, and children had been executed.

The letter told about the number, military equipment, and position of the Iranian Army to be brought into the territory of Azerbaijan. The "Quartet" wrote:

Now we are faced with a matter of life or death. If so, we prefer to die with dignity. True, our armed forces are insignificant and we are short of weapons; nevertheless, people trust our party and our population is courageous. Using all possible means, we are prepared to defend our fate; if necessary, we shall go to the mountains to wage guerilla warfare. All of us—old people and youth, men and women, are ready to fight. The morale of the nation, the *Fedais*, and the National Army is very high.

Leaders of South Azerbaijan reported that they were practically unarmed in front of the armed-to-the-teeth enemy. Even worse, there were no weapons to arm peasants, workers, and intellectuals who arrived in Tabriz to help the Democrats. In general, the Azerbaijani Army had 4 cannons and 2 mortars with no shells and mines. They pointed out:

We need your help very much. Beyond any doubts, our *Fedais* are ready to defend our achievements even with their bare hands to smash tanks, but it is not enough. We have always been sincerely backed by you personally and the population of North Azerbaijan in general. We ask you, our brothers, to cooperate in arms supply. If yes, we shall be able to rout the reactionary government in Tehran. If we succeed to defeat them in several places, all of them will have to run away or be captured. We ask you to help us on this track, and you must help us. Without

weapons, we cannot hold out long. We see no other way out of the situation. Now all Azerbaijanis repeat over and over again: "Better to die than retreat!" Our slogan today is "Either live in liberty or die in glory." Even mountain dwellers apply to us, asking, "Why do our brothers across the river Arax decline from giving us weapons, lending a helping hand? How can the great Soviet power reconcile with the fact that reactionaries headed by Qavam are going to annihilate us?"¹¹

Tabriz leaders asked Baghirov to deliver the letter to I. Stalin. To comply with their request, Baghirov forwarded the letter to Stalin on 2 December. Concurrently, the Soviet Consulate in South Azerbaijan gave a detailed account on the morale of the population and the army to the Soviet Foreign Affairs Ministry. Of interest was the fact that the ministry itself asked for this information.

On 2 December, M. J. Baghirov sent a telegram to I. Stalin, which stressed the necessity of dispatching officers and students from North Azerbaijan to Tabriz. He noted that commencing from May officers and students from Iranian Azerbaijan had been educated in Baku and Kirovabad. Owing to the changes of the situation in Iran, Baghirov considered it necessary to group them according to their specialization—for instance, anti-tank defense, artillery sub-unit, etc. Also, these groups were to be supplied with German captured arms, mortars, and cannons. "If necessary, these groups could be at the Azerbaijani Democrats' disposal by your order."¹²

However, Soviet leaders, hoping that the situation could be settled peacefully and that Qavam was unlikely to attack Azerbaijan, instructed the ambassador in Tehran to meet with the prime minister again. During early December talks, the Soviet Ambassador again gave "friendly advice." Sadchikov reminded Qavam about his promise to consider the issue at the Council of Ministers, saying that he was tired of waiting for the Council's final decision. The ambassador added that if the situation got out of control, the USSR "will not be indifferent." If there were some shortcomings in the agreement signed between Azerbaijani officials and the central government, the latter could settle them through "friendly conversations" with Azerbaijani representatives. Otherwise, the Soviet-Iranian borderline would be turned into an arena of "armed clashes" and "guerilla wars." The Soviet Ambassador added that armed groups might cross the Soviet borderline and pose "problems" there. Qavam replied that the lack of decision on the part of the Council of Ministers was due to the Friday holiday and departure of some ministers to Zanzan, following that city's occupation. Qavam added that in connection with the elections it was decided to forward troops all over Iran, including Azerbaijan. The prime minister pointed out that he was thankful for "friendly advice." Still, he stressed that he bore the responsibility for Iran and compliance with its laws and that no pressure could make him change his mind. Qavam told him that Iran was not planning to attack any province; the problem was to ensure control over the elections. The Soviet Ambassador suggested that