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The Soviet Union and the Tudeh during and after the Iranian revolution

The 1978 revolution in Iran came as a surprise for the Soviet leadership. Even more surprising were the forces that led it. Soviet experts underestimated the Shi'a clergy that turned out to be the main driving force behind the revolution. Among the things brought by the early days of the revolution was political freedom. This included a lift on all bans on the activities of political parties. For the Soviet Union, it meant that the People's Party of Iran (the Tudeh), its local communist ally, had a chance to legally participate in the political life of Iran for the first time in 30 years.

This article looks at the relations between the Tudeh and the Soviet Union in the volatile period encompassing the revolution. An important part of the research is dedicated to assessing Soviet expectations with regard to the revolution itself, and Moscow's wish to see it transform into 'a truly progressive' movement with the Tudeh taking the leading role. As communication between the Tudeh and the Soviet Union was the responsibility of the Central Committee of the Communist Party's International Department and of the KGB, this research analyses these institutions strategy toward Iran. It looks at how their perceptions and their relation with the Tudeh evolved until the mid-1980s. By that time, the left in Iran had long been crushed by the new Islamic regime. Yet, many Soviet experts continued to praise the Iranian revolution as an example of anti-imperialist struggle.