

# MUSADDIQ 'S MEMOIRS

*By: Dr. Mohammad Mosaddiq, Champion of the Popular Movement of Iran and Former Prime Minister*

*Translated by: Hassan Amin, Advocate (Edinburgh) and Former Professor of Law at Glasgow Caledonian University*

In the month of Jamadi al-Akhar 1339 (February 1921), Ahmad Shah sent me a telegram announcing the premiership of Sayyid zia. Since I regarded not only the implementation but even the publication of the shah's telegraphic instruction as being against the country's interest, I sent him the following telegram:

6th Isfand 1229 (February 1921), from Shiraz to Tehran. Your Majesty's telegraphic order was received. As a loyal servant, I should humbly submit to your Majesty that if this telegram is published in the province of Fars it will cause strife and turmoil which will be difficult to control. Your obedient servant, having the interest of the state at heart, did not wish to let that happen, and has so far not made the telegram public. If the telegram has indeed been issued on Your Majesty's instructions and it is necessary to publish it, please order the local telegraph office to publish it. Governor-General of the Fars Province, Dr Mohammad Musaddiq.

After this telegram, a public statement issued by the prime minister<sup>1</sup> and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces<sup>2</sup> was received, and was published in the daily newspapers. Then the prime minister sent a telegram to me personally, which I quote verbatim:

10 Istand 1299 (29 February, 1921) from Tehran to Shiraz. Your Excellency Dr Musaddiq al-Saltaneh, Governor-General of the Fars Province. It has been brought to my attention that you have refrained from the publication of the telegram which contained the news of my appointment to premiership, on the argument that you wished to avoid civil disturbances. I am convinced that Your Excellency is unaware of the situation, and believe that the outlook in Tehran is as you had experienced it before. This is not so. Your distance from the capital, and unawareness of the circumstances have robbed your excellency of important information. This new government

which has been formed by the sword and the might of a commander and representative of the army will show nothing but a strong fist to those who make trouble in its path, and - at a moment's notice - will put the life, property, family, and interests of the troublemakers in jeopardy as hostages for securing their good conduct. This roughness and toughness is not intended for personal gain, but for the sake of the national interest which should make any decision lawful and legitimate. Therefore, the view that the publication of His Sacred Majesty's order (may we forfeit our lives for him) might have led to certain difficulties was a totally irrelevant idea. It is essential that you discharge your duties with utmost power and authority. No one but a traitor could doubt the validity of this nationalist reformist government, and he, too would receive his punishment instantly.

Here [in Tehran] I have put all of the weak and phoney political personalities under arrest. I am sounding the bell of social reform, and - given the courage and daring of the army under my command - I regard every barrier and difficulty as if it were non-existent. If your excellency wishes to be the emissary [sic] of such government, you should begin reforming in your seat of appointment with determination as well as the benefit of my unlimited support, and know that there is ample opportunity for learned and honest people [in the new regime]. I should tell your excellency that I have a high opinion of you, and would like to use a worthy person like your excellency in reforming the Fars province. In return, it would be necessary for me to learn about your honesty and sincerity [towards myself]. Therefore, I am waiting for you to make up your mind. At the same time, I am obliged to point out to you (as further evidence of my sincerity and truthfulness) that it is expedient for those to whom such questions are put to choose to be honest and truthful [in their response] for to do oth-

erwise would damage themselves. I hope that, in the name of the fatherland and of progress, you would fraternally embrace me from this long distance, and give your help and support to me in the name of the national interest. You have no doubt seen my programme (which I ordered to be circulated to the provinces), and been informed of my views. Sayyed Zia al-Din Tabataba'i, Prime Minister.

I did not reply to this telegram at all, and received another telegram from the prime minister as follows:

The respectable Governorate-General of the Province of Fars. This is to inform you that the commander of the southern army has been ordered to send an artillery platoon to Tehran. 30 March 1921, No. 1401, Sayyed Zia al-Din Tabataba'i, Prime Minister.

In this telegram the designation of the [British] South Persia Rifles had been changed into the southern army. This was inconsistent with the nationalist pretences of the government which had thus been officially reorganised, and - realising the hypocritical nature of their claims - the people decided to oppose and protest against the new regime. And as the news of [the situation in] Tehran began to arrive bit by bit, the people tended to intensify their opposition.

Although the minister for public welfare had been in direct communication with the chief provincial magnates to arrange my arrest, he did not get anywhere because he had been told that I had done nothing but serve the country. Therefore, he was told, they had better summon me to Tehran, and do what they thought fit.<sup>3</sup> Colonel Fraser had a discussion with me, and - pretending to support the shah's position - he wondered why I had not enforced the shah's order in the province. I told him that it was not his place to ask such questions of me. The shah of the country had sent me an order as the governor-general, and I had refused to publish, let alone enforce, it because it would cause chaos and unrest. He apologised instantly, saying that, as a foreign officer, he should not have asked such a question. He then wondered if we could have a friendly chat, which I agreed to with pleasure.

Colonel Fraser asked if I was thinking of separating the province from the rest of the country, and setting up an

independent state. I replied that I had no such intention. He then said that, in that case, I had to choose either of two alternative courses of action: to cooperate with the government even though this was against my own views, and wait and see to what extent it would fulfil its promises; or to resign, and let their writ run in the province as in the rest of the country. He then asked me for my comments on his suggestion.

Colonel Fraser's real motive was to make me come to terms with a government which had been formed in the interest of a foreign power, so that my opposition to it would not encourage others to do likewise, thus neutralising foreign plans. It is a characteristic of British diplomacy that they first ask for the maximum, and if that is rejected by rational argument, they will be ready to settle for the minimum, which would be in line with their interest. Indeed, to demonstrate their disinterest they would prefer the slightest favour from principled people to the greatest benefit from the dependent and the unprincipled.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, they would use the unprincipled only when those with some principles would not let themselves be used by them. Therefore, when Fraser saw that I was speaking reasonably, and would not agree in the slightest with foreign interference in the country's affairs, he thought it best for me to resign voluntarily. And in fact I had no other choice, for the only hope for the efficacy of my views was for the shah to refuse to accept my resignation, just as in the recent Movement,<sup>5</sup> the country's true independence could have been maintained if the shah [Mohammad Reza] had not dismissed and, at the same time, replaced me by someone else [i.e. Zahedi]. That was also the reason why [at that time] I telegraphed my resignation to Ahmad Shah rather than to the government. If I had not gone along with the Colonel's suggestions, I would have been arrested for refusing to enforce the shah's order, either by some of the provincial magnates or by the South Persia Rifles, and they would have made a show of it in Shiraz as well. Hence, I sent the following telegram to the shah himself:

In view of likely developments as well as my own ill health, which has suddenly struck and prohibits hard work by this servant, I shall hold the provincial fort until the

arrival of Mr Qavam al-Mulk, and await Your Majesty's commands after that. Dr Mohammad Musaddiq, 5 March, 1921.

My purpose in sending this telegram was twofold. First, I wanted to bring the phrase 'likely developments' to the shah's notice, make him realise that he was about to fall, and that he should not, therefore, consider the passive resistance which he had displayed in London to be sufficient. And - if he was to fall - at least he should leave a great name for himself in the country's history. Secondly, I was hoping that Haj Mukhbir al-Saltaneh, the governor-general of Azerbaijan, would also use the [patriotic and democratic] sentiments of the people of that province (who, since the very onset of the Constitutional Movement had displayed their selfless patriotism on every possible occasion) and refuse to cooperate with a foreign-made government. That was also the reason why I had reaffirmed my being in charge of the province until Qavam al-Mulk's arrival in Shiraz.

I had not yet received any reply to my telegram when, barely a few days before the Persian New Year [21 March], Mu'ayyid al-Shari'a - one of the ulama and landowners of Shiraz - complained to me about the South Persia Rifles' intention to turn his farm into a race course. I sent word to Colonel Fraser through Mazhur Idris Mirza [an Iranian officer in the SPR]. He agreed that they should compensate the plaintiff - based on expert assessment - for the damages to his property after the race. I thought he would be happy with this arrangement. But he explained that, as a result of my intervention, they would compensate him this time, but would use his property in the following years without paying anything for it. I said an outgoing governor could do no more, and he had better get what he wanted by referring to the commander of the SPR.

Mu'ayyid left saying that he had no hope in anybody, and would take his case to the Divine Court. This touched me deeply, and I was wondering how I could satisfy him when I received an invitation card for the race from the Colonel. I wrote a reply on unmarked paper, apologising for being unable to attend because of the proprietor's discontent. The Colonel telephoned me afterwards and said

that my letter had taught him a lesson.<sup>6</sup> 'I wanted to say these few words by telephone at this time of night', he added, 'and come afterwards to apologise for what has happened'. He came the next day in the company of Mirza Mohammad Baqir Khan Dihoan, Qavam al-Mulk's business manager. Very pleasantly, Fraser asked if I knew Dihqan. 'Certainly', I replied, 'he is Qavam al-Mulk's business manager'.<sup>7</sup> Fraser said that he managed Farmanfarma's business as well, and the reason why he had brought him was for him to state his consent to the use of Sultan-Abad, Farmanfarma's property, for the race. 'Now that the proprietor's representative has given his consent, would you come to the race?', he asked. 'With pleasure', I replied.

The Colonel then went and had all the tents which had been set up in Mu'ayyid's property pulled down and moved to Sultan-Abad. This was the behaviour of Colonel Fraser towards me on the eve of the Persian New Year in 1921. One is left to wonder whether this senior officer of a foreign army would only treat me - a governor who had resigned and whose status was unclear - in that way, or whether he would have treated another governor in the same way.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Tr. i.e. Sayyed Zia.
2. Tr. i.e. Reza Khan (Pahlavi).
3. These sentiments were expressed when the new regime was not yet fully established, and, hence, the people could still comment on the rights and wrongs of the situation.
4. This has been the real reason behind the formation of [some] popular governments in Iran. [Tr. The reference is apparently to governments such as Mushir's and Mustawfi's at the time.]
5. Tr. i.e. the Popular Movement which led to Musaddiq's nationalisation of Iranian oil, and his premiership. See further, Introduction.
6. Tanbih kard ('taught me a lesson') are his own exact words [put in Persian].
7. Tr. Ibrahim Qavam al-Mulk, son of Habibullah Khan Qavam al-Mulk IV, was a leading local magnate.

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All correspondence should be addressed to the Editor:

Hassan Amin, Ph.D. (Glasgow), Advocate (Edinburgh)  
The Encyclopaedia of Iran Publications  
Mehr Building, 2 Palestine Street, Enghelab Avenue,  
Tehran, Iran, Post Code: 14168  
Tel: 009821-66968488

Fax: 009821 - 66968487

- Editor-in-Chief : Professor Hassan Amin, Ph.D.
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