

“Is Hindenburg a Sultan?” The Trial of the Iranian Communist Journal *Peykar* in Weimar Germany

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Student missions abroad figured prominently in the Pahlavi state’s plans for infrastructural and technical modernization. While the majority of students in the 1920s and 1930s were sent to France, Germany’s reputation for technical knowledge encouraged the Iranian government to send students there to develop their skills in fields such as mechanical engineering, naval engineering, railway engineering, chemistry, pharmaceuticals, and modern veterinary practices.

Yet there was a lack of appreciation for societal and political factors that could alter intended state plans for the molding of students into policy instruments. The urban landscape of interwar Berlin was an exhibition of divergent political thoughts, from social democracy to communism and an emergent fascism. It housed new sights and sounds, whether it was the chaotic and liberating music of jazz; the artistic schisms demonstrated by expressionism and the artistic school of *Neue*

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Sachlichkeit, which denounced the moral elitism of the ruling classes; or the new mode of cinematic entertainment, which equally condemned the values of bourgeois culture.¹ Indeed, a new republic had been formed based on social democratic values, but it had to govern the interests of industrialists and merchants. It was a unified state, but one that was built on the skeleton of a German Empire that respected the boundaries of its constituent states. As such, it brought out disagreements over the rights of the individual provinces and foreign policy interests. The city encapsulated the extremes of modernity, suffering from inflation and political instability resulting from a mechanized, industrial, total war while enjoying the diversification of cultural tastes and political allegiances. In the midst of this milieu, Iranian students studied and partook in political activities. An investigation into one of their publications, the communist journal *Peykar* (*Struggle*), and the German and Iranian governmental reactions to it, highlights these contradictions and tensions.

The First World War and its conclusion proved to be disastrous for Germany. The Treaty of Versailles placed the burden of instigating war on the shoulders of the German Empire, and as such, harsh measures were stipulated in the treaty to ensure that German political, military, and economic power be restricted. For its actions, Germany, now under the newly formed republic headed by the Social Democratic President Friedrich Ebert, had to pay reparations, its military was severely restricted in both size and activity, whatever bits of colonial possessions it possessed were taken away, and as the defeated power, it was ostracized in postwar international negotiations. Under such severe conditions, the Weimar Republic sought an alternative means to reinvigorate its international standing and integrate itself back into the international arena while at the same time dispelling the suspicions of the entente powers of a revanchist Germany. This situation, however, was not altogether bleak. In three important ways, Germany still possessed the characteristics of a great power:

¹See Larry Eugene Jones, "Culture and Politics in the Weimar Republic," in *Modern Germany Reconsidered 1870-1945*, ed. Gordon Martel (New York: Routledge, 1992), 74–95. Reference on p. 84 and 85.

its large domestic market, its ability to produce and export quality manufactured products, and most importantly for this article, its “cultural reputation.”² Indeed, culture could be used to recoup the prestige and power that Germany had lost. It was in accordance with the belief in the power of German academia that following the war a number of intellectuals under the guidance of the Prussian Culture Minister Carl Heinrich Becker called for a revitalization of *Kulturpolitik* (cultural diplomacy).³

Iran figured prominently in Germany’s mission of *Kulturpolitik* during the interwar period. Cultural diplomacy focused especially on states that did not completely fall into the territories of other European empires, whether Britain, France, or the Soviet Union. These were states that were aiming for the preservation of independence and for economic development, and were weary of too much reliance on the traditional Western powers (France and Britain). Countries such as Iran (Persia), Japan, China, the newly formed Turkish Republic, and the South American states were among the territories in which Germany sought to gain a foothold.

Thus, the opening of German schools in Iran and other countries in Asia and South America was central to rehabilitating Germany’s image and encouraging foreign students to come to Germany for the continuation of their studies. Both the Advisory Board for the Education of Persian Students in Germany and the later German-Persian School Association were formed to promote the teaching of the German language in Iran and the continuation of studies in Germany in order to make the Reich a viable and desirable destination for scholarship.⁴ Iranian students were to be cultivated through German culture and education in

²Stephen Gross, *Export Empire: German Soft Power in Southeastern Europe, 1890–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 13.

³Gross, *Export Empire*, 112.

⁴Letter from the German members of the Advisory Board for the Education of Persian Students in Germany to the Foreign Office, 10 March 1920, Charlottenburg, RZ 207, R 78098, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (PA-AA), Berlin; Constitution of the German-Persian School Association, German Foreign Office memo, 19 September 1935, Berlin, RZ 207, R 78099, PA-AA.

order to become Germanophiles who, after returning to their homeland and to occupations in prominent official roles, would work to foster closer relations between the two respective countries.

For Iran, on the other hand, student missions abroad were part of a larger goal that stretched back to the founding of Dar al-Fonun in 1851.⁵ That goal was to eliminate the need for foreign advisers in Iran's drive to industrialization and economic advancement. Iranian students were sent to England, France, Germany, and Belgium, to name a few countries, under the supervision of mission guides or the Iranian delegates in those specific countries. Upon their return to Iran, the students were expected to fill prominent governmental or teaching positions that would facilitate the education and training of a larger technocratic workforce that would in turn reduce dependence on foreign teachers and advisers. Thus, the Iranian–German educational programs that emerged were the products of mutually beneficial governmental programs that sought to reconfigure both states' international standing in the postwar period. Iranian students were at the intersection of two divergent yet intertwined state goals.

While the focus of this article is on the role played by the journal *Peykar* in the deterioration of relations between the Pahlavi regime and the Weimar Republic, and perhaps more importantly on German society's self-reflection on its supposed republican freedoms, it is important to note that there were precedents to *Peykar*'s anti-Pahlavi stance.

One particular instance was the suspected communist activity of two Iranian students, Khalil Maleki and Ahmad Hami.⁶ They were accused by the Iranian government of supporting the communist pamphlet *Rote*

⁵Christl Catanzaro, "Policy or Puzzle? The Foundation of the University of Tehran between Conception and Pragmatic Realization," in *Culture and Cultural Politics under Reza Shah: The Pahlavi State and the Creation of a Modern Society in Iran*, ed. Bianca Devos and Christoph Werner (London: Routledge, 2013), 37–54. Reference on pp. 43–44.

⁶Ambassador in Paris Hoesch to Foreign Office Abteilung III for the British Empire, America, and the Orient, 14 June 1930, Paris, RZ 207, R 78107, PA-AA. Another case involved inflammatory material spread by Ahmad Assadoff during the visit of Abdolhossein Teymurtash, the minister of court to Reza Shah Pahlavi, to Europe.

Stern (*Red Star*), which was printed and distributed from Leipzig.⁷ On 14 June 1930, the Iranian government requested that these two students be deported from Germany due to the agitation they had caused amongst Iranians living in Europe. The Iranian envoy in Berlin expressed his disappointment that these students would partake in such activities and be disrespectful toward the supervisor of students in Berlin, Mohammadali Jamalzadeh, especially when these students were, for the most part, supported by Iranian governmental scholarships.⁸ Moreover, Iran also expressed its distaste for the political movements that were gripping Germany at the time and their effects on Iranian youth.

On 7 May 1930, the German Foreign Office wrote to their envoy in Tehran, describing this dissatisfaction and its possible ramifications for Germany's *Kulturpolitik*. The letter went on to state:

⁷The communist pamphlet in question seems to be *Der Rote Stern* (*Red Star/Setare-yi Sorkh*), which according to Mohammad Golban was published in Vienna. However, the location of its publication was not clear at the time, with Austrian authorities claiming that there were no known Persian communist publications in their country. Its printing and distribution, however, were thought to have originated with the Soviet-backed publisher Peuvag, located in Leipzig. Foreign Office Abteilung III to the German Embassy in Paris, 21 January 1930, Berlin, RZ 207, R 78107, PA-AA; Mohammad Golban, "Tajdid Chāpi-ha: Rouznāmeḥ-a va Majalehā-yi Farsi ke Tajdid Chāp Shodeh And" ("Reprinted: Farsi Newspapers and Journals That Have Been Reprinted"), *Kelk* 84 (2007): 29–60, reference on p. 47, www.noomags.ir/view/fa/articlepage/304033.
⁸Ambassador in Paris Hoesch to Foreign Office Abteilung III, 14 June 1930, Paris, RZ 207, R 78107, PA-AA. Mohammadali Jamalzadeh had been a longtime resident of Berlin dating from his time as a member of the Persian Committee set up by the Foreign Office during the First World War and a contributor to the journal *Kaveh*. Following *Kaveh*, Jamalzadeh published essays in Hossein Kazemzadeh's *Iranshahr*, as well as his own journal *Elm va Honar* (*Knowledge and Art*) from 1927 to 1928. Within this journal, Jamalzadeh called for the creation of a modern Iranian civilization through native Iranian methods, much like Japan had done, rather than through blind imitation of the West. In 1918, Jamalzadeh took on the responsibility of supervising incoming Iranian students in Germany. See Jamshid Behnam, "Zamīnehā-yi Feckri-yi Andishemāndān-i Irāni dar Berlin" ("The Intellectual Background of Iranian Intelligentsia in Berlin, 1915-1930"), *Iran Nameh* 16 (1998): 553–78; Tim Epkenhans, *Moral und Disziplin: Seyyed Hasan Taqizāde und die Konstruktion eines "progressiven Selbst," in der frühen iranischen Moderne* (*Ethics and Discipline: Seyyed Hasan Taqizadeh and the Construction of a "Progressive Self" in Early Modern Iran*) (Berlin: K. Schwartz, 2005), 152. For Germany's program of revolution during the First World War, see Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1967).

The Persian regime also believes that there is a danger of communist influence in Berlin due especially to its close proximity to the Soviet Union. While the number of Persian students in France is in excess of 1000, they are easier to monitor since they reside in boarding schools. A monitoring of their foreign correspondence is also possible. In Germany, however, students live more freely in apartments without any control. Therefore, many of them do not dedicate themselves seriously with their studies. This would, therefore, compel the Persian government to limit the number of students it sends to Germany. The Persian government does not know the benefits of the German universities, especially the technical universities. If the grievances were to be corrected, it would be possible for them to send more students to Germany.⁹

Understandably, the message was forwarded to the German embassies in Paris and Moscow. The Foreign Office then went on to request that the Berlin police proceed in similar fashion to the Paris police: by threatening the students so they leave the country on their own accord, enabling the German government to avoid public scorn for having forcefully deported foreign students.¹⁰ There was a clear coordinated effort amongst the German delegations in major European capitals with their legation in Tehran to assuage the worries of the Pahlavi regime about the potential radicalization of the youth abroad. The German government was very conscious of how it handled the activities of foreign students. Importantly, it was aware of how the French government responded to political disturbances. Moreover, the Foreign Office was careful to avoid public scorn in its handling of the Iranian students, especially when the future of the student outreach program was on the line.

At the same time, the Iranian government expected the students to stick to their studies. Reza Shah was concerned that students would lose

⁹Foreign Office Abteilung III to the German Envoy in Tehran, 7 May 1930, Berlin, RZ 207, R 78107, PA-AA. All translations are mine.

¹⁰Foreign Office Abteilung III to the German Ambassador in Paris, Hoesch, 18 June 1930, Berlin, RZ 207, R 78107, PA-AA.

their sense of Iranian patriotism and become intoxicated with Western ideas. Upon their departure for their studies in Germany, which were funded by the Iranian government, the students were required to sign a promise that they would adhere to all the orders of the Persian envoys in Berlin and Paris—a promise that the Iranian government now deemed to have been broken. It was on this basis that the Iranian envoy in Paris, Khan Ala, requested the deportation of Maleki and Hami, and that the German government prevent the distribution of communist pamphlets, though Khan Ala believed that no doubt they must have originated from Russia.¹¹

On the one hand, the Pahlavi regime had a clear expectation of the conduct, or role to be played, of Iranian students in Germany: they had to stick to their studies and nothing more. The period of study abroad would pay dividends in technical knowledge that would be not only brought back by these students, who would assume prominent positions in government and industry, but also nurtured in the education of future generations that would look to Iran instead of abroad for the continuation of their studies. On the other hand, foreign students—not just from Iran, but also from countries such as Turkey, Japan, Egypt, Argentina, and Brazil—had a clear role to play in facilitating the expansion of German academic networks, and as a by-product, ensuring favorable grounds for the forging of commercial and political ties due to the presence of Germanophiles in key positions. Thus, the activities of young Iranians beyond their studies threatened to derail the visions of both governments. As such, any disturbance, whether political or not, had to be dealt with.

In the case in question, after further investigation by the Berlin police, it became apparent that the accusation of communist activity as grounds for the deportation of Maleki and Hami was without evidence. Rather, the dispute surrounded personal grievances held by the two students against the Iranian delegate in Berlin (Mostafa Samii) and Jamalzadeh, for a case involving the suicide of their friend, Atai Hussain Gholi, who

¹¹German Embassy in Paris to Foreign Office Abteilung III, 27 June 1930, Paris, RZ 207, R 78107, PA-AA.

was in fact the second cousin of Maleki. According to Attaché Pirnahad and Legation Secretary Sheyhani, Atai Hussein Gholi, born in Tabriz on 21 October 1904, had requested that a particular letter be written by the legation regarding support for his studies. When such a letter was not accordingly provided, on 5 April 1930 at 2:30 p.m., Atai was found with a self-inflicted head wound and a pistol next to his body at one of the rooms in the Iranian Legation. A certain Professor Höllander bandaged his head and took him to a clinic. He died on the way.¹²

Interestingly, Khalil Maleki had been one of the targets of the German program of *Kulturpolitik*, having attended the German-Persian Technical College in Tehran. In 1927, he was sent to Germany with 109 other students bound for Europe as part of a program sponsored by the Iranian government. Upon arriving in Berlin, Maleki, along with 6 other fellow students, joined the Iranian Students' Union, headed by Taqi Erani and Morteza Alavi.¹³ Certain members of the union, which was composed mostly of young Iranians with leftist leanings, were initially against admitting these students, believing them to be simple "lackeys" of the Iranian government that sponsored them.¹⁴ However, these students' solidarity in connection with the suicide of their fellow countryman soon changed the minds of the naysayers.

Based on the lack of evidence of communist activity by the two students, the Foreign Office refused to carry out the request for deportation. Their refusal to do so was also based on their lack of trust in the capabilities of Mostafa Samii, whom they saw as "a young, inexperienced, and nervous man, who fears being made responsible for the publication of Farsi communist pamphlets in Germany."¹⁵ The Foreign Office also noted that the Iranian envoy in Paris, Khan Ala, was an extreme Francophile who sought to exploit the current situation in order to convince the

¹²Criminal Assistant Meyer, "Polizei Revier: Kriminal-Polizei-Berlin," 5 April 1930, Berlin, RZ 207, R 78107, PA-AA.

¹³Homa Katouzian, *Khalil Maleki: The Human Face of Iranian Socialism* (London: Oneworld, 2018), 6.

¹⁴Katouzian, *Khalil Maleki*, 7.

¹⁵Foreign Office Abteilung III to the German Ambassador in Paris, Hoesch, 18 June 1930, Berlin, RZ 207, R 78107, PA-AA.

government in Tehran to relocate its students from Berlin to either France or Belgium.¹⁶

This episode provides a glimpse into the political milieu of Berlin during the late 1920s and early 1930s, and the impact that Iranian students had on German foreign policy. First, it shows the competition between Germany and France over the recruitment of Iranian students. In this competition, Germany was by far the underdog due to the esteemed position the French language had amongst Iranian academics and the large contingent of Iranians continuing their education in France. Second, it shows the Pahlavi regime's expected code of conduct by Iranian students—namely, that they avoid political activities and stick to their studies. Third, the episode demonstrates the relative ease with which charges of communist activity could spur the Weimar Republic to take action against the supposed perpetrators. It was under these circumstances that the publication of *Peykar* aroused a new round of domestic and foreign antagonisms.

The first issue of *Peykar* was published on 15 February 1931, with the second a month later on 14 March 1931.¹⁷ The goal of the paper was as follows:

To expose the torturous and harsh penalties of despotism that have continued to this day since the Naser al-Din era [. . .] From outside of Iran, we will raise our voice through this revolutionary paper, and call on the Iranian people to join in resistance and struggle. The purpose of this revolutionary paper is to give voice to the protests and revolutionary sentiments of the Iranian people and to unite the splintered forces of the proletariat under the banner of revolution. The goal of this revolutionary paper is to bring to the attention of the progressive and freedom-loving newspapers and circles of Europe, the heart-wrenching cries of the imprisoned [. . .]¹⁸

¹⁶Foreign Office Abteilung III to the German Embassy in Paris, 2 July 1930, Berlin, RZ 207, R 78107, PA-AA.

¹⁷*Peykar*, 15 February 1931, 14 March 1931, RZ 207, R 78107, PA-AA. The title of the paper was originally mistranslated as *Bikār*, which in Persian means “unemployed.”

¹⁸*Peykar*, 15 February 1931.

The writers of *Peykar* were thus very aware of the social and political climate of interwar Berlin. They were aware that their denunciations against the monarchical establishment of Iran would be met with a sympathetic ear. The issues of *Peykar* themselves mention how the paper caused reverberations among the democratic and leftist-oriented papers of Germany, whose majority reported in detail the publication of *Peykar*. These included leftist papers such as *Berlin am Morgen*, *12 Uhr*, *Montag Morgen*, *Die Weltbühne*, and *Berliner Tribüne*.¹⁹

Moreover, the Berlin police's ensuing investigation revealed the young age of both the individuals involved with *Peykar* and those who denounced Reza Shah in the German press. They were a mix of Iranians and Germans who sought to channel the rebellious energy of interwar Berlin toward what they perceived as a quintessential despotic regime. The identified were the following:

- The publisher, Dr. Carl Wehner, thirty-four years old.
- The student Morteza Alavi, twenty-six years old.
- The editor of *Berlin am Morgen*, Martin Duszynski, thirty years old.
- The journalist Ernst Kiesewetter, thirty-three years old.

The oldest of the accused was the managing director (*Geschäftsführer*), Felix Wolf, who was sixty-one, and claimed to have no knowledge of what was being written, as he had no knowledge of Persian.²⁰

Immediately following *Peykar*'s publication, the new Iranian envoy in Berlin, Mohammadali Farzin, protested to the German government and used the threat of rescinding the student mission to Germany. Afterward, on 8 April 1931, Farzin wrote to the Foreign Office, hoping that appropriate action would be taken against the paper: "In fact, just to give a concrete example, Persia, whose centenarian friendship with Germany need not be further emphasized,

¹⁹Sebastian Beck of the Oriental Seminar to Fritz Grobba of the Foreign Office Abteilung III, 12 May 1931, Berlin, RZ 207, R 78107, PA-AA.

²⁰Dr. Hirschbruch, Beschluss (Decision), RZ 207, R 78110, PA-AA; Dr. Wilde of the Generalstaatsanwalt bei dem Landgericht I to the Prussian justice minister, 15 April 1831, Berlin, RZ 207, R 78107, PA-AA.

is currently entertaining hundreds of students in Germany and other European countries who could be distracted from their school assignments by the publication of this rebellious paper.”²¹ A few weeks later, in another letter, Farzin condemned the actions of individuals, such as Morteza Alavi, who “seduce young people that have been sent abroad by Persia to acquire the necessary technical knowledge for the development of their country.”²² Even more damning, according to Farzin, was that these individuals were being assisted in their propagandistic activities by non-Iranian agitators such as Dr. Wehner. Surely, Farzin proposed, the German government would not allow its “hospitable soil to become a field of activity for those Persians who are hostile to their homeland.”²³

Germany had, indeed, become a safe ground for many Iranian intellectuals that opposed the presiding government in Iran. Berlin, as a site for foreign opposition, had been used previously by the writers of the paper *Kaveh*, set up in 1916 by Hassan Taqizadeh under the auspices of the Foreign Office. While the German government had promoted these previous efforts, Iranian students themselves initiated the anti-government publications of the 1920s, much to the dissatisfaction of the Weimar Republic.²⁴ Morteza Alavi, a national economy student, had been tasked by the Iranian Communist Party at a congress in 1927 or 1928 to head its activities in Germany.²⁵

²¹Mohammadali Farzin to Fritz Grobba, 8 April 1931, Berlin, RZ 207, R 78107, PA-AA.

²²Iranian Legation in Berlin to the Foreign Office, 29 April 1931, Berlin, RZ 207, R 78107, PA-AA.

²³Iranian Legation in Berlin to the Foreign Office, 29 April 1931.

²⁴Another publication by Iranian students was *Nameh-e Farangistan (Letters from Europe)*, published from 1924 to 1925.

²⁵Nader Moradi, “Shemeh-ī az Dastan Tasis va Toghīf Nashriyeh Peykār dar Ālman” (“A Summary of the Foundation and Prohibition of the Journal *Peykar* in Germany”), *Noormag* 87 (2017): 262–75, reference on p. 262, www.noormags.ir/view/fa/articlepage/331694; Morteza Alavi to the Foreign Office, Abschrift zu III E 3. 1164, 30 May 1932, Berlin, RZ 207, R 78108, PA-AA. Morteza Alavi became interested in political activism following the Russian October Revolution. He became one of the leaders of the Iranian Communist Party among people such as Taqi Erani, Reza Radmanesh, and Iraj Eskandari. He was the brother of the Iranian writer Bozorg Alavi. See Morteza Alavi, “Morteza Alavi Dar Yek Mosāhebe-ye Se Nafari, 1927” (“Morteza Alavi in a Three-Way Interview, 1927”), interview by Daniel Martin, translated by Khosrow Shakeri, Brussels, 13 February 1927.

Peykar was to function as an official organ of the Iranian Communist Party. It was to be run by students studying abroad under the supervision of Alavi and Hedayat Sultanzadeh, and the publisher, Carl Wehner. Other students residing in Germany that were regular contributors to the paper included Ahmad Imami, Mohammad Purreza, and Ahmad Assadoff, as well as Dr. Morteza Yazdizadeh and Dr. Bahrami.²⁶

Thus, from its inception, *Peykar* was very much a student affair. As such, it put both the Pahlavi and Weimar governments in a compromising position given that both of their broader state goals depended on the sending and bringing of students to Germany. The gravity of the situation forced the Iranian government to search for other avenues to pressure the German government to act against the publication. In Egypt, Djevad Sineky, the Iranian emissary, was ordered to approach his German counterpart, Eberhard von Stohrer, the former director of the Press Department, about the matter and for his message to be relayed to Berlin. Sineky expressed worry about the future of German schools in Iran, which had been set up to foster students being sent to Germany, should the *Peykar* affair continue unresolved.²⁷ However, Stohrer felt compelled to point out that nothing could be done, since in Germany, “we have freedom of the press.”²⁸

In fact, the contrasting view on the inherent value of freedom of speech was a major sticking point in the dispute between the two governments. When kept up to date about the proceedings against *Peykar*, Reza Shah found it preposterous that the German government could be powerless

²⁶Moradi, “Shemeh-ī az Dastan,” 262; Alireza Ismaili, “Asnādi az Toghīf-i Ruznāmeḥā-yi Peykār va Nehzat dar Berlin (1309-1311),” (“Documents on the Suspension of the Newspapers Peykar and Nehzat in Berlin, 1930/31-32”), *Ganjineh Asnad* 29 and 30 (1998): 15–38, reference on p. 16, www.noormags.ir/view/fa/articlepage/92205; Reza Azari-Shahrrezaei, *Peykār dar Berlin: Doreh-ye Ruznāmeḥ-yi Peykār, Nashri-yi Hezb-i Communist-i Iran. Bahman 1301-Day 1311 (Peykar in Berlin: Duration of the Newspaper Peykar, a Publication of the Iranian Communist Party, February 1923-December 1932)* (Tehran: Shirarzeh-Ketab-i Ma, 2016/17), 17.

²⁷Eberhard von Stohrer from the German legation in Egypt to Hans Heinrich Dieckhoff, head of Foreign Office Abteilung III, 30 April 1931, Cairo, RZ 207, R 78107, PA-AA. The spelling of the Iranian emissary’s name as used in the document was kept for this article.

²⁸Stohrer to Dieckhoff, 30 April 1931.

in suppressing publications. Suspicion toward the German government became even stronger when it was pointed out that France had banned the import of *Peykar* into French territory.²⁹ Matters worsened even further when an article titled “The Emperor without Ancestry” by a German journalist was published in a Munich paper, detailing the shah’s humble origins and lack of education, and his rise to the country’s highest position.³⁰

By October 1931, the lack of action by the German government set off an anti-German campaign in the Iranian press. According to Blücher, the German envoy in Tehran, “they write that either the German government is an incapable government, one that cannot prevent slander against foreign countries, or it is ready to allow the reputation of other countries to be stepped on.”³¹

On 20 October 1931, in a follow-up telegram to the Foreign Office, Blücher reported that the shah, out of anger for the disparaging article in the Munich paper, had recalled the entire Iranian legation from Berlin. Blücher added:

The Foreign Minister confirmed this to me and added that the shah made this decree in a certain manner that no objection could be raised. For the shah is of the mindset that if he cannot protect his government from the press attacks in Germany, then he must at least recall his representatives. I voiced the severe disparity between the measures taken and their cause, and pointed out the implications such an abrupt act will have on German-Persian relations. I had the impression that my remarks were not lost on the foreign minister. He did not consider our relations to be broken, simply that Persia would not have representatives in Berlin for a while. In my opinion this was the despotic, arbitrary act of a hot-tempered shah. The minister did not object of course out of fear. He will now likely work

²⁹Foreign Office to the Prussian Ministry of the Interior, 20 August 1931, Berlin, RZ 207, R 78108, PA-AA.

³⁰Foreign Office memo, 17 October 1931, Berlin, RZ 207, R 78108, PA-AA.

³¹Blücher to Foreign Office Abteilung III, 19 October 1931, Tehran, RZ 207, R 78108, PA-AA.

to soften the effects of the measures [. . .] The press has already begun to calm down.³²

The Weimar government was understandably put in a difficult situation. It had to pursue its greater foreign policy goal of rehabilitating its image in the international arena. It feared international isolation of the type it experienced during the First World War. German officials and academics especially believed that sympathy for the French—due to the power of French cultural expansion—had been to the detriment of the German nation.³³ As such, through *Kulturpolitik* and the student outreach program, Germany sought to strengthen its relations with the non-European world.

Yet in trying to suppress political dissent by foreign nationals, the hands of the Foreign Office were tied by the Weimar constitution. At the same time, the Foreign Office faced fierce opposition from the provincial Prussian authorities who sought to protect their inhabitants from the arbitrary power of the federal government. The Prussian police rejected the Foreign Office's criticism of its lack of action, pointing to article 118 of the German constitution of 1919, which prevented censorship.³⁴ This division in ideology and power among the different levels of government was exemplified by the Prussian police's refusal to carry through with the Foreign Office's demands for Alavi's deportation. Following a review of Morteza Alavi's time in Germany, the police reported that since there was no evidence of political activity, there was no justified reason for his deportation.³⁵

The Iranian government, however, continued to press the issue, and eventually, a loophole was found. Article 103, *Majestätsbeleidigung* (Insult toward the Majesty), of the German penal code made it a

³²Blücher to Foreign Office Abteilung III, 20 October 1931, Tehran, RZ 207, R 78108, PA-AA.

³³General Konsul Leon Guttman, "Außenpolitik, Universität, Hochschulbehörde," 1928, RZ 507, R 64013, PA-AA.

³⁴Fr. Klausener of the Prussian Ministry of the Interior to the Foreign Office, 6 July 1931, Berlin, RZ 207, R 78108, PA-AA.

³⁵Report by the Berlin Police to the Prussian Ministry of the Interior, 12 June 1931, Berlin, RZ 207, R 78108, PA-AA.

criminal offense to publicly insult a foreign head of state. Key to the application of article 103, however, was that it had to be reciprocated by the other country. That is, since the Iranian sovereign was being protected against insults in Germany, so too must the German head of state be protected from insults in Iran.³⁶

During the proceedings against the publishers of *Peykar*, evidence was presented that Iran already had such a law, dating from 24 February 1908, in which foreign *salatin* were protected from public slander.³⁷ However, with the key word being *salatin*, the plural of *sultan*, the Prussian police refused to take action since Germany had no sultan, or even any monarch for that matter. The provincial police's refusal to submit to increasing pressure from the Foreign Office, and their insistence in following the full letter of the law, induced the Iranian government to amend its 1908 code to include the "sovereign" heads of state, thus incorporating presidents and other heads of republican states into its purview. The new law was promulgated in early May 1931.³⁸

With the condition of reciprocity fulfilled, and the Foreign Office's constant pressuring about the detrimental effects of the inflammatory *Peykar* to German interests, the police confiscated the existing issues of the paper and banned its further publication. The police's actions at the insistence of the Foreign Office, however, immediately drew the attention of the Berlin press.

In its 17 May 1931 issue, *Montag Morgen* published an article titled "The Offended Shah." The piece denounced the police actions based on article 103, and found it astounding that a republican judiciary, based on the instigation of the Foreign Office, would take away the freedom of speech of a few Iranian "emigrants" simply for the fostering of German-Iranian relations.³⁹

³⁶"Der Beleidigte Schah" ("The Offended Shah"), *Berliner Morgenpost*, 19 February 1932, RZ 207, R 78110, 24 March 1932, PA-AA.

³⁷Judicial clerk, 24 March 1932, RZ 207, R 78110, PA-AA.

³⁸"Der Beleidigte Schah" ("The Offended Shah"), *Berliner Tageblatt*, 19 February 1932, RZ 207, R 78110, PA-AA; Judicial clerk, 24 March 1932.

³⁹"Der Beleidigte Schah" ("The Offended Shah"), *Montag Morgen*, 17 May 1931, RZ 207, R 78107, PA-AA.

At the time, however, the confiscation of existing issues of *Peykar* and ban on its publication were about as far as the police were willing to go. The police resisted demands made by the Foreign Office for Alavi's deportation. The Prussian Ministry of the Interior even went as far as conferring onto Alavi asylum status, much to the ire of both the Foreign Office and the Iranian government.

On 18 August 1931, the Foreign Office wrote to Police President Albert Grzesinski, stating that Alavi was not, as he claimed, "a socialist," but in fact a communist and part of the same group that fought the Iranian government in cooperation with the Soviet Union in 1919 in northern Iran.⁴⁰ The journal *Peykar*, moreover, was being published and sent abroad through the Karl-Liebknecht-Haus, the headquarters of the German Communist Party.⁴¹

The fact that Alavi was deemed to be communist and not a socialist was a major point of emphasis in the governmental correspondence in Germany at the time. The Weimar Republic was constantly at odds with the extreme leftist political elements in Germany at the time, encapsulated by the Communist Party. The division that existed was to such a degree that the republic at times depended upon extreme right-wing groups, such as the *Freikorps* (Free Corps) to crush leftist uprisings and any attempts at a communist seizure of power.⁴² Thus, the charge that Morteza Alavi, and other leftist Iranian students for that matter, were in fact communists was a rather serious charge, one that would emphasize the revolutionary and insurrectionist nature of their ambitions and collective goal.

The presence of foreign revolutionary groups was highly inopportune for a government that sought to stabilize the economy following the

⁴⁰Foreign Office Abteilung III to Police President Grzesinski, 18 August 1931, Berlin, RZ 207, R 78108, PA-AA.

⁴¹Foreign Office to Grzesinski, 18 August 1931.

⁴²Mary Fulbrook, *History of Germany 1918-2000: The Divided Nation* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 23, 27. The communists in Germany viewed the Weimar Republic as the "enemy of the working class" and a government that was in league with the counterrevolutionary forces. See William Carr, *A History of Germany 1815-2000* (New York: Hodder Arnold, 1991), 245.

market crash of 1929 and faced mounting attacks from both communists and fascists. The significance of foreign markets and contracts for industrial projects was another factor that was continuously emphasized by the Foreign Office. In an urgent message to the Prussian minister of the interior, Dr. Carl Severing, the Foreign Office on 28 August 1931 wrote that since Alavi was, in fact, “a communist and middleman for a local subversive organization,” his actions were a clear abuse of the asylum rights that had been granted to him.⁴³ Furthermore, the message to Severing highlighted the importance of industrial contract negotiations that had been jeopardized. In addition, the letter stated that Alavi’s “activities have greatly impaired our relationship with Persia. This is clear from the persistent complaints of the Persian Government about our tolerance of the activities of Alavi in Germany [. . .] This Persian resentment will adversely influence what until now have been favourable German-Persian economic relations.”⁴⁴

The case of *Peykar* and the activities of Iranian students during the Weimar Republic underscore the governmental divisions that existed in Germany. Moreover, they draw attention to the importance of student programs and their possible negative implications for Germany’s broader postwar political and economic goals.

Indeed, on 12 September 1931, a report from Schulenburg, the previous German envoy in Tehran, noted that in the same year, the Iranian government was sending 79 students to Europe for study, the overwhelming number of whom were going to France, and 18 of whom would be going to England. None, however, were being sent to Germany that year. The reason, he believed, was that the Iranian government was “afraid students could be influenced by communism. Thus, it must be taken into consideration to dispel the Persian government’s fears for the following year.”⁴⁵

⁴³Foreign Affairs Minister Julius Curtius to Prussian Interior Minister Carl Severing, 28 August 1931, Berlin, RZ 207, R 78108, PA-AA.

⁴⁴Curtius to Severing, 28 August 1931.

⁴⁵Schulenburg to the Foreign Office, 12 September 1931, Tehran, RZ 207, R 78108, PA-AA.

The gravity of the situation, however, seems to have had its effect on the Prussian Ministry of the Interior. Alavi's residency visa was not renewed, and he was forced to depart from Prussia on his own accord, much to the satisfaction of the Foreign Office.⁴⁶ Moreover, the other members of *Peykar* were charged, and trial proceedings were set to begin in early 1932.

On 6 February 1932, the criminal chamber of the *Landgericht* (Regional Court) found that the individuals involved had been charged as follows: "I. Dr. Wehner acting in concert with Duszynski, and further Kiesewetter in one case, were guilty of having insulted the ruler of a state not belonging to the German Reich, namely the shah of Iran, publicly through the press. II. Morteza Alavi knowingly assisted the accused Dr. Wehner in committing the act of offence. III. Dr. Wehner and Felix Wolf acted jointly in another independent action in publishing a periodical that went against Reich press laws."⁴⁷

The issue once again became the term *salatin* (plural of *sultan*), which had been used in the original Iranian penal code of 1908. Since the new code of May 1931, passed by the Iranian parliament, had come only after five issues of *Peykar* had already been published, the new law would be applicable from only the sixth issue onward.⁴⁸ The state prosecution, therefore, set out to prove that *salatin* was not only applicable to a Muslim ruler, which had been the definition given by Sebastian Beck of the Oriental Seminar in Berlin, but also meant *Machthaber*—that is, "ruler/sovereign" or "a person in power." In this sense, it should also apply to the president of Germany, who at the time was Paul von Hindenburg, thus fulfilling the reciprocity clause of article 103 of the German penal code.⁴⁹

⁴⁶Report by Fritz Grobba of the Foreign Office Abteilung III, 26 October 1931, Berlin, RZ 207, R 78109, PA-AA. Following his deportation from Germany, Alavi sought refuge in the Soviet Union. After some time, he was accused of being a German spy and killed. See Alavi, "Morteza Alavi."

⁴⁷Dr. Hirschbruch, Beschluss (Decision).

⁴⁸K, "Prozess gegen Persische Revolutionäre" ("Process against Persian Revolutionaries"), *Germania*, 5 April 1932, RZ 207, R 78111, PA-AA.

⁴⁹Judicial clerk, *Vermerk (Memorandum), Für die Richtigkeit der Abschrift*, RZ 207, R 78110, PA-AA.

To back its claim, the prosecution employed four expert opinions from Iran about the broader meaning of the term *sultan*. The four explanations were written by a long-serving undersecretary in the Ministry of Justice and, at the time, legal adviser in the National Bank, Mostafa Adl; another undersecretary in the Ministry of Justice, Dr. Ahmad Matin Daftari; the head of the criminal chamber of the high court, Mohamad Reza Vodjdani; and the adviser in the criminal chamber of the high court, Forouhar.⁵⁰

Mostafa Adl, in his definition, stated that *salatin* could be interpreted in three ways. In one sense, it could be applied to anyone who has sovereignty (*souveraineté*) within a country, be it a king, an emperor, or the head of a republic. Secondly, it could be used specifically to refer to one existing king in a specific country. Thirdly, much like the term *shah* was associated with the king of Iran and the term *mikado* referred to the emperor of Japan, so too could *sultan* be used in specific reference to the Ottoman emperor. Given its varied applicability, for Mostafa Adl, the term *salatin* clearly could not have any meaning other than “head of state” (*chef d’État*).⁵¹

Dr. Ahmad Matin Daftari was much more practical in defining the use of *salatin* in the Iranian penal code. For him, the term *sultan* was an Arabic word that referred to the governing body, which was formed by the constitution of each respective nation, whether it be an emperor, *padeshah*, amir, grand duke, and so on. During the time of the Constitutional Revolution and the passing of the penal code in 1908, the individuals involved in the movement lacked equivalent native terms for the constitutional ideas that they had been influenced by from abroad. Thus, the term *salatin* was used to refer to *chef d’État*.⁵²

Both Vodjdani and Forouhar had similar definitions to Mostafa Adl and Daftari. Vodjdani added that since Iran also had relations with republican countries, such as France, at the time of the penal code’s

⁵⁰German Envoy in Tehran Blücher to the Foreign Office, 23 April 1932, Tehran, RZ 207, R 78111, PA-AA.

⁵¹Blücher to the Foreign Office, 23 April 1932, Tehran, RZ 207, R 78111, PA-AA.

⁵²Blücher to Foreign Office, 23 April 1932.

promulgation, it would be ridiculous to suggest that these nations were excluded from the law in question. Meanwhile, Forouhar pointed out that the only country at the time that employed the term *sultan* and with which Iran had signed treaties was the Ottoman Empire. Logically, the plural *salatin* could only have been used to refer to all heads of state.⁵³

The Foreign Office employed all tools at its disposal to win a favorable verdict. The submission of expert opinion from abroad in a German judicial case highlights the significance of Iranian student publications in threatening German and Iranian state goals. Moreover, state laws were reformulated to prevent the publication of further inflammatory materials, as evidenced from the May 1931 revision to the Iranian penal code. As well, alongside expert Iranian opinions, the Foreign Office reached out to experts in oriental studies within Germany itself, such as the orientalist Professor Moritz, who traced the origin of the word *sultan* back to the eighth century BC when it was used in the form *schiltanu* by an Assyrian king to refer to the ruler of Egypt,⁵⁴ thus removing its Islamic connotation.

The irony of the case, in which a republican state was trying to protect a foreign monarch from public offence, was not lost on the German press. One article titled “Is Hindenburg a Sultan?” stated: “Considering that German law knows no preferential treatment of the Reich President, no concept of offence toward a majesty, according to this legal construction, the sovereign of a foreign state is better protected in Germany than the German President himself.”⁵⁵

In another article, titled “The Triumph of the Persian Shah?” in the Berlin paper *Tagebuch*, author C. Z. Klötzel wrote:

We are oddly enough no longer living in a republic. There now presides in Wilhelmstrasse an order that presents a lion with

⁵³Blücher to Foreign Office, 23 April 1932.

⁵⁴Report by Professor Moritz, 28 June 1932, RZ 207, R 78111, PA-AA. Moritz traces transference of the term *sultan* into Arabic and the Koran and its adoption by the Abbasid Caliph Mansur in the eighth century AD. For the latter fact, he cites Tabari as his source.

⁵⁵“Ist Hindenburg ein Sultan?” (“Is Hindenburg a Sultan?”), *Vossische Zeitung*, 18 February 1932, RZ 207, R 78110, PA-AA.

a saber. The Foreign Office has achieved a victory for the Persian shah through directing its criminal code and police against the journal *Peykar*, and against Alavi who has lived in Germany since 1923. One, however, must be fair: it is not easy for the Foreign Office to deal with Reza Shah. This is a man that one must cautiously avoid. This is a man that has soared from a simple soldier to an emperor (*Kaiser*), and this career is only possible when one throws everything that stands in his way to the ground with ironclad determination [. . .] It is nonsense to let our notions of a modern state and government principles be overtaken by an Eastern country that still finds itself in Islamic medievalism.⁵⁶

Klötzel also pointed out that a paper could be banned only if it disturbed public order. *Peykar*, however, was in Persian, and could not be read by anyone other than Iranians and a few academics at the Oriental Seminar. He bemoaned that “When all an ambassador or an envoy has to do to ban a paper is to walk into the Foreign Office with a complaint, so would the ‘Triumph of the Persian Shah,’ be the final destruction of the remaining press freedoms.”⁵⁷

While the vast majority of newspapers were critical of the Foreign Office for what they perceived as bowing to a foreign ruler and especially for infringing on the rights of Iranian students to freedom of the press, some papers became critical of the students’ activities.

On 10 April 1932, the *Düsseldorfer Zeitung* published an article that lamented the lack of action taken by the German government against “emigrants” that abused the hospitality provided to them:

Emigrants who leave their fatherland for political reasons misuse their right to hospitality in their resident country to fight their own far away land. The Italians, who live in France and see Mussolini

⁵⁶C. Z. Klötzel, “Kommt im Triumph der Perser Schah?” (“The Triumph of the Persian Shah?”), *Tagebuch*, 31 October 1931, RZ 207, R 78110, PA-AA. Wilhelmstrasse refers to a street in Berlin where many of the governmental buildings were located.

⁵⁷Klötzel, “Kommt im Triumph.” Incidentally, Klötzel would find himself in hot water with the Iranian government and the Foreign Office for having written this article.

as an enemy, are astutely observed by the French government, to prevent the slightest damage to the relations between Paris and Rome. The parliament and the people see this as a given. Only we Germans have to be the exception, whose asylum laws for refugees enable the continuation of their subversive activities against their native government [. . .] Our diplomats in Wilhelmstrasse are in the complete right to assert that the commercial relations of Germany with Persia are more important than the asylum rights of a bunch of Persian students.⁵⁸

German businesses were, indeed, afraid of their weakening position in Iran and had been pressuring the Foreign Office to settle the matter as quickly as possible. In a letter noted as “Strictly Confidential,” the Reich Association of German Industry, which included companies such as Krupp, spoke of the necessity of preserving good relations with Iran in the interest of German exports. Student experience was deemed to be crucial to the spread of German influence, and as a by-product, German business. Due to the “Bolshevik” activities of Iranian students in Berlin, the report continued, the Iranian government looked to send its students to Paris and London—cities free from such radical tendencies—much to the disadvantage of German interests. The Reich Association of German Industry thus called on all companies with an interest in Iran to support the Iranian legation in its demands against student “revolutionaries.”⁵⁹ Further reports came from the German envoy in Iran about the dismissal of two Germans working in the armoury, despite their outstanding work. Nine more would be dismissed in a matter of months.⁶⁰ Another report indicated that due to the *Peykar* affair, a commission worth 100,000 RM was threatened and that twenty-three Germans had been dismissed from the National Bank. As a result of the destabilized situation and lack of a speedy and effective

⁵⁸“Die Klage des Schah” (“The Lawsuit by the Shah”), *Düsseldorfer Zeitung*, 10 April 1932, RZ 207, R 78111, PA-AA.

⁵⁹Herrn von Düring beim Reichsverband der Deutschen Industrie (The Reich Association of German Industry), Berlin, RZ 207, R 78108, PA-AA.

⁶⁰Blücher to the Foreign Office, 29 April 1932 and 9 June 1932, Tehran, RZ 207, R 78111, PA-AA.

solution, the German envoy reported that other Germans, fearing a similar fate, planned to call on Hitler's intervention.⁶¹

With the growing power of national socialism, the tone of the press began to change. An interesting article from *Der Angriff* (*The Attack*) from 4 July 1932, titled "Jewish Propaganda Destroys Germany's Foreign Relations," pointed to Germany and Iran's shared racial background, and the detestable attacks on Reza Shah's strong leadership by the German press:

For years since the war, Germany and Persia have had the most congenial relations and developing commercial relations. These relations were strengthened with the coming to the throne of Reza Khan in 1922, who comes from a military background and from the northern province of Mazandaran where to this day the Nordic blood of the ancient Persians, our racial relatives, is strong. He kicked the hedonistic Qajars, who had blown all the nation's money in Paris, out of the house. He created a modern army, a well-run administration, and revived a strong economy. What is simply interesting and absolutely pioneering, is [Reza Shah] rescuing his country from exploitation and foreign monopoly over trade. The new shah is without doubt a great figure in the history of Iran. He understands the importance of holding back English and Russian influence in the country while having good relations with them, and in German help and German advisors gaining a purely objective partner [. . .] Since the unfolding of the Jewish press, most of all the *Berliner Tageblatt*, a hate campaign has been going on against the shah who has been an honest ruler simply for defending himself against Jewish criminal delinquents.⁶²

In the end, on 4 April 1932 at two in the afternoon, the verdict for the first court case for insult against a monarch (*Majestätsbeleidigungprozeß*) in

⁶¹Industrie- und Handelskammer zu Halle to the Foreign Office, 14 June 1932, Halle (Saale), RZ 207, R 78111, PA-AA; Blücher to Foreign Office, 9 June 1932.

⁶²Dr. v. L., "Jüdische Hetze stört Deutsche Auslandsbeziehungen" ("Jewish Propaganda Destroys Germany's Foreign Relations"), *Der Angriff*, 4 July 1932, RZ 207, R 78111, PA-AA. The year of Reza Shah coming to the throne was actually 1925.

the German republic was pronounced. All the defendants were acquitted due to the failure of the prosecution to prove to the court that reciprocity had been established in Iran. The court found that only issues six and onward could be questioned in the trial since only at the time of their publication had the new penal code in Iran been passed, amending the 1908 penal code.⁶³ However, issues six and onward did not contain anything that could be considered insulting to the shah. Consequently, Dr. Wehner and Felix Wolf were charged only 60 RM for violating the press law by having continued to publish *Peykar* despite the ban.⁶⁴ Following an appeal by the prosecution, the original decision was largely upheld with the punishment for Dr. Wehner being increased to six weeks in detention instead of the two months requested by the prosecution.⁶⁵

By the summer of 1932, the Iranian government had largely calmed down, with the German government having addressed other grievances held by the Iranian government against its treatment in the German press.⁶⁶ The *Peykar* trial highlights the sensitivity of the Pahlavi regime toward its depiction in the West. It shows the divisions and contradictions that existed within the newly founded Weimar Republic. It also shows Berlin as a site where Iranian students became participants in the convoluted and contentious political atmosphere of interwar Germany. Most importantly, the episode demonstrates state perceptions of youth as vessels of state doctrines—youth that are to be molded for the attainment of particular futures guided by governmental programs such as student missions abroad, the expansion of academic institutions, or the instilling of patriotism through various youth organizations. These futures, though, are never

⁶³“Freispruch im Persien-Prozess” (“Acquittal in the Persian Case”), *Berliner Tageblatt*, 4 April 1932, RZ 207, R 78111, PA-AA; K, “Prozess gegen Persische Revolutionäre.”

⁶⁴“Verbürgte Gegenseitigkeit” (“Guaranteed Reciprocity”), *Vossische Zeitung*, 5 April 1932, RZ 207, R 78111, PA-AA; K, “Prozess gegen Persische Revolutionäre.”

⁶⁵*Aufzeichnung* (Foreign Office outline of trial proceedings), 2 July 1932, RZ 207, R 78111, PA-AA.

⁶⁶These included an article published in a Munich magazine by a German named Leo Matthias and the publication of the successor to *Peykar*, titled *Nehzat*. A detailed discussion of these two publications is beyond the scope of the present article.

guaranteed. They are negotiated, altered, and contested by youth who display their own agency as history-making actors and the heirs to a multitude of possible futures.