How did East Germany’s Media represent Iran between 1949 and 1989?

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79,761 words
Abbreviations

A short list of some frequently used abbreviations:

ADN  Allgemeiner Deutscher Nachrichtendienst
AFP  L’Agence France-Presse
AP  Associated Press
DPA  Deutsche Presseagentur
FRG  Federal Republic of Germany
GDR  German Democratic Republic
SED  Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of Germany)
SNB  Sowjetisches Nachrichtenbüro (Soviet News Bureau)
SMAD  Sowjetische Militäramnistration in Deutschland (Soviet Military Administration in Germany)
UP  United Press
UPI  United Press International
USSR  Union of Socialist Soviet Republics

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Abstract

This thesis examines how the press of the erstwhile German Democratic Republic represented Iran in the years from 1949 – the year of the GDR’s formation – until 1989, the last complete year before its demise on 3 October 1990. The study focuses on key events in Iranian history such as the overthrow of the Mossadegh government in 1953, the White Revolution, the Islamic Revolution of 1979, and the Iran-Iraq war.

It will be shown that although news and articles were based on selected facts, they still presented a picture of Iran that was at best distorted, the distortions and misrepresentations amounting to what could be described as 'factual fiction'. Furthermore, clear evidence will be provided that economical and political relations with Iran were a primary concern of the GDR’s leadership, and thus also of the GDR’s press and have therefore dominated the reporting on Iran. Whatever ideological concerns there may have been, they were hardly ever allowed to get in the way of amicable relations with the Shah or later with the Islamic Republic. Only in periods where the two countries enjoyed less amicable or poor relations, was the press free to critically report events in Iran and to openly support the cause of the SED’s communist Iranian sister party, the Tudeh.

Despite East Germany’s diametric ideological environment and despite the fundamentally different role that the GDR’s political system had assigned to the press and to journalism, East Germany’s press was as reliant on the input of the global news agencies as any Western media. The at times almost complete reliance on Western news agencies as sources for news on Iran challenged more than just the hermeneutic hegemony the SED and the GDR’s press wanted to establish. After all, which news and information were made available by the news agencies to the media in both East and West was primarily determined by the business interests of said agencies.

The study makes a contribution to three fields: Modern Iranian history, (East-) German history and media studies. The most valid findings were certainly made in the latter.
Declaration

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Introduction

In the run-up to the American and British led attack on Iraq in March 2003, the British media relentlessly made the case for war. Journalists from all points along the political spectrum, some of whom were well regarded for their sceptical approaches to big power politics, seemed to have bought into the propaganda of the Bush- and Blair administrations, which portrayed Saddam Hussein as a bloodthirsty maniac, a Hitler reincarnate, who had to be removed from power at almost any price in order to save the people of Iraq. While some right-wing writers and commentators made no secret of their old fashioned xenophobic, racist, and imperialist persuasions, the case of the 'interventionists' on the liberal left was certainly more complicated. For they claimed to advocate, for solely humanitarian reasons, military action against the 'evil dictator' who, allegedly, was in the business of slaughtering his own people and of stockpiling weapons of mass destruction. The case was, or at least appeared to be, a moral one. Among the most vocal British supporters of Western military action against the Ba'athist regime was the Independent newspaper's Johann Hari. In a comment published soon after the invasion on 11th April 2004, he summed his argument up as follows:

The message from pro-war lefties such as Christopher Hitchens, John Lloyd, Nick Cohen and myself has always been clear: that each person’s stance towards the war should be determined by listening to the Iraqi people. It is their country, and their children who might be blasted apart. It was up to them to decide whether this risk was justified. Unlike most of the anti-war movement, we actually spoke to some Iraqis and Kurds; we did not disregard the International Crisis Group Report; we understood that sometimes a short war is preferable to an endless tyranny.¹

Here, one of the key statements is “… by listening to the Iraqi people”. In this particular article he did not specify in any greater detail who precisely had spoken to him in the name of the Iraqi people. One can only assume that it was primarily Iraqi exiles, Kurds, and other opponents of people who for various reasons held their own particular grudges against the Iraqi Ba'athist regime. It was further to be assumed that

some of those he had spoken to might, in all likelihood, have belonged to a Western educated intelligentsia who subscribed to European ideals of democracy and the Enlightenment. Undoubtedly, they would have told him many stories of cruelty, of torture and injustice, of persecution and fear in a country that was, indeed, suffering under what appeared to be a brutal authoritarian regime. Yet, the stories might have been decidedly one-sided, not least because the voices heard stemmed only from a small group from within the broad and dissonant chorus which constituted the 'Iraqi people' in the final days of Saddam Hussein. These voices, nevertheless, were almost the only ones Johan Hari and others had chosen to listen to when they argued their case for war against Saddam Hussein.

They were also aware of the numerous intelligence reports, in retrospect some of them clearly fabricated, while others were, even at the time, contradictory in content, which further persuaded the supporters of military action that the time was ripe for a 'just war' against Saddam Hussein. What in retrospect might strike us as a rather selective perception of Iraq under Saddam Hussein, was, however, by no means unique to Johann Hari.

To his credit, he later reconsidered his support for the war, when the dubious quality of the intelligence provided by the US and the UK became as apparent as the suffering of the people during, and in the aftermath of, the invasion. He also began to question the motives and goals of the US led coalition; and he finally admitted that he had 'got it terribly wrong'.²

Military intervention, the forceful interference into the affairs of independent states on moral and humanitarian grounds, as was initially promoted by Johann Hari, is still a popular concept among Western liberals and leftists. The basic idea that, to slightly misquote Jim Morrison, ‘the West is best’ can here also be understood as ‘the West knows best’.³ It implies a sense of superiority that is by no means unique to liberal

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² ‘Johann Hari: I Was Wrong, Terribly Wrong - and the Evidence Should Have Been Clear All along - Johann Hari - Commentators - The Independent’<http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/johann-hari/johann-hari-i-was-wrong-terribly-wrong--and-the-evidence-should-have-been-clear-all-along-470638.html> [accessed 4 August 2012].

³ ‘The End’ by The Doors, opening- song for the motion-picture Apocalypse Now, 1979, directed by Francis Ford Coppola, first released on the Doors' album The Doors (1967,
and/or left-leaning intellectuals but, rather, a cultural mentality deeply ingrained into the psyche of Europeans and Americans, as one could easily argue with Edward Said. Following from this, one might then assume that a confident and unquestioning belief in the universal validity and superiority of one's own cultural values and persuasions results in an equally confident and unquestioning belief that one can legitimately intervene in someone else's affairs in order to impose one's own standards on them.

However, as Johan Hari came to recognise, governments hardly ever decide to send their forces into action against sovereign states on moral and humanitarian grounds alone but, rather, to secure some sort of advantage, be it economic, geo-strategic or for any other real or imagined benefit.

Why did I choose to introduce my research into the ways the media of the GDR represented Iran between 1949 and 1989, with the seemingly unrelated example of Johann Hari’s initial support for the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003? The decision had less to do with the issue at hand than with Hari’s profession. Within the context of my enquiry, I was compelled by the ways he reported and commented on the Iraq of Saddam Hussein. As I sat working on this thesis, the highly biased perception of events and developments in Iraq; the assumed ideological and moral high ground; the reliance on incomplete facts and narratives which had been filtered through a number of editorial processes before they reached Hari, brought to mind the situation in which editors and journalists in the GDR had found themselves. Like their Western colleagues, they hardly ever saw the full picture. Nor could they, for a variety of reasons which will be discussed in-depth in this study, realistically expect ever to see the full picture. Certainly, they were ideologically biased. This was to be expected from journalists working in a semi-totalitarian system founded on a particular and increasingly dogmatic variant of Marxist-Leninism, such as was the GDR; they were partisan and hardly ever endeavoured to deviate from the official party line.

The argument was rather eloquently and somewhat polemically made in Said’s Orientalism and has since been reiterated and elaborated upon manifold. It has also been disputed, often vehemently. One of the most significant, and entertaining, rebukes of Said’s theoretical construct is perhaps For The Lust of Knowing by Robert Irwin.
Partisanship was at the heart of East German journalism. The GDR’s media-system had been instigated by the Soviet army, and in the early years the Soviet army’s advisers were a presence on all levels of the emerging press that could not be ignored. However, the East German journalists were also professionals. Not so much perhaps in the very early years in which very often untrained Volksjournalisten (people’s journalists) were recruited from the working class, but certainly in later years when access to the profession would become much more regulated. The further the study developed, the more apparent it became how very dependent the editors and correspondents of the East German press were on a rather limited number of sources. Among these sources numbered members of the Iranian Marxist-Leninist party, the Tudeh, who had found exile in the GDR. They were the East German journalists’ equivalent to Hari's Iraqi friends. More significant, though, was the high dependence of the East German press on the output of news agencies and of the Western media. For various reasons, though certainly not for a lack of trying, the GDR was throughout her existence never capable of reaching the aspired state of total hermeneutic hegemony, a term introduced here to signify a state in which the dominant elites have total control over language, narratives and meanings. This understanding of hermeneutic hegemony borrows heavily from Gramsci’s concept of hegemony.\(^5\) This lack of hermeneutic hegemony was mostly due to the country’s enforced exposure to Western media and the alternative narratives provided by these, but even more so due to the heavy reliance on the input from the global news agencies. As this study shows, the simple fact was that any foreign reporting was to a high degree reliant on information provided by global news agencies on whose agendas and criteria for what constitutes ‘newsworthiness’ the GDR press had no influence at all. The dilemma the GDR faced was and is shared by all insular societies, while research by Boyd-Barrett, Terhanen or Shrivastava indicates that in their foreign reporting Western media, including major publicly owned corporations such as the BBC, also heavily rely\(^6\) on the services of the very same few global news agencies.

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6 In 1957 the two and NBC launched the news film agency Visnews. Reuters bought Visnews in 1985 and renamed it Reuters Television. The BBC still is one of Reuters Television’s major clients. See also: ‘BBC News | Services | Help | Sources’ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/help/sources.stm> [accessed 3 December 2014].
Ideology, foreign policy and western sources

At the outset of this thesis, the aim was to investigate three factors which it has been assumed impacted the East German media’s representation of Iran, namely: first the GDR's state ideology of Marxism-Leninism; second, East German foreign and economic policies; and third: the potent combination of a particularly East German brand of Orientalism in addition to a more widely prevalent European view of the Orient. Accordingly, the overarching research question; ‘How did East Germany’s media represent Iran between 1949 and 1989?’ could only be addressed via three initial sub questions:

1) How did the official state ideology of *Marxism-Leninism* and the relations between the press and the impact on writing on Iran in the East German press? Of particular interest here are the formal and informal relations the SED have maintained with Iran’s communist Tudeh Party.

2) To what extent was reporting on Iran informed by different aspects of *foreign and economic policy* of the GDR?  

3) What was the impact that *Orientalism*, as a set of cultural prejudices in a broadly Saidian sense, had on the reporting on Iran?

As the research progressed, however, and the quantity of analysed articles grew, the focus of the study shifted away from sub question three. Instead a fresh question arose which was the question of what actual information on events in Iran was available to the GDR press’ foreign desks and how that information was then processed and finally presented to the readership. To define this question more precisely: which sources were available to the press within the GDR? In what manner and under what circumstances was information gathered? And how did journalistic practice shape the final articles presented to the public? Although it might still be an interesting endeavour to research the role Eurocentric views of the ‘Oriental Other’

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7 These are in particular: a) the ideological aspects of East Germany's foreign policy; b) the diplomatic competition with West Germany; c) the primacy of the Soviet Union's foreign policy and the concerted foreign policy of the Warsaw Pact-states; e) economic relations with Iran in the Seventies and Eighties.
and a specifically German brand of orientalism might have played in constructing representations of Iran, it is therefore no longer a topic pursued in any considerable depth as a component of this thesis. Instead, sub question three addressed in this thesis has become:

What sources were available to the foreign desks of the media of the GDR and what use was made of the information gathered from these sources?

Some of the informants and news services utilised by the East German publications are surprising, to say the least. Not only did their sources include Western global news agencies – for example, Associated Press (AP), Agence France-Presse (AFP), UP/UPI and Reuters – but East German media also made use of the West German Deutsche Presseagentur (DPA) and a range of other West German media sources. Equally surprising is that, within a sample group totalling 527 individual articles, the Soviet agency TASS was credited as a primary source on only nine occasions. Given the close relationship between the Soviet agency TASS and the local agencies in the member states of the Soviet dominated Warsaw Pact, TASS was clearly the senior partner and one would have expected TASS to be East Germany’s main source for foreign news. Over the course of this research, this initial expectation was completely overturned; instead it became apparent that the reporting of foreign affairs within the GDR was hugely reliant on input supplied by Western news agencies. Even the ruling party’s flagship paper, Neues Deutschland, rarely had its own independent correspondents on location but rather carried the same material – predominantly gathered via Western partner-agencies, correspondents, local sources or international media and distributed by the state’s official Allgemeiner Deutscher Nachrichtendienst (ADN) – as that featured in Berliner Zeitung or Horizont. Moreover, because the original information can often be traced back to the same small handful of truly global news agencies, it has been possible to see that the reported facts and events

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9 A good analysis of the special relationship between ADN and TASS is Minholz' and Stirnberg’s authoritative study of East Germany’s state run news agency ADN: Michael Minholz and Uwe Stirnberg, *Der Allgemeine Deutsche Nachrichtendienst (ADN) : gute Nachrichten für die SED* (München; New Providence: Saur, 1995). Anke Fiedler also investigates ADN’s role as one of the three East German ‘Leitmedien’ (leading media), the other two being Neues Deutschland and the television programme Aktuelle Kamera: Anke Fiedler, *Medienlenkung in der DDR* (Wien; Köln; Weimar: Böhler Verlag, 2014)
mostly mirrored what could be read in the Western press. Points of view, however, and the interpretation of events and developments, often differed remarkably from contemporary presentations in West German media. A good example of how the East German media used Western television footage to polemically engage with West German narratives and to provide contrasting viewpoints to these is the infamous ‘der Schwarze Kanal’. Karl-Eduard von Schnitzler, the programme’s editor and anchorman, did not restrict his activities to the Schwarze Kanal either. He also frequently worked as a political commentator for the news programme ‘Aktuelle Kamera’, authored articles for the press, wrote books and filmed documentaries.  

Given that the national narrative of the GDR was deliberately based on the official ideology of Marxism-Leninism\(^\text{11}\), one could expect differences in the reading of international events. On this point, however, what this thesis will explore is whether ideology alone really explained the particular angle taken regarding Iran - the interpretations of events and the representations of the country’s culture, history and economy - in the GDR’s press or whether there were other hitherto unrecognised factors involved.

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Articles on Iran based on material acquired from news agencies and/or Western media

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<td>West-Germany</td>
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<td>TASS</td>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UPI (former UPI)</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARS</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REUTER</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UP (became UPI on 24 May 1958)</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
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<td>DDP</td>
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</table>

**Total** 366

**No sources provided / own correspondents** 161

**Number of articles analysed** 527

*Table 1: GDR press on Iran 1949 - 1989, sources*

Based on preliminary findings in the first stage of this research, an assumption behind this thesis became that despite the declared strategy of the ruling SED, which was to monopolise and tightly control the GDR’s media in an attempt to compete against Western narratives and establish hermeneutic hegemony, the GDR’s media remained integrated within the global media system that had been emerging since the late 19th Century and that was — and still is — dominated by a small cluster of international news- and media corporations. Consequently, in their foreign reporting,
the GDR’s media remained, to a considerable degree, permanently reliant on the input of Western news agencies and other Western media sources. This study will also show that the GDR’s press could never escape from competition against alternative narratives presented by West-German radio and television, both of which became increasingly available to the GDR’s population throughout the forty year-lifespan of the East German state. In the last decade of the GDR’s existence, the SED reached a point where they had ostensibly given up the fight for the control of the viewing habits of East Germans and grudgingly accepted that, with the exception of a small region in the country's Southeast, the viewing of West German TV had become a normal part of life for a majority. The problem which the ready availability of Western media and their narratives posed to the GDR's press should not be underestimated. From the analysis of articles it becomes clear that one of the strategies developed to deal with this problem was to simply acknowledge that readers had access to West German television and, if deemed necessary, to make explicit as well as implicit references to reports and programmes broadcast by their neighbour. Furthermore, at least in the case of the press' reporting on Iran, West German media were referenced as sources for articles, often, it seems, to lend the articles additional credibility.

The reliance by the press within the GDR, on the services of the domestic ADN and of the international news agencies, on the input from a small number of their own correspondents and on intelligence gathered from other foreign press releases, meant that the availability of information on Iranian current events was sorely limited. Also, the little which was available was often taken out of context or might only highlight one particular and limited aspect of far more complex events. To understand what occurred, special attention has to be paid to the business and journalistic practices involved. Most of the major global news agencies were (and are) commercial enterprises,\textsuperscript{12} while others such as the French AFP were also part-funded or co-owned by their respective governments.\textsuperscript{13} While all the global news agencies subscribed to a set of core values and principles which can be summed up as ‘integrity, independence

and freedom from bias at all time',

they were also in the business of selling information, as they are now. Business interests therefore influence decision-making in terms of what constitutes ‘valuable’ news and what is deprioritised or ignored; to survive western news agencies must focus on news that sells. News agency editors need to know what their customers expect, what they find interesting or irrelevant and ultimately what news is it that the customers will pay for. To make matters more complicated, the editors of the media they supply must in turn anticipate as accurately as possible the expectations of their own specific audiences. Anticipation of customer wishes and expectations, common journalistic practice, briefings for correspondents, ideological and cultural backgrounds – all these factors play a role in deciding what constitutes news and what not, and also determine how the news is eventually interpreted and presented. Finally, the presentation of news in the media is as much dictated by the technical requirements of the medium as by common journalistic practices. The impact of both these elements upon the GDR’s press reporting on Iran will be discussed in greater detail in later chapters.

Given the central position of the global news agencies in the international media system, it is surprising how under-researched the field has been. The most authoritative scholarly studies of news agencies have been undertaken by Oliver Boyd Barrett and Terhi Rantanen while K.M. Shrivastava has built on their work in his assessment of the role of the news agencies in the age of the Internet concluding that new communications technologies have paved the way for a democratisation – albeit superficial – of access to information. Because of the scarcity of relevant literature on news agencies, most of the chapter on news agencies further below has been primarily based on Boyd-Barrett’s, Rantanen’s and Shrivastava’s work. This study does, however, add additional research in this area including interviews with various journalists and with a representative of the West-German news agency DPA.

The aim of this study is to investigate the technical, professional, political and ideological frameworks in which the East German print media operated. In the

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14 These are stated in Reuter’s ‘Trust Principles’. Similar or identical principles are explicitly put forward by other global agencies. K.M. Shrivastava offers some interesting insights into the past and present values, codes of conduct and business ethics of the leading global news agencies: K.M. Shrivastava, News Agencies: from Pigeon to Internet (Elgin: New Dawn Press, 2007)
context of this study, the term GDR media is – unless explicitly stated otherwise –
used as a synonym specifically for the printed press of the GDR.

In my approach I apply an intra-disciplinary methodological framework that
borrows from the tool kit of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as it was developed
and applied by Fairclough\textsuperscript{15} and van Dijk\textsuperscript{16}. I was particularly inspired, though, by
Ruth Wodak’s Discourse Historical Approach which she applied to a study of Austria.
Her study took into consideration the context supplied by politics, economics,
ideological factors and foreign relations, then sought to understand how these were
reflected in selected textual sources. Because of the peculiarities of the East German
situation as one half of a divided nation, Ruth Wodak’s study of the discursive
construction of national identity\textsuperscript{17} offered helpful clues as to how to understand some
underlying and less ostensible processes in both East Germany’s open and hidden
discourses. Although Wodak’s team studied changing and adapting narratives of
national identity in Austria, the similarities with the post war- situation in East (and
West) Germany are, despite some obvious differences, striking. Like both parts of
Germany, Austria had to deal with the trauma of total defeat in the war, with the
subsequent occupation and with the need to accept the fact that a sizeable portion of
its population had been willingly involved in genocide on an industrial scale\textsuperscript{18}. Unlike
West Germany, where responsibility for the crimes of Nazism were undisputed and
the process of dealing with the past was a public and very painful process
consequently becoming an essential part of the national narrative, both Austria and
the GDR pursued a strategy which tended to portray their respective nations as
victims of Nazism rather than as collaborators and perpetrators. Austria could provide
an at least superficial justification for this claim due to the fact that the country had
been the first to be occupied by Nazi Germany and therefore unification with the
Third Reich was forced upon them.\textsuperscript{19} The case for East Germany, however, was far

\textsuperscript{15} Norman Fairclough, Media Discourse (London: Arnold, 2001).
\textsuperscript{17} Ruth Wodak and others, The Discursive Construction of National Identity, 2nd edn
\textsuperscript{18} Wodak and others, pp. 4–5.
\textsuperscript{19} Wodak and others, pp. 60–62.
more difficult to make.

The discourses engaged with also include the history of Iran and the GDR in particular as well as, more generally, the Cold War context. Furthermore, the research endeavours to contribute to the field of media studies, in that it investigates, albeit from an unusual angle, the interdependence of the media in a rapidly globalising world, in which those who gather, possess, interpret and distribute information determine our perceptions and actions.

What made the case of East Germany particularly interesting in this regard was the country's enforced openness to information in the native German language from sources within West Germany, sources that were beyond the control of the authorities and that provided alternative interpretations and contesting narratives. The GDR's inability to ward off the influx of information coming from the outside made it unique amongst the communist countries in Europe. Indeed, because of the presence of a Western counter-part next door, and of West Berlin as a Western enclave right at the very heart of East Germany, its ruling elites never managed to achieve ideological and hermeneutic hegemony at any point during the forty years of the GDR’s existence.

This study makes a number of assumptions that are tested in various ways namely: that East German perceptions and representations of Iran were shaped by the specific brand of Marxism-Leninism which formed the state's official ideology; that the narratives presented to the public through the GDR media mirrored economic, ideological and foreign policy concerns of the regime in the GDR; and that these factors stood alongside the particular role and nature of news agencies and other media.

Easily accessible alternative narratives provided by outside sources can, and do, cause problems for the ruling elites of any authoritarian system if parts of the population deem these outside sources to be more trustworthy than their own media, which appears to have been the case in East Germany. But even if the GDR's ruling elites had enjoyed ideological and hermeneutic hegemony, would that have significantly altered its representations of Iran, or of any other non-European society?
If the GDR was a totalitarian state, as has been claimed by Fulbrook and others\textsuperscript{20}, then it could be argued that it was a failed totalitarian system, at least when it comes to the control of the flow of and the population's access to information. This study will prove that although the GDR narratives and interpretations of events may have differed from those provided by Western ideological competitors, the facts on which they were based were mostly the same. The media in East and West created what I term ‘factual fiction’, a concept explained further in the adjacent chapter.

Hypothesis: factual fiction

This study’s core hypothesis is that, throughout the lifespan of the GDR from 1949 to 1989, reporting on Iran was, at best, distorted. The distortions and misrepresentations are so significant that they ultimately amount to what could be described as 'factual fiction'. The term ‘factual fiction’ as used in the context of this thesis, describes pieces of printed work based on objective facts and events that indeed happened. These facts and events can be independently verified and hence there is usually little reason to doubt the overall correctness of the piece in which they appear. But while core facts and events may be verifiable, the less that is known of the specific context and the particular circumstances in which events occurred, the more open those events are to widely varying interpretations and representations which fundamentally deviate from objective fact. Factors influencing the representation of news and thus forming the narrative of factual fictitious news-representation may include, to name but a few; ideological positions, the assumed expectations of target audiences, foreign policy and/or economic interests or cultural prejudices as well as a general lack of in-depth knowledge. In the case of the GDR, the general geopolitical terrain of the Cold War also played a role when it came to reporting on Iran, one equal to the GDR’s fierce, and initially existential, competition with West Germany.

Finally, another important factor with regards to the production of factual fiction is journalistic practice. While examining journalistic practice, it was necessary also to focus on the journalists themselves. Here I relied primarily on a small but significant body of scholarly literature that began to emerge soon after the demise of the GDR. Of particular importance were the studies of Günter Holzweißig, Petra Gansen, Rolf Geserick, Wilke and Meyen. Who were the journalists working in East

22 Petra Gansen, Wirkung nach Plan (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1997).
25 Michael Meyen and Anke Fiedler, 'Journalists in the German Democratic Republic (GDR)'
Germany’s media? What were their social, ideological and professional backgrounds? In the case of the GDR this is no straightforward line of inquiry because entry-routes to the profession changed significantly during the four decades of the GDR as did the social and ideological backgrounds of the journalists. Initially, before and soon after the foundation of the GDR, many of the journalists writing for the newly created publications were not professional journalists in the classical sense, but came from a variety of diverse social and professional backgrounds. All they often only had in common was their ideological conviction.26 The second and third generation of East German journalists however had undergone proper journalistic – and ideological – training both at the University of Leipzig and, on a practical level, in the editorial offices of one of the publications or with ADN. They came from within a society that had slowly adapted to ‘real existing socialism’. This generation of journalists had grown up in relative prosperity and in a stable political environment. They had been fed the values and narratives of socialism and of the GDR with their mothers’ milk.27 Meyen and Fiedler identify the particular role journalists played in the GDR:

Journalists in the GDR were part of the political field. This fact may serve both to explain the permeability between editorships and party leaderships and led to certain proximity to decision-makers, but at the same time means that the politicians were always at the centre of power. That means that in case of doubt, what was published was not what was required journalistically (i.e. information on orientation in a complex society), but what seemed to best help the current aims of the publishers. The word ‘seemed’ has been chosen on purpose. Party leaders may have been experts in politics (although that is not to be judged here), but hardly knew media logic at all.28

It is tempting here to draw on Bourdieu’s29 field theory. The journalists were formed by their habitus, as it was defined by social background, age, education, professional training, career, gender, experiences, persuasions and privileges. They too were part of the ruling elite, close to the main currents of power.

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26 On the origins of East German journalism see Holzweißig, Meyen, Fiedler, Genserick, Raue and Wilke.
27 Meyen and Fiedler, pp. 320–21.
28 Meyen and Fiedler, p. 331.
Although he researches journalism and the roles of journalists in the context of Western liberal democracies, Eric Louw’s observation that „The intelligentsia are crucial agents in building political identity because they are key players in circulating the meanings from which identities are built“\textsuperscript{30} rings as true in the case of the GDR where the intelligentsia was almost entirely tied into the SED. In a later chapter on the peculiarities of the structures of the East German press, this thesis will investigate to what extent the journalists were an integral part of the political system of the GDR. Before that, however, the applied methodology will be explained in more detail.

Methodology

This study focuses exclusively on the press. The media investigated were limited to newspapers and other printed publications for three reasons:

Television was not widely available in the early years of the period I am looking at. During these years print media and radio were the principal news sources in the GDR and they were available to every household.\(^{31}\) Television, although introduced as early as in 1952, would only turn into a mass medium by 1960 when for the first time there were more than one million receivers registered in the GDR.\(^{32}\)

The print media were chosen over radio because there was a much wider variety of different titles available, all addressing different target groups. Also, the print media employed several thousand professional and semi-professional journalists;\(^{33}\) therefore deviations from the official party-line (if there were any) would have been more likely to occur in the press than on radio.

Furthermore radio, television and the press, for technical reasons, each employ different languages and imagery, and therefore the structure of the narratives, however similar the underlying stories might be, differ significantly from one medium to another as a consequence.\(^{34}\)

The sources analysed included daily newspapers such as the official nation-wide newspaper of the SED *Neues Deutschland* or Berlin's regional SED-organ the *Berliner Zeitung*, monthly publications such as *Horizont*, a foreign affairs magazine, and newspapers which were published by the other political parties. Although

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\(^{32}\) Levasier, p. 224.


\(^{34}\) The format dictates the presentation of the news. Television relies heavily on carefully edited imagery, sounds, spoken language and the impression of immediacy. Radio misses the whole visual dimension but still can employ interviews and authentic sounds. Print was and probably still is the least immediate medium. The only, though often powerful, imagery is the still photo or an informative illustration. In terms of actuality print usually lags behind its competitors. However, the lagging behind can be an advantage, since it allows for a more rounded presentation that sometimes has the additional bonus of hindsight.
officially independent, these parties were allied to, and effectively controlled by, the SED. Also included in the material analysed are German language publications which were published and controlled by the Soviet Military Administration and a few articles from German language Soviet magazines such as *Neue Zeit*. The reason here was to investigate the extent to which elements of the Soviet press functioned as opinion leaders for East German editors and to establish if they indeed provided ideological directions. Additionally, material from East Germany's official state-run news agency, *Allgemeine Deutsche Nachrichtenagentur* (ADN) was analysed, too.

To better understand the ideological, structural and political contexts in which editors and journalists operated in the GDR, a separate chapter of this study is dedicated to how East German journalism was organised under the control of party and state; this includes a section on the background, education and training of journalists. While researching how the GDR press represented Iran, it soon became apparent that East Germany's official news agency, ADN, played a crucial role in the GDR media system. This flagged up the necessity for a further chapter, on the news agency and its modus operandi. A rather unexpected finding was that in its gathering of news and intelligence, ADN - and consequently the newspapers and weeklies of the GDR – were heavily reliant on formal and informal network-partnerships with foreign news agencies. Less of a surprise was that ADN had entered into partnership-agreements with news agencies from other Eastern Bloc and non-aligned countries. The input from these agencies, however, was negligible. Even the Soviet Union's TASS agency had, in forty years, only supplied just a bare handful of Iran-related news to the GDR's press. A further, equally unexpected, finding was that the GDR’s sources for news on Iran were surprisingly sparse, a situation which led more often than not to coverage of Iran that was based on secondary, or even tertiary sources, such as foreign media or intercepted broadcasts. The few major international players in the news business of the period in question, Reuter, AFP, AP and UP/UPI all supplied the GDR's media via ADN, providing it with the very same news material accessed by the British, West German, American or French press. The dominant role of the international news agencies in the global media market made it therefore necessary to provide an additional section on news agencies.
Framing the discourse

East Germany was not a nation state in the classical sense, nor really in any sense at all. Rather, it could best be described as an attempt to create a nation state based not on a nationalist but on a ‘weltanschauliche’ ideology.35 The German adjective ‘weltanschaulich’, while near impossible to translate into English is used here with the meaning of a quasi-philosophical world view. The SED attempted to replace any traditional bourgeois narrative of the German nation with a highly selective Marxist-Leninist reading of what constituted ‘Germanness’ that cherry-picked what was deemed good and worthwhile while putting the blame for everything that went wrong in German history firmly into West Germany's basket. Initially, the GDR claimed to be the sole representative of the German nation. On 8 September 19149, one month before the establishment of the GDR, Otto Grotewohl, her designated Prime Minister, stated: “The real Germany is the Soviet Occupied Zone. Therefore the founding of the German Democratic Republic does not equate with the setting up of an East German state or an East German government but establishes a government for the whole of Germany.”36 Nevertheless, the GDR’s claim to sole representation did not only clash with that of West Germany, it was also impossible to enforce in any meaningful way that would have relevance in international law. The diverging national and historical discourses in the two parts of Germany later had an effect on the reunited Germany too, which Stevenson and Theobald have, among others, studied in some depth. At this point the term discourse requires qualification. This study defines discourse not as a static phenomenon, but as a complex set of continuing negotiations among individuals and groups in society. Discourse, therefore, is in permanent flux. The movement is not a linear development, though, but a continuous grouping and regrouping around a core of values and ideas which are more persistent, although, in the longer run, these also mutate. The idea of democracy may serve as an example for


the various changes, interpretations and negotiated re-interpretations a concept undergoes. In ancient Greece democracy was an exclusive affair. The direct participation of citizens in public decision making and thus in the governing of the polity was strictly limited to male free citizens of the (city-)state. Slaves and servants were as much excluded as were women. The idea of liberal democracy as an inclusive system is fairly young in contrast. In 19th Century Britain women still had no vote nor could they be elected. In Switzerland women achieved full suffrage only as late as 1990.

Discourse as a struggle over meaning and interpretation is determined by power-relations. This definition of discourse borrows heavily from both Norman Fairclough’s work, especially his studies of the overlapping of institutional practices and political and social structures37, and Gramsci’s concept of ‘hegemony’.38 In this study, discourse is not confined to one singular society, though, but also understood as communicative action that involves groups and elements from outside society’s core, who do not necessarily take direct part in interior communications and negotiations but influence both, nevertheless. For this reason, attention will be paid to influences from outside the dominant discourse, such as the impact West German television and radio may have had on the representations of Iran in the East German press.

A key question this study aims to answer is: to what extent did the pragmatic interests of the GDR's foreign policy, and its economic relationships with the Iran, filter through into the representations of the country in its domestic press? Of particular interest in this context is how the media dealt with potential ideological conflict that resulted from attempts to establish good relationships with the Shah's government while at the same time actively supporting Tudeh's activities inside Iran and playing host to the Tudeh leadership in East Germany. Ingrid Muth points out that in East Germany foreign news also served internal purposes and was used to create a consensus between the party and the people.39 In the very early days of the GDR, the leadership realised that active involvement with anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist

38 Gramsci, pp. 256–257.
movements in the Third World as well as aiding the development of newly liberated countries, found a positive resonance with the domestic population.

The study provides overwhelming evidence that particular East German foreign policy and economic considerations were mirrored and expressed in the representations of Iran in the press of the GDR. Furthermore, when economic and foreign policy matters were at stake, it became evident again and again that they were deemed to be of a much higher priority than any ideological matters, even if the latter included the friendly relationship with Iran’s communist party. When the GDR's leadership deemed amicable relationships with Iran more important than the SED’s ideological and practical alliance with the Tudeh, they had no problem sacrificing the relations with the Tudeh for the higher good. The GDR press duly followed suit and widely ignored the plight of the Tudeh in Iran when the GDR's foreign and economic policy interests demanded positive news and articles only. While trying hard to create a hermetically closed system which enabled uncontested hermeneutic hegemony, the creation of a new socialist narrative and consciousness, which not only broke with the immediate fascist past but also with the legacy of Germany's traditional class structure, the East German leadership ultimately realised the impossibility of the task they faced. After all, the 'other' Germany continued to exist right next door; family ties connected East and West Germany; and there was a shared cultural and historical heritage. Most importantly, though, there was a shared language. Despite diverging linguistic developments in both German states, often intentionally initiated by the East German leadership in their attempts to establish hermeneutic ownership of certain values, terms and concepts, different readings of linguistic content would ever become a serious barrier between the two. Linked to this was West German radio and – a little later – West German television, transmitting right into the heart of East Germany, offering alternative narratives, interpretations and world views, and thereby seriously contesting the Marxist-Leninist project.40 This situation was unique. Only in Vietnam and Korea could (and in the latter case still can) a comparable constellation be found, where a country is divided into two states with antagonistic political systems and ideologies and where the electronic media of one state can reach

40 Raue, p. 147.
listeners/viewers of the other, thus offering alternative narratives from the perspective of a shared cultural, political, linguistic and historical heritage. Alternative narratives provided by outside sources can, and do, cause problems for the ruling elites if parts of the population deem these sources to be more trustworthy than their own media.

Any attempt to analyse and to evaluate the manner in which the East German media reported on Iran between 1949 and 1989 has to start by investigating the media itself and the role it was assigned in a state which perceived itself as Marxist-Leninist. This will be done in the separate chapter on the press of the GDR.

When the East German authorities undertook to establish the rule of Marxism-Leninism as their state ideology, they had to change the rules of discourse. A socialist discourse was to be constructed, replacing some elements of prevailing discourses in East German society, at the same time as building on others. In order to construe a specific socialist consciousness, which was understood as more than working-class consciousness because it ideally involved the inclusion of all classes and hence would lead to the abolition of classes altogether, rules were rewritten and reformatted. The party aimed at assuming control over the language, its rules and meanings, and extending control to a degree which allowed for far reaching hermeneutic hegemony. New vocabulary and new phrases were created while simultaneously the meaning of existing vocabulary was either modified or completely changed, hence creating a peculiar language which in its formal structure and in its vocabulary still resembled standard German, but with altered meanings and readings. The language created became known as Party Chinese, an often wooden, cumbersome and unattractive, but ideologically correct, lingo. Thus, language was intentionally used as a tool to assert and to distribute power, in a Foucauldian sense. Also, the narrative, the underlying message was altered with new modes of understanding and interpretation being forcefully imposed. To draw on the title of Noam Chomsky's seminal work on media structures and power-relations, consent had to be manufactured.

The SED claimed that the particular East German flavour of Marxism-Leninism was purely based on science. Therefore, Marxist-Leninist journalism perceived itself as truthful, unbiased, objective and scientific. At the same time, socialist journalism was supposed to be partisan, to actively endorse the position of the working classes and its avant-gardes, the Socialist parties. Consequently, Marxism-Leninism can be regarded as a filter, a particular lens through which the world was seen and understood according to the principles of Marxism-Leninism. This had implications for both the journalists and their readership, especially when it came to reporting on other countries, peoples and cultures. While the general readership/audience had, to a significant extent, the opportunity to compare reportage on home affairs with their own experiences and perceptions, based on an intimate familiarity with the context, this was not the case with news and reports from further afield. East German citizens were severely restricted as regards their freedom to travel abroad. While some popular holiday-destinations in Eastern Bloc countries, such as Hungary or Bulgaria, were within reach, only a very small number of ideologically trustworthy East Germans were granted permission to travel to non-socialist countries. First-hand experience of foreign societies was, therefore, rare.

The notion of the media as the 'Fourth Estate' which is so common in Western media discourses, is neither applicable in the case of East Germany in particular nor in the case of communist societies more generally. The GDR's media were an integral part of the system, an instrument of the Party rather than independent mediators between the ruling class and the people. The media were neither capable of operating, nor were they intended to operate, in what calls 'the public sphere'.

The MacBride report, until today still the most influential, complete and ground breaking report on media globalisation, emphasised the tendency of the media in general to focus only on certain aspects of foreign news. It is usually only wars,

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45 The concept of a 'filter' is borrowed from Herman's and Chomsky's propaganda-model. In Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media they identified 'ideology' (anti-communism in the case of the American media during the Cold War) as one of the five filters which determine the presentation of news in the mass media.

famine, natural disasters, revolutions or events considered 'exotic' that make it into the headlines; in depth-reports not based on any of the former are rare. This observation is predominantly directed towards the Western media. However, one can argue that despite their Marxist-Leninist ideology, East European media, such as that of the GDR, were deeply rooted in European/Western understandings and journalistic practice. Therefore whilst the emphasis on certain aspects of the topics reported might be different from the emphasis chosen by Western counterparts, the topics would mostly be the same. The study provides overwhelming evidence that particular East German foreign policy and economic considerations were mirrored and expressed in the representations of Iran in the press of the GDR. Furthermore, when economic and foreign policy matters were at stake, it became evident again and again that they were deemed to be of a much higher priority than any ideological matters, even if the latter included the friendly relationship with Iran’s communist party. When the GDR's leadership deemed amicable relationships with Iran more important than the SED's ideological and practical alliance with the Tudeh, they had no problem sacrificing the relations with the Tudeh for the higher good. The GDR press duly followed suit and widely ignored the plight of the Tudeh in Iran when the GDR's foreign and economic policy interests demanded positive news and articles only.

German – Iranian relations in historical perspective

As this study shows, the East German media covered Iran extensively between 1949 and 1989. But why? One answer to this question can be found in the historical relations between Germany and Iran.

Since the days of the Enlightenment, Iran has fascinated German thinkers, artists, writers and historians alike. Goethe responded the German Orientalist Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall's 1812 translations of the Persian poet Hafez with *West-östlicher Diwan* (1814). Diplomatic, economic and cultural relations between Germany and Iran were traditionally friendly. In WWI Iran became the focus of covert and overt German military activity directed against British and Russian interests and military positions in Iran. German fascination with Iran turned extreme under the Third Reich. Racist Nazi ideology identified Iranians as Aryans and fostered the notion of a mythic blood-relationship between Aryan Germanic peoples and the Aryans of Iran. In the vocabulary of National Socialist Germany the term 'Aryan' became synonymous with the 'Super Race'.

German fascination with Iran survived the country's defeat in World War II. In the late 1950s, it was further fuelled by a West German media craze over Mohammad Reza Pahlavi’s second wife, Soraya Esfandiyari Bakhtiari, whose mother was German. The sensationalist reporting of the West German media on Soraya, her marriage and its subsequent break-down, as well as on Iran’s monarchy in general, did not go unnoticed in the GDR press either, where critical stories on the Pahlavis sometimes mirrored what was written in the West German media.50

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50 See for example *Neues Deutschland*, 24. July 1962: ‘Skandal in Cannes’. The author, writing under the pseudonym Cobra, comments on an extravaganza of Shah Reza Mohammed Pahlavi's twin-sister Ashraf in a French casino. Style and content of the piece mirror the reporting of West Germany's yellow press. The angle of the story, however, is a much harsher critique of Ashraf's behaviour.
The White Revolution, initiated by Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in 1963, and put to a national referendum on January 26, 1963, again inspired extensive reporting on Iran in the East German media. In the late 1960s, reasons for news coverage of Iran included events closer to home: Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's visit to West Berlin and the accompanying violent clashes between anti-Shah street protesters, Iranian pro-Shah protesters and the West Berlin police, which led to the shooting of the West German student Benno Ohnesorg by a policeman.  

Further topics which featured regularly in the East German press in the 1970s were Russian-Iranian relations and the GDR's economic relations with Iran. Finally, the East German media paid considerable attention to the Iranian Revolution in 1979. The war between Iran-Iraq, however, was for most of its duration intentionally ignored, and if there was reporting of it, then it was cautiously measured.

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The relationship between the German Democratic Republic and Iran has, most of the time, not been the most harmonious.\(^\text{52}\) It needs to be understood against the background of the diplomatic competition between the two German states as well as within the context of the Cold War. West Germany used a wide range of means available to it to prevent the GDR receiving recognition from other states; it claimed the exclusive right to represent the entire German nation; and it followed as its guiding principle the Hallstein Doctrine. East Berlin dismissed Bonn's claim and countered the Hallstein Doctrine with its own Ulbricht Doctrine.\(^\text{53}\) However, the result was the widespread diplomatic isolation of East Germany, outside of the Eastern Bloc. Only in the late 1960s, when both German states entered a phase of direct contact and negotiations, which finally led to the abandonment of the Hallstein Doctrine, did the international standing of the GDR significantly improve.

As long as the GDR and Iran maintained no official diplomatic relations, the former was highly critical of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's regime, denouncing it a puppet regime of Western imperialism\(^\text{54}\) and a feudal autocratic dictatorship. At this time, the East German government not only granted asylum to the leadership of the Tudeh Party in Leipzig and East Berlin, it also gave it financial and organisational support, thereby directly interfering in Iran's internal affairs. Members of the Tudeh established the Persian language radio station *Radio Peyk-e Iran* which between 1957 and 1963 used the technical infrastructure of Radio Berlin International to broadcast their programmes into Iran. From 1963 onwards, they utilised Bulgarian transmitters for their 25 hour per week broadcasts.\(^\text{55}\) However, as East Germany's foreign policy fell under the shadow of the Soviet Union's foreign policy, wherever Moscow led,

\(^{52}\) For a detailed analysis of the relations between Iran and East Germany see: Oliver Bast, *Germans in Persia*, Encyclopaedia Iranica online, available at www.iranica.com.


\(^{54}\) ‘Von Amini zu Alam’, *Neues Deutschland* (Berlin GDR, 21 July 1962).

East Berlin had to follow. When the Soviet Union began to improve its relations with neighbouring Iran in the 1960s, the GDR soon followed suit.

The hostile attitude of the East German government towards Iran changed significantly when the two countries resumed official relations; this culminated in the recognition of the GDR by Iran in 1973, and in the subsequent establishment of diplomatic representations at embassy level, in both countries. As regards the press, the result was a more measured tone, a more diplomatic official language used in portrayals of Iran in general and the Shah's government in particular. While the importance of Iran as a trading partner increased and economic ties between the two countries strengthened, the attitudes towards Iran shifted noticeably. Nevertheless, the GDR still remained a significant sponsor of the communist Tudeh Party.

Ideologically, this pragmatic course of maintaining relationships with feudal/bourgeois governments while simultaneously supporting dissident groups or revolutionary movements in the same country, must have been somewhat controversial; it seems to indicate a preparedness to subordinate the principles of proletarian solidarity to the primacy of state interest.

From a Marxist-Leninist perspective, the outcome of the 1979 Iranian Revolution must have appeared bewildering. While at the outset, conditions seemed right for a class struggle which pitted urban workers, the impoverished peasantry and ethnic minorities against the feudal and proto-capitalist regime of the Shah, the revolution resulted not in the victory of the 'progressive forces' but instead in 'reactionary religious fanatics' coming to power. The religious forces soon turned against their erstwhile socialist allies, among them the Tudeh, who remained astonishingly loyal to Ayatollah Khomeini even after the clerics had turned against not only the Bazargan government, but also against their former allies on the left.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, however, also demonstrated a strong anti-imperialist and anti-Western orientation, and therefore, for ideological reasons alone, it could not be entirely disregarded by the press. When Iraq, under the leadership of Saddam Hussein, decided to attack Iran, in September 1980, the East German government faced another dilemma: on one hand, Iraq was the longest standing partner of the
GDR in the Middle East, being the first country in the region and one of the first non-
Communist countries in the world to have established formal diplomatic relations
with the GDR, as early as in 1969. On the other hand, Iran was seen as an important
economic partner for the GDR. While its anti-Western stance hardened throughout the
war, the country also appeared to be a potential ally in the Cold War scenario. The
GDR refused to take sides and decided to stay as neutral as circumstances allowed. At
the same time, East Germany sought to establish and maintain a relationship with the
Islamic Republic that was at least as amicable – and profitable as we will see later –
as that previously with the Shah’s Iran.

To develop a better understanding of why the press of the GDR represented Iran as
they did, one first of all has to analyse the structures of the press, the function
assigned to it and the position of the press in the ideological framework of the GDR.
The following chapter is therefore dedicated to the press of the GDR.
East Germany's press – the party's sharpest sword

In his study of the GDR's media, Günther Holzweißig used the term ‘*Die schärfste Waffe der Partei*’ for the East German printed press to describe the role the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED) had assigned the press in its quest for total ideological hegemony in the German Democratic Republic. The term was originally coined by Lenin. The fact that it was chosen as the motto of the SED's first conference on the role of the press in 1950, illustrates the high degree of importance the SED attached to the media in general and the press in particular. The SED adhered to the key Marxist tenet that the ruling ideas of an age were the ideas of the ruling class.

From its very first day, the GDR employed a whole battery of tools designed to re-educate its population. Ideological education and indoctrination were almost impossible to escape. It began as early as in kindergarten, while schools were the main battleground for the minds of the new generations. Literature, the arts, music, film, and theatre were all considered to be means for the relentless transmission of the Marxist-Leninist message.

The leading role in this mission to win hearts and minds was accorded the media, who were deemed crucial to the enormous social engineering project the SED sought to undertake to create a Marxist-Leninist state from the rubble and ruins of the totally defeated Nazi Germany. The party’s Marxist-Leninist theory of the press as a tool, or weapon, if one wants to use the Leninist term, left no room for liberal understandings of the press as the fourth estate. The press, and the media in general, were in no way intended to function as a power independent of party and state. Nor was it ever assigned the role of a public sphere or that of a mediator between the powerful and

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58 9-10 February 1950. Round about 200 party journalists, 'Volkskorrespondenten' (people's correspondents) and functionaries attended the conference. Its full title was *Unsere Presse – die schärfste Waffe der Partei*.
59 Fulbrook, p. 131.
60 Fulbrook, p. 131.
the populace. The press was expected to be partisan. Journalists were ‘party soldiers’ rather than independent observers, manipulators instead of neutral mediators. The SED's leading publication, the daily newspaper *Neues Deutschland*, was the purest incarnation of the Marxist-Leninist concept of the party press as a collective agitator, organizer and educator.\(^{61}\)

\(^{61}\) Holzweißig, Die schärfste Waffe der Partei, p. 31.
The origins of the East German press-system

The 1945 Potsdam Conference placed those areas of Germany that were to constitute the GDR four years later under Soviet occupation. The Soviet Military Administration [SMAD] had already charged a group of exiled German communists led by Walter Ulbricht, who had survived not only Nazi persecution and the war, but also Stalin's purges of the exiled German Communist Party in Moscow, with the task of establishing functioning administrative structures in their zone of occupation. Remarkably, four of this small group, Walter Ulbricht included, were journalists.

Ulbricht and his group were well aware of the ways the press can influence public opinion. They could not have failed to notice the massive impact the Hugenberg press, which dominated the media landscape in Weimar Germany, had had on political developments in the Weimar Republic, nor can it have escaped their attention how ruthlessly and efficiently Joseph Goebbels had used the media as a powerful propaganda tool in the Third Reich. They strongly believed in the effectiveness of the press as a tool to manipulate minds in order to not only counter whatever was left of racist Nazi ideology or petty-bourgeois world-views but also to create a new kind of ‘socialist’ consciousness.

However, it was not Ulbricht and his group who started the first post-war German language newspaper in the Soviet occupied zone but the Red Army (from 9 June 1945: the Soviet Military Administration in Germany).

The first issue of the SMAD’s daily newspaper Die Tägliche Rundschau, was published on 15 May 1945. The intention behind the publication of the Tägliche Rundschau was twofold: firstly, the newspaper was to function as an instrument to enforce the political line of the SMAD, which was summed up in the slogan

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62 Participants were J.W. Stalin, Britain’s PM Winston Churchill and from 28 July his successor Clement Attlee, and US president, Harry Truman. Also attending were the foreign ministers of the USSR, Great Britain and the USA, the chiefs of staff and a number of advisers. The Potsdam Agreement defined the framework for the future administration and organisation of post-war Germany.

63 SMAD = Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland (Soviet Military Administration in Germany).

64 Ulbricht is included in this count, and also a technical assistant, who was part of the group, but whose name is as unknown as his later whereabouts.
'Demokratische Umwälzung' (Democratic Transformation); secondly, it was to serve as the blueprint for future East German newspapers as well as for the kind of journalism expected from East German journalists. The newspaper also played an important role in the professional training of post-war East German journalists. More than 500 journalists, many of whom would later hold leading positions in the East German media, started their career at the paper. Among those were the Weltbühne's future editor in chief, Peter Theek, and the editor in chief of Die Außenwirtschaft, Hans W. Aust.

Berliner Zeitung was the second German language daily newspaper to be published by the Red Army. While the Tägliche Rundschau was conceived as a national newspaper, Berliner Zeitung was the Red Army's publication for the people of Berlin. The first issue was distributed on 21 May 1945. Soon after, on 20 June 1945, ownership of Berliner Zeitung was transferred to the Magistrat of Berlin, and from 5 April 1946 the Berliner Verlag became the publisher of the newspaper; it would serve as the official organ of Berlin's SED until the end of the GDR.

On 10 June 1945, the SMAD issued order No. 2, which permitted the formation of political parties and mass-organisations in the territories under Soviet occupation. SMAD order No. 2 also governed the licensing of press publications. The Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (KPD) was the first to be granted a licence for its central organ Deutsche Volkszeitung. On 9 July 1945, the SMAD also founded the Sowjetisches Nachrichtenbüro (SNB) as East Germany’s central news bureau. All media in the Soviet Occupied Zone were obliged to carry the SNB bulletins and news. The main responsibilities of the SNB were the supervision of the East German media; the implementation of Soviet information policies; and the collection of economic, social and political data and reports. Articles distributed by the SNB had to be printed, and they were not to be edited or altered in any way. Furthermore, until 1948, the SNB held the monopoly on foreign reporting. In some ways, the SNB constituted a hybrid between a news bureau in the traditional sense, and a powerful

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65 Raue, p. 36.
66 Raue, p. 41.
67 Holzweißig, Die schärfste Waffe der Partei, p. 139.
68 Communist Party of Germany
supervisor and censor of the press who also maintained a close relationship with the Soviet secret service. From 1946, the year in which the German news bureau Allgemeiner Deutscher Nachrichtendienst (ADN) was licensed, the news gathering and distribution services were step by step handed over to ADN.

The SNB’s German employees were moved into the newly opened agencies Deutsches Institut für sozialökonomische Probleme (German Institute for Socio-economic Problems), Deutsches Institut für Publizistik (German Institute for Communication Science), and Deutsches Institut für Zeitungswissenschaft (German Institute for Newspaper Research). Most of these German SNB employees were soon to be found in leading positions in the GDR’s media. ADN’s first editor in chief, Georg-Wilhelm Hansen, for example had been one of the SNB’s German deputies.69

By the end of 1946, all important cornerstones of the emerging media-system of the later GDR were in place. This included the professional organisation of East German journalists, the Verband der deutschen Presse (VDP),70 which was to play a significant role in the professional education (and indoctrination) of present and future journalists. Those applying for membership not only had to provide proof that they were professional journalists, but also that they had at no time been members of the NSDAP. However, there were some important qualifications to the latter rule: journalists who had been members of the Nazi Party but who could prove that they themselves had not committed any crime nor been involved in any crimes committed by the regime, and who could also prove that they had not actively supported the Nazi system, were offered membership after a trial period.71

On 21 January 1951, the VDP opened the Institut für Journalisten und Zeitungskunde (Institute for Journalists and Newspaper Research) in Berlin. The institute was to educate future journalists in ideological, economic, political, cultural, and professional matters and also to train them in all aspects of practical journalism.

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70 Association of the German Press.
However, the institute did not only train newcomers to the profession, but also journalists who were already on the job; to those it offered evening seminars, lectures, and material for independent study. When the VDP left the Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (FDGB)\textsuperscript{72} on 18 July 1953, the association was no longer a lobby group for the interests of journalists but had turned into a constituent part of the GDR's media system, charged with the indoctrination, education, and training of East German journalists.

\textsuperscript{72} Free Confederation of German Trade Unions. The FDGB was founded on 18 April 1945 in the West German city of Aachen. The Western occupying forces denied the FDGB the licence to operate in their territories. The Soviet Military Administration on the other hand allowed on 10 June 1945 for the establishment of the umbrella organisation for 15 individual trade unions. Soon after the FDGB would be incorporated in the power structures of the GDR as a tool to exercise ideological control in the workplace.
Access to the profession of journalism was strictly regulated. By ensuring that only those who were committed to the principles and goals of the SED variant of Marxism-Leninism could actually become journalists and work as such, the party was able to achieve control over the media without having to employ open censorship. The GDR did not have a dedicated press law. The constitution of the GDR guaranteed the freedom of opinion and the freedom of the press in the articles 27.1 and 27.2. And indeed, there was no institutionalized censor. Only church publications were subject to censorship through the Presseamt which cooperated with the Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (MfS). However, there was a much more subtle system of censorship, which will be laid out below.

A first indication that the press of the GDR was not as free as article 27.2 seems to suggest, can be found in the wording of article 27.1 where it states: ‘... den Grundsätzen dieser Verfassung gemäß’ (according to the principles of this constitution). To achieve complete control over the media without resorting to blatant censorship, the SED established a sophisticated system of guidelines, recommendations, and control over sources. At the head of this system was the party’s Secretary General. Directly subordinated to the Secretary General and to the Central Committee were the Abteilung Agitation of the Central Committee and its subdivision the Presseamt. The SED believed the following to be the primary functions of the press: collective propaganda, agitation and organisation. The last term requires further qualification. According to Lenin, the ‘organisational’ function of the press included the control of the execution of party resolutions and the enforcement of the latter. Journalism was hence understood as an instrument of the party to be used to realise and to enforce revolutionary politics.

The professional training of journalists was completely centralised. The only University offering degrees in Journalism was the Sektion Journalistik of the Karl Marx University of Leipzig. The Sektion Journalistik employed ‘...proven anti-
fascists as instructors of the first hour...”

The most prominent of those were Heinrich Bruhn, Hermann Budzislawski, Wilhelm Eildermann, and Hans Teubner. Of those, Hermann Budzislawski was perhaps the most influential character. In 1940 he fled from the Nazis to the US, where he worked with and as a ghost-writer for Dorothy Thompson and was also a commentator and a columnist for the New York Overseas News Agency. In May 1944 he became one of the founders of the ‘Council for a Democratic Germany’. Budzislawski returned to Germany in 1948, where he joined the SED and became a professor for Internationales Pressewesen at the University of Leipzig. From 1954-1962 he was the dean of the newly founded Fakultät für Journalistik.

It was in the US, where Budzislawski had come into contact with American media

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75 Raue, p. 28.

76 American writer and journalist, founder of W.O.M.A.N (World Organisation for Mothers of All Nations). After WWII, Thompson went first to Vienna and then to Berlin, where she lived until 25 August 1935, the day she was forced to leave the country on Hitler's order. Hitler had been enraged by her book “I saw Hitler”, in which she referred rather critically to an interview which Hitler had granted her in 1932. She was the first foreign correspondent to be expelled from Berlin after the Nazis came to power. During her time in Berlin, she made herself many friends among Germany's artists and writers, including Thomas Mann, Bertold Brecht, Stefan Zweig, and Carl Zuckmayer. Back in New York, she helped German exiles such as Thomas Mann and Bertold Brecht in their dealings with the authorities and in settling down. She also became an influential columnist for the New York Herald Tribune.

77 William Boyd, 'William Boyd on the largest covert operation in UK history', Guardian Online<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2006/aug/19/military.secondworldwar> [accessed 29 November 2010]. Set up in New York by the BSC (British Overseas Communication), the ONA was one of the largest covert operations in the history of British intelligence. The aim of the Overseas News Agency was, simply put, to win over the American population for the war against Nazi Germany. In 1940, the ONA's headquarters were established in Manhattan's Rockefeller Center, with some secret assistance from the FBI. What followed, has been described by the Guardian's William Boyd in the following terms: '[in]1941[… the] BSC became a huge secret agency of nationwide news manipulation and black propaganda. Pro-British and anti-German stories were planted in American newspapers and broadcast on American radio stations, and simultaneously a campaign of harassment and denigration was set in motion against those organisations perceived to be pro-Nazi or virulently isolationist (such as the notoriously anti-British America First Committee - it had more than a million paid-up members). […] BSC's media reach was extensive: it included such eminent American columnists as Walter Winchell and Drew Pearson, and influenced coverage in newspapers such as the Herald Tribune, the New York Post and the Baltimore Sun. BSC effectively ran its own radio station, WRUL, and a press agency, the Overseas News Agency (ONA), feeding stories to the media as they required from foreign datelines to disguise their provenance. WRUL would broadcast a story from ONA and it thus became a US “source” suitable for further dissemination, even though it had arrived there via BSC agents. It would then be legitimately picked up by other radio stations and newspapers, and relayed to listeners and readers as fact. The story would spread exponentially and nobody suspected this was all emanating from three floors of the Rockefeller Centre.[…]’ In short: whether knowingly or not, Budzislawski worked for the British Secret Service.
theories, especially with the work of Robert Ezra Park,78 the leading thinker of the Chicago School, whose influential dissertation ‘Masse und Publikum’, on mass psychology and audience reception, had had a major influence on him.79 This influence was to be seen in the curriculum and in its understanding of the particular duties of journalists. The task of the media was essentially, according to Budzislawski, to supply information. This information, he then qualified this statement, was to allow the population to judge and to understand all aspects of life in terms of class relations and partisanship.80 Budzislawski was the author of the textbook for the training of journalists that had been designed for his department. Its title was *Sozialistische Journalistik* (1966). According to Budzislawski, journalism was understood as a weapon in the internal struggle for hermeneutic hegemony, the media were the tool to spread the SED variant of a socialist, Marxist-Leninist ideology and to establish it as the dominant worldview in East Germany.

It is fair to say that by the mid-1970s the overwhelming majority of journalists working in the GDR’s media were committed SED members or members of one of the Bloc Parties and hence firmly rooted in the system and its ideology.81 This does not mean that there were not some who were sceptical about some aspects of the system, but not to the extent where they would have actually doubted the system itself. Because of shared beliefs, familiarity with party ideology and party guidelines, and given the instinctive knowledge of how far one could go, GDR journalists had exercised a curious form of self-censorship for which the term ‘*die Schere im Kopf*’ had been coined.82 East German journalists themselves were parts of the elite and of the power structures. In a Gramscian understanding of hegemony, the journalists in the GDR represented the ‘intellectuals’ of the ruling elites.83 Indeed, at an almost

79 He wrote his dissertation 1904 in Heidelberg. *Masse und Publikum* is regarded as one of the pioneering - and still valid - works in the fields of Mass Psychology and the research of public opinion. Park was not only the leading thinker, but also the founder of the Chicago School.
82 Lit.: Scissors in the head.
83 Gramsci, pp. 60–61.
subconscious level, GDR journalists had internalised the limits and guidelines to such a degree that they only rarely found themselves in danger of crossing a line. They could, however, never be really sure about where the line was drawn. And being criticised by the Abteilung Agitation for the content of a published article, or for the wording of a single paragraph, or for the use of a wrong term could lead to serious consequences, usually a warning, although in more severe cases it could well be job loss or even a term in prison.

While improving economic conditions in the GDR would be a long-term process, even in the best of circumstances, the efforts to promote a specific GDR identity intensified almost immediately, although the SED still vehemently paid lip-service to the idea of a united Germany. This was de facto put to rest with the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, even though the GDR officially remained committed to German unity until the revised constitution of 1968 shifted the emphasis towards the notion of two separate German states and, finally, the official recognition of the GDR as a separate entity in the early 1970 as a result of Willy Brandt’s Ostpolitik. There was a grudging realisation among the party leadership that the press had to become a little more entertaining, that some criticism was necessary – as long as the critique was not directed at the system itself, and as long as it did not challenge the still shaky authority of the party and its politics.

Even so, from the relative freedoms some papers and authors enjoyed at times, it would be an illusion to draw the conclusion that the GDR media were not continuously under strict supervision until the very last days of the GDR. The argument has often been made that the SED had established a totalitarian regime, and Holzweißig is among those who forwarded the thesis again after the end of the GDR. The defining characteristics of a totalitarian system were described by Hannah Arendt, as well as Carl Joachim Friedrich and Zbigniew Brezinski, as the existence of a prescribed hegemonic ideology, the rule of one party that has monopolised power, and that party’s monopoly over the media, including the press.

84 Holzweißig, Die schärfste Waffe der Partei, pp. 7–12.
The GDR never was a totalitarian system in this respect, the counter-argument goes, simply because it was impossible to achieve a monopoly on published opinion. And indeed, even if it was within the power of the SED to establish and maintain a monopoly on the press, there was little that could be done against the general availability of West German radio and television broadcasts. A significant share of the GDR population with access to Western media regarded these as more trustworthy and a little less biased than their own.\textsuperscript{86}

The SED leadership was well aware of this and made several attempts to improve the quality of their own media, while also critically engaging with the broadcasts by West German media. The most prominent example of the latter attempt is \emph{Der schwarze Kanal}, a programme that was put together, edited and moderated by Karl Eduard von Schnitzler. The SED leadership also silently acknowledged the existence of this alternative news source. Holzweißig and others have found a number of instances where reports and articles in East German press publications could only be made sense of if the reader was aware of information broadcast by West German media.\textsuperscript{87} The results from this study confirm these findings, too.

The SED conducted a number of reader surveys in order to establish how popular the printed press was among the population. Unlike similar data for the electronic media, the print surveys have never been made public and were mostly destroyed before the end of the GDR. However, researchers like Meyen paint a more complex picture. While Meyen's studies do not deny the widespread distrust which East Germans showed towards their own press, they also show that there was indeed a significant proportion of East Germans who were SED members and committed socialists and who therefore generally agreed with the views of the GDR press.\textsuperscript{88} Also, Meyen along with Boyen, Holzweißig and others point out that there were some media, such as \emph{Horizont}, \emph{Wochenpost} or \emph{Sinn und Form}, which enjoyed a better

\textsuperscript{86} Wilke, p. 228.


\textsuperscript{88} Michael Meyen, \textit{Denver Clan und Neues Deutschland} (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2003), p. 44.
reputation than others.

In the early 1990s it became known that the SED had maintained an ‘Opinion Research Institute’ which was operational from 1965 until 1978. Although most of the surveys and related data were destroyed when Erich Honecker shut the Institute down in 1978, the German social scientist Heinz Niemann was able to restore most of the, around 200, opinion polls that the institute had conducted.\(^89\) The Institut für Meinungsforschung had been established in the wake of the VI. party conference of the SED in January 1963. The institute was allowed to work according to recognized Western standards. The SED leadership had also explicitly decreed that all surveys were to be conducted in a way that would ensure that no participant would need to fear any consequences or pressure resulting from his answers. No personal data were stored, anonymity was guaranteed, and the institute went to great lengths to ensure that no answer could be traced back to a particular participant. In short: the polls satisfied the strictest standards of the discipline.

Some of the surveys conducted by the Institut für Meinungsforschung also investigated how the GDR press was received. The SED never made much of an effort in this respect, though. The press was an area in which the media of the GDR faced no direct competition from the West since Western press publications were available only to a small selected circles. The readership was therefore taken for granted. While the results of the radio and television surveys often had a direct impact on the programming, there was no comparable impact of equivalent surveys on the press.\(^90\)

What is shown by the polls which Niemann, Gansen, Geserick and others have evaluated is that, in general, the press was not deemed trustworthy.\(^91\) However, this statement needs further qualification. It appears that the level of trustworthiness rises the closer the reporting gets to home, a point Meyen\(^92\) has made and which has been confirmed by the findings of the surveys Niemann has assessed.\(^93\) Local news,

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\(^{89}\) Heinz Niemann, Meinungsforschung in der DDR. Die geheimen Berichte des Instituts für Meinungsforschung an das Politbüro der SED (Köln: Bund Verlag, 1993).

\(^{90}\) Geserick, p. 147.


\(^{92}\) Meyen, p. 58.

\(^{93}\) Niemann, p. 107.
company and workplace stories, and regional events as well as entertainment stories, travel reports or art reviews were usually not only trusted, but also favourites among the readership. The same goes for sports and, of course, television programmes. The picture looks different when it comes to official announcements and declarations, party politics, reports on West Germany or the capitalist West in general. Here all surveys show a high degree of scepticism.94 Interestingly, this scepticism was not exclusively reserved for the East German media. Rather to the contrary: East German watchers of West German television were as prepared to suspect hidden agendas behind West German news programmes as they expected them from their own media.95 The party, as well as the editors of newspapers, too, were aware of this reception amongst their respective readerships and willing to engage to a degree with their readers. Readers were encouraged to participate in ‘readers’ discussions’, which often took place in the editorial offices. Readers’ letters were also encouraged. If the latter addressed specific local issues, the editors often passed these on to the local or region party official so that they could be resolved. There was a willingness to follow up on complaints and to resolve problems, although only as long as the issues raised did not touch on matters of principle. It was absolutely fine to complain about a lazy bureaucrat or a broken bus shelter, but it was certainly not all right to question the leadership of the party or the principles of Marxism-Leninism.

Thus an understanding of the GDR as a totalitarian system still carries validity, argues Holzweißig; and he draws direct comparisons between the media system of the GDR and the way the Nazis had attempted to control German media and used them as a propaganda tool. The comparison is legitimate, claims Holzweißig, not least because the mechanisms of media control were principally the same in the Third Reich as later in the GDR.96 Both emphasised Erfolgspropaganda (lit: success propaganda). Problems were only to be reported if a solution was possible and imminent. Information provided was strictly selected and fragmented, and often phrased in a deliberately misleading way. Criticism of the system and the regime was taboo, and so were stories on or about the leaders. Foreign reporting had to be

94 Geserick, p. 15.
95 Geserick, p. 126.
96 Holzweißig, Die schärfste Waffe der Partei, pp. 4–6.
balanced. If there was reporting on conflicts between two foreign states, the articles had to be neutral. Holzweißig states the example of Italy's invasion of Abyssinia (3 October 1935): 'in the Reichspressekonferenz, the NS media-controllers admonished some newspapers for expressing sympathy with the invaded African country.' We find the same cautious attitude in the GDR's media. For example, Detlev Pries, the current foreign editor of Neues Deutschland remembers the war between Iran and Iraq:

I was working at the foreign desk, and we received strict orders from the Politbüro as to how to treat the conflict. The articles had to be absolutely neutral and were under no circumstances to show any kind of preference for one side or the other. After all, we were on friendly terms with both. Even the word-count had to be exactly the same for either side.98

However, despite the similarities between the two systems, there were important differences. To begin with, the mere twelve years during which the Third Reich existed were dominated by relentless movement, upheavals and fundamental ruptures in the fabric of society of which the devastating war that brought the Reich to an end was the most extreme. One might argue that only because of the powerful momentum of unfolding events were the Nazis able to establish and consolidate their rule and to secure support from the populace. This would be in line with the understanding of 'mass movement' as expressed by Hannah Arendt.99 In this understanding, a movement - and she characterised National Socialism as being less a traditional party than an ideological mass movement - has to move in order to keep its momentum. Neither the direction nor the aim of the movement are of any major importance, it is the act of moving itself that counts.100 A movement that stops pushing and moving, that rests and allows for breaks or even settling down will cease to be a movement and turn into a system. As such, it will become vulnerable to changes from within and without; developments in society and in the party at the heart of the movement will catch up and force both to adapt. Adaptations might be slow, initially, but they will add up, causing changes to the system; stagnation might at first freeze the dynamic

97 Holzweißig, Die schärfste Waffe der Partei, p. 6.
98 Excerpt from an interview with Detlef Pries, recorded in January 2009.
99 Arendt, p. 726.
100 Arendt, pp. 663–667.
and then finally break the system.

This was so in the case of the GDR; and it was what made the system of the GDR, however dictatorial and authoritarian it was, different from the Third Reich. No doubt, there were methodological and structural similarities between their attempts to control the press, similarities to which Holzweißig has rightly pointed, but there were also remarkable differences. The most obvious one: the GDR lasted for almost 41 years, 29 years longer than the Third Reich. No society, however totalitarian, can remain in a state of absolute stasis over such a long period of time. Changes in external circumstances will trigger internal changes, world-views and belief-systems develop with every new generation as do knowledge, ethics and moral codes. GDR society of the 1980s was in many respects very different to that of the 1960s. The structure of power, the mechanisms used to control the media, may not have changed, but emphasis might have shifted as well as perception and the understanding of information and its reception.

Before we come to the representation of Iran in the GDR’s media, this chapter will conclude with an overview of the formal structures of the East German media system.
Controlling the press

To achieve total control over the press without resorting to blatant censorship, the SED established a sophisticated system of guidelines, recommendations, and control over sources. The primary functions of the press were collective propaganda, agitation and organisation.\(^\text{101}\) The Presseamt's responsibility was primarily to enforce uniformity of form and content in all newspapers affiliated with the other political parties and to ensure that they followed the guidelines for the SED-papers. The Presseamt also issued licences and, most importantly, decided the paper contingents for all press publications. Denial of paper or cutting back the contingent for a particular publication was a means of punishing a given publication for 'misbehaviour'. Furthermore, the Presseamt was responsible for the coordination of the state's public relations campaigns. Last, but not least, the Presseamt was assigned the authority to censor church publications. Another instrument used to exert pressure on newspapers and/or editors was access to the printers. The SED owned the Zentrag (Zentrale Druckerei- Einkaufs- und Revisionsgesellschaft mbH). Zentrag was directly subordinated to the SED's Central Committee and by 1989 owned more than 90 publishing houses, printers, paper mills and other companies.\(^\text{102}\) For the detailed structure of the sophisticated system of media-control the GDR operated, see the diagram in Appendix 2.

\(^{101}\) Holzweißig, *Die schärfste Waffe der Partei*, p. 34.

ADN – Allgemeine Deutsche Nachrichtenagentur

The state run news agency, ADN (Allgemeiner Deutscher Nachrichtendienst), received its licence from the SMAD on 10 October 1947 and was initially founded as a private company with limited liability. In April 1953, ADN was nationalised and established as the official news agency of the GDR. The agency held a near monopoly on foreign news. With the exception of a few privileged titles such as Horizont, Neues Deutschland, the Wochenpost or the Berliner Zeitung, no other publication was allowed to gather its own foreign news or to employ foreign correspondents. ADN reports had to be printed in their original wording. Editing was not allowed. Also, all photos and illustrations were exclusively distributed by the state's official photo agency Zentralbild. Many of the journalists who staffed the foreign desks of the leading East German publications had at one stage of their career worked for ADN. Furthermore, the agency regularly provided both the SED leadership and the editors of relevant newspapers and magazines with fact files and briefings on selected countries. These briefings included carefully selected original articles from the West German press including Industriekurier as well as articles from other Western publications such as Le Monde, The Washington Post, La Repubblica or the Guardian.

Given the importance of ADN as one of the main pillars of the GDR media system, it is rather surprising that until now very little research has been done on the agency. Its vast text-archive which now belongs to Deutscher Depeschendienst (ddp), has never been properly explored and catalogued and is mostly stored in boxes in an industrial warehouse near the now defunct airport Berlin-Tempelhof. The most authoritative of the very few scholarly studies currently available of the Allgemeine Deutsche Nachrichtendienst is a volume authored by Michael Minholz and Uwe Stirnberg.\(^\text{103}\) Because of the unique and dominant role ADN was assigned in the media system of the GDR, I not only include some ADN briefings on Iran in my analysis, but also investigate the structure and the different functions of this

\(^{103}\) Michael Minholz and Uwe Stirnberg, Der Allgemeine Deutsche Nachrichtendienst (ADN) : gute Nachrichten für die SED (München; New Providence: Saur, 1995).
organisation and its employees in further detail below. Before engaging any further with the role ADN was assigned in the media system of the GDR, though, it is necessary to scrutinise in some detail the roles news agencies play and have played in the international media system and their importance for this system.
The emergence of global news agencies

Although European trade- and merchant companies such as the Augsburg-based Handelshaus Fugger started to operate world-wide news gathering operations as early as the late 16th century,\textsuperscript{104} the birth of the news bureau in the modern sense took place in the Amsterdam of 1833, where Isaac Belinfante founded a press agency named after himself, which in 1844 changed its name to Nederlandsch (Haagsch) Persbureau.\textsuperscript{105} Belinfante's press agency, however, was primarily a local and regional player. Its principal interests were limited to the Netherlands and the Dutch colonies. Arguably the first truly international news agency was the French Havas, established in 1835, in Paris, by Charles-Louis Havas. The second news bureau of international importance was set up on 28 November 1849 in Berlin, where the medical doctor Bernard Wolff, a former employee of Havas, founded Das Telegraphische Correspondenzbureau WTB. Shortly afterwards, in 1850, Paul Julius Reuter, likewise a former employee of Havas, started his own short lived news bureau in the German city of Aachen. After moving to London and acquiring British citizenship, he set up a news agency in the British capital. The news agencies relied heavily on the new technology of the telegraph system. Reuter established as his two primary business principles that all his clients would be treated equally and that his agency should always be the first to report events.

The first news agencies soon formed an alliance which in effect established a global news-monopoly that lasted well into the 1920s. On 1 February 1870, Reuter, Havas and Das Wolfsche Telegraphische Correspondenzbureau (WTB) closed a deal in which Reuter signed all his German operations over to WTB and, more importantly, in which the three agencies partitioned the world into exclusive spheres of interests. According to the contract concluded, each news bureau was warranted the exclusive right to gather news in the part of the world assigned to them and to distribute these to their clients. They also set up procedures on how to exchange news


\textsuperscript{105} 'Nachrichtenagenturen-inside » Geschichte der Nachrichtenagenturen vor 1900' <http://www.nachrichtenagenturen-inside.de/geschichte-der-nachrichtenagenturen-vor-1900/> [accessed 29 November 2012].
among themselves.\textsuperscript{106} Reuter's zone of exclusivity included Great Britain and her colonies, China and Japan. Assigned to Havas were France, its colonies and overseas territories and also Spain, Portugal and Italy. Finally, WTB was allotted Germany and her colonies, Austria-Hungary, Scandinavia including Denmark, the Netherlands, parts of Switzerland, Russia and the European parts of the Ottoman Empire.\textsuperscript{107} Although in terms of ownership independent companies, all three agencies maintained indirect ties with their respective governments and were to a degree influenced by government policies. Governments were both secure sources of revenues and of intelligence. In the period between 1860 and 1900 Reuters increasingly acted as an institution of the British Empire, while Bismarck's government, in an attempt to avoid a potential takeover of the company by Reuters, heavily subsidised Wolff.\textsuperscript{108} Then as now, news bureaus were commercial organisations which dealt with information. With the establishment of the news bureaus, foreign news had finally become a commodity the distribution of which the three agencies had successfully monopolised in Europe.\textsuperscript{109} In the aftermath of the German Empire's defeat this global news cartel finally broke up after the end of World War One.

The most lucrative part of the kind of the news business model the three had developed and advanced was the gathering of intelligence on trends and events which were related to stock markets, trade and local and regional economies. Their main clients, those who generated most of the profit for the news bureaus, were banks, trading companies, and industrialists with a vested interest in any of the regions covered by the agencies. Probably even more important as clients were various government departments and agencies. Governments were among the first to very quickly realise the significance and importance of news agencies as gatherers and suppliers of intelligence and also as instruments to promote ideologies and their own


\textsuperscript{107} Minholz and Stirnberg, p. 14.


\textsuperscript{109} In 1848, a group of twelve American newspapers had in New York set up their own news agency which was the forerunner of what later turned into Associated Press (AP). AP soon became an international partner of the cartel, though not a member.
versions of reality. In the second half of the nineteenth century, national news agencies owned and operated by their respective governments, competed with the international cartel on the national and regional level. One of them, the Austro-Hungarian Korrespondenz-Bureau (founded 1860), dominated the Central European news market until the First World War.

The second tier of the news bureaus' clientèle included the media. Publications of all sizes, from internationally well reputed titles such as the London Times to local newspapers somewhere in Prussia, subscribed to the services of the news agencies and relied on their foreign reporting more often than not almost entirely on agency-supplied material.

Not surprisingly, the domestic media's dependence on the output of the news cartels had a massive impact on how Europeans perceived foreign cultures. Very few publishing companies could afford or maintain a vast network of foreign correspondents permanently based in other parts of the world. Leading publications may have operated their own bureaus in selected capitals such as London, Paris, Washington, Istanbul, Vienna or Moscow, but for news from other parts of the world they were heavily dependent on the services of the cartel. Long before the notion of globalisation became fashionable, the news agencies were truly global enterprises. Oliver Boyd-Barrett portrays the news agencies as the pioneers of globalisation and also as one important part of the machinery that allowed Europeans to exert power

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110 Immediately before and also during World War One, the British government for example sought to coerce Reuters into a close cooperation. Although Reuters could mostly maintain their independence and successfully resisted any further government attempts to establish a firmer foothold in the running of the agency, Reuters did indeed distribute to their clients news and reports authored by government sources which clearly promoted specific British positions and narratives. In comparison, Reuters' French counterpart Havas enjoyed a much closer relationship with the French government who not only subsidised the agency but also used it as an international propaganda tool.

111 Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen, p. 126.

112 The exception here is AP. Associated Press was created 1846 by five newspapers from New York City. Originally tasked with the establishment of a pony-express route through Alabama in order to bring news of the Mexican War north sooner than the U.S. Post Office could deliver it, AP quickly developed into the leading North American news agency and emerged in the 20th century as one of the major global players. However, because AP was designed as a co-operative of newspapers rather than a full service agency such as Reuter or Havas, the agency's main emphasis has always been on the gathering of information for journalistic purposes. West Germany's DPA, founded after the end of WW II, followed the example set by AP.
over large parts of the world, and consolidate their power, by utilising the advantage
given them by their access to a vast and methodically collected pool of information.\textsuperscript{113}
The ability of news agencies to set agendas and to cement the information monopoly
of the first world was still in evidence after World War Two and was one major aspect
of the overpowering Western communications and information hegemony. The far
reaching consequences of the Western communications monopolies in a rapidly
globalising world concerned UNESCO so much that it commissioned the MacBride-
Report, which was finally published in 1980.\textsuperscript{114}

Although the cartel of Reuter, Havas and WTB broke up after World War One, the
ways in which a few international information-merchants dominate the global news-
business would not change until very recently. Until the arrival of the internet and of
social media, such as Twitter, Facebook or YouTube, opened entirely new channels
for global information (and wilful misinformation) exchange which allowed for
greater public participation, a revived public sphere and a perceived democratisation
of the access to the media, there were only very few global media companies,
including the likes of the BBC, CNN, the Bertelsmann Group or Rupert Murdoch's
vast News Corporation, which could actually afford to maintain a sufficient global
network of correspondents and reporters; they still relied, to various, albeit
significant, degrees, on the services of the news bureaus. The same can be said for the
publicly owned media operations of countries such as Germany, France, or Italy.\textsuperscript{115} As
already stated, the consequences of the media's heavy reliance on the output of
commercial news organisations are serious: one story generated and spread by a news
bureau is very likely to be reproduced in hundreds if not thousands of media outlets
around the globe.\textsuperscript{116} No surprise then that stories in different newspapers and
electronic media read and sound surprisingly alike.

\textsuperscript{113} Oliver Boyd-Barrett, ‘National and International News Agencies: Issues of Crisis and
\textsuperscript{114} Sean MacBride, ed., \textit{Many Voices, One World: Towards a New More Just and More
Efficient World Information and Communication Order} (London/New York/Paris: United
\textsuperscript{116} Edgar Klüsener, \textit{The Iranian Revolution of 1978/1979 and How Western Newspapers
Given that independent news agencies provide editors with the majority of foreign news, they obviously have the capability to filter information to meet their own agenda, which is foremost a commercial one. Agencies will only distribute information to their clients which is ‘newsworthy’. The news item will fulfill all the formal requirements of professional journalism. It will be presented as impartial and objective. Oliver Boyd-Barrett sees today’s news agencies still following the very same professional practices which in their origins date back to the days of the cartel:

In general terms the agencies are still mainly providers of ‘spot news’, following in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, developed in the 19th century and honed in the 20th, of a ‘journalism of information’, which privileges ‘facts’ together with the routines in which this style of journalism engages to convince readers of the authenticity of such ‘facts’. The 'facts' thus privileged overwhelmingly favour certain categories of information and events over others, and certain locations over others.\textsuperscript{117}

More often than not, foreign news-bulletins distributed by the news agencies prioritise war, general violence, natural disasters, technical catastrophes or sensationalist stories which highlight ‘exotic’ practices and aspects of cultural backwardness from a distinct European/Western point of view. I recommend for further reading on how news in general and foreign news in particular are generated Herbert Gans' seminal work Deciding What's News\textsuperscript{118} as well as Herman's and Chomsky's revised edition of Manufacturing Consent as an equally important contribution to the field. Both also engage with the question of how organisational structures and provider-client relations impact on the editorial decision of what constitutes news and what not. Foreign correspondents, those employed by news agencies included, are not necessarily ‘ideas’ people as Eric Louw points out. They are rooted in a distinct cultural and intellectual context which informs their world view. According to Louw,

[they] interpellate themselves into signification systems intellectuals have already manufactured. The three most common sources of such world views are: attending university courses; on the job socialisation; and consuming other

\textsuperscript{117} Boyd-Barrett, “Global” News Agencies’, p. 37.

media. Journalists are renowned copy cats – they constantly develop story lines by watching what other journalists produce. Hence much of what the second-tier intelligentsia produces encodes intertextual readings – ideas borrowed (often unconsciously) from other texts/sources. […] Once socialised, they become (often unconscious) missionaries for whatever worldview they have been interpellated into – e.g. journalists produce media content through a process of selection and emphasis based upon their existing beliefs (i.e. the coding system they have been interpellated into).  

Once the news has been received from the foreign correspondent, the editor in charge will take great care to ensure that the golden rule of professional news gathering, the famous ‘five W's’ of journalism, have been observed. In short, the news gathered and distributed will conform to all valid journalistic standards. However, the way news is gathered is highly selective. In the first instance, the correspondents decide what is newsworthy, ignoring all events they deem not interesting enough for their editors, whose expectations they anticipate. Interestingly, the editors themselves base their expectations on anticipations of what their clients might find interesting enough to buy the news. Because foreign correspondents are usually based in the capitals and only very rarely in other major cities of a country, their output frequently ignores trends, developments and events in different parts of the country in question, unless something remarkably unusual happens. News reporting is event-focussed; hence contextualisation is reduced to a bare minimum, although what has been omitted could well have been crucial additional information for any recipient without an in-depth knowledge of history, society, culture, economy, political development and the international relations of the country in question to actually make full sense of the report. Even if the correspondents themselves want to provide wider contextual frameworks, they are still severely limited by the formats to which they are required to adhere by the editorial policies of their own agencies, those of the agencies' clients, and also by technology and established media standards.

As previously stated, news agencies act as gatekeepers. Their own sources might be

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rather diverse but are seldom as impartial as often claimed. To keep up to date with events, trends and developments in a foreign country, the news agencies’ correspondents frequently monitor the country’s daily newspapers, skim through press releases, watch television and listen to radio broadcasts.\textsuperscript{121} They attend press conferences and rely on a network of native stringers. The latter are usually contacts in government, business, administration and the regional media who are fluent in one of the major foreign languages the agencies operate in. Additionally, correspondents tend to establish small networks of private contacts. More often than not, these informants share a cultural background with the correspondents. They are often Western educated, belong to either the ruling elites or the indigenous middle class, speak foreign languages and are well connected. The \textit{Guardian}'s correspondent to Tehran in the days of the Islamic Revolution, Martin Woolacott, explains:

There [Tehran 1979] was a collective of foreign correspondents. Most of them were Western, there were hardly any non-Westerners. The correspondents were assisted by a lot of local Iranians, but those would tend to be Western educated themselves anyway.\textsuperscript{122}

Quite regularly, foreign correspondents posted to less high profile destinations act as sources for each other. The prospect of correspondents briefing each other is in itself slightly alarming, but also hints at a more serious flaw in news reporting: cultural preconception. If in doubt, the Western source will often be more trusted than native sources. Among Western sources can also be counted embassies, business people or representatives of Western NGOs. The explicit mention of ‘Western sources’ in articles appearing in European or North American publications usually means that the information the article is based upon has either been received from another journalist or an official of a Western government who does not want to be named. In these cases the explicit mention of the 'Western source' also serves to add extra credibility to the article.

Another reason for the exchange of information between foreign correspondents – regardless whether they represent news agencies or any other media – is certainly

\textsuperscript{121} Klüsener, p. 32.
\textsuperscript{122} Klüsener, p. 34.
due to the fact that the task of gathering newsworthy information is in any case enormous for any single correspondent in a foreign country. Therefore any hint or tip from a trustworthy colleague is well appreciated, as Rudolf Chimelli, 1979 correspondent for West Germany's *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in Iran, confirms although he did not consider himself being part of any Western correspondent-community in Iran:

> Because I speak Farsi and had good knowledge of the country, its history and culture, I had better access to local sources than most other Western correspondents who seldom spoke the language or had any in-depth knowledge of the country. Therefore I was not really part of the community of Western correspondents in Tehran. The few I knew better and found reliable and trustworthy were the ones I exchanged tips, analyses and thoughts with.\(^{123}\)

Interviewed by the author on 20 March 2006, Justus Demmer, then head of press and promotion at Germany’s DPA (Deutsche Presseagentur) further elaborated on the news gathering process:

> Our employees in foreign countries also interview local sources. Moreover, DPA has partnership agreements with some 80 news agencies in all parts of the world. We are free to use their local material, as their correspondents in Germany can use ours. We review all our sources carefully to ensure that they are genuine and reliable. Every single news item coming in from correspondents will then be checked by at least one in-house editor before we distribute it to our clients.\(^{124}\)

The first step in the filtering-process is to determine whether information that has reached the desk of the bureau's editor is of any commercial value. If it is deemed to be of potential interest to any of their clients it will be made available to the subscribers of the relevant news services. This process involves a number of decisions to be made based upon an assumed understanding of what the retail clients and the final recipients might or might not want. While the global agencies claim to be impartial and to report only the facts as they are, they are nevertheless biased. They also act as interpreters. Foreign correspondents need to make sense of what they see, hear and experience. Their interpretation of events is rooted in their world view, one broadly shared with their editors, the agencies retail clients and last, but not least, the final recipients. The apparent bias is also a result of the news agencies’ business

\(^{123}\) Klüsener, p. 34.

model that regards news primarily as a commodity and thus either completely ignores events of little commercial news value or, in the best of cases, pays only minimal attention to them.

The global news agencies fiercely compete with each other. All the same, as Justus Demmer states, they also collaborate on various levels. The exchange of news among the agencies is part of their daily business. Over the decades, local, regional and global players have developed a collaborative network which is expressed as strong reciprocity, which can be traced back to the first global news cartel. Boyd-Barrett speaks of a bi-directional dependency that:

...involves exclusive use of news both in global and domestic markets. In order to secure compliant local partners it suited the globals to work through local monopoly structures. In the cases of the United States, Australia and New Zealand, local monopolies were achieved through strong local co-operatives which then charged high entry fees to outsiders. They secured the services of a global agency, in this case Reuters, through which they had access to news gathered by the members of the European cartel.125

Local partners were - and are - not always so easily subordinated. Boyd-Barrett states the example of DPA, the West German news agency initially established by the allies after World War II:

Here a local, media-owned co-operative agency, established, ironically, by the Allies in the aftermath of the last world war – retains a strength on its own domestic market which can withstand full-blown competition from the global agencies and which has even had the curious effect of encouraging the globals to become more local. This is certainly an unusual case. There are not many markets where the competition for local media is quite so unrestrained. Were DPA stronger, it arguably could mount greater competition on international markets; the strength of the activity of global agencies in its domestic market is possibly one strategy to discourage such an outcome.126

In some respect, DPA's East German counterpart and international competitor, ADN, was in a much better situation. The state-run agency had no domestic rival.

125 Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen, p. 30.
ADN – news and propaganda

ADN, the East German news agency, had almost no competition in its local market. The notable exception was the Evangelische Nachrichtendienst in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, the official news agency of the Protestant Church of the GDR.\(^{127}\) The ENA was founded in 1947. Its very first news bulletin, authorised by the SMAD, was issued on 4 August 1947.\(^{128}\)

The Allgemeine Deutsche Nachrichtendienst was also entangled in the global web of the news agencies and dealt on a regular basis with capitalist global giants such as Reuters, AP, UP/UPI and AFP, as well as with its West German counterpart, DPA, and the Soviet Union's TASS. The latter played a hegemonic role throughout the Eastern Bloc. To its partners in the West, ADN was a news agency like almost any other. They were aware that ADN as much as TASS and the other Eastern Bloc news agencies operated in a different ideological and economic environment and that ADN had been assigned specific tasks by the SED which determined and defined the agency's internal and external role. However, they also acknowledged that ADN adhered to basic professional standards and therefore accepted material provided by ADN in exchange for news received from the Western agencies. All the same, Western agencies entering into partnership agreements with counterparts in which their respective government has a say always keep some caveats in mind. As DPA's Justus Demme explains: ‘In cases where there is obvious or suspected government involvement, although we have partnership agreements we have to treat some of the material provided by these agencies with caution.’\(^{129}\)

ADN had, on the other hand, been part of the global network of news agencies and

\(^{127}\) Minholz and Stirnberg, p. 208.

\(^{128}\) The GDR's Protestant Churches also published five newspapers. However, the church's news agency focussed on church matters in particular and on religious matters in general. While occasionally touching on topics of broader interest, the agency could not do so without the consent of the censor. Unlike any other media in the GDR, the church publications - both Catholic and Protestant - including the news agency, were subject to pre-print censorship from the Presseamt. Albeit, despite pre-censorship, the ENA repeatedly ran into trouble with the Presseamt because the agency in several cases refused to adapt the officially prescribed language. For more details on the Kirchenzeitungen and Censorship also read Holzweißig 'Die schärfste Waffe der Partei'.

had entered into various partnership agreements with major international players which granted the agency, and thus the SED and the GDR's media, more or less open access to a plethora of foreign news and intelligence. As early as late 1946, ADN signed its first contract with a foreign partner, the British agency Reuters. Until the end of the 1940s, a number of further partnership agreements would follow, primarily with agencies of friendly socialist countries. By 1957, ADN also had concluded agreements with UPI, AP and AFP. By 1984, the number of ADN’s international partners had risen to 89 and even included the West German competitor Deutsche Presseagentur (DPA). Due to the professionalism and reliability of the agency's work, and despite the obvious role as a tool designed by the SED to control the domestic media and to spread propaganda, ADN was firmly integrated into the global system of news and information exchange. Already by the end of the 1960s, ADN had managed to establish itself as an international agency. While ADN enjoyed a domestic monopoly, the agency had successfully built a network of branches and correspondents in a number of countries and had entered into supply- and distribution- contracts with all of the major global and also some selected important regional and national news agencies. According to DPA’s Justus Demmer, whose agency also had entered a professional agreement with ADN, pointed out the awkwardness of it:

   "Our partnership agreement with ADN was not any different from the ones we had with other agencies. We were free to use their local material as their correspondents could use ours. However, we were always aware of the fact that ADN was controlled by the SED and that therefore any domestic news they distributed had to be taken with a pinch of salt."  

   The SED's leadership was rather pleased with the international standing ADN had achieved, and in an expression of their satisfaction, in 1986 they awarded the agency the prestigious 'Karl-Marx medal'.

   An international partner of overwhelming importance to ADN was the Soviet

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130 Minholz and Stirnberg, p. 341.
132 Minholz and Stirnberg, p. 63.
Union’s official news bureau, TASS. Not only was ADN modelled on the Soviet agency, but TASS also, for the most part, determined the ideological direction the German agency had to follow in its international reporting. In the early 1950s, the activities of ADN and TASS were to a high degree coordinated. To ensure that ADN operated according to the standards set by TASS, the latter had placed three ‘coordination editors’ in the Berlin offices, who worked in the so called ‘Russischen Abteilung’\footnote{Lit.: Russian Department} and officially acted as advisers, although in practice they supervised their German colleagues. Furthermore, in this period, ADN director Hansen frequently travelled to Moscow where he received new instructions which were to be implemented in Berlin. In October 1950, TASS was also instrumental in putting into place a network of news agencies from friendly socialist countries. The treaty concluded between the agencies stated as its main purpose the:

...mutual coordination of news reporting in the interests of the common goals of socialist activism and the struggle for peace. Furthermore, the purpose of the network should be to create a common defence against the warmongering and mendacious propaganda of the Western powers.\footnote{Minholz and Stirnberg, p. 319.}

The agencies frequently exchanged news and photos, collaborated in the fields of documentation and technology and assisted foreign correspondents of partner agencies where possible. Additionally, as a means to further qualify their personnel, they exchanged staff on an annual basis. Last but not least, they periodically organised conferences, set up study-groups and established procedures for close journalistic cooperation in any major events. To get the maximum out of the cooperation with the other Eastern Bloc agencies, ADN's headquarters in Berlin set up the task group, ‘Socialist Economic Integration’, which was put in charge of joint projects with the socialist partner agencies.

The role assigned to ADN in the framework of the GDR's media system was clearly defined. As early as 1945, both the SMAD and the communist leadership arriving back in Berlin from their exile in Moscow had been very aware of the power news agencies had in terms of setting agendas and creating and promoting narratives.
Equally important, they recognised that the GDR's media had to rely on the output of a news agency in order to function. Minholz and Stirnberg quote the German media scientist Walter Hagemann to convey the party leadership's recognition of the imperative to establish a news agency. In 1950, Hagemann described the news agency as an essential tool for both newspapers and radio without which neither would be able to meet the recipients' demands of 'actuality' and 'universality':

The retention of an army of additional correspondents – domestic and abroad – is beyond the economic capabilities of even the biggest international papers. This demonstrated the indispensability of a journalistic institution which was organised according to the principles of mass-production and mass-distribution and hence capable of acquiring the merchandise, ‘news’, on an industrial scale and distributing it to the highest number of customers.135

When ADN was put under state control in 1953, the aim was to break the bourgeois news monopolies, since the nineteenth century typified by the likes of Reuters and WTB. Also, ADN was the tool designed to counter the harmful propaganda of the West German media by providing alternative readings to the 'bile and lies’ spread by the West Germans.136 The two principal tasks set were therefore: internally, ADN was to function as a tool to exercise power by instructing the media; externally, the agency's mission was propaganda, the promotion of Marxist-Leninist ideology in general; and the achievements of the GDR and the SED's ideological positions in particular. ADN was to function as the voice of the SED and was tasked to assume leadership in the field of GDR journalism. Thus the agency was not only the main provider of foreign and home news to the GDR's leading newspapers, but also determined the narratives, and acted as the official mouthpiece of the SED. ADN

...exercised critical selective influence over what information could appear in the GDR media, especially in terms of foreign affairs. Radio and press coverage would often simply reproduce ADN reports verbatim, since every journalist knew the serious professional danger of inaccurately re-writing an ADN report. By restructuring institutional channels of informational flows, the party could and did guarantee a great deal of homogeneity in media forms simply as a result of the structuring of the flows.137

135 Minholz and Stirnberg, p. 15.
136 Raue, p. 112.
137 Dominic Boyer, ‘Censorship as a Vocation: The Institutions, Practices, and Cultural Logic of
In addition to its function as a professional organisation engaged in the gathering and distributing of information, in the ideological framework of the Marxist-Leninist press theory of the GDR, the socialist press agency is also defined ‘as a political tool in class struggle’. ¹³⁸

The recognition of ADN's key role also induced the SED leadership to knit the agency even closer into the political organisation of both party and state and integrate it even further with GDR area studies. Kai Hafez describes the degree to which ADN and the area disciplines were increasingly interwoven:

Not only graduates, but also academic employees in area studies, have, for varying periods of time, worked in the GDR's foreign office or in other organs engaged in foreign relations. As early as in 1962, the state secretary for higher education demanded a closer linkage between academics from the area disciplines and the foreign policy activities of the GDR such as travel cadres in cultural institutions, trade representations, ADN and embassies. The number of travel cadres in the area disciplines was relatively high. ¹³⁹

By providing texts and images and by setting agendas, ADN was to serve as a tool of the GDR's media policies that were designed to contribute to the development and consolidation of socialist consciousness. ADN was to provide the GDR's press, radio and television with up to date and partisan information on all relevant events in all fields. ¹⁴⁰ The same was expected from ADN journalists. They had to be dedicated believers in the SED's version of Marxism-Leninism, ready and willing to promote the policies of the party and to contribute to their realisation. Hence, news distribution was understood as ‘agitation using precise facts’, thus enabling the citizens of the GDR to better understand and recognise who their friends, and who their enemies, were, and encouraging them to side with the working-class and to work for peace and socialism. ¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Minholz and Stirnberg, p. 40.
¹⁴¹ Deba Wieland, ADN's managing director from 1952 – 1977, as quoted in DDR Handbuch.
Although ADN held an almost complete monopoly on foreign news, the agency was not the main provider of news for all the GDR's media. Among the daily newspapers, all central organs of the parties and mass organisations based in East Berlin and in the regional capitals had to subscribe to ADN's services. Local newspapers, on the other hand, very rarely obtained news from the agency, and if so, then usually only after they had been encouraged by the Presseamt or the regional party-organisation to carry a specific piece. For the GDR's public broadcasters – both radio and television –, ADN was their primary source of news and information. However, both electronic media also employed highly competent journalists, too, who not only carried out their own research but also in turn supplied ADN with domestic news on regional and local levels.¹⁴²

As mentioned above, ADN’s international offices and foreign correspondents also played a vital role in the GDR's attempts to break the almost complete diplomatic isolation the country found itself in during most of the first three decades of its existence. Until 1972, the FRG’s threat to break off diplomatic relations with any country that fully recognised the GDR prevented the GDR from establishing normal diplomatic relations with all countries of the Western world and with a vast majority of countries in the developing world. Furthermore, the GDR was also prevented from cooperation in international bodies such as the United Nations and its sub-organisations. The GDR, not surprisingly, perceived West Germany's politics of aggressive isolation as a very real threat to its existence.¹⁴³ In the period from 1949 to 1972, East German foreign policy was limited to full diplomatic relations with a dozen communist countries. The GDR was not represented in even one international organisation, nor was it partner in any universal international agreement – with the notable exception of the Moscow Treaty from 12 August 1970.¹⁴⁴ In an international context, the GDR was only – albeit rather successfully – present at sport events.

In its struggle to achieve international recognition outside of the Eastern Bloc, the

¹⁴² Minholz and Stirnberg, p. 206.
¹⁴³ Muth, p. 30.
GDR sought to establish a range of contacts and exchanges with groups, organisations and officials of other countries that were on levels below those of formal diplomatic relations. Between 1949 and 1972, ADN’s international offices and the foreign correspondents played a key role in the GDR’s attempts to create a favourable international climate and to establish links with other countries. Once accredited as correspondents in a country, the journalists had access to sections of the political elites as well as the opportunity to establish and maintain contact with decision makers in business, culture or sports. In some ways they acted as diplomats, which did of course have an impact on their reporting. The opening of ADN’s office in the Swedish capital, Stockholm, in 1956 had a particular significance for the GDR and was celebrated as: ‘the first major step out of the international isolation forced upon the GDR by West Germany and her Western allies.’

What was expected from ADN's correspondents was no mean feat: they had to be professional journalists and at the same time ambassadors for their country. They were obliged to promote the SED version of socialism and to establish and maintain contacts not only with socialist parties but also with senior figures in politics and the economic sphere. Statements from both senior ADN employees and high ranking SED officials indicate that they valued the diplomatic activities of the correspondents much more than their journalistic work. Once a foreign government had signalled its readiness to positively engage with the GDR, ADN correspondents – as well as the domestic media – were advised by the Presseamt to not report negatively on the country on question. In the case of Iran we will see that both ADN and the leading newspapers of the GDR at times reported positively on the country and the Shah's government even though the Marxist-Leninist Tudeh party was banned and heavily persecuted. That scores of party members disappeared in Iran’s prisons, were tortured and executed, did not prevent the GDR from maintaining amicable relations with the Shah’s government, thereby violating all the principles of proletarian internationalism upon which the official foreign policy was based. The analysis of articles on Iran

One notable organisation founded for that purpose was the Gesellschaft für kulturelle Beziehungen mit dem Ausland (Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries).

Minholz and Stirnberg, p. 284.
Minholz and Stirnberg, p. 286.
Bruns, xi, p. 52.
published in the press of the GDR between 1949 and 1989 clearly demonstrates to what extent the SED, and thus editors and journalists, followed through an approach that could best be described as Realpolitik. Amicable relations with the respective governments of Iran were always prioritised over party-relations with the Tudeh.

From 1949 until 1972, the main reasons to open an office in a foreign country were more likely to be of a political rather than a journalistic nature. The primacy of politics over journalism is also demonstrated by the preferences shown when it came to the establishment of relations with foreign news agencies. That ADN established contractual relations with agencies in newly independent countries such as Zanzibar, Madagascar or Sao Tomé was primarily due to the GDR's foreign policy strategy. The GDR was quick to recognise as a sovereign state any country that emerged from a struggle for independence from their former colonial masters. The aim of this strategy was to encourage these countries to, in turn, formally recognise the GDR, thus breaking the isolation enforced on the GDR as a consequence of West Germany's application of the Hallstein Doctrine. Because ADN's foreign correspondents often acted as unofficial representatives of the SED and the GDR's foreign office, too, they were occasionally, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, accused of espionage for the GDR and, by implication, the USSR. Mostly, the accusations were made by the West German media. In some cases, the consequences were severe for ADN. In October 1961, for example, ADN's London correspondent, Ruth Kallmann, who had been based in the British capital since 1957, was denied the renewal of her residency permit on her return from a short holiday in the GDR. Her successor, Franz Krahl, Neues Deutschland's London correspondent, was soon after asked to leave the UK, too, which meant that in the beginning of 1962, the GDR had not a single correspondent in the UK. Similar fates met the correspondents in Kenya (November 1965) and Uruguay.149

Initially, ADN cooperated with the Gesellschaft für kulturelle Verbindungen mit dem Ausland150. The society was founded in 1952 and originally tasked with the establishment and maintenance of cultural relations with relevant organisations and

149 Minholz and Stirnberg, pp. 291–293.
150 Literally ‘Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries’
societies in other states of the emerging Eastern Bloc. Only two years later, however, the scope of its activities was widened significantly and the society was transformed into an organisation that could potentially act on a worldwide level. In 1956, the society opened the *Informationsbüro für Auslandspropaganda*\(^{151}\) whose main purpose it was to provide friendly organisations abroad with material about the GDR in their respective native languages. When the GDR reorganised their foreign activities in 1961, essential parts of the *Gesellschaft für kulturelle Verbindungen mit dem Ausland* were taken over by the newly founded *Liga für Völkerfreundschaft*\(^{152}\). In 1978 the society finally ceased to exist\(^{153}\).

Although ADN had by 1989 established 47 international offices, it is conspicuous that despite the internationalist propaganda of the GDR which continuously expressed full and unrestricted support for developing countries more than half of these offices were actually in Europe. As was and is the case with foreign correspondents of most Western agencies, ADN journalists were not necessarily experts in the internal affairs of the country to which they had been assigned. Often, they neither spoke the local language(s) nor did they have any specialist knowledge of the local history, culture, economy, structures of power or political organisation. Usually, they stayed for two to four years in the country and would then be moved to another country, often in a different part of the world, where they stayed for a similar period.\(^{154}\) Because there were so few international ADN offices outside Europe, they usually covered vast geographical areas. The ADN correspondent for Iran, for example, was based in ADN's Egypt office, and accredited in Egypt as well as in Iran and had to cover most of the Middle East. Only occasionally did ADN's Cairo-based Iran correspondent spend more than a few days in Tehran. This was the case with Eberhard Amme, who stayed in Tehran for several months during and after the Islamic Revolution. Very rarely did ADN send additional special correspondents to places such as Tehran. The Cairo office was chosen to cover Iran, rather than any of the other Middle Eastern offices, in Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut or Khartoum, because there were frequent

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\(^{151}\) Literally 'Information Office for Propaganda Abroad'

\(^{152}\) Literally 'League for Friendship among the Peoples'

\(^{153}\) Muth, p. 90.

\(^{154}\) Minholz and Stirnberg, p. 301.
flights to Tehran. Another reason for the choice was that Iranian-Egyptian relations were mostly trouble free during the Shah's regime, although they severely worsened shortly after the Islamic Revolution.\textsuperscript{155} For the at-best-sporadic presence on location, ADN compensated by other means. Inside the GDR, the agency operated a highly sophisticated listening-station equipped with satellite receivers and high-tech aerials which monitored radio and television transmissions from the entire Middle East.\textsuperscript{156}

\textsuperscript{155} This particular bit of information was provided by DAPD Nachrichtenagentur GmbH, the legal successor of ADN.

\textsuperscript{156} ‘ADN Sendestelle, Weesow, D (Textauszug zum vimudeap Objekt)’, de <http://www.vimudeap.de/292_4691.html> [accessed 5 January 2013].
Period 1: 1949 – 1960

... and Iran

On 26 June 1949 the foreign news section of Tägliche Rundschau, the daily newspaper run by the Soviet Military Administration (SMAD) and printed in German, published a short piece on Iran. It bore the somewhat unimaginative headline ‘…und Iran’.\(^{157}\) The article paints a dire picture of Iran and of the country’s economy that is supposedly heading towards a serious depression. It claims that as a consequence of the Iranian government’s failed economic policies, around 80% of the population are malnourished, have no access to appropriate housing and have less than the bare minimum of clothing at their disposal. The article was based on material provided by Allgemeiner Deutscher Nachrichtendienst, the East German news agency that had been founded in 1946\(^{158}\) and was still privately owned in 1949. However, the text makes it clear that ADN itself is not the original source, but rather, it broadly refers to reports in other newspapers, above all to an article published in a magazine called Dad.\(^{159}\)

The article seems odd in several respects. Firstly, no further context is provided. Therefore, the reader, in all likelihood not an expert on Iran, will have wondered what kind of economic policies the Iranian government were pursuing and why they continued these policies although the results were clearly devastating. All the reader learned from this article was that the situation in Iran was bad: people were suffering, and their government was to blame. Secondly, Germany might have lost the most devastating war in modern history, the country might have been occupied and

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\(^{157}\) ‘…und Iran’, Tägliche Rundschau (Berlin GDR, 26 June 1949).

\(^{158}\) Founding members were a number of publishing companies, newspapers and radio stations. Originally, ADN was set up as a limited company and licensed by the SMAD. In 1953, the SED dissolved the limited company and put ADN under state control.

\(^{159}\) [...] Presseberichten zufolge...[...]. In both East and West German media this is a standard phrase used to indicate that the text is not based on one single and clearly identifiable source but on reports in one or more newspapers which may or may not have based their version of events on more reliable sources or research. The use of the phrase expresses a caveat, the editors want to make it clear that they could not themselves verify the factual correctness of the information provided. No further information could be obtained about the magazine Dad which the article also referenced.
divided, the cities destroyed and Germans still had to come to terms with the fact that the majority of them had willingly taken part in world history’s most gruesome organised genocide ever, and yet, apparently, elsewhere, there were people who were even worse off. However badly defeated Germany was in World War II, in 1949 both parts of the divided country were well back on the road to recovery. Housing was still a problem and so were food and employment, but the general well-being of the population had already improved massively since the end of the war in 1945. The message East German readers of Tägliche Rundschau could therefore extract from this article was very simple: ‘We may not yet live how we’d like but we are getting there. Others have it much harder.’

At the time the article was published, the GDR had not yet come into existence. The population of the Soviet Occupied Zone still had access to media from the zones occupied by the French, British and Americans. While access to Western media was already severely restricted in much of the rest of the zone, people living in the Soviet administered sector of Berlin still found it easy to access newspapers and magazines from the other zones. Thus people, including East German journalists and editors, were able to compare competing narratives, and so they did. On 18 July 1949 the East German newspaper the Berliner Zeitung filed a news report distributed by VWD - a financial news agency based in the West German city of Frankfurt am Main that later became part of Deutsche Presse Agentur (DPA) - which provided some of the context that the article above had missed. According to the news report, Iran’s Cabinet had approved a number of measures for the implementation of a ‘seven year plan’ for the development of the Iranian economy. The news then lists the measures: an industrial credit bank was to be founded to supply industrial concerns with long term credit. A portion of the publicly owned shares in the Agricultural Bank was to be transferred to a planning organisation to enable it to purchase machinery, to establish co-operatives and to support further developments in agriculture. Finally, the old Iranian Industrial Bank was also assigned to the planning organisation.160 Interestingly, although the news-item was made available at least to the editors of the Berliner Zeitung, Neues Deutschland and Tägliche Rundschau, none of the media in the Soviet Occupied

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160 VWD, ‘Iranischer Siebenjahresplan’ (VWD, 1949), Archiv Berliner Zeitung Iran C 33 F.
Zone used and broadcast the information provided.

On a different level, the article in *Tägliche Rundschau* also clarifies the official Soviet line on Iran in the late 1940s. In this period, relations between the Soviet Union and her southern neighbour were difficult to say the least and they still suffered from the fact that only seven years earlier, in the summer of 1941, British and Soviet troops had entered officially-neutral Iran and dethroned Reza Shah Pahlavi. The move had been deemed necessary by both powers because of the close economic ties between Iran and Germany and because after Germany’s attack on the Soviet Union there were still many German advisers and military experts in Iran. For the economic ties, Nikkie Keddie states, Germany was the leading country in Iran’s foreign trade from 1939 to 1941, controlling more than half of it.\(^{161}\) To the growing dismay of both Britain and the USSR, Germany had used the period between the two world wars to steadily increase her political and economic weight and influence in Iran and to establish herself as the third major foreign player in the country. However, the principal reasons for the joint occupation of Iran in 1941 were probably less Soviet fears of a military attack, since even Moscow officials privately admitted that there was no military danger emitting from the presence of Germans in Iran.\(^{162}\) More likely, the reasons for the joint Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran were to secure vital gas- and oil supplies, as well as to keep supply routes for military equipment open. To legitimise their move, the Soviets invoked Article VI of the treaty between Iran and the USSR concluded on 26 February 1921. This article granted the Soviet Union the right to move troops into Iran if Moscow felt there were threats to the security of the USSR emanating from across the southern border. The allies not only invaded and occupied Iran, they also forced Reza Shah Pahlavi to abdicate in favour of his son Mohammad Reza and they intervened massively in Iran’s interior affairs.\(^{163}\) In 1942, British and Soviet troops in Iran were joined by American forces. After World War II

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\(^{163}\) The history of Tsarist Russia’s and later the Soviet Unions and Britain’s interference in Iran’s affairs is a long one and dates back to the 18th and 19th Century when Iran became the top prize in the Great Game which saw Russia and Britain struggle for dominance in Central and West Asia.
came to an end, in 1945, Soviet troops showed no indication of a forthcoming withdrawal. At the Tehran Conference (28 November to 1 December 1943), Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill had pledged to observe the independence of Iran and withdraw their troops from Iran following the cession of hostilities. Instead, the USSR demanded rights to oil exploration in the north which were on par with those the British enjoyed in the South.\footnote{Fred Halliday, \textit{The Middle East in International Relations} (London: Cambridge University Press, 2005).} By the beginning of January 1946, British and American forces had left Iran, while the Soviets stayed on. The occupation ended at the end of May 1946, but only after lengthy negotiations between the Iranian premier Qavvam and the Soviets in which Qavvam granted a concession for a joint Soviet-Iranian oil concession in the north, a promise that still had to be approved by Iran’s Parliament. Following the withdrawal of Soviet forces, soon after the separatist regimes collapsed, the Iranian army took over the provinces of Kurdistan and Azerbaidjan and the leaders were sentenced to death and executed\footnote{Keddie (2003), p. 112.}. The consequences for the Tudeh were dramatic, too. Those Tudeh members who had a seat in the cabinet were expelled and the party was to suffer from heavy-handed suppression for years to come.\footnote{Adam B. Ulam, \textit{Expansion and Coexistence: The History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-67 / by Adam B. Ulam.} (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968), p. 427.}

Things got worse for the Soviet Union: not only did Moscow have to come to terms with rapidly growing American influence in Iran but the signed agreement over the establishment of an Iranian-Soviet oil company was not ratified by Iran’s parliament and this at a time when the war-alliance finally fell to pieces and was replaced by the open ideological, economic and strategic confrontation which culminated in the Cold War. Some historians regard the showdown between the USA and the USSR over the latter’s continuing occupation of Azerbaijan as one of the starting points of the Cold War.\footnote{Halliday, p. 124.}

In short, relations between the neighbours had turned sour towards the end of the 1940s. Against this backdrop, the negative description in \textit{Tägliche Rundschau} of Iran as a backwater of civilisation where hunger and extreme poverty are prevalent, no longer comes as much of a surprise.
In 1949, the newspapers and magazines published in the Soviet Occupied Zone of Germany rarely printed anything about Iran. One of the very few references to Iran can be found in *Neues Deutschland* on 19 March 1949. The article, prominently placed on *Neues Deutschland*’s front page, celebrates the success of the 1949 Leipzig Trade Fair. Over the past eight centuries, the Leipzig Trade Fair had developed into one of the foremost of its kind in Europe. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Leipzig Trade Fair had even become one of the most important trade events in the world. After the war, the Leipzig Trade Fair had to re-establish itself at a greatly reduced level and in a significantly altered economic environment. Every success story the Leipzig Trade Fair could provide also was a point scored in the East’s economic and political competition with West Germany, which was rapidly emerging from the ashes of the Third Reich to become a new economic world power. Unlike the first two post-war Leipzig Trade Fairs, this one was organised by the ‘Ostzone’ alone. To emphasise the obstacles faced by the East Germans in general and the organisers of the Trade Fair in particular, *Neues Deutschland* laments the *Transitsperren* (transit blockade) imposed by the military administrations of the three Western occupying powers, which banned certain goods, organisations and people aiming for the Eastern zone from passing through the territories of the Western zones. The article then continues by stating figures which are meant to demonstrate the scope of the success claimed. Of particular interest in the context of this thesis are the following:

2,300 foreign buyers have visited the fair and a total of 1,869 sales agreements have been signed. All in all, 33 countries have bought products of the Eastern Zone. […] Among these were a great number of non-European states such as India, Argentina, Canada, Lebanon, Israel, Iran, China, Iceland.

Although Iran is only mentioned as being one of 33 states that entered into trade

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170 Eastern Zone (of Occupation), a commonly used German term for the Soviet Occupied Zone.
relations with the Eastern Zone at the 1949 Leipzig Trade Fair, this is one of the earliest indications that there was an East German realisation that the oil-rich country could be a potentially important trade-partner. Occasionally, Iran was mentioned in the context of Soviet-Iranian relations, too. For example, on 10 April 1949 Neues Deutschland reported that the USSR had delivered 100,000 tons of wheat to Iran in order to prevent starvation in the neighbouring country.\textsuperscript{172} In December 1949, Neues Deutschland again focussed on Iran. This time, however, the topic had a particular German twist. According to the news report, the US had handed Iran’s General Staff a list of Nazi officers and had granted Iran the right to contact the former officers of the defeated German Wehrmacht and to offer them employment. According to ADN, which was named the source of the news, and Neues Deutschland, the only condition the Americans attached to the deal was that the German officers were to be stationed in the strategically important military zone in North Iran which borders the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{173} The news primarily serves as a means to underpin the GDR’s emerging principal narrative which, very simply put, was: the GDR had completely broken with Germany’s Nazi past and was the real and only home to the progressive, anti-imperialist and peaceful working-class, whereas West Germany was the capitalist and neo-imperialist heir to the Third Reich, where Nazis are still pretty much in charge. In this narrative, West Germany’s occupiers and protectors, especially the USA, are power-hungry, aggressive imperialists who have no problem working hand in glove with former Nazis and using them against the Soviet Union and her allies. The notion that Iran was increasingly becoming a primary target for US imperialism was also promoted in a previous article Neues Deutschland had printed in April 1949. The article quotes from a speech the leading Tudeh member Iradj Eskandari had given during the first World Peace Congress held in Paris:

The delegate from Iran, Eskandari, denounced the imperialistic politics of the United States of America which are aimed at the economic and political subjugation of Iran. The people of Iran are not prepared to accept that their country is being transformed into an American military base against the Soviet

\textsuperscript{172} ‘100.000 Tonnen Weizen aus der Sowjetunion’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 10 April 1949).

\textsuperscript{173} ‘USA “Hilfe”: Nazi-Offiziere’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 20 December 1949).
As will become evident in the analysis of the published articles selected for this thesis, the portrayal of Iran as a victim of American and – to a lesser and lesser extent – British imperialism will develop into one of the main Iran narratives in the GDR media. However, it appears that throughout 1950 Iran dropped off the GDR press radar. Only from spring 1951 onwards can a renewed interest in Iran be detected. For the rest of the year, though, and also in 1952, Iran became a familiar topic not only for the readership of Neues Deutschland, but also for the Berliner Zeitung and Tägliche Rundschau as well.

Throughout most of the 1950s, as regards the manner in which the GDR media portrayed Iran, it generally followed the example set by Tägliche Rundschau in its 26 June 1949 article.\footnote{In response to the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany on 23 May 1949, the German Democratic Republic was established on 7 October 1949.} To reiterate the Soviet media’s official line on Iran, which had to be adhered to by the GDR’s publications, on 14 January 1950 ADN distributed a German synopsis of an article Trud had published on the same day.\footnote{ADN, “‘Trud’ über die Lage der Werktätigen in Persien’ (ADN, 1950).} Trud, established 1921, was the organ of the USSR’s Labour Union and among the most influential Soviet publications. According to ADN’s news release, Trud’s assessment of Iran’s economic and social environment was bleak. The country’s elite’s were selling out to the US imperialists, while the situation of the workers went from bad to worse. The headline, translated by ADN, was well chosen: ‘Armut und Hunger der Werktätigen in Persien’ (Poverty and starvation of the workers in Persia). The article then goes on to describe the economic malaise of Iran and its effects on the working-class and peasants alike, in greater detail – and blames the effects on American ‘aid’ for Persia:

The newspaper [Trud] points out that a catastrophic rise in unemployment figures was the first consequence of this ‘aid’. By April 1949, there were already one million unemployed in Persia. In the big textile centre Isfahan almost all factories have been shut down and the workers have been made redundant, while in Tabriz more than half of the local manufacturers had to fire their workforce. The unemployed do not receive any benefits, which has led to

\footnote{‘Manifest des Friedens’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 26 April 1949).}
a rapid increase in suicide numbers and crime.

Then the article focuses on the situation in Persian-Azerbaidjan, the part of Iran the Soviets had occupied until May 1946, and where Soviet troops had protected a left-leaning autonomy-oriented government. And this is what apparently bothers *Trud* most:

In Persian-Azerbaidjan, thousands of farmers are faced with ruin. Thus, unrest among the peasants who are oppressed by the big landowners is steadily increasing. [...] With extensive speculation, hundreds of big landowners, merchants, industrialists and members of the government have, hand in glove with American speculators, made large profits at the expense of the workers.177

Implicit here is the assumption that peasants and workers would have fared much better if the province had remained under the control of a socialist government, protected by Soviet troops and linked with Moscow. Instead, the old elites had sold out the country and the wealth of its peoples to American capitalists in order to maximise their own profits. This article, taken from *Trud* and translated and distributed by ADN, set the tone for most of the news that GDR print publications brought out on Iran in the following years. Not that there were many, though. For all of 1950, there are only a handful of articles and stories on Iran, most of which appeared in the Soviet published *Tägliche Rundschau* rather than in any of the new East German publications. A very brief news item that appeared in the newspaper on 27 April 1950 serves as a further example of the main perspective *Tägliche Rundschau* took on events in Iran in 1950. The piece was based on material sourced from ADN and United Press (UP), the precursor of United Press International (UPI): *Tägliche Rundschau* is also listed as a source. However, it is not clear if *Tägliche Rundschau* journalists have provided additional information or whether the newspaper credits itself ‘only’ for the final edit. In just 29 words, the article tells of events that took place in the North Persian city of Shahi178 on 26 April 1950. The brevity of the news item allows for the reproduction of the translated text in its

177 In the 1950’s and 1960’s, German media used both Iran and Persia as names for the country. Only after the GDR’s establishment of formal diplomatic relations with Iran in 1972 was the use of Persia discontinued.

178 Until the Iranian Revolution the city was known as Shahi. In the aftermath of the revolution the name was changed to Qa'em Shahr. Shahi was one of the centres of Iran’s textile industry. Interestingly, the article locates the North Persian city in the south of the country.
entirety:

Tehran. 26 April (ADN/UP/TR). On Monday, in the South [sic] Persian town of Shahi, police units opened fire on a protest march of striking textile workers. Five people were killed and many more were injured. The textile workers were demanding higher wages.179

The headline for this article was ‘Feuerüberfall auf Streikende’. The choice of vocabulary is striking. ‘Feuerüberfall’ is a military term and in its normal use describes artillery shelling180. The headline therefore blows events, which were severe enough anyway since there were indeed five casualties and an unspecified number of injured, somewhat out of proportion. The intention seems to have been to emphasise even further the unequal balance of power and armament between the striking workers and the armed (though not with artillery) police.

Also worth mentioning is an article that appeared in Neues Deutschland on 16 May 1950 and which, once again, highlights the tensions between the USSR and Iran in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The article bears the headline ‘USSR hands note of protest to the government of Iran’. The article is based on material sourced from ADN and it reports the unease the Soviets feel about the Iranians’ plans to send a team of cartographers, oil-prospectors and American ‘specialists’ into the Iranian provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran. The work was intended to be carried out along the Soviet-Iranian border, which raised the suspicion of the Soviets, especially since part of the proposed exploration involved taking aerial photographs. The note of protest explicitly stated that Moscow was concerned that the real purpose of the undertaking might well be the gathering of relevant military-strategic intelligence. The note of protest expressed the indignation felt in Moscow about not being consulted but, instead, having to learn of the exploration through an article in the Iranian newspaper, Keyhan. Finally, Neues Deutschland reported that the Soviet embassy in Tehran had reminded the Iranian government in no uncertain terms of the Soviet-Iranian treaty from 1921, which gave the Soviet Union the right to move troops into Iran if Moscow had the feeling that either the security of the USSR or the internal stability of Iran was

179 ‘Feuerüberfall auf Streikende’, Tägliche Rundschau (Berlin GDR, 27 April 1950).
180 In British English the corresponding term would be ‘stonk’.
threatened.\textsuperscript{181}

The image of Iran that dominates reporting on the country in the first months of 1951 is that of a country in the grip of internal class struggle and externally dependent on US imperialism, to which the ruling elites have sold out. Rather than engaging in deeper analysis of Iranian contexts, the news reports often seem superficial, engaging only with some selected aspects of events instead of providing a fuller picture.

This changed when \textit{Neues Deutschland} dedicated almost a whole page to an Iranian point of view expressed by Iradj Eskandari. Eskandari, a prominent leader of the banned Tudeh party, had come to Paris to represent the Iranian peace movement at the first World Peace Congress in the French capital. This article set a precedent. It was the first in which a Tudeh leader set out ‘as an expert’ the views held by Iranian communists of events in their country.\textsuperscript{182} Until 1989, there would follow a number of key articles in \textit{Neues Deutschland} and \textit{Horizont} authored by Tudeh members who analysed internal developments in Iran and commented on changes in the relations between the Soviet Union and Iran as well as those between Iran and the West.

Aside from the peace rhetoric and calls for peace treaties between the five powers\textsuperscript{183}, Eskandari’s piece provides a couple of carefully drafted narratives which emphasize a view of the Soviet Union that is supposedly commonly held among the people of Iran – despite the anger over the Soviet occupation of Azerbaidjan during and immediately after the war:

\begin{quote}
Iran is the only country in the Near East on whose territory the Red Army was stationed side by side with the British and the American armies. The Persians could see with their own eyes the differences between the armies of the imperialistic countries and the army of the Homeland of Socialism. The brotherly and impeccable attitude of the Soviet army stood in harsh contrast to the attitudes of the Anglo-American soldiers and officers who behaved as if they were in one of their colonies and neither respected Iran’s sovereignty nor the customs and traditions of the people. This comparison rendered completely...
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{181} ‘Note der UdSSR an die Regierung des Iran: Befremdende Tätigkeit einer Erdöl-AG / Amerikanische “Fachleute”, \textit{Neues Deutschland} (Berlin GDR, 16 May 1950).

\textsuperscript{182} Iradj Eskandari, ‘Das iranische Volk steht immer zur Sowjetunion’, \textit{Neues Deutschland} (Berlin GDR, 1 March 1951), p. 4.

\textsuperscript{183} Reference was made to the five permanent members of the UN Security Council: USA, UK, France, USSR and China
implausible the mendacious and defamatory propaganda of a government which is in thrall to Anglo-American imperialism.\textsuperscript{184}

In another part of the article, Eskandari elaborates on what he regards as the widespread anger among Iranians about the continuous interference of Western imperialist powers in the internal affairs of Iran. He refers to strikes and demonstrations that were taking place in all major urban and industrial centres of Iran in early 1950. According to Eskandari, the vast majority of Iranians were not prepared to side with Britain and America against the USSR and that it was pressure from the people that had forced Iran’s government to sign a trade agreement with Moscow.

\textsuperscript{184} Eskandari, p. 4.
The Mossadegh era: 1951 – 1953

An article Neues Deutschland published on 1 April 1951 still shows little awareness of the most recent political developments in Iran. The article is based both on reports provided by ADN, and also on information gathered by ND's own staff. The article consists of two parts which are not really related to each other. Headline and sub-headline already give the split away: the headline runs: ‘In Persia 18,000 on strike’, while the sub-header informs the reader that: ‘75,000 Persians have signed the Berliner Appell. Additional information on the Berliner Appell will be provided further below. The first part of the news item tells the reader that there have been strikes in the large oil refinery owned by the Anglo Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) in the south Persian port-city of Abadan. 12,000 workers have gone on strike in Abadan alone, another 6,000 workers have joined the strikes in the oilfields of Masjed-e Sulaiman, which is about 230 kilometres away from Abadan. The article also states that the governor of the Khuzestan province has requested that central government dispatch additional troops to the oilfields. This is the information given. What is missing is any kind of context. To be able to fully comprehend the situation in Iran in April 1951 and to understand the context and the significance of the strikes, the readership would have needed more information.

Oil, and the fact that the AOIC exploited Iran’s natural oil reserves without paying adequate royalties for the right to do so, was a hot topic in Iran. The 1950 election campaigns to a new Majles, Iran’s parliament, were primarily fought over oil. The popular National Front, which opposed a ‘Supplemental Agreement’ with the AOIC that had been agreed to by Iran’s previous government, emerged as the winner from the elections. The National Front was also making a strong nationalist case and was vehemently opposed to any subservience to foreign powers. With its anti-imperialist and anti-colonial stance, the National Front not only attracted nationalists and urban conservatives but also a wide range of left-leaning and social democrat

185 ‘In Persien 18.000 Streikende - 75.000 Perser unterzeichneten Berliner Appell’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 1 April 1951).
186 That there was a significant contribution from ND- journalists was made clear by the addition of Eig.Ber. (Eigener Bericht = own report) in the Header section of the article’s body text.
intellectuals who were not, or only loosely, affiliated with the Tudeh. More seriously, and to the consternation of the Tudeh party, the National Front also gathered significant support from among the unions and the working-class in general.  

The omission of vital background information makes it hard for any reader with less than an in-depth knowledge of Iranian politics to make sense of the information provided them. One of the problems the newspapers may have faced was perhaps a lack of reliable correspondents and sources in Iran. Tägliche Rundschau for example based its 31 March 1951 report of strikes in the oil fields of the AIOC almost entirely on material sourced from the Western news agencies AP and UP. Incidentally, Tägliche Rundschau uses ‘Persian’ rather than ‘Iranian’: there was still no consensus on which name to use for country and people in the GDR press.

The second part of the news simply states that 75,000 Persians had signed the Berliner Appell. Again, no further context is provided. East German readers, however, will have been well aware of the Berliner Appell, which dominated the headlines of Neues Deutschland on several occasions in 1951. The Berliner Appell was a resolution adopted by the first congress of the World Peace Council. The World Peace Council originated from an international peace conference in Paris in the year 1949. About 2,000 delegates from 72 countries gathered in the French capital to lay the foundation of a global peace movement. The conference was opened by Frédéric Joliot-Curie, the symbol of the movement, a stylised blue dove, La Colombe, was created by Pablo Picasso, especially for the conference. The World Peace Council, later based in the Finnish capital Helsinki, soon had branches and affiliated local peace groups in more than hundred countries. Throughout the Cold War era, the World Peace Council was accused of being an organisation set up as an Eastern Bloc propaganda tool, financed and organised by the Soviet Union and her European satellites. The allegations were not entirely unfounded. Shortly before his death, Stalin had ordered the creation and mobilisation of civil organisations in East and

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188 Sepehr Zabih, Communist Movement in Iran (Oakland: Univ of California Pr, 1966).
190 Iran’s representative at this conference was Iraj Eskandari, nephew of the first secretary general of the Tudeh Party and later himself a prominent leader of the party. In the summer of 1946, Iraj Eskandari was appointed Minister of Commerce and Industry in Qavam’s coalition cabinet.
West, of which in later years the World Peace Council would become one of the most influential. However, although the influence of the communist parties, of both East and West, was certainly present, the World Peace Council was in all likelihood never as fully controlled by Moscow as its critics in the West have claimed. The organisation survived both the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union and is still active, although the worldwide support it enjoyed in the decades from 1950 until 1980 has largely diminished. The Berliner Appell to which the article refers, appealed to the five big powers (the permanent members of the UN Security Council: US, USSR, France, UK and China) to end confrontation immediately and to start negotiating a lasting and reliable peace-treaty. The appeal was fully supported by the SED and by the GDR media, who throughout 1951 tirelessly reported record numbers of signatures from all over the world.

Most of early spring 1951 the GDR press paid, at best, sporadic attention to Iran, and then, only if events were somewhat dramatic. On 14 April 1951, for example, the Berliner Zeitung picked up a news report from AP about unrest in the South Persian oil fields near Abadan in which several people had died. The same day, Tägliche Rundschau provided a little more information on these events. While the Berliner Zeitung summarised the events in only 23 words, Tägliche Rundschau dedicated 184 words to them. Although the Tägliche Rundschau’s article is also primarily based on the AP bulletin, the newspaper was able provide additional detail based on research by its own correspondents. Crucially, Tägliche Rundschau also placed the strike in a broader context. In Tägliche Rundschau’s version of events the strikers had demanded the immediate nationalisation of the oil fields. Hossein Ala’s government responded to strikes and demands – according to Tägliche Rundschau – by sending in a tank brigade to break the strike; thereby bowing to pressure from Britain’s foreign minister, Morrison, who had threatened to dispatch British troops to Iran.

The more dramatic the wave of incidents, the more attention the East German press gave them. One day after Tägliche Rundschau’s more substantial article, the

191 Michael Ploetz and Hans-Peter Müller, Ferngelenkte Friedensbewegung?: DDR und UdSSR im Kampf gegen den NATO-Doppelbeschluß (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004), p. 27.
following up on events, delivered additional details, too. The article was mainly based on bulletins from ADN and some added information researched by BZ’s own staff. The *Berliner Zeitung* paid special attention to Morrison’s threat against Iran and also reported that the British had begun to build up their naval presence near Abadan.194 *National Zeitung*, the official organ of the *National Demokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NDPD), provided further details on 17 April 1951. The paper, which did not reveal its sources, claimed that Iran’s Prime Minister Hussain Ala, in a meeting with Britain’s ambassador, Shepherd, had been ordered by the latter to undertake even more draconian measures against the striking workers.195 *National Zeitung* also noted that most of the oil from Abadan was destined for the American fleet based in the Mediterranean Sea and gloated at the prospect of American warships stranded because of a lack of fuel.

The narrative emerging from these few examples is clearly one that pits the working-class against a government that is under control of the British and does not hesitate to use the military against its own people if told to do so by its masters. It is therefore not too dissimilar from Eskandari’s description of the situation in Iran a few weeks earlier. Still, in their reporting of the strikes in the oil fields, the GDR press relied almost exclusively on agency reports and did very rarely, if at all, use as sources the contacts the SED had by then established with members of the Tudeh. That the agencies, in this case ADN, had only limited access to first-hand information or eyewitness-reports, is demonstrated by an article in *Neues Deutschland* that was printed on 21 April 1951. Once again, the general news topic is the on-going strikes in Abadan. The particular occurrence reported on that date is that soldiers employed against the striking workers had apparently refused to obey orders to open fire on the strikers196. The only source referenced by ADN and ND is the Iranian newspaper *Madjmar*. However, this narrative would soon be challenged and change dramatically, when one of the key events in Iran’s modern history unfolded: the confrontation between the newly appointed Prime Minister, Mossadegh, and the West, and consequently the overthrow of Mossadegh and his government on 19 August 1953.

196 ‘Soldaten verweigern Schießbefehl’, *Neues Deutschland* (Berlin GDR, 21 April 1951).
An article published by *Neues Deutschland* on 20 June 1951 marked the change in emphasis. The news is based on a broadcast from Radio Tehran and includes some additional material added by *Neues Deutschland*’s editorial staff. The article only reports the position taken by Radio Tehran and does not provide any alternative point of view. The bias is therefore clearly recognisable and indicates the preferred view the GDR press was to assume for the entire duration of the confrontation between the Mossadegh government and the AIOC/Britain. The piece carries the headline ‘Iran will not bow to blackmail’, which is followed by the sub-headline ‘Government called off negotiations with representatives of the Anglo Iranian Oil Company’. Interestingly, the body text starts with the expression *Bekanntlich* which can best be translated as ‘as is well known’ and presumes a certain familiarity with Iranian affairs among *Neues Deutschland*’s readership. On what this assumption is based is not quite clear, because up until that time there had only been very limited reporting on Iran’s conflict with the AIOC; even less had been written previously on the presumably ‘well known’ demand from the government of Iran that Anglo-Iranian agree to pay Iran a royalty of 75 per cent of all yields as a pre-condition for talks. The article then laments the bland and evasive response the AIOC had given to Iran’s demands. Finally, in direct reference to the headline, *Neues Deutschland* reiterates Radio Tehran’s claim that ‘the imperialistic circles of Great Britain and the USA are attempting to intimidate the people of Iran in a war of nerves.

From 20 June 1951 onwards, the GDR press closely followed events in Iran as they unfolded. News was now printed on an almost daily basis. The sudden interest the GDR press took in developments in Iran seems to indicate that there was a sense that the country’s confrontation with the West might turn out to be a game changer in terms of Cold War constellations in the Middle East. The more hostile Britain and the US grew towards Iran after the Mossadegh government had nationalised the oil industry, the more Iran was perceived as a potential ally for the Eastern Bloc. This view was not unique to the GDR press, either, since American and British media had begun to portray Mossadegh as the Iranian politician who was about to lead Iran into Moscow’s arms.

Iran’s confrontation with the West continued to dominate the reporting throughout 1951. The articles emphasised the strong support Mossadegh enjoyed from both parliament and population and expressed a notion of Schadenfreude about Anthony Eden’s warning, in a speech to the British lower house, that the loss of Iranian oil would lead to dramatic consequences for Europe’s defence capabilities. The same article, the source of which was possibly Neues Deutschland’s London correspondent, also stated that the British military was preparing for a grand offensive against Iran. A further narrative evolving was that of David (Iran) against Goliath (Britain/USA), underdog versus villain. Initially, Mossadegh was portrayed as a kind of modern Robin Hood who, very much like the mythical figure, enjoyed the undivided support of the majority of Iranians regardless of their class or political background for his stance against the mighty imperialist powers. In the summer of 1951, GDR interest in Iran reached beyond the oil-question, too. On 28 June 1951, Neues Deutschland informed its readers that Iran’s youth were preparing for the III World Youth Festival in Berlin and announced that the Iranian delegation would showcase examples of traditional Iranian folk-art which had a tradition stretching back thousands of years. The primary focus, however, remained firmly on Iran’s quarrels with the West. Reports of threats posed to the Iranian port-city and oil harbour of Abadan appeared frequently on the pages of Neues Deutschland, the Berliner Zeitung and Horizont. The involvement of the UN’s Security Council and therefore of the Soviet Union became a real possibility when Iran announced that it would take its case to the UN.

Apparently, in anticipation of Iran’s move to appeal to the Security Council, the Soviet publication Trud clarified the Soviet Union’s position towards events in Iran. On 30 June 1951, Neues Deutschland printed a translation. The Trud article left no

200 ‘Schwerer Schlag gegen Kriegsprogramm’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 23 June 1951), section Außenpolitik, p. 6.
201 As source/author was stated ‘eigener Bericht’ (own report), which indicates that ND’s London correspondent has contributed some of the material. Additional information has probably been added to the article by a member of ND’s editorial staff.
204 ‘Jugend des Iran rüstet für Berlin’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 28 June 1951), p. 4.
doubt that the Soviet Union fully supported the stance taken by the Mossadegh government and agreed with most — if not all — of its actions. However, the article, at least in its German translation, carefully avoided any wording that could have hinted at a more practical and material support of Iran’s government against the West.  

The III. World Youth Festival in Berlin gave the press the opportunity to break with routine and to provide a slightly different view on Iran. Most noticeable was a piece that appeared in *Neues Deutschland* on 27 July 1951. The author was Georg Ekbatani, according to *Neues Deutschland*, the representative of Iran’s youth on the International Committee that organised the festival. The article was quite substantial, filling only slightly less than one quarter of the page. The author gave an insight into the poor working conditions in the oil fields and refineries, and praised the workers’ resistance against British and American imperialism while facing the canons of British warships threatening Abadan. He painted a dramatic picture of the harsh poverty the unemployed experienced and described Iran’s youth as the avant-garde of a Middle Eastern youth movement that would campaign for peace and against Western imperialism. In one short passage he also described the relationship between the USSR and the youth of Iran:

The current struggle of the Iranian people has just one aim, to fulfil the people’s unanimous demand to end the exploitation of our country for the benefit of the bankers in the city of London and for the benefit of those who prepare war against our great neighbour the Soviet Union, who in her 34 year existence has always been a true friend of the Iranian people.

Here again the Soviet Union – and with it the other countries belonging to the Moscow-led Socialist Bloc – was firmly cast as the only real friend the Iranian people had in times where the country’s livelihood, if not its existence as an independent state, was once again under threat from Western imperialism. That only a few years previously the USSR themselves had been an occupier of sovereign Iranian territory was conveniently forgotten. For the reader in the GDR, the narrative was


reduced to a beautiful simplicity that perfectly mirrored one of the dominant Western Cold War narratives: Iran is the victim; Western imperialism aggressive; the Soviet Union and the Socialist states are peaceful and well meaning. Until the demise of the GDR in 1990, all that occasionally changed in this narrative was the place reserved for Iran.

Even in the summer of 1951, the narrative was not always straightforward, though, as the following article, again published in *Neues Deutschland* highlights. Unlike the vast majority of articles printed in *Neues Deutschland*, this piece is attributed to an author who signs it with the initials C.E. He quotes from an interview with three young men who have come to Berlin as members of the Iranian delegation to the III. World Youth Festival. They describe the misery of Iran’s working-class and claim that the Tudeh party, declared illegal in 1948, has been the only party to fight for the rights of the working-class. The article also accuses the Mossadegh government of double-crossing Iran’s people by openly confronting the West while, behind closed doors, still seeking close cooperation with the US. The article points at the ambivalent position the Tudeh held towards the Mossadegh government.

While the party – who despite its illegality enjoyed strong support among the workers as well as among urban intellectuals, and had established powerful networks inside Iran’s armed forces – supported the anti-imperialistic sentiment of the populist National Front government, the Tudeh certainly was bothered by the popularity of Mossadegh’s policies, even among its own supporters, and opposed to the bourgeois and nationalist character of the National Front. The article constituted the first clear indication that the Tudeh was about to place itself in opposition to the Mossadegh government. The fact that *Neues Deutschland* seemingly accepted the Tudeh’s strategy without any further comment or questioning indicates that the Tudeh concurred with Moscow on the role it needed to assume in Mossadegh’s Iran. The East German press continued to pay close attention to developments in Iran. The exclusive focus rested on the confrontation between Britain and Iran, the role of Truman’s special envoy, Harriman, as a ‘partial’ mediator, the threat to Iran posed by

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209 Zabih, pp. 177–180.
the British naval presence in the Persian Gulf and, to a far lesser degree, internal Iranian quarrels between the Tudeh and the authorities. No other aspects of Iran were mentioned. The press completely ignored the role of Islam and the clergy as well as social and cultural developments and gave no room to voices from inside Iran other than the occasional quotes from Tudeh members. What emerged, was a black and white picture with hardly any shades of grey.

Occasionally, the East German press also attempted to place Iran’s struggle with the West into a global strategic context. One such attempt was a remarkable article published by Neues Deutschland on 25 August 1951. The lengthy piece was authored by Georg Krausz\textsuperscript{210} and bore the headline ‘Achtung, Brandstifter am Werk!’ (Attention, arsonists at work), which was followed by the sub-header ‘Die Strategie bankrotter Kriegsanstifter: Kaesong – Teheran – Tokio – Bonn’ (The strategy of bankrupt warmongers: Kaesong – Tehran – Tokyo – Bonn).\textsuperscript{211} In his text, Krausz connected the Korean war with British and American military threats to Iran and American strategic planning envisaging aerial attacks on China and the USSR as it had been laid out in a Newsweek article.\textsuperscript{212} In this way he construed an analysis of a supposed imperialistic global strategy that posed a threat not only to the socialist countries of the Eastern Bloc but to all independent countries. His analysis put the Iran conflict into a global context that was dominated by the binary opposition between an American-led West and a Soviet dominated East:

Those who still doubt that Anglo-American imperialism is systematically working towards the wilful causation and broadening of armed conflicts should direct their views away from Kaesong and Tokyo and look at Iran instead. The Iranian people quite naturally claim possession of the oil riches of their own country. However, the English and American oil-robbers deny the people of Iran this right. Instead, London, seconded by the American Harriman.\textsuperscript{213}

\textsuperscript{210} At the time the article was published, Krausz was deputy director (Hauptreferent) in the Department Press, Radio, Propaganda at the SED’s executive committee.


\textsuperscript{212} The article Krausz was referring to could not be obtained, therefore it was not possible to check his quotes and references.

\textsuperscript{213} In July 1951, US President Truman sent William Averell Harriman as special envoy to Iran to mediate between the Mossadegh government and the British in their conflict over the fate of the Anglo Iranian Oil Company. Previously, Harriman had been the US ambassador to Moscow from 1943 to 1946.
threatens Iran with ultimatums and with invasion. What the hell are the British and the Americans doing in Iran in the first place, the man on the street might now ask? Is it not the people’s natural right to demand “Iran for Iranians!”? Is it not in their right to tell the British and the Americans “Get out of Iran!”? Is that not the natural right of every people in the world? The Anglo-American imperialists answer the people of Iran the same way they have answered the people in Korea: with warships and troops.\footnote{Krausz, p. 4.}

He also accused both Tokyo and Bonn of not only acting as willing helpers of Western imperialism, but of actually being among the driving forces behind the aggressive warmongering of the Western powers. To bring those readers up to date with the developments in Iran and to illustrate the scale of Western interference in Iran, the article also provided a time line from December 1950 to 23 August 1951. The news on the second date was that the British had amassed ten warships in the Persian Gulf which threatened the oil port of Abadan.\footnote{‘Britisches Ultimatum zurückgewiesen: Aktive Vorbereitungen zur Intervention gegen den Iran’, \textit{Neues Deutschland} (Berlin GDR, 23 August 1951), p. 4.}

However, despite the threats and sanctions imposed by Britain and America, a defiant Iran proceeded in the nationalisation of the AIOC and set up its own national oil company. Dutifully, the GDR press continued to report on the conflict, but the articles grew shorter and shorter once it became apparent that, in the end, the British would shy away from military intervention, not least because – according to \textit{Neues Deutschland} – the USA wanted to keep Mossadegh in power and was therefore opposed to any kind of British military operation against Iran.\footnote{‘England droht Iran mit Waffengewalt - Abadan unter iranischem Militärschutz / Alarmbereitschaft im Süden’, \textit{Neues Deutschland} (Berlin GDR, 28 September 1951), p. 4.} There was renewed interest when Britain took the matter to the UN Security Council. Immediately, \textit{Neues Deutschland} drew parallels to the war in Korea where – in ND’s version of events – the USA had exploited the Security Council to legitimise military action against Communist North Korea, which had attacked South Korea on 25 June 1950.\footnote{‘England blockiert Iran - Sicherheitsrat soll zweites Korea ermöglichen’, \textit{Neues Deutschland} (Berlin GDR, 30 September 1951), p. 2.} Two days later, the \textit{Berliner Zeitung} followed up with the news that in protest against British imperialism and in support of Mossadegh the unions had called for a general strike. The article was based on material from ADN and from Associated Press.
Interestingly, the spelling the *Berliner Zeitung* had chosen for the name of Iran’s prime minister (*Mossadek*) differed slightly from that commonly used by both ADN and *Neues Deutschland* (*Mossadeq*) and the *Mossadegh* you could also read on occasion. In the article, the *Berliner Zeitung*, too, pointed out explicitly that Iran’s government had declared that the presence at the UN Security Council meeting of an Iranian delegation, led by Prime Minister Mossadegh, would in no way imply that Iran recognised the authority of the Security Council in this matter.\(^{218}\) In this view he was supported by the Soviet representative at the UN Security Council, Zarapkin, who claimed that Britain’s move to take the matter to the Security Council would constitute a breach of Article 2 clause 7 of the UN charter and would therefore amount to a violation of Iran’s sovereignty. *Neues Deutschland* gave Zarapkin’s opening statement quite a bit of room and left no doubt that the views expressed by Zarapkin were fully shared by the newspaper.\(^{219}\) The press continued to report on the meetings of the Security Council as well as on the strikes which frequently hit Iran’s oil industry and on the military pressure on Iran building in the Persian Gulf. Occasionally, *Neues Deutschland* utilised Iran’s ‘heroic resistance against the forces of Western imperialism’ to take a swipe at West Germany. One of these could be found in *Neues Deutschland* on 17 October 1951, written by an author who signed his article with the acronym R.Kr. Titled ‘Nur Bonn kuscht’ (only Bonn knuckles under), the rather polemical piece first listed examples of Middle Eastern countries such as Iraq, Egypt and Iran who, in one way or the other, resisted pressure from Britain and the US. Then, now focussing on Iran, the writer made a point about Mossadegh that consequently served as the foundation for his attack on the government of the other Germany:

Iran’s prime minister, Mossadeq – certainly not a communist, quite the contrary – last Monday issued a unmistakeable warning to the British delegation at the UN’s Security Council and to the majority of the council members who were supportive of Anglo-American imperialism: under no circumstances would Iran bow to any coercive measures. Iran’s people would be adamant in the defence of its sovereignty and end the exploitation of Iran by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Thus speak even the most reactionary governments of semi-colonial

\(^{218}\) ‘*Generalstreik der Werktätigen Irans*, *Berliner Zeitung* (Berlin GDR, 2 October 1951).

\(^{219}\) ‘UdSSR verteidigt die Souveränität des Iran: Der sowjetische UN-Vertreter Zarapkin sprach vor dem Sicherheitsrat’, *Neues Deutschland* (Berlin GDR, 3 October 1951), p. 2.
countries whose peoples increasingly demand national independence. In contrast, what language does Bonn speak? Does Bonn dare to protest, however quietly, at the on-going occupation of its territory by French, British and American forces? Rather to the contrary, obligingly the Bonn government draws more and more foreign troops into West Germany.\textsuperscript{220}

In one sentence, the author accused the West German government not only of being reactionary but also of subordinating itself cowardly to Western imperialism rather than fighting for national independence. This was written at a time when both Germanys officially still stated the achievement of reunification as their highest priority. Accusing West Germany of voluntarily selling out to Western imperialism therefore also carried the charge that West Germany’s government had put obedience to the Western powers before the national interest of all Germans and was therefore to blame for the continuing division of Germany.

Mossadegh and the National Front, however, posed a dilemma for the East German press, too. They could hardly not express sympathy and support for his government’s actions in the conflict with Britain over the AIOC and had to acknowledge the widespread support Mossadegh enjoyed among the Iranian population, especially since a majority of the working-class – the core clientele of the Communist Tudeh party with which the SED maintained friendly relations – seemingly also backed him. For that very reason, though, Mossadegh’s National Front was also regarded as a serious competitor to the Tudeh. On the same page, \textit{Neues Deutschland} featured a second article, this time exclusively dedicated to Iran, which further modified the SED’s perspective on the situation in the country. In this article, titled ‘Iran wendet sich gegen Kolonialherren’ (Iran turns against the colonial masters),\textsuperscript{221} Mossadegh was portrayed not so much as an independent actor but as someone who was pushed by the majority of the people to pursue policies which might have run against his own political instincts, which were (according to R. Kr.) that of a ‘reactionary bourgeois nationalist’. The same article also quoted the Iranian MP Ashtianezadeh who in a speech to the Majles had thanked the Soviet Union, ‘in the name of the people of Iran’, for the support they gave Iran in the oil conflict with

\textsuperscript{221} ‘Iran wendet sich gegen Kolonialherren: Ministerpräsident Mossadeq erinnert an das Erwachen Asiens’, \textit{Neues Deutschland} (Berlin GDR, 17 October 1951), p. 2.
the West. The article consists of four different news items which are based on the output of Western news agencies, a press-statement issued by Iran’s delegation to the UN Security Council, minutes from the session of Iran’s parliament and a press statement issued by the National Iranian Oil Company.

Towards the end of 1951, the frequency of reports on Iran decreased even further. Occasionally there were further reports on strikes and demonstrations in early 1952. Other than that, the GDR’s press did not seem to be particularly interested in Iran. Readers looking for more in-depth coverage on the country, its history, culture and religion would find nothing on either in the newspapers. The only angle they took on Iran was that of ‘disaster journalism’: political unrest, strikes, earthquakes, international conflicts and the like were the primary topics. Likewise, there was hardly ever any news hinting at any kind of a relation between the GDR and Iran. Instead, in its assessment of Iran’s internal and external affairs, the viewpoint taken by the press in most cases was that of the interests of Soviet foreign policy, which in turn was increasingly informed by the emerging Cold War context.

One of the rare exceptions to this pattern was an article that Neues Deutschland brought out on 8 March 1952. It was part of a special page that was created for International Women’s Day and carried stories highlighting aspects of the challenges and difficulties women and children faced in different countries and cultures. The author, Cläre Einhorn, used the example of a working-class Iranian woman, Zakine, a single mother of eight children, four of whom she had lost due to malnourishment, to paint a very dark picture of the misery working-class-women had to endure in Iran. The author then moved to the general harsh situation of the millions of working-class women and their children in a country which had no social security system in place, no kindergartens and only one maternity unit for the whole of Tehran. Finally, she contrasted the misery of the working-class poor and their lack of protection and social security with the millions of dollars the Mossadegh government was about to spend on American military equipment. And still, ‘[…]Zakine was putting up a fight[…]’, wrote Einhorn admiringly.

Together with thousands of other working-class women she took to the streets. Not for bread and kindergarten, for women’s rights and better education for her
children, though, but for world peace, for a petition that demanded that the five big powers sign a peace treaty that would end the Cold War before it turned hot.²²²

A hint that recent developments in Iran’s foreign relationships had not gone entirely the way Moscow would perhaps have preferred was given in a news item that Neues Deutschland printed in late May 1952. Based on a statement issued by the official Soviet agency TASS, Neues Deutschland reported that the government of the Soviet Union, alerted by the unexpected resumption of the Iranian-American defence treaty, had presented the Mossadegh government with a note in which the Soviet Union made it very clear that this treaty was considered an unfriendly act because: ‘the outcome of the treaty is that the Iranian government effectively places the country’s armed forces under the control of the government of the United States of America.’²²³

The Soviets, and with them, it appeared, the GDR media, followed the rapprochement between the Mossadegh government and the US with some suspicion. An Iran in close military alliance with the US would imply the very real possibility of American military installations right on the border of the Soviet Union, a strategic nightmare for Moscow for whom encirclement was one of its greatest fears. Nevertheless, the GDR press, at least, soon lost interest in Iran again.

That would change, though, when on, 23 July 1952, Neues Deutschland’s front page featured the headline ‘Iran’s people wiped imperialist lobby off the face of the earth.’²²⁴ Four days after Prime Minister Mossadegh’s resignation, the Shah had appointed Qavam os-Saltaneh (spelled ‘Kavames Sultaneh’ by the paper) as his successor. However, there was no previous mention of Mossadegh’s resignation in Neues Deutschland or the Berliner Zeitung; the reader might well have wondered where Qavam had suddenly come from. The text then described Iran as a country in uproar about the appointment, and it talked of violent protests, strikes and multiple

²²² Cläre Einhorn, ‘Mutter Zakine demonstriert für das Recht der Frauen und Kinder’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 8 March 1952).
declarations by several political groups who opposed the appointment of the former representative of the nationalised Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. The article explicitly mentioned that the prominent Muslim leader Kashani had declared his solidarity with the calls for Qavam’s immediate resignation and had called for ‘action against Sultaneh’s lackey-government.’ This was a very rare acknowledgement of the degree to which the Shi’a clergy at times engaged in Iranian political affairs. Usually, at least until the revolution in 1979 changed the entire perception of the political potential of Iran’s Shi’a clergy, Islam as a factor in Iran’s societal fabric was more or less ignored by the GDR’s press. Again, *Neues Deutschland* could not resist a swipe at West Berlin’s social democratic media who, according to the article, had denounced the Iranian masses as a ‘mob’, and against the Adenauer government who could only ‘hold on to power because it enjoyed American protection’. The renewed interest in Iranian political developments manifested itself in a few further articles throughout July and early August 1952. *Neues Deutschland* and the *Berliner Zeitung* described how crowds in Tehran demanded the immediate withdrawal of all American military from Iran and attacked and beat up one unfortunate member of the American military mission. Repeatedly, they also emphasised the support the protest against the government enjoyed from some of the Shiite clergy and here in particular, from Kashani. What they failed to say, though, was that Ayatollah Kashani was not only a cleric but also a member of parliament, and that he had been allied with Mossadegh. It is a remarkable feature of the GDR press reporting on Iran that the role played by the religious forces in shaping developments in Iran was consistently ignored until the final stages of the Islamic Revolution made it impossible to neglect them any more.

The initially friendly alliance between Kashani and Mossadegh went through different stages and cooled down significantly in 1952 before turning into open hostility ahead of and during the events of 1953 which led to the overthrow of the Mossadegh government. In ‘Prime Minister Mossadegh and Ayatullah Kashani – from Unity to Enmity: As viewed from the American Embassy in Tehran’, US Air Force Captain Wolfgang K. Kressin provides one of the most detailed accounts yet of the difficult and competitive relationship between the two men which would significantly shape Iranian interior politics, as well as the Mossadegh government’s
decisions and actions, in the conflict with Britain and the US. The study also highlights how powerful alliances between the religious and the secular in Iran have been and would prove to be in the future. The argument is, for the most part, based on documents and material and other intelligence (including interviews with Kashani and minutes of talks between Kashani and Harriman) gathered by civil and military analysts based in the US embassy in Tehran from 1950-1953 – tainted by a cultural bias and Cold War mentalities of which Kressin is well aware – and provides some in-depth analysis of the course of events.

Kashani had a German connection, too, although probably only very few Middle East experts in the GDR were aware of it. In World War II, Kashani was behind operations against the British occupation forces which were aided by a ‘German-assisted network known as the Iranian Nationalist Movement’. Once Qavam had been forced out of power and fled the country, the East German media were again not overly-concerned with Kashani but focussed, rather, on the activities of what they perceived to be the progressive forces in the country: unions, working-class organisations led or influenced by the Tudeh, secular liberals and anti-imperialist nationalists. Less newsworthy, however, was apparently the return of Mossadegh, as Qavam’s successor. East German readers only learned about this event when several newspapers reported massive strikes in all sectors of Iran’s industries and violent clashes between working-class protesters and government-forces. The continuing unrest prompted the government to issue an anti-strike law, which Der Morgen, the official newspaper of East Germany’s Liberal Democratic Party (LDPD) reported on 26 October 1952, in just 23 words. The impression given in the text is that the Mossadegh government had resorted to dictatorial measures in an attempt to break workers’ resistance to their policies.

In the early 1950s, Iran was portrayed in the press of the GDR as a country which featured unremittingly miserable economic circumstances, social unrest and a working-class struggling against exploitation by foreign owned companies. There

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226 Kressin, p. 20.
227 ‘Mossadegh erläßt Antistreikgesetz’, Der Morgen (Berlin GDR, 26 October 1952).
were also tales of a country fighting colonialism and imperialism. The narratives were very much embedded in a wider Cold War context which pitted the USSR and her allies against a US-dominated Western Bloc USA and – to a rapidly diminishing extent – Britain. Viewed against that background, every move that Iran made on the international scene had direct implications for the strategic balance between the two superpowers in the Middle East. Because of Iran’s geographical proximity to the USSR and the long border shared by the two countries, any step that seemed to take the country into the Western camp was regarded with utmost suspicion in Moscow. In this period, there was no noticeable particular German interest in Iran. Therefore the GDR press usually simply adopted a Soviet point-of-view. With regard to developing countries, in the 1950s one core principle of socialist foreign policy was that of anti-imperialistic solidarity.228

Towards the end of 1952, the stream of articles on Iran appearing in the GDR’s press was reduced to a mere trickle and nothing prepared the reader for the dramatic developments which would make 1953 to a watershed year in modern Iranian history. How little attention was paid to Islam as the country’s dominant religion in general, and to the role some important factions of the Shiite clergy played in its politics in particular, is demonstrated in a very short news item Neues Deutschland printed in January 1953. The article was based on an ADN dispatch and reported the Ayatollah Borghai’s return to the city of Kum (Qom) from the Völkerkongress für den Frieden (World Congress of the People for Peace) which had taken place in December 1952 in Vienna. According to ADN, Borghai had been welcomed back by a huge crowd. The welcoming celebrations were disturbed by what the report described as a ‘hired gang of fascist provocateurs’. The ‘thugs’ were backed by the police who attacked the crowd.229 The Ayatollah Borghai referred to in the text was the Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Akbar Borqa’i, who was known for his sympathies for the Tudeh. In 1953, the Ayatollah Borujerdi forced him out of Qom.230 The article labels the city of Kum (Qom) a Mohammedan sanctuary. There was no further information on the huge

228 Muth, pp. 41–47.
229 ‘Völkerkongreß-Delegierte berichten in Warschau - Begeisterter Empfang im Iran für den mohammedanischen Geistlichen Ayatullah Borghai’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 6 January 1953).
importance that the holy city of Qom has for Shiites in- and outside of Iran, not only
as a spiritual sanctuary but also as one of the major centres of Shiite learning. This
short news item would be the only piece to mention Islam for months to come.

Instead, GDR press focus returned to Mossadegh and what it represented as his
struggle with the monarchist and pro-British elements of Iran’s bourgeoisie, along
with the left and, here in particular, with the Tudeh. In March 1953, Neues
Deutschland used news of an attempted coup d’état, following Mossadegh’s failure to
force the Shah to abdicate, to accuse the prime minister of maintaining close ties with
US imperialism:

The Britain-friendly wing of the bourgeoisie attempted a monarchist coup
d’état against Mossadegh who, according to Western news reports, sought
shelter in an American office building. By many, this was seen as further
evidence for Mossadegh’s connections with US imperialism.\(^2\)

The last part of the article emphasised that the ‘national-revolutionary’ (national-
revolutionäre) Tudeh party had come out in support of Mossadegh and had called for
the people to fight the intervention of foreign imperialists and colonialists. This was
the first explicit mention of the Tudeh in months and a good indication that ADN and
Neues Deutschland had realised that the Communist sister party was once again about
to assume a more pro-active role in Iran’s politics. Throughout March, April and May
1953 Tägliche Rundschau, the Berliner Zeitung and Neues Deutschland covered, in
various articles, a series of industrial disputes which were often fought violently and
in several cases ended with the police or military units opening fire on strikers and
protesters. The on-going civil unrest induced the Mossadegh government to put
places such as the city of Kermanshah under martial law. In a short news item, the
Berliner Zeitung informed its readers about that particular incident.\(^3\)

This very short news item, of just 21 words, emphasised the state of chaos and civil unrest that Iran
was apparently in, pitching workers and their organisations against a government that
did not shy away from harsh and occasionally bloody responses. The representations
of Iran in this period also portrayed a country that was on the verge of economic
collapse and, to a large degree, dependent on trade with the Soviet Union. A short

\(^2\) ADN ND, ‘Neue Kämpfe im Iran’, Neues Deutschland, 3 March 1953, p. 2.
\(^3\) BZ, ‘Erdölarbeiter demonstrierten’, Berliner Zeitung, 23 April 1953,
Western news agencies call the trade treaty concluded between Iran and the USSR in Tehran on 10 June 1953 the ‘rescue of Iran’s economy’. The treaty in which the Soviet Union widely accommodated Iran’s needs for imported industrial goods means a palpable easing of the country’s economic situation. Among other benefits, the treaty allows Iran significant savings on foreign exchange. Almost the country’s entire demand for industrial goods is now being satisfied through Soviet deliveries.233

Perhaps in an attempt to manifest the credibility of the news even further, Neues Deutschland decided to quote Western news agencies to press home the core message that without Soviet help Iran would have gone bankrupt. This portrayal of Iran's economic situation in spring 1953 did not entirely correspond with reality, though. At that time, Iran's economy was already responding positively to a whole catalogue of measures initiated by the Mossadegh administration. Output of refined sugar, textiles, and minerals rose and the trade balance was growing favourably in 1952 and 1953.234

The news itself was based on material from ADN, who most likely had also provided the dispatches from those Western agencies with whom ADN maintained contractual relationships. The very few stories one could find on Iran in the summer of 1953 were mostly concerned with the improving relations between the Soviet Union and Iran. The focus would suddenly change back to Mossadegh’s conflict with the West, though, when developments in Iran took a dramatic turn. On 18 August 1953, Neues Deutschland published an article about the coup d’état that had been attempted in March of that year and alleged in its headline that the coup had been ordered by the USA. Headlined ‘Putschisten in Iran arbeiteten im USA-Auftrag’, the piece, based on material provided by ADN and Radio Teheran and on a communiqué issued by the Pan Iranian Party, claimed that the American General Herbert Schwarzkopf235 had been directly involved in the attempted monarchist putsch against Mossadegh.236 Only two days later, Neues Deutschland reported another coup d’état:237

233 ‘Osthandel rettet Irans Wirtschaft’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 23 June 1953).
235 General Herbert Norman Schwarzkopf was the father of general Norman Schwarzkopf who was in charge of the American operations in the first Gulf War.
236 ‘Putschisten im Iran arbeiteten im USA-Auftrag’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 18 August 1953), p. 4.
237 ‘USA inszenieren Militärputsch im Iran: Monarchisten ermorden Außenminister /
On Wednesday [19 August 1953 ed.] military units under the leadership of General Zahedi occupied all government offices in the capital Tehran. They also took over the city’s radio station. Foreign Minister Fatemi has been shot while Prime Minister Mossadegh managed to escape the renegade units.

*Neues Deutschland* provided a rather condensed account of the run of events. The whole structure of the article, as well as the wording, indicates that *Neues Deutschland* as well as the paper’s sources in Iran – apart from spokespeople of the Tudeh party, probably foreign (Russian and Western) journalists, radio announcements, personnel of the Soviet embassy – were taken by surprise by the coup d’état. The additional background information provided was sparse. In just one short sentence the readership was informed that ‘Mossadegh had, as is commonly known, a few days ago dissolved parliament after a referendum and announced new elections.’ However, in their analysis of the background of the coup d’État *Neues Deutschland* was surprisingly accurate. The newspaper alleged that the putsch had been orchestrated by Americans and named as one of the main wire pullers the general Herbert Norman Schwarzkopf with whom the Shah had a number of talks before he fled Iran. Of Zahedi, *Neues Deutschland* knew that only a few days before the coup he had fled into the mountains where he had spend time with the ‘savage Bakhtiar mountain people whose chief was the father of the empress’. The still primarily pastoral ‘savage mountain people’ were one of the most important and powerful tribes of Iran. The Bakhtiar played a crucial role in the Constitutional Revolution. When Reza Khan came to power, he turned against the Bakhtiaris. The campaign against the tribe and its leaders was interrupted by World War II. However, although power and influence of the Bakhtiaris was clearly diminished after the war, they still presented a force to be reckoned with. Another detail not reported by *Neues Deutschland*, the wealth and income of the ‘Great Khans’ of the Bakhtiaris was directly affected by the nationalisation of the Anglo Iranian Oil Company. Against this background, and given Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi’s marriage with Soraya

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Esfandari, a granddaughter of the Bakhtiar leader Esfandiar Khan, it seemed to make sense that the general had sought assistance from the tribe. *Neues Deutschland* also provided little information on the role the Tudeh played, or had decided to play, immediately after the coup d'état. The Tudeh party was the only force in the country that possessed the organisational structures, including a vast network established inside the military, the strength and the discipline to offer any meaningful support for Mossadegh and resistance to the putschists. However, the party’s only action at that time was described by *Neues Deutschland* as follows:

> In an appeal to the people of Iran issued last Tuesday the Central Committee of the Iranian People’s Party (Tudeh) states: ‘Until the monarchy is eradicated to its roots, the breeding grounds for treason will continue to exist. Therefore the watchword for all fighters against the colonialists must remain "Down with the monarchy, long live the Democratic Republic".’  

The GDR press had very quickly come to the conclusion that the entire coup d’état had been organised and facilitated by the Americans. In the days that followed they provided further evidence for this supposition by citing reports from the American media such as the *New York Post* or the *Washington Post*. Other sources included dispatches from Western news agencies, interviews with Western business people who had been in Iran while events were unfolding and Iranian media. They quoted the British general, MacLean, who had stated that during World War II he had on one occasion almost shot the Persian general, Zahedi, because the latter had cooperated with a Nazi-supported conspiracy against the British occupiers and they reported that the Kashgai tribe, described as Mossadegh-supporters, had risen up against the Zahedi-putschists.  

After initial surprise at the coup d'état, the GDR press followed a clear and coherent narrative that was as partisan as it was accurate in at least some of its analysis. Although they severely underestimated the influence the British had in the preparation of the coup d'état, they realised very early on that the coup had been

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240 ‘USA inszenieren Militärputsch im Iran: Monarchisten ermorden Außenminister / Ministerpräsident Mossadegh geflüchtet’.  
orchestrated by the US. Interestingly, most of the reporting on the coup was based on Western sources. To a far lesser extent than could be expected, they seemed to have relied upon information gathered from members of the Tudeh, the Soviet press or the Soviet agency TASS. The articles were generally well researched and objective. The term objectivity, however, needs qualification: in the socialist understanding of objectivity in journalism, partisanship is considered objective as long as it favours classes and forces deemed to be progressive, which implies that the view taken by the GDR’s media was indeed heavily biased. Given the close connections between Iran’s Tudeh party and Moscow, it seems surprising how little was written on the responses of the Tudeh – after all also a sister party of the SED - to the coup d’etat or on any noteworthy actions the party had, or had not, taken to support Mossadegh and to defend him against the plotters. Although Neues Deutschland wrote of violent clashes between protesters and security forces in Kermanshah and Hamadan and also told of further fights between members of the Kashgai tribe and local police units, there was no word of whether the Tudeh had played any role at all in these occurrences.242

Also, in late August 1953, Neues Deutschland and the other East German publications appear to have relied increasingly on material obtained from Western news agencies and American or British newspapers rather than on sources of their own. Oil was another matter the press continuously focussed on. Here the story was that the coup had not only been orchestrated because the USA needed to ensure, militarily and strategically, that Iran stayed within the Western camp, but also because the USA wanted Iran’s oil for herself rather than leaving it to the British allies. A brief article Neues Deutschland published on 26 August 1953 made this point very explicitly:

Following his return to Iran, the Shah has issued a call for help, apparently addressed to the USA, for help with the consolidation of the bankrupt public purse. In response, Washington has stated that the prospect of the new Iranian government of receiving financial help would be good as long as it shows itself willing to settle the oil question in a reasonable way. What this means is that America expects Iran’s government to hand over to American monopoly capitalists the oilfields that had been nationalised following massive pressure

from the Iranian people.\footnote{USA spekulieren auf iranische Ölfelder, \textit{Neues Deutschland} (Berlin GDR, 26 August 1953), p. 2.}

In October 1953, \textit{Neues Deutschland} finally broke its silence on the Tudeh. The leader was written by an author who signed his article with the letters Lk and whose identity could not be determined. He first retold the story of Mossadegh’s nationalisation of Iran’s oil industries and then turned to what, in his opinion – which by then quite likely was the official view of the SED – was the greatest mistake Mossadegh had made in his conflict with domestic monarchists and fascists, the British and the USA:

The government of Mossadegh did not base itself on the crucial national force, the working-class and her party, the Tudeh. Because the bourgeois strata it represented were scared by the democratic demands made by the working-classes, the government failed to create for itself a mass base formed by an alliance of all patriotic forces in the Iranian people. Only for that reason could the American agents risk their coup d’ état by seducing the most backward layers of society to overthrow Mossadegh.\footnote{Lk., ‘Das amerikanische Henkerregiment in Iran’, \textit{Neues Deutschland} (Berlin GDR, 3 October 1953).}

The case the author makes is quite simply that of blaming Mossadegh for the fact that the Tudeh had not risen up to defend his government against the American sponsored coup. The article does not mention, however, that the price the Tudeh had to pay for its inaction was every bit as hefty as that of Mossadegh and the National Front. As soon as the Zahedi government had secured its position, it moved swiftly against the Tudeh and its military network. Although the Tudeh managed to put up some resistance in the following years, by 1958 the party had finally lost its social basis and its organisation. Thousands of Tudeh members had been arrested. The party leadership was either executed, imprisoned or lived in exile.\footnote{Maziar Behrooz, \textit{Rebels with a Cause} (London, New York: I.B.Tauris, 2000), pp. 10–11.} The exiled leadership regrouped in East Germany which not only added a new aspect to Iranian- East German relations before and after the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1972, but would also influence future perspectives on Iran of the GDR press. A first Tudeh member to be given prominent space in an East German newspaper was the writer Bozorg Alavi. In the GDR he was offered a visiting
professorship at the Humboldt University. In January 1954, *Bauern Echo*, the official organ of the Demokratische Bauernpartei Deutschlands (Democratic Farmers’ Party), published an article about Alavi’s visit to the Kreisbauerntag (*County Farmers’ Convention*) in the rural town of Aschersleben where he addressed the farmers. According to the article, Alavi presented a rather grim picture of the life of the majority of Iranian farmers and peasants, a life that was marked by illiteracy, poverty and a slave-like dependence on the big landlords, some of whom owned areas almost the size of Switzerland. Still, according to the article, Alavi then compared the situation of Iran’s rural population with that of East German farmers. The intention of the article is apparently to counter any feeling of discontent with their own situation the East German farmers might harbour by telling them: ‘Stop moaning, you are so much better off than those poor people in Iran’. Also implicit is the message, a point expressly made, that a fate very similar to that of the Iranian farmers would be in store for German farmers and peasants if the Anglo-American exploiters get their way. What makes this piece particularly interesting is the overt reference to programmes broadcast by RIAS.

The example of Iran demonstrates the grim realities of the so-called ‘liberal market economy’. Incredible wealth and abundance for a tiny minority of exploiters on one hand and hardship, misery and oppression for the working people on the other. All of those farmers, who still fall for the drivel of free market economy propagated by RIAS should keep these facts in mind.

The author is apparently convinced that most, if not all, of those attending at the Kreisbauerntag were familiar with the programming and broadcasts of the West Berlin based radio station RIAS, which propagated narratives and ideologies which were in obvious contrast to the official Marxist-Leninist world view of the GDR. This statement also implies a rather frank acknowledgement that in the GDR of the 1950s there was no such thing as an undisputed media-monopoly for the SED and, ergo, no hermeneutic hegemony either.

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248 RIAS = Rundfunk Im Amerikanischen Sektor (Radio in the American Sector), a radio and television broadcast service set up by the American Military Administration in West Berlin. RIAS programmes could be received almost everywhere in the GDR.
Later in the 1950s, the GDR press’ interest in Iran was mostly reduced to three primary topics: Iranian-Soviet relations, Cold War contexts and the economic misery in which Iran’s working-class and peasantry existed. Continuously, the country would also be portrayed as one that its leaders had voluntarily – against the will of the people – subordinated to the interests of aggressive Western imperialism. Towards the end of the decade, however, the East German press could no longer ignore the obsession with Iran’s Shah and his wife Soraya that had started to grip the media of West Germany. Because Western newspapers were still relatively easily available to East German readers and because West German radio transmitters reached almost all parts of the GDR, many East Germans were also aware of how big a topic the Iranian emperor’s family affairs had become in the West. So it comes as no surprise that East German papers started to respond to the West German craze and put forward their own views. On 27 of January 1957 the Berliner Zeitung printed an article titled: ‘Worüber Soraya nicht [emphasis in original] weint.’ (What Soraya does not cry about). The headline mocked the way West Germany’s red top press presented stories on the life of Empress Soraya and her marriage to the powerful Shah as a kind of daily soap opera full of sentimental kitsch and oriental clichés. The article itself, authored by The Berliner Zeitung’s Iranian correspondent, did not mention Soraya once. Instead, the author described the miserable circumstances in which the rural population of Iran existed and dedicated a major part of the unusually long article – roughly 650 words – to the power the Solfaori [sic] family held over farmers and peasants in the more than 300 villages the brothers owned. Some of the themes in the GDR press portrayals of Iran so dominant in this period of time would still be present in the decade to follow. However, there were also some remarkable changes in the perception and representations of the country, as the next chapter will show.

250 The identity of said correspondent could not be established.

Our reader Annedore Schr.

On Wednesday 20 September 1961, the Berliner Zeitung responded to a reader whose name was given as Annedore Schr.\(^{251}\) Annedore might have been a real reader who had written a real letter to the editors of the Berliner Zeitung or she might have simply been made up by an editor who wanted to make a point. Regardless whether the reader was fictitious or not, in either case, the points the editor seemingly wanted to make by answering her letter(s) warrant closer attention, because his reply highlights some of the issues regularly brought up by the print media of the GDR in their reporting on Iran in the 1960s. The article first introduced the reader and her request: ‘Our reader Annedore Schr. very much deplores that our newspaper never reports on royal scandals and sleazy aristocrats.’\(^{252}\) The reader was then quoted:

You only ever write about the life of us working-class people. I know very well how we live. I would rather learn more about the lives of those in the limelight whose lifestyles are completely out of reach for the likes of us. Why shouldn’t I at least be allowed to dream of that?

Readers of the Berliner Zeitung would have sensed some mild criticism in these words. Frau Annedore Schr. from Berlin NO 35 was apparently accusing the Berliner Zeitung of being boring. She missed the entertaining little flights from the dull familiarities of everyday life in the GDR which the glossy West German illustrated papers so readily provided. Papers, to which she must have had fairly easy access until 13 August of 1961, the day on which the GDR began building the wall that was to divide West from East Berlin. This wall also cut East Berliners off from access to West German media. For the first time since the foundation of the GDR, the East German print media actually enjoyed a near complete monopoly that could no longer be challenged by newspapers, magazines and glossy illustrated magazines from the

\(^{251}\) ‘Auf vielfachen Wunsch einer einzelnen Dame’, Berliner Zeitung (Berlin GDR, 21 September 1961).

\(^{252}\) Unless stated otherwise, all translations from German are mine. If there are differences in spelling, ie Teheran / Tehran, I will use the German spelling in direct translations but the English in all other circumstances.
West. While GDR citizens still could at least partly, despite the GDR’s attempts to jam the signals, receive West German radio broadcasts and, increasingly in the 1960s, television programmes, access to printed media from the other side of the Iron Curtain was now severely restricted, if not near impossible. For those East Germans like Annedore, who had thrived on a diet of stories about royals and movie stars and who, like their West German counterparts, were fascinated by the tales emerging from the household of the Shah of Iran, the sudden cut-off must have caused withdrawal symptoms. The *Berliner Zeitung*’s reply to the reader’s letter sarcastically played to this tune, acknowledging that the political situation had indeed changed significantly. The GDR was finally completely severed from the West of Germany, the last ties had been cut:

Well, it is really unfortunate that you cannot longer educate yourself from glossy Western illustrated magazines that tell you which playboy is currently making Soraya happy or whether Empress Farah is pregnant again. Truly, this is a gap in one’s education! However, we are not fiends and therefore don’t want to withhold from you the most recent news about Empress Farah.

The article consists of three parts. The first, the letter and the editor’s response, serves as an introduction. Two photos, however, dominate the story: the first one shows a little baby boy with a measuring tape circling the crown of his head. The second one, much bigger, shows a little girl burying her face in a hand: the hand is that of a much older person, dry and wrinkly. The girl’s eyes show a dreamy expression. Space is always at a premium in daily newspapers; they are heavy on text and put less emphasis on visual elements. Photos of such a dominating size were rarely found in the GDR’s daily newspapers. The text-photo ratio is almost 2:1. The photos do not quite show what readers used to West Germany’s ’Soraya-Press’ would have expected.253 Leading to the stories behind the pictures, the author wrote:

If you want to find your way back to earth from your dreams, please, make sure you don’t miss the photo below and the accompanying text. Should you still continue to dream afterwards, we wish you a good night.

253 A term coined for those segments of the West German red top press who for years focussed almost exclusively on the Shah of Iran, his ex-wife, Soraya, and his second wife, Farah. The term has survived both, the Shah’s reign and Soraya Esfandiary-Bakhtiari.
Both pictures were taken from West German illustrated magazines and so were the captions. If any alteration had been made to either text or photos, then the Berliner Zeitung did not admit to them. The little boy with the tape-measure around his head was identified as nine-month old Jean Michel Boutenko, a French child who happened to have exactly the same body-measurements as Reza Cyrus Ali, the nine-month old son of Empress Farah. Jean Michel Boutenko, explained the article, was used for measurements by the Parisian fashion designer Jean Laffont, whom the empress had hired to design and to make all her son’s clothes; she wanted him to be dressed in the most up-to-date Parisian fashion. The article ended: ‘While Cyrus enjoys his holiday on the beaches of the Caspian Sea – he loves wearing his blue-and-white striped swimming-costume, Sheherazade, - in Paris Michel steps in as a model for him.’ Text and photo were accredited to the West German illustrated magazine Bunte Illustrierte/ Münchener Illustrierte.

The second picture was attributed to Stern, a liberal West German magazine that enjoyed a great reputation for excellent journalism and outstanding photographs. In the early 1980s Stern damaged this reputation with the ill-considered decision to publish the forged diaries of Adolf Hitler, a blow from which the magazine has never fully recovered.\footnote{For a comprehensive account of the ‘Stern Scandal’ which not only involved editorial staff at the German magazine and the forger Konrad Kujau but also some well reputed and internationally renowned experts who, after assessing the faked material, testified to its genuineness, see: Robert Harris, Selling Hitler: Story of the Hitler Diaries, New edition edition (London: Faber & Faber, 1987).} However, in the 1960s it was one of the beacons of quality German-language journalism. The photo itself was a carefully-set masterpiece which needed only a little in the way of descriptive text to convey a powerful impression of sadness, melancholy, suffering, and tiredness. The Berliner Zeitung filled in some of the background by describing the girl as a: ‘small child, living in poverty, whose siblings have all died from terrible deprivation’ before reprinting the original text: ‘She dreams of bread; her belly is swollen, her stomach is empty. The hand of this ten-year-old girl could be that of a fifty-year-old woman, she’s so worn out.’

What makes this article remarkable is the fact that both photos and text were taken from West German publications, seemingly to further emphasise the basic statement of the article: Iran is not the fairy tale glam-and-glitter world of Farah and Soraya, but
a rather backward Third World country in which 'normal people' suffer immensely.

The pointed reference to West German publications was no accident. Throughout the 1950s and very early 1960s we find several instances of GDR newspapers making explicit references to Western sources, the media of the 'Klassenfeind' (class enemy). On 8 July 1961 for example, *National Zeitung*\(^{255}\) published an article titled ‘...Du rettest den Thron nicht mehr’ (... you won’t save the throne anymore).\(^{256}\) The author was not named. The main sources, however, were. Chief among them was the West German glossy magazine *Quick*\(^{257}\), another one was West Berlin’s daily newspaper, *Morgenpost*. Using material from both, *National Zeitung* painted a dark portrait of Iran, according to which the country was on the verge of bankruptcy. The Shah’s regime was portrayed as a brutal and corrupt puppet of the oil monopolies and the US global strategists, which suppressed and exploited the masses. The *National Zeitung* article employed the West German publications as witnesses for the case it wanted to build:

Suddenly, Western correspondents find illuminating details to report. When there are government contracts available, from which every public servant will take a share for his friends and relatives, huge sums will be forked out for commissions first. Then machinery will be purchased on credit and pompous headquarters will be built for organisations that only exist on paper. When it is time to pay for all this, the entrepreneurs balk and simply start something new, for which their friends in the offices of government shove new credit to them.

At the time this appeared, the border between East- and West Berlin was still open and GDR-citizens enjoyed easy access to Western publications. The editors of *National Zeitung* were, therefore, right to assume that many of their readers were at least vaguely familiar with both *Quick* and *Morgenpost*. Employing Western media as a means of adding weight to their own reporting and opinion also indicates that East German newspaper editors might have sensed that they faced a credibility problem. In

\(^{255}\) From 22 March 1948 to 30 June 1990 the daily newspaper *National Zeitung* was the official organ of the National Demokratische Partei Deutschlands (NDPD). One of the four Bloc Parties, the NDPD had been set up to provide conservatives and nationalists with a political home in the GDR.

\(^{256}\) ‘... Du rettest den Thron nicht mehr’, *National Zeitung* (Berlin GDR, 8 July 1961).

\(^{257}\) Founded 1948, throughout the 1960s and 1970s *Quick* was one of the best-selling and most important glossy magazines in West Germany. One of *Quick*’s specialities in the 1950’s and 1960’s was extensive reporting on the Iranian Royals. In the 1980s *Quick* entered a phase of decline. In 1992 the magazine was finally taken off the market.
part, this problem was caused by the role the SED had assigned the press. The GDR populace was aware of the ‘propaganda’- function of the press and treated its reporting, even on foreign affairs, accordingly: it did not fully trust its own media.

As soon as the construction of the Berlin Wall had been completed, however, references to West German newspapers – not to West German television or radio, though – became increasingly rare. Only in matters which affected in one way or another both parts of the divided Germany, or where the GDR media directly responded to a report in West Germany’s press, references were still made. From 1962 onwards, ordinary citizens of the GDR were effectively cut off from all Western print-media. Not so, however, the editors of newspapers, leading party members and other state-officials, who needed access to foreign media. The state-owned news agency, ADN, frequently supplied the editorial offices with selected clippings from West German and other, usually translated, Western media.

As in later periods, in the 1960s East German print media primarily reported on key political developments in Iran. One such event took place on 18 May 1961 and initially attracted only very limited attention. In Tehran, some 80,000 protested against the government of Ali Amini, whom the Shah had appointed prime minister only one month previously.  Berliner Zeitung dedicated two sentences to the news. On 20 May 1961, the newspaper printed: ‘Hochrufe für Mossadegh’ (Cheers for Mossadegh). The headline suggests that in the eyes of the editor, the most important aspect of the event was that the crowd cheered for Mossadegh. The text confirms the impression:

Teheran.(ADN/BZ). In a mass rally, last Thursday (18 May 1961 ed) more than 80,000 supporters of the Persian opposition party, the National Front, demanded immediate parliamentary elections. For the very first time since 1953, cheers for the former, progressive PM Mossadegh could be heard at a public rally.

The short article followed the established conventions of news reporting in German newspapers. It stated the origin of the news (Tehran), the source (ADN) and indicated

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that the ADN-original had been edited further (BZ). Noticeably, the article referred to Iran as Persia. At that time, there was no common agreement among East German editors as to which name to call the country. The politically correct form would have been Iran, and only a few days later the same newspaper called the country by its correct name.\footnote{\textit{Verfassung verletzt}, \textit{Berliner Zeitung} (Berlin GDR, 18 June 1961).} Throughout the 1960s, the \textit{Berliner Zeitung} only repeated the Persia usage on a handful of other occasions, and it was not the only GDR- publication to do so. Both names, Persia and Iran, evoked particular cultural associations among some Germans. While those with a classical education might have associated Persia with the wars the Ancient Greeks fought against the Persian Empire or with Goethe’s admiration for the medieval Persian poet Hafez, whose work inspired the German’s \textit{West-Östlicher Divan}, the term Iran had a more sinister overtone to German ears. As the home of the mythical Aryans, ancestors of what, according to National Socialist race theory, later became the German master-race, Iran played a key role in Nazi race propaganda, which identified the Persians as racially related. This was all but forgotten by the early 1960s.

The article, not least due to its extreme brevity, did not provide any significant context. The reader would not learn from this brief news item who this Mossadegh was that the masses were cheering for. Nor did the article provide any information about why nobody had bothered to cheer for Mossadegh in the years from 1953 to 1961. In other respects, the text was slightly misleading. The reader might have wanted to learn why Mossadegh had been a ‘progressive’ prime minister, especially since ‘progressive’, in the terminology of the SED, was synonymous with socialist/communist. Mossadegh was neither. Rather, to the contrary, he was a feudal-bourgeois nationalist and pretty well portrayed as such in the GDR’s very own media throughout the early 1950s. However, the term ‘progressive’ was also applied to leaders of the Third World who were seen to pursue anti-imperialist causes. Hence people like Mossadegh or Nehru would be regarded as progressive, too. The failure of the Iranian communists to support him when his government was overthrown in a coup had, until 1961, never been properly aired in any discussion of Iran in the GDR press. Any reader without previous knowledge of contemporary Iranian history would not have been able to make much sense of this news, other than that there were...
80,000 angry people in Iran, followers of the opposition party, the National Front, who were demanding a parliamentary election and who were cheering for Mossadegh, a former ‘progressive’ prime minister, who had, until that very day, been more or less forgotten. Interestingly, there was no mention of the Tudeh Party or the party’s possible participation in opposition activities. In 1957, the Tudeh, one of the SED’s socialist sister-parties, had been forced underground. The party’s central committee, lead by Secretary General Reza Radmanesh had gone into exile to the East German city of Leipzig. From the GDR, the Tudeh not only organised the party’s activities inside Iran, but also operated a radio station, Peyk-e Iran, which broadcast into Iran.

The topic of growing opposition against the Shah’s government, led by the National Front, would throughout the remainder of 1961 and all of 1962 remain at the forefront of GDR press interest. 1962 was the year the GDR press paid more attention to Iranian affairs than in any other year of that decade. Mostly, events were mirrored in very short and dry news items, usually based on ADN reports, which only stated the event itself but failed to provide any additional background. A good example of this practice may be seen in an item titled ‘Amini soll zurücktreten’ (Amini has to go) that was published by the Berliner Zeitung on 22 January 1962:

On Sunday, students in Iran’s capital demonstrated for the immediate resignation of the Amini government and for new elections. There were fierce clashes with Iranian police. 200 students were injured, more than 100 arrested.

Up to that time, the reporting on the clashes between the opposition and the government had been measured and not particularly biased. This would change on 22 February 1962. The Berliner Zeitung am Abend (BZA), sister publication of the Berliner Zeitung, opened a new phase in the reporting on events in Iran, which turned increasingly partisan. The story was presented in an atypical fashion guaranteed to draw attention from readers. It opened with a big photograph, showing armed policemen or soldiers in riot-gear battering civilians. Next to the picture rather than above or underneath it, there run the headline: ’Darüber vergießen sie keine Träne!’

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(They don’t shed a tear over that!).

The text that followed was rather polemical in nature and demonstrated open animosity towards the Shah’s government:

That is how those in power in Iran do it: they outlaw the political parties; they bludgeon demonstrators; they shoot opponents. ‘We’ll simply build new prisons when we run out of cells’, drumbled Prime Minister Amini when a powerful student movement recently demanded the resignation of the corrupt Shah regime. What is it the people of Iran revolts against? Against extreme poverty. Against hunger, illiteracy and corruption. Against Malaria, tuberculosis and CENTO bases as bases for aggression. Against the sell-out of the country to foreign monopolies.263

The piece was odd in some ways. Formally, it was neither an opinion editorial nor news, nor did it deliver any valuable background information. The vicious attack on a foreign nation by a state-controlled newspaper, accusing its government of violence against the opposition, of murder, and – the main accusation – of starving its own people, might surprise at first. But the GDR, internationally still isolated, did not maintain diplomatic relations with Iran nor, in the early 1960s, were there any significant economic interests at stake. Consequently, there were no serious reprisals to fear. Because the GDR also played host to the exiled leadership of the banned Iranian Tudeh Party, an attack on the Iranian government over its dismal economic, democratic and human rights records could be sold as an act of international solidarity with Iran’s working-classes and other progressive forces, such as the National Front. This article blamed the Amini-government for virtually all the evils present in Iran, including malaria and tuberculosis. However, there was another reason behind this attack, too: Iran’s membership of the Baghdad Pact. The Baghdad Pact, or CENTO (the Central Treaty Organization) as it was called from 1958 on, was a strategic Cold War Alliance, initiated by the USA and established in 1955. Initial members were Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey and the United Kingdom.264 The US never joined the Pact as a member but continuously supported the organisation as an

associate. CENTO was set up to curtail any Soviet influence in the Middle East, and was quite rightly perceived as a strategic threat by both the Soviet Union and, by implication, the Warsaw Pact, of which the GDR was one of the key members. This article laid out the the GDR's position in the context of the Cold War and largely set the tone for a number of subsequent stories on Iran. The country would throughout the early 1960s be presented as corrupt, backward, brutally authoritarian, controlled by foreign oil monopolies and American global strategists. The latter aspect caused the occasional dilemma for GDR journalists, simply because in the Marxist-Leninist world-view a country controlled by imperialists and monopolies would, of course, also deserve to receive socialist international solidarity.

The first newspaper to devote more than just a few sentences to the developing situation in Iran and to provide an analysis of the situation from the GDR perspective was Neues Deutschland. Headlined ‘Teheraner Studenten stürmen gegen den Pfauenthron – zu den Demonstrationen in Iran’ (Tehran’s students rage against the Peacock Throne – about the demonstrations in Iran), the lengthy article, authored by Davoud Norouzi, analysed the situation in Iran strictly from a Tudeh point of view. Norouzi was among those Tudeh leaders who had gone into exile to East Berlin. This was not the first time that an official of the Tudeh had been given space in the party organ to write about Iran and to comment on current Iranian affairs, and Norouzi in particular would become a regular contributor on Iranian affairs in the 1960s. We do not know in what language the article had originally been written. Although the text was obviously partisan, it still provided some of the background which, up to that time, was clearly missing from many of the previous stories. Norouzi began with the student demonstrations which had made headlines all over the world, the many injured and the arrests of several leaders of the National Front. He then claimed that Iran’s PM Amini had threatened to imprison everybody who was openly anti-governmental and as proof he reiterated a quote allegedly from Amini: ‘Should existing prisons not be enough, the government will have to build new ones’. Norouzi


offered further details which had hitherto not been mentioned in any of the daily newspapers, among them that Amini had dissolved parliament ten months earlier and that he had violated the constitution by not arranging new elections. What followed this was a declaration of war by Tudeh on the Amini-government: 'The Tudeh Party of Iran, the most persistent defender of the social and individual freedoms of the people have taken up the battle against the Amini Regime.'

Norouzi saw the Tudeh in a great alliance which included the National Front and other 'democratic forces' in the country, but also Iranian students abroad. He denounced Amini’s land reform as a sham, reasoning that Amini himself held a large estate and was part of the landowning caste. Nevertheless, he explained the proposed land reform in great detail, focusing on the negative aspects for the peasantry and emphasising the benefits for the big landowners. Below the article, Neues Deutschland placed a very incongruous photo: it showed a silent protest of Iranian students, demonstrating against the Shah’s regime in the West German city of Hamburg!

The land reform, the first step towards the massive reform-project initiated by the Shah’s government after a public referendum in 1963, which became known as the White Revolution, posed another dilemma not just for the Tudeh but also for the journalists and editors of the East German press. On the one hand, the openly declared aims of the land reform, which included the redistribution of some agricultural land, addressed some of the issues the Tudeh had repeatedly pushed to the fore in its campaigns, and which therefore should be supported. On the other hand, the party was deeply suspicious of the motives underlying the land reform. The Tudeh viewed the land reform as a tool to both calm down social unrest and to break the power of the landlords who might have posed a threat to the throne. The Tudeh also saw the USA, worried about growing popular unrest threatening the political stability of a key ally, as the driving force behind the reform program; GDR journalists initially sang from the same hymn sheet.

In the early months of 1962, there seemed to have been a real possibility that a rapidly growing popular movement, lead by the resurgent National Front, might

actually force the Iranian government to resign and to push the Shah to undertake a
root and branch overhaul of the political system. The GDR media paid close attention
to events as they unfolded. In January 1962 alone we read headlines like ‘Amini soll
zurücktreten’ (Amini has to resign), already mentioned above, the monstrous headline
‘Aufruf der Nationalen Front Mossadeghs: Vor Generalstreik gegen das korrupte
Schah-Regime – Trotz brutaler Polizeigewalt erneut machtvolle Demonstrationen in
Iran’ (Appeal from Mossadegh’s National Front: General strike against the corrupt
regime of the Shah – despite brutal police violence again powerful demonstrations in
Tehran),269 the poetic ‘Proteste halten an’ (Protests continue)270 and ‘Der Schah ließ
schießen - Volk von Iran kämpft mutig gegen korrupte Regierung’ (the Shah ordered
to open fire – the people of Iran bravely fight the corrupt government).271

The last article warrants closer attention. Its final paragraph refers to a press
conference Prime Minister Amini had held: ‘In the course of the press conference he
announced that he will travel to Bonn (!) on 21 February.’ The exclamation mark after
Bonn at first seems a little odd. Why emphasise that Amini was planning to visit West
Germany’s capital? This played mainly to the domestic gallery. It appears to make
clear who is on whose side. While the GDR championed the oppressed masses and
the progressive forces of Iran in their struggle against a brutal, dictatorial regime,
West Germany, the true heir to Nazi Germany, was in bed with dictators, tyrants and
imperialists.

There were follow-ups to this news. On 22 February 1962, the Berliner Zeitung am
Abend272 reported from the West German capital, Bonn, that West Germany’s foreign
office and the local police had been forced to declare the Iranian prime minister a
high security risk, because around 100 Iranian students had demonstrated against his
state visit to Bonn. Four days later, Neues Deutschland printed news of
demonstrations in West Berlin against Amini’s visit to the divided city and of violent

269 ‘Vor Generalstreik gegen das korrupte Schah-Regime: Trotz brutaler Polizeigewalt erneut
271 ‘Der Schah ließ schießen - Volk von Iran kämpft mutig gegen korrupte Regierung’, Berliner
Zeitung (Berlin GDR, 24 January 1962).
clashes between Iranian students and West Berlin police. Official visits to West Berlin by foreign statesmen, other than those of the occupying powers, were always a thorn in the side of the GDR. Not surprisingly, therefore, *Neues Deutschland* used Amini’s visit to West Berlin for some vitriolic attacks on Berlin’s mayor, the later West German chancellor Willy Brandt. It called West Berlin’s police force ‘Brandt’s Knüppelgarde’ (Brandt’s bludgeoning guard), and the West Berlin newspaper *Telegraf*, close to Brandt’s Social Democrats, was accused of suppressing news on the demonstrations. The article, although on the topic of Amini’s visit, basically served as a vehicle to express East German animosity towards West Berlin and the city’s mayor. Prime Minister Amini’s short term in office came to an end in July 1962. Amini had attempted to tackle corruption, the deepening economic crisis and to improve the country’s financial situation. He was on good terms with the USA and responded well to the pressure put on Iran by Washington to implement certain reforms. The Kennedy administration had come to the conclusion that: ‘it might be important to American strategic and economic interests in the area to have an Iranian government with a broader internal base, greater efficiency and popularity and less corruption than existed in the 1950s’. However, when the Shah refused to reduce the army budget, Amini resigned, claiming the inadequacy of American aid to be the reason.

In a lengthy article headlined ‘Das Experiment des Dr. Amini’ (Dr Amini’s experiment), *Berliner Zeitung* dedicated almost 1,400 words to the topics of Amini’s resignation and the desperate state of Iran’s economy. The article also discussed America’s ‘new strategy’ of applying gentle pressure on key allies to encourage them to initiate internal reforms aimed to raise living standards and improve the popular standing of authoritarian regimes. The author was one ‘G.R. Hardtke’, a pseudonym occasionally used by Walter Ulbricht’s foreign policy adviser, Gerhard Kegel. Accordingly, what we read here might well be regarded as the GDR’s official position on Iran in the summer 1962. In the first paragraph, Hardtke started by framing Amini’s resignation in an international context:

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The resignation of the Iranian Prime Minister, Dr Amini, and his meticulously prepared retreat to Switzerland are of a significance that reaches far beyond the borders of Iran. The external reason behind his fall was the impossibility of achieving an even halfway balanced state budget. Beyond that, however, it is the end of an experiment of principal importance. Its failure was unavoidable.

Thereafter he reiterated the grounds specified by Amini for the failure of his reforms, including the lack of general American financial support. Above all, it had been the cuts in American military aid that had outraged Amini, claimed Hardtke, and elaborated further: 'Especially, since Iran’s inflated defence expenditures primarily serve the aggressive politics of the USA to establish and maintain military bases.'

He then plunged into his analysis and judgement of the Kennedy administration’s new foreign policy theme of encouraging allies to instigate internal reforms. This policy, he claimed, was primarily directed against the true interests of those countries' peoples; the real target, however, were the progressive forces and their allies among the Socialist Bloc. To back up his argument, he quoted US president John F. Kennedy:

'What we must offer these peoples', Kennedy explained, 'is a revolution, a political, economical and social upheaval of a far higher value than anything Communism might have on offer – more peaceful, and democratic, emerging from local political communities and led by indigenous forces.'

There was a definite change of tactics on the American side, concluded Hardtke, but, using the case of Iran as a prime example for the reasons and as a reference for many other countries, the new strategy would ultimately fail, because:

Here, an estimated 70 % of the arable land belongs to only a few hundred families. Iranian peasants, of whom even today an overwhelming majority are still illiterate, live in indescribable misery. Between two thirds and four fifths of their earnings they have to hand over to their feudal masters, who themselves live a fantastically luxurious life. The country is not even poor. It is rich in oil, but the country’s reserves are being exploited by foreign monopolies. [...] The masses recognise the roots of their misery. They also understand that the country’s corrupt elites are closely intertwined with the US imperialists, the SEATO and CENTO-pacts, in which Iran is charged with procuring the bloody business of the USA.

In this passage, Hardtke laid out how the GDR officially regarded Iran: as an American stooge, charged with a specific strategic role in the region, a pawn on the
chessboard of the global strategists in Washington. In Cold War terms, Iran was on the other side. Hardtke recognised Iran’s strategic and economic importance for the region. In his view, Iran was simultaneously a victim of imperialism and of foreign monopolies. Recognising this, the GDR would therefore demonstrate solidarity with the impoverished masses and with all progressive forces in the country and lend its support to those whenever possible. To this primary viewpoint, the GDR media would adhere for the most of the 1960s.

In the final two paragraphs, Hardtke presented a modified model of Marxist-Leninist development and revolution theory which in its conclusion prohibited any cooperation other than one on grounds of tactical considerations with old elites who tried to introduce measured reforms:

In the second half of the twentieth century, in our era of the transition from capitalism to socialism, people’s movements – once they have started rolling – will no longer stop for bourgeois-democratic reforms. The people demands total political and economic freedom; freedom from all exploitation and oppression. The example of Iran demonstrates therefore: imperialism cannot step over its shadow, it cannot solve the imminent contradictions; it cannot halt the national and social liberation movements of those still colonised and exploited peoples by this or that reform from above.

The transition from Amini to Asadollah Alam, an old friend of the Shah, was subject of a number of news items. The more entertaining news-stories, however, dealt with the appearances of the Shah’s twin-sister Ashraf in French casinos. On 21 July 1962, the *Berliner Zeitung* printed a short news item under the headline ‘Tausende verjubelt’ (thousands squandered). The news really only consisted of a couple of lines:

Cannes (ADN/BZ). In only a few minutes, Princess Ashraf, twin sister of the Shah of Persia, lost around 50,000 Marks in a casino in Cannes. In West-European casinos she has earned herself a reputation for wasting monstrous sums at the tables - money that is owned by the people of Iran who vegetate in horrendous poverty.

As sources are named ADN and BZ. ADN itself will probably have sourced the news from either one of its Western partner agencies or from Western media. The

style used, sharp and pointed dichotomies, was rather typical for the 1960s: here we had Ashraf who wasted fortunes in European casinos, there we had the extremely poor people of Iran. The vocabulary used was equally suggestive, polemical, grossly exaggerated and manipulative.

Three days later, *Neues Deutschland* picked up on the story in an opinion piece. The author wrote under the aptly chosen pseudonym of Cobra278. Cobra’s language was as caustic as it was entertaining. Cobra certainly had fun with it and apparently did not see any reason to restrict himself in his attacks on Ashraf, the Shah and the Persian monarchy. The latter, by implication, was being portrayed as a stereotypical Oriental despotism straight from the tales of the Arabian Nights. The whole text was a brilliant piece of caustic and acute propaganda, and the language was in some respect reminiscent of the more sophisticated Nazi journalism used in the times of the Third Reich. But also, of course, it was very similar to the kind of commentary one could read in the Western tabloids, notably the *Sun*, *Bild*, or the *Daily Mail*. Some of the most entertaining plays on words and metaphors are almost impossible to translate. While the portrayal of ‘Spinne im Netz der Intrigen, die sich um den Pfauenthron ranken’ (...a spider in the net of intrigues woven around the Peacock Throne ...) might make sense to an English reader, the following is simply beyond translation: ‘Die in den kostspieligsten Pariser Salons auf Teenager getrimmte persische Spätlese....’279

The piece reduces the princess to a cartoon character.

Formally, the article constitutes a dialectical antagonism, contrasting the lavish, exalted and pompous lifestyle of the Persian monarchy, and especially of the Shah’s twin-sister Ashraf, who was also a political figure of considerable power and influence in the palace, with the plight of ordinary Persians:

In Persia, thirteen out of every hundred children die at birth, simply because their mothers have to give birth without the assistance of a doctor or a midwife. A midwife charges around ten West-Deutsch Marks for her services - for 99 per cent of all Persians this is a fortune which they don’t even dare to dream of.

Interestingly, even though the readership is East German, the currency of reference

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279 Spätlese (literal meaning: late harvest) is a German language term for wine from fully ripe grapes which were picked towards the very end of the harvesting period.
is West German Marks.

From the end of July to the end of November 1962, the East German media fell more or less silent on Iran. The silence was broken by an article in the *Berliner Zeitung*, which brought out a story on the land reform in Iran and on the difficulties the reformers faced in various parts of the country.\(^{280}\) The article dealt with particular aspects of the land reform initiated by the Shah’s Government. In response to the murder in the south of Iran of an official charged with the organisation of the land reform, hundreds of thousands of Iranians had, in telegrams to the government, volunteered to fight against the feudal landlords of the Fars province. The article provided some additional details about the dire living conditions experienced by people in the rural areas of Iran.

A rather different topic dominated the reporting on Iran in December 1962: female suffrage. First, in a very brief news item from October 1962, printed in *National Zeitung*. The entire text was: ‘For women - according to a law that was published on Tuesday, it appears that Iranian women have been granted active and passive voting rights.’\(^{281}\) Only one sentence for a rather significant development in Iran in the 1960s: no source, no context, no further information. Even the phrasing leaves room for doubt about whether this law had really been ratified.

On Monday, 3 December 1962 three newspapers returned to the topic. What had happened? The law that granted Iranian women the right to vote and to be elected, had been withdrawn. The *Berliner Zeitung* chose the headline ‘Wahlrecht abgeschafft’ (right to vote abolished).\(^{282}\) One can imagine that some GDR citizens, reading this first thing in the morning, might have choked a little on their breakfast tea or coffee when they saw the headline. To their relief, they would learn that the GDR still allowed its citizens to cast a vote in elections. Because the news was: ‘Tehran: On Saturday, the government issued a decree that abolished the right to vote that Persian women only recently had been granted’.

No further information was given, no source and no indication as to what might

\(^{281}\) ‘Für Frauen’, *National Zeitung* (Berlin GDR, 10 October 1962).
have been the background to the decision to revoke the voting rights.

Also on 3 December, Der Morgen dedicated a story to the topic. Headlined 'Wieder abgeschafft' (abolished), the text provided a little more context than the ultra-brief news printed by the other newspapers:

The right to vote, that had only recently been granted to Persian women, has been abolished by decree from the government. The Islamic clergy had protested against female suffrage and claimed such freedom would contradict the Quran and threaten the existence of the government. Prime Minister Alam declared to the press that parliament would revisit the issue of female suffrage after the March elections.\(^{283}\)

The article hinted at an on-going conflict between Islamic clergy – or influential parts of the clergy – and the government and parliament. Viewed in terms of the reactionary-progressive spectrum in this article, the government, despite of all its shortcomings and despite the apparent authoritarian structure of Iranian society, could be placed more to the side of the progressive camp.

The ambitious reform programme initiated by the Shah’s government in 1963, labelled the White Revolution, would continue to attract the attention of the GDR press. On 20 July 1963, Berliner Zeitung dedicated half a page to a critical analysis of the programme and its ramifications for Iranian society.\(^{284}\) The author of the article was the Berliner Zeitung’s international financial columnist, Dr Heiner Winkler, the later editor in chief of the influential foreign policy weekly Horizont. The article opened with a reference to religious riots that had shaken Iran in the summer of 1963.\(^{285}\) According to Winkler, the riots had been instigated by a number of Mullahs who belonged to the Mohammedan Schika (sic!) sect. While ‘Schika’ is most likely nothing more than a typo which should really read ‘Schia’ (Shi’a), the text goes on to demonstrate that Winkler’s knowledge of Islam – like many German contemporaries he used the term Mohammedanism for Islam – was at best limited. In the text he

\(^{283}\) ‘Wieder abgeschafft’, Der Morgen (Berlin GDR, 12 March 1962).


\(^{285}\) The riots Winkler was referring to happened on 5 June 1963 and were a response to the arrest of Ayatollah Khomeini on 4 June 1963. The unrest, later known as the ‘15 Khordad riots’, spread from Tehran to Shiraz, Kashan and Mashhad. It took government forces several days to suppress the demonstrations in which hundreds had lost their lives. Following the riots, Khomeini was exiled.
equated the organisational structures of Iran’s Shiite Islam with the more familiar European ecclesiastical structures and even referred to Shiite clergy as ‘the church’. The language used was a rather polemical, judgemental and partisan. Describing the riots he stated that: ‘In the name of the prophet they [the mob led by the Mullahs] set alight numerous buildings and cars.’ But he arrived at a surprising conclusion:

A religious conflict? An uprising against tyranny and dictatorship even? None of that! Behind what took place in the streets of Tehran and Shiraz were the very worldly interests of the fat Persian big landowners revolting against their feudal master, the Shah, [...] because they dislike his so-called reform propensity.

Winkler went on to allege that the Shah was actually quite pleased with the riots against his reforms because they allowed him to present himself as a progressive. More importantly, though, was Winkler’s clear dismissal of religion as a force in its own right. Adhering to a Marxist view that postulates that social being determines consciousness, he did not acknowledge that powerful beliefs and ideas might not necessarily result from social conditions. By viewing Muslim protest against the reforms the Shah’s government only through a materialist and anti-clerical lens, he well missed an additional dimension to the protest.

For the rest of the article, Winkler followed the by then well-established patterns. He portrayed the Shah as an absolutist and pompous oriental monarch who was forced by his imperialist American masters to embark on a series of reforms. Those reforms, Winkler concluded, might have appeared progressive at first sight, designed to raise the standard of living of the poor, but in reality they would only benefit the ruling elites, the bourgeoisie and, the biggest beneficiaries, the American capitalists. According to Winkler, the big landlords numbered among the losers; he thought this explained their at times violent opposition to the reforms. He included among those who lost the most the rural Shiite clerics, many of whom possessed large (clerical) livings which were threatened by the reforms. Also threatened by the literacy programme that was part of the reform package was the ulema’s monopoly on education.

Although the language used was polemical, Winkler’s analysis of the reasons behind the Shah’s reform-programme and the resistance it met from within various
parts of the old elites, was mostly correct. The text also hinted at the ideological dilemma in which the East German observers found themselves. The reform programme included many measures which had for many years been demanded by the communist Tudeh Party, too, such as the re-distribution of land, improved rights for the rural population and literacy campaigns. Therefore, the programme should be regarded as progressive. On the other hand, it was a top-down approach, initiated by an absolute monarch who had only acted under pressure from the US. Furthermore, the Tudeh Party still was banned and suffered from heavy-handed persecution. Finally, strategically and militarily, Iran remained in the Western camp and, as a member of CENTO, posed a threat to the security of the USSR. In his final paragraph Winkler admitted to the dilemma and described the hope of the country’s ‘progressive forces’ that the reforms might in the end indeed lead to changes in Iran’s societal make up:

They cautiously welcome the Shah’s reform plans not least because they create the possibility that the forces of reaction might be forced on to the defensive. There is hope that pressure from the national liberation movement will compel the forces of reaction to relinquish their positions. This pressure has already led to the government announcing that the maximum size of property cannot longer be 500 hectares and instead must not exceed 40 hectares of fertile ground, or 100 hectares of arid ground. The progressive forces regard such concessions as an encouraging sign. Thus, they are certain that the national liberation movement will certainly also overcome those barriers which the Shah, with his reforms, hopes to put in the movement’s way.286

In his text, Winkler also pitted two major societal forces against each other. In the ’reactionary camp’ he saw a coalition formed by the ‘church’, aristocracy and feudal landowners, the chiefs of the powerful tribes, conservative bazaaris and the Shah’s government. In his reading of Iranian society of the early 1960s, the progressive camp consisted of the working-class and its (still banned) party, the Tudeh, liberal and left leaning intellectuals and the nationalist but also anti-imperialist National Front.

On 14 August 1963, ADN distributed among the SED leadership and the editors of the leading publications a dossier on Iran’s forthcoming general elections obtained

from the West German news agency DPA. In this dossier, DPA’s Iran correspondent, Bahram Shahrokh, provided detailed background information on the preparations being undertaken for the elections. He paid particular attention to the fact that for the first time in Iran’s history women were not only allowed to cast their vote but could also stand as candidates. Although East Germany’s ADN and its western counterpart maintained a professional relationship with each other, it was not common practice in the 1960s, a decade in which the relations between the two German states could easily be described as hostile, for ADN to circulate a full and seemingly unedited DPA analysis among its own customers. The document was marked ‘Rot’ (red) which meant that it was for the eyes of the inner circle of the Politburo and for selected editors only. It is not clear in which language Bahram Shahrokh had originally written the text and whether or not it had been edited by DPA’s office staff before it went into distribution. However, from the content of text one can surmise why ADN had decided to circulate it. Shahrokh’s analysis, and the views he expressed, corresponded to a fair degree with those officially held by the SED and the GDR’s media. Like Winkler, he noted that Iran’s reactionaries, exemplified by the ‘thousand families’ (quotation marks in the original), were deeply opposed to all the reforms and made continuous overt and covert attempts to sabotage the reforms wherever possible. The dispatch also gave the impression that the forthcoming elections were free and that the government would refrain from any interference:

The government of Prime Minister Assadollah Alam is consistent in its politics of ‘non-interference’ in the run-up to the elections. The watchword here is: the masses shall decide. Nevertheless, surprises cannot be excluded from the pre-election campaigns, which will last for a few more weeks.

From the elections, the author turned to Iran’s economic situation. The picture he painted was dark: as a result of one of the most devastating droughts of the previous three decades, he wrote, the southern parts of Iran suffered from a serious shortage of basic foodstuffs and drinking water; this was causing social unrest in dozens of affected towns and villages. Furthermore, the number of agricultural cooperatives forcefully introduced by the reformers lagged behind the amount of land made

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available in the process of re-distribution. Nobody seemed to know when and how the farmers would be able to start working on their newly acquired land. In addition, a few of the remaining big landowners had been allowed to keep substantial parts of their arable land but refused to collaborate with the newly formed farmer cooperatives.

The last part must have sounded very familiar to East German officials and editors alike, for it described a problem very similar to the one the GDR had faced, too, when the Ulbricht government embarked on a large scale collectivisation program in the 1950s, which had not only been met with widespread resistance among the farmers but had also suffered from serious discrepancies between plan and reality. In his excellent study *Conflict and Stability in the German Democratic Republic*, Andrew I. Port describes the uphill struggle faced by the GDR authorities in their attempts to collectivise the agricultural sector and points to the reluctance of the remaining ‘big’ landowners to join and remain in collective farming units.  

The last part of the DPA paper focussed on modifications in Iran’s foreign policy. While the author pointed out that the country’s relationship with the USSR was continuously improving, he paid much closer attention to what he perceived to be a significant amelioration of the relations between the uneasy neighbours Iran and Iraq. Interestingly, though, he based his assessment of the changes in the relations between the two countries – chief among which was the re-instatement of an Iraqi ambassador to Tehran towards the end of September 1963 – not on Iranian sources but on opinions gathered from ’diplomatic representatives of Iraq based in Tehran’ (Irakische diplomatische Vertreter in Teheran). No further information was provided as to who these diplomatic representatives were and what status they had. All further details supplied on the promising negotiations between the two governments were also entirely based on unnamed ’Iraqi circles’ (irakische Kreise). An Iranian perspective was also provided. Again, rather than to identify his source, Shahrokh only referred vaguely to ’political circles in Tehran’ (politische Kreise Teherans) who:

’[...]view recent developments to be a result of the resolution of the problems over oil between Iran and Iraq. The resolution was agreed upon in the

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negotiations between delegations from both countries on 5 August in Tehran.’

Referencing unnamed ‘Diplomatic Representatives’, ‘Western Diplomats’ and ‘Political Circles’ is journalistic practice as common today as it was in the 1960s. Sometimes, the source can be a whistle-blower who wishes to remain anonymous. More often, there are several sources who each provide bits and pieces of information that the journalist then puts together. The part of the news dispatch that focussed on Iran’s foreign policy provided the SED leadership valuable information for their assessment of Iran. Improving relations with the USSR also meant that the GDR media had to represent Iran in a manner that would not potentially harm USSR interests in Iran. News of Iran’s rapprochement with neighbouring Iraq was equally important. Iraq was one of the very few countries outside the Socialist Bloc that had already established some sort of diplomatic relations – although not yet on embassy level – with the GDR by 1963. A GDR trade mission had been established in Baghdad in November 1958, and a consulate-general in June 1962.\(^{289}\) In East Berlin, Iraq was considered a close ally.

Although it was rare for ADN in the 1960s to circulate material obtained from the West German news agency DPA among the exclusive circles of the SED leadership and selected editors, the agency did increase the frequency with which it provided translated dossiers and articles from other Western sources in this decade. Among those were articles from the French leftist newspaper Le Monde, economical analysis published in the West German daily business publication Nachrichten für den Außenhandel (NfA), and an interview with the Shah which had appeared in Süddeutsche Zeitung.\(^{290}\)

\(^{289}\) Muth, p. 282.
Western sources

What the ADN bulletins show is that they all focussed on either economic developments in Iran or on foreign policy issues which were in one way or the other related to relations between Iran and the USSR and which also highlighted trends in Iran’s position in regional strategic contexts. Among the pieces translated from foreign languages can be found lengthy analytical texts from publications such as the Russian *Mezhdunarodnaja Zhism* or the British weekly *The Economist*. As for the accuracy of the translations, it would be beyond the scope of this thesis to analyse the quality of the translations. Where possible, I have compared some original texts available to me with the versions translated and circulated by ADN. In all cases the translations were of a relatively high standard and their content did not appear to have been subjected to further editing.

In their representations of Iran’s economic development, the media of the GDR were seemingly torn between open admiration for the country’s rapid development into an economic heavy-weight, whose wealth was primarily based on its oil reserves, and a sceptical view of Iran’s attempts to modernise the country. Special attention was, too, paid to the growing economic links between Iran and the European Economic Community in general and West Germany in particular. What also sporadically attracted the GDR’s media interest in Iran, were the classical themes of disaster journalism – here the East German media followed the same patterns that are familiar in the Western press – such as earthquakes or assassinations attempts on leading politicians. One such occurrence was the assassination of Ali Mansour in 1965. On 22 January 1965, *Der Morgen* issued a very brief news bulletin headlined simply: ‘*Attentat*’ (assassination).[^1] In just 38 words the article informed the reader that the Iranian prime minister, Ali Mansour, had been shot several times by a young man and that he had been taken to a Tehran hospital in a critical condition. No further details were provided about the assassination attempt, its circumstances and a possible political background. The source was ADN who in turn referred to material received from UPI. As elaborated upon in this thesis in the chapter on news agencies, a lack of contextual information is a general problem with news journalism that

[^1]: ‘*Attentat*, *Der Morgen* (Berlin GDR, 22 January 1965).
focuses on events and hard facts. While all Western and Eastern news agencies, ADN included, as well as foreign correspondents usually answer the five basic questions of news journalism – ‘what?’, ‘who?’, ‘when?’, ‘where?’, ‘why?’, they very often fail to put reported events into a wider context, even though only knowledge of that context would allow the readership to actually understand what is going on. The failure to provide necessary context information is inherent to a system of news reporting where currentness is the key priority. The pressure of close-to-real time, up-to-date news reporting simply does not leave correspondents, researchers, investigators and editors the necessary time to conduct in-depth research. Also, technical limits such as wire capacities or the actual space available in newspapers significantly restricted the volume of text that could be provided.

The media followed the story up on a number of subsequent days. On the 27 of January the Berliner Zeitung am Abend, the sister publication of the Berliner Zeitung, announced Ali Mansour’s death. The news item reporting the demise of Iran’s prime minister was even shorter than the report of his assassination in Der Morgen. Berliner Zeitung am Abend gave no more than 18 words to the event. One day later, in equally short form, the German-language Soviet publication Neue Zeit - Moskauer Hefte für Politik announced that the Shah had appointed Amir Abbas Hoveida as Mansour’s successor. Again, no further context was provided nor any additional information on who this Amir Abbas Hoveida actually was.

For most of the second half of the 1960s, the GDR media fell more or less silent on Iran. The few articles that can be found were concerned with the two major themes: improvements in USSR and Iran relations, and the fate of Tudeh members who were still active in Iran and who suffered from heavy-handed persecution.

The Shah’s 1965 trip to Moscow, however, was paid some attention. And so was his trip to the Romanian capital, Bucharest, in 1966. However, during this period, much more space was given to the fate of Tudeh activists.

Officially, the SED and the Iranian Tudeh Party maintained friendly

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292 ‘untitled (Mansour)’, BZ am Abend (Berlin GDR, 28 January 1965).
relations’. Furthermore, as has already been mentioned, the Tudeh leadership was in exile in the GDR. Still, it is surprising how much space Neues Deutschland, the official organ of the SED, sometimes gave to official statements and declarations from the Tudeh. Half a page, for example, on 21 December 1965, when an article appeared that bore the title ‘Der Terrorjustiz ein energisches Halt’ (A forceful stop to the terror justice). The authorship was attributed to the Tudeh Party. The wording of the article seems to suggest that the targeted readership was not only East Germans, but also readers in other German-language countries. The article opened by reporting how a military tribunal in Tehran had handed down death sentences or long-term imprisonment to nine Tudeh members accused of treason and the plotting of a coup d'état against the Shah’s government. Not surprisingly, the Tudeh condemned the sentences and denounced the Iranian justice system as a system of terror justice. In the article, the Tudeh then called for international support and a campaign against Iran’s persecution of the Tudeh. Finally, the article claimed that the Tudeh's cause had wide international support, demonstrating this by listing 120 French public figures, including Jean-Paul Sartre, Louis Aragon and Eugenié Cotton, who had declared that they backed the Tudeh.

The campaign found support in East Germany, too. On 30 April 1966, for example, Neues Deutschland printed a piece titled 'Protest gegen Mordplan der Reaktion Irans’ (Protest against murder plot of Iran’s forces of reaction). According to the piece, which was based on material provided by ADN, staff of Deutsches Theater in Berlin had sent a letter to Iran’s Council of Ministers (Ministerrat), protesting against the death penalties handed to the 'Iranian patriots’ Parviz Hekmatdjou and Ali Khavari. The letter referred to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights enshrined in the UN Charter and alleged that Iran was in blatant breach of the said charter. The letter also called on all the world’s theatre people to join in the protest. The article ended:

Parviz Hekmaidjou and Ali Khavari along with twelve co-defendants have been accused of working for the Tudeh Party, which has been banned by the forces of reaction, and have been sentenced by a military tribunal either to death or to

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295 ZK Tudeh Partei, ‘Der Terrorjustiz ein energisches Halt: Tudeh-Partei von Iran appelliert an das Weltgewissen’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 21 December 1965).
296 ‘Protest gegen Mordplan der Reaktion Irans’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 30 April 1966).
long prison terms.

In this article, the GDR clearly positioned itself in the role of defenders of Universal Human Rights. Once again, Iran was portrayed as a reactionary state. The terminology used is also interesting. While the term 'reaction' signifies the ruling elites, the Tudeh members were called 'Iranian patriots'. Hence the Tudeh was not depicted as an internationalist communist party, but, rather, as a progressive patriotic movement. The article also stated that the patriots had demanded the right of political self-determination for Iran; the implication here was that Iran was regarded as a state dominated and controlled by foreign powers such as the USA, West Germany and the United Kingdom. One of the terms used in the article to describe the reign of the Shah’s government was ‘Gesinnungsterror’ which is almost impossible to translate. What was meant, is that the methods used by the Iranian government to suppress any differing opinions, beliefs and ideologies were those of an Orwellian state.

Interestingly, West German propaganda frequently accused the GDR of practising ‘Gesinnungsterror’ against any internal opposition.

In 1969, Iran was suddenly back on the main radar of the GDR press. On 24 April 1969, National Zeitung issued a long article on occurrences on the Iran-Iraq border. Apparently, the relationship between the two countries, which had seemingly been normalised in and after 1963, had once again turned sour. The article bore the headline: ‘Wer schürt am Schatt-el-Arab?’ (Who fans the flames at the Shatt-al-Arab?), followed by the sub-header ‘Imperialistische Interessen im Spiel/ Hintergründe eines Konflikts’ (Interests of imperialism involved / backgrounds to a conflict).\(^{297}\) The author, only identified by the initials G.A., put all the blame for the renewed conflict over shipping rights and demarcations in the Shatt-al-Arab firmly on Tehran. Basing his entire argument almost exclusively on a variety of Iraqi sources, ranging from newspapers to statements issued by government officials, the author portrayed Iranian policy as aggressive towards its Iraqi neighbour who wished to continue amicable relations with Iran, although the latter had unilaterally terminated a border treaty from 1937. He went on to provide an analysis of the situation from a strictly pro-Iraqi, anti-Western and Cold War point of view, presenting the conflict as one between the progressive Arab countries with which the GDR maintained friendly

relations and the reactionary monarchies in Iran and Saudi Arabia; a conflict though, that, ultimately served not Iranian or Saudi interests but those of their American and West German imperialist masters. What he saw behind Iran’s move was not an expression of an independent Iranian foreign policy but a conspiracy behind which were the Western oil monopolies and the US government. To prove to the readers of *National Zeitung* the sinister role West Germany played in the region and the extent to which Bonn was involved, he referred to West German media reports without, however, any indication as to which specific sources he had used. The whole article was primarily based on Western and Iraqi sources, which also included the *New York Times* and *US News and World Report*. Most of the numbers and facts provided were factually correct but either taken out of context or reinterpreted in a manner that fitted the clearly identifiable ideological bias. In his last paragraph, the author summed his argument up as follows:

Once more the old maxim of ‘divide and rule’ is being applied by the monopolies and their respective governments. They use contradictions and disagreements in the Persian Gulf region to play countries and groups of countries against each other. This way they hope to considerably delay the long overdue social and political changes in the ‘Sea of Changing Winds’, as the Gulf was called in Antiquity. However, today Baghdad has once again emphasised that the Republic of Iraq will under no circumstances bow to military pressure and will continue to follow the chosen path of the Arab resistance. Nor will Iraq be deterred from its anti-imperialist foreign policy.

The very real possibility of a war between Iran and Iraq over the border-question and shipping rights in the Shatt-al-Arab kept the GDR press firmly focused on Iran and the Gulf region. On 25 April 1969, *Bauern Echo* published an official statement, issued by an unnamed speaker from the GDR foreign ministry and circulated by ADN; it stated that the foreign ministry condemned Iran’s unilateral termination of the border treaty from 1937. As in G.A.’s piece in *National Zeitung*, the GDR official also blamed the USA and – explicitly – Bonn for the crisis in the Persian Gulf. Throughout the decade, East Berlin portrayed the government of the other Germany as an imperialist power that was, together with the USA, one of the main driving forces in the Western camp and therefore as much a player and main actor in

the Cold War as the USA. In contrast to West Germany, the GDR presented itself as a force for peace and against imperialism:

The unilateral termination by the Iranian government of the Iranian-Iraqi treaty over the border demarcation at the Shatt-al-Arab and the military threats made towards the Republic of Iraq have provoked a crisis situation which threatens peace and stability in this important region. It is obviously not by accident that this provocation is directed against the Republic of Iraq whose anti-imperialist politics is a thorn in the flesh of the imperialistic global strategists in Washington and Bonn.\(^{299}\)

Other newspapers joined in. On 27 April 1969, the *Berliner Zeitung* provided extensive background coverage to the events, including geographical facts which highlighted the importance of the region for the fuel supply of the developed world.\(^{300}\) What all articles on the crisis in the Gulf had in common was that they were written from a clearly partisan perspective. Also, they constructed a dichotomous narrative in which Iran was the sole perpetrator. The Iranian view was as much ignored as were any motives for the unilateral termination of the border-treaty, other than those alleged. Instead, the representation of Iran as a mere stooge of aggressive imperialism and of capitalist monopolies, an unholy Washington-Bonn axis, was continuously reiterated. Unusually, many of the articles and opinion pieces were signed. In *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, it was a writer who used the contraction Jo who pointed out that Iran’s move had been triggered by research findings which suggested that there were huge oil reservoirs in the disputed area.\(^{301}\) In *Der Morgen* Peter Fischer was given half a page to provide some historical context – again, from a strictly Arab point of view – and an analysis of the economic reasons for Iran’s move. Fischer, too, portrayed the Iranian government as puppets under the control of the Western powers and monopolies.\(^{302}\) In *Schweriner Volkszeitung*, Wera Hasse commented on developments and followed the same lines and narratives as the aforementioned writers.\(^{303}\) The style and wording of all the articles and opinion pieces which were

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\(^{299}\) ‘Vorsätzliche Provokation: DDR-Sprechererklärung zur Lage am Schatt El-Arab’.
\(^{300}\) ‘Iran/Irak’, *Berliner Zeitung* (Berlin GDR, 27 April 1969).
\(^{303}\) Hasse Wera, ‘SVZ kommentiert: Schatten am Schatt-el Arab’, *Schweriner Volkszeitung* (Schwerin, 26 April 1969).
printed in the GDR press on the crisis in the Persian (or Arab, both names were used) Gulf varied; but narratives, viewpoints and bias remained the same in all articles reviewed. Noticeably, and unlike the years before and after, in this short period of time we suddenly find stories relating to Iran in the regional and local party press, too. The East German view of Iran prevalent in the late 1960s was reinforced by the Tudeh leadership; this was laid out in a statement from Dr Reza Radmanesh, first secretary of the illegal Tudeh which the East German magazine for foreign affairs, Horizont, printed 1969 in its May issue. At the time of writing, Radmanesh, like most other leaders of the Tudeh, lived in exile in East Germany. Technically and financially supported by the SED, who also provided the infrastructure necessary, the party operated not only a radio station, that broadcast deep into Iran, but also initiated and coordinated action of the Tudeh remaining inside Iran. The article mirrors some of the basic Tudeh judgements of present and future social, economical, political, military and strategic developments in Iran which would 1969 also be presented by Radmanesh to the delegates of the International Meeting of Communist and Workers’ Parties in Moscow. At this point it is necessary to investigate a little further the role the Tudeh played in how the media of the GDR represented Iran.

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From the Tudeh’s point of view: how Iranian exiles used the press of the GDR

In the previous chapter, an article from Davoud Norouzi, a leading member of the Tudeh, was analysed. What has not yet been discussed in sufficient detail is the author’s background. Why did the Tudeh leadership feel the need to use an East German newspaper to make known their take on events in Iran? Equally interesting is the question why a leading figure of the Tudeh Party, which was banned in Iran since 1946 and heavily persecuted by the government since 1953, was given the space for such a lengthy article in East Germany’s leading daily newspaper? Seen from Tehran, this must have seemed like an unfriendly act of a nature serious enough to have an impact on bilateral relations. Even more so since the paper in question was also the official newspaper of the ruling party.

In the 1960s, Davoud Norouzi was one of the leaders of the Iranian Tudeh Party in exile in the GDR. Following the violent overthrow of the Mossadegh government on 13 August 1953, the Tudeh had suffered from heavy persecution and many of its members had to leave the country to avoid imprisonment, torture and, perhaps, execution.

For the Tudeh, the years between 1954 and the publication of Norouzi’s article in 1962 were foremost a period of re-structuring and re-organisation. Since its foundation in 1941, the party had always been close to Moscow and had accepted the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in strategic and ideological matters. From 1954 to 1961, the exiled leadership, now based in Leipzig and mostly cut off from any surviving party structures inside Iran, faced an additional problem: the development of what appeared to be good neighbourly relations between the Soviet Union and Iran. After Stalin’s death, on 5 March 1953, the USSR was eager to stabilise and improve relations with Iran, although in 1955 Iran had joined the Baghdad Pact, a regional defence-organisation set up by the US, who themselves had never become a member, with the sole purpose of curtailing Soviet military power and strategic position in the region. The Soviet Union had always strongly objected to
Iran’s membership of the Baghdad Pact, but it also pursued a strategy of rapprochement, regardless. A number of outstanding border and monetary issues were solved in this period. For the Tudeh, Soviet-Iranian cooperation was troublesome, because it effectively restricted the party’s scope of possible action against the Iranian government. Moscow certainly did not want the seemingly improving relations with Iran to be spoiled by Tudeh activities. When the Shah and his wife, Soraya, visited the Soviet Union in June and July 1956, the Soviet leadership used the occasion to welcome the visitors with all ceremonial honours. In return, the Shah reassured the Soviets that his country would never enter an anti-Soviet military alliance. However, relations between the two countries finally soured after it became apparent that the Shah was playing the USA and the USSR against each other in order to force the USA into a serious commitment to provide defence to Iran. The Soviets, who in February 1959 had sent a high level mission to Tehran that was prepared and authorised to negotiate a treaty of non-aggression between the neighbours, reacted furiously when they realised the real intentions behind the diplomatic moves of the Shah’s regime.305

As a consequence of this, the Soviets engaged in a violent propaganda assault on the regime, which was mirrored in the GDR press and in which the Tudeh leadership in Leipzig became a leading participant. The tools available to the Tudeh Party included the radio station Peyk-e Iran. Based in Leipzig, maintained and financed by the SED, Radio Peyk-e Iran (The Voice of Iran) was characterised by Radio Free Europe researcher William McLaughlin as: ‘...[a] clandestine radio station,... [that] regularly broadcasts inflammatory messages and instructions to Iran from East Germany.’306 This is not to say that the modus operandi of Radio Free Europe, an American propaganda station whose broadcasts were aimed at the peoples behind the Iron Curtain, was fundamentally different from that of Radio Peyk-e Iran.

In terms of propaganda and agitation, and of mobilising and organising the remnants of the Tudeh followers inside Iran, the operation of a radio station which broadcast into Iran but was out of reach of the Iranian authorities, made perfect sense.

306 McLaughlin, pp. 1–5.
More sense, at least on first view, than a lengthy article in the SED’s flagship publication, *Neues Deutschland*, which would primarily be read by East German party members.

From the point of view of the average East German reader, the aforementioned article simply provided some background information on current events in Iran. However, read a bit more thoroughly, it also constituted a strategic paper. In the text, Norouzi apparently abandoned some of his party’s long held ideological and strategic positions and repositioned the Tudeh in both her Iranian and her internationalist context.

In the period leading up to overthrow of the Mossadegh government in 1953, the Tudeh had, to some degree, supported the National Front government. However, when events unfolded, the Tudeh, for various reasons, resisted coming to the rescue of Mossadegh. At that time, the Tudeh Party was the only organisation in the country that possessed the necessary level of organisation, large membership, and armed power to, potentially, take on the fight and to win it. The Tudeh did not, however, mobilise her military branch and her supporters, but instead watched from the sidelines as the Mossadegh government was pushed out of power. Soon after, the Tudeh herself paid a hefty price for her inaction.

Internally, the decision to not support Mossadegh was hotly debated, and a rift in the party leadership was clearly evident. There were a number of reasons for the Tudeh to remain passive. One was that two CIA-financed Iranian agent-provocateurs had hired a large crowd on August 17 and had instructed them to act as if called into the streets by the Tudeh. The crowd chanted Tudeh slogans and vandalised statues of the Pahlavi Shahs. Pressed by the American ambassador, Mossadegh had no other choice than to suppress the riots by ordering army and police into the streets. Once called in, army and police effectively took control of the streets, making it much harder for the Tudeh to mobilise support. The party was furious that the government had deemed it necessary to employ the security forces against a Tudeh crowd, even if it was one only in appearance.  

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The other reason for the Tudeh remaining on the side-lines had a more ideological nature. In 1953 the Tudeh still adhered to the Stalinist principle that the communist party was the only legitimate leader of the revolutionary working-classes and that it had to automatically assume the leading position in any struggle for national liberation. In this understanding, the feudalist bourgeoisie as much as nationalist liberation forces fighting foreign domination had to be treated with utmost suspicion. While the Tudeh approved of the steps taken by Mossadegh’s governing National Front to nationalise the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and to transform the hitherto authoritarian regime of the Shah into a more democratic system, they also treated the National Front with some distrust. Following Stalinist doctrine, any alliance with the National Front had to be temporary and tactical, and under Tudeh leadership.308

The Tudeh’s unwillingness to engage on the side of the Mossadegh government would prove fatal for both the Mossadegh government and the party. It also severely damaged the Tudeh’s reputation inside Iran and caused long-lasting debates and friction in the party.

Against this background, the first paragraph of Norouzi’s article deserves particular attention:

In the past few weeks, hundreds of students have been arrested. Many of them have been seriously injured, and one was killed. Furthermore, a number of National Front leaders have been thrown in prison, among them Dr Sanjabi, the former minister for People’s Education. Dr Amini, Iran’s prime minister has threatened to imprison all anti-governmental elements.309

What is striking here is that Norouzi explicitly endorsed the National Front. Following the introduction, he accused the Amini government of blatant breaches of the Iranian constitution before he returned to the National Front and the role the Tudeh assumed for itself in its opposition to the Amini government:

The Tudeh Party of Iran, the most dedicated and consistent defender of the social and individual freedoms of the people has committed itself to the uncompromising fight against the regime of Amini. Also, the National Front,

309 Norouzi (1962).
lead by followers of Dr. Mossadegh, and representing the middle classes of the
country, demands immediate elections and the convening of parliament. In
addition to these two great political forces in Iran, almost all newspapers and a
great number of independent political figures have condemned the Amini
government as illegal.

What we have here is a seemingly unilateral announcement of a popular front – of
the National Front and the Tudeh – against the Amini government. The text suggests
that the Tudeh was perfectly well prepared to step into line, to act as an equal partner
in a coalition without demanding a leadership role for itself. As the text progresses, it
becomes clear that Norouzi also included in this alliance the University of Tehran and
progressive Iranian students in Europe and America. Before he finally came to the
main message of the article, he dedicated one long paragraph to the economic reforms
undertaken by the government, and here, in particular, the proposed land reform. For
decades, one of the main political demands of the Tudeh – and promises, should the
party ever get into power – was radical land reform. That was now initiated by the
Amini government, the very same government the Tudeh had declared war on.
Norouzi solved the ideological dilemma by making a case against the land reform,
denigrating the project as a pure diversionary tactic.

The last paragraph of the article bore the headline ‘The struggle continues!’ He
proceeded:

Following a thorough analysis of the current situation in Iran, the Central
Committee of the Tudeh issued a statement in which it calls upon all nationalist
and anti-imperialist parties and individuals in Iran to form a unified national
popular front against the Shah and his regime.

Again, although the party called for the creation of a national popular front, of
which the Tudeh would be a part, there was no demand for the leading role. Also, the
Tudeh appeared keen to not repeat the bad strategic mistake the party had made
when it decided against supporting the Mossadegh government in its moment of
crisis. That decision had since been hotly debated in the party and the leadership had
acknowledged that a mistake had been made, one that was not to be made again. The
new stance of the party also reflected significant changes in international communist
theoretical thought, first articulated by Mao and subsequently endorsed by the
The Soviet publication *Sovetskoye Vostokovedeniye* asserted: 'The national bourgeoisie is not always prone to betray the cause of national independence; on the contrary, it is the natural and almost irreconcilable enemy of imperialism.'\(^{310}\) This ideological shift merely reflected and acknowledged the prevailing conditions in many countries, where conditions were such that the main forces fighting for independence from colonial and imperialist domination consisted of nationalists and the educated middle-classes, while communist parties found themselves in much weaker positions, often due to the lack of substantial industrial workforces that could be organised.

The question still remains unanswered: why did *Neues Deutschland* provide significant space for an article that was not only primarily laying out changes in the strategical and theoretical position of a foreign party, but that also had the potential to impact on the GDR’s relation with a foreign country?

To address the last part of the question first: in 1962 the GDR had not yet established formal diplomatic relations with Iran, and her foreign policy with regard to the country followed that of the Soviet Union. The USSR had just mounted a vicious propaganda attack on Iran, so the GDR simply joined in, without having to fear any serious repercussions. Supporting the Tudeh cause and offering the party a platform to make known its position on events in Iran, could also be sold as an act of international socialist solidarity. Within this context, target-readership that mattered were not so much the ordinary readers of *Neues Deutschland*. Rather, the message was aimed at socialist parties around the globe and at the international left in general, West Germany explicitly included. Interestingly, the editorial staff of *Neues Deutschland* was in no way involved in the decision to print articles from leading Tudeh members, such as that authored by Davoud Norouzi. Instead, it appears that the articles were handed to the editorial staff with clear guidelines when to print them and in which section of the newspaper. Harri Czepuck, assistant editor-in-chief of *Neues Deutschland* from 1967 until 1971 and in charge of the foreign desk, recalls: *Neues Deutschland* received the articles from the *Abteilung Internationale*

Verbindungen des Zentralkomitees der SED. They were in German. Who had originally written or translated them was unbeknown to the editorial staff. As far as I remember, the articles were hardly ever edited by Neues Deutschland staff.

It is quite likely that SED relations with the Tudeh exiles in the GDR had also been handled by Abteilung Befreundete Parteien und Organisationen des Zentralkomitees der SED.

Finally, Czepuck also hints at another reason for why the leadership was given space in Neues Deutschland:

„As far as I can remember, there were fierce debates taking place among the leadership of the Tudeh, regarding the conflict between China and the Soviet Union and the Tudeh’s position in that, but also about future strategies and the aims of the struggle. The articles which appeared in Neues Deutschland, written by several members of the leadership, highlighted their different positions and opinions and thus allowed interested members of the SED to achieve a better understanding of the state of the debate inside the Tudeh.“

Leading Tudeh members continued to provide ‘expert views’ on Iran as well as party political statements right through the 1970s and into the 1980s. However, the extent to which they were encouraged, or allowed, to speak out in the GDR press was to a high degree dependent on the state of the relations the GDR and the USSR maintained with Iran at a given time. Especially during, and shortly after, the Islamic Revolution, the number of articles authored by members of the Tudeh increased significantly, and equally so towards the end of the 1980s.

311 Department for International Relations of the Central Committee of the SED (DIR of CC).
312 Quoted from an email received from Detlef Pries, foreign editor of Neues Deutschland, containing Mr. Czepuck’s answers to questions I had asked Mr. Pries to forward to him. The email was received on 4 December 2011.
313 Department for Befriended Parties and Organisations of the Central Committee of the SED (DBPO of CC).
Period 3: 1970 - 1979

Amicable relations and revolutions

The years between 1970 and 1973 were a period of significant changes for both Iran and the GDR, changes which might well have altered and reshaped the perception of Iran in the GDR and, therefore, its representations in the East German press. During these three years, the Shah arranged pompous celebrations for the Persian monarchy’s (imagined) 2,500th anniversary, while simultaneously attempting to establish Iran as the hegemonic power in the Persian Gulf. At the same time, he also continued pushing through his highly ambitious programme of internal reforms, which has become known as the White Revolution. Furthermore, Iran improved its economic and political relations with the Soviet Union and other countries of the Eastern Bloc, while at the same time achieving full control over the country’s oil industry. Internally, the government crushed all opposition – including the remains of the Marxist-Leninist Tudeh (people’s party), which had been banned since 1949, and the National Front – and established what was in effect a one-party system. In addition, the Shah built the secret state police, SAVAK, into one of the most efficient and fearsome secret police forces in the entire Middle East. Between 1970 and 1973, Iran also enjoyed significant economic growth and began to invest some of its oil revenues abroad. In the US, for instance, Iran’s state controlled Oil Company, NIOC, bought a 50 percent share in the downstream operations of the Ohio-based Ashland Oil Company and concluded an agreement that called for the refining of 150,000 barrels of crude oil. The agreement not only gave the NIOC participation in refining and marketing but also part ownership of Ashland’s New York operations.314

Meanwhile, the GDR, in her struggle to break free from the international isolation in which Bonn’s Hallstein Doctrine had firmly kept her since 1949, came to an agreement with the Federal Republic of Germany in the year 1972 that de facto ended West Germany’s politics of isolating East Berlin internationally.315 The

315 In a speech before the West German Bundestag (the directly elected Parliament) on 28
‘Grundlagenvertrag’ (basic foundation agreement) paved the way for a wave of full diplomatic recognition of the GDR by countries in all parts of the world. Until the end of 1972, only thirty-one countries had established and maintained formal diplomatic relations with East Berlin, of which twenty-two were situated outside Europe. Among the first non-European states to establish relations with the GDR at embassy-level were Iraq (May 1969), Syria (June 1969), Sudan (June 1969), the Yemen (July 1969) and Egypt (July 1969). From 15 November 1972 to 1 February 1973, however, another sixty-six states fully recognized East Berlin. Among the very first of those was Iran, which exchanged ambassadors with the GDR on 7 December 1972. That the majority of these countries were Arab states (others such as the People's Republic of Algeria followed soon after in the years from 1970-72) has several reasons.

Wolfgang Bator, a former GDR ambassador to Libya and post-revolutionary Iran, points to some of them. His core argument is that the needs and interests of countries which had just gone through the process of decolonialisation were similar to those of the GDR. They strove for international recognition but did not necessarily seek close relations with their former colonial masters. They turned to the Soviet Union and her European allies to find solidarity and economical support. For the GDR, these were favourable conditions, especially in those Arab countries such as Egypt or Iraq who had a generally positive image of Germany.

June 1956, then Foreign Minister Heinrich von Brentano declared that the recognition of the GDR by a third state with which the FRG had diplomatic relations would be ‘regarded as an unfriendly act calculated to intensify and aggravate the partition of Germany’. The Federal Republic would in such case have to reconsider its relations with the state in question. In the years following this first declaration of what was become to be known as the Hallstein Doctrine (named after Walter Hallstein, then State Secretary in the Foreign Office in Bonn), Bonn developed – and on occasion employed – a whole range of diplomatic and economic measures against states which attempted to establish formal relations with the GDR. Exempt were countries from the former Eastern Bloc, since Bonn assumed, at least officially, that those had established diplomatic relations with the GDR under pressure from Moscow.

316 Full diplomatic relations were established on 20 May 1970.
Iran on the chessboard of the US global strategists

On 11 February 1970, Neues Deutschland printed a short article under the headline: 'Iran auf dem Schachbrett der USA-Globalstrategen' (Iran on the chessboard of the US-global strategists).

The article was authored by an unnamed correspondent in Baghdad. No indication was given as to the status of the correspondent or his professional relationship with Neues Deutschland. He might have been the newspaper’s regular Middle East correspondent. Just as well he could have been someone from the GDR’s diplomatic corps in Baghdad, or a correspondent for ADN. What the article does tell us is, that its author was based in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad. In 1970, at a time when the GDR was still struggling to break its international isolation, Iraq was one of the very few countries that had already established full diplomatic ties with East Germany. Furthermore, despite the fact that the nationalistic Ba’ath party had violently crushed Iraq’s communist movement after the successful revolution that had brought it into power in 1968, it was still considered a valuable ally in 1970. The text opened with the line: ‘By concentrating troops at the Iraqi border, the Iranian government has created a dangerous situation.’ The information provided in this sentence was sketchy at best. In the subsequent sentence the writer revealed one of his primary sources: Radio Baghdad. To be more precise, a speech that Iraq’s president, al Bakr, had delivered in a broadcast. In his speech, we read, al Bakr had also accused Iran of provoking military skirmishes in the border region, thereby intensifying an already tense situation. The next paragraph switched focus away from Iraq and to Teheran:

As recently as [last] Sunday, Iran’s Prime Minister Hoveida pointedly announced a massive increase in the war budget. In this context, Tehran points to Washington’s most recent decision, based on the Nixon doctrine, to significantly increase arms exports to some countries in the Middle East.

Aside from the spelling of the Iranian Prime Minister’s name – in the early 1970s the GDR media seemed to be unable to reach an accord over the spelling, hence it

318 ‘Iran auf dem Schachbrett der USA-Globalstrategen’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 11 February 1970).
was variously given as Howeida, Hoveida or even Hoveyda – the choice of vocabulary appears peculiar. Whereas in most cases, investments in the military would be labelled ‘Aufstockung des Verteidigungsbudgets’ (increase in the defence budget), the author explicitly stated that it was the ‘Kriegsausgaben’ (war-expenses) Iran had increased. And the announcement of the increase was ‘demonstrativ’ (pointed). The impression aimed at was clearly that of Iran as an aggressive power which was threatening neighbouring Iraq with military force. However, the author went on to suggest that there might have been even more to Iran’s aggressive stance than just Teheran’s wish to establish a position of military might. A connection was made with the Nixon doctrine and Iran’s explicit reference to it.

In a speech on 3 November 1969, broadcast nationwide by radio and television, the American President, Richard Nixon had articulated the two cornerstones of his doctrine. They were America’s determination to defend by all means necessary, including nuclear strikes, any ally and any other nation that the USA regarded as vital for their own security against any threat by a rival nuclear power. In all other cases of non-nuclear aggression against any of these nations, the USA would be prepared to support, militarily and economically, the attacked, although it was expected that the nation in question would first fully employ its own defence resources. The author then went on to quote ‘political circles’ in Baghdad who expressed their own interpretation of recent events:

Political circles in Baghdad emphasise that these events are self-evidently part and parcel of the United States’s global strategy for the Near East, which aims at the encirclement of the progressive Arab nations and at the overthrow of their leaderships. Therefore, it is no accident that the timing of the intensification of the tensions at the Iraqi border coincided with the escalation of Israeli acts of aggression.

The use of the term ‘political circles’ for the author’s otherwise anonymous sources suggested to the reader that his informants were authoritative. As pointed out earlier, this is a classic journalistic technique, also commonly used in the Western press, where one often finds references to ‘usually well informed circles’ or ‘sources within

the government’ when the author cannot, or does not want to, reveal the identity of his source. However, it is also a technique which can be used to manipulate the content, meaning, credibility and weight of a specific piece of information.

The introduction of the ‘political circles’ leads to the core argument this article seemingly aspired to make: Iran, however aggressively it might behave, was in reality just an American pawn on the Middle Eastern chessboard. The analogy of the chessboard is an interesting one. A game of chess usually involves two players. The headline already tells us which of the players was supposed to be the US. The chessboard is the globe. The article did not name the other player, though. If the whole globe is the chessboard, then the binary world view to which both the US and the USSR and their respective allies subscribed suggests that the author in all likelihood understood the other player to be the USSR. However, the Cold War was not only about the clash of two nuclear superpowers. Rather, one of the main features of the Cold War was the clash of ideologies, of belief systems, a stand off between Communism and Capitalism, and, even more broadly, East and West. Accordingly, the article also promoted the prevalent binary world view. Both Iran and Iraq were implicitly described as parts of the global chess game. The use of the adverb ‘progressive’ to classify a specific group of Arab Nations indicated to a reader who was familiar with Marxist-Leninist vocabulary that the nations in question were moving towards a socialist kind of system and were not part of the US-dominated bloc of nations. Hence, the ‘progressive Arab nations’ (primarily Syria and Iraq) were represented to the reader as potential or actual friends, not just ideologically but also economically and politically. They were not part of the Socialist Bloc of states, though, nor were they formal allies.

This rather short article had been authored by a correspondent who was, at the time of writing, based in Baghdad. It had then been transmitted, by phone or by telex, to the editorial office of Neues Deutschland in East Berlin, where the foreign editor would have edited it. The editing would have followed the in-house formal and linguistic guidelines. Thereafter it would have been passed to the Chef vom Dienst (managing editor) who might have altered it again. And finally, the editor might have had a look at it. Because Neues Deutschland was the official party-newspaper, the
SED’s mouthpiece, every single member of staff – editorial as well as technical and administrative – was a committed member of the party. Whatever was written in *Neues Deutschland*, whatever opinion was expressed, it was the official line of the party. Apparent deviation from that line was neither allowed nor possible.

While adhering to the formal requirements of news journalism and only stating facts that could be proved if needed, East Germany’s journalists had perfected the art of manipulative news reporting. It was not so much what was said or stated that counted but what was omitted or taken out of context.

On 17 February 1970, *Neues Deutschland* issued another piece on Iran with the headline: ‘Iran hilft Imperialisten’ (Iran aids imperialists). It was significantly shorter than the previous article and consisted of only around 50 words:

> The independent Baghdad-based newspaper *Al Nour* has pilloried the subordination of Iran’s foreign policy under the interests of imperialism and the country’s expansionist ambitions vis-a-vis Iraq. Iran’s reactionaries were acting in the role of helpers in World Imperialism’s conspiracy against the Arab peoples.

Again, the author of the article was a correspondent. This time we learn a little more, though. The body text opened with the identification of the location where the news had been generated: once more, it was Baghdad, the capital of Iraq. The author was identified as (*ADN-Korr ND*).

From these bracketed abbreviations, any reader familiar with the formal structures employed by *Neues Deutschland* – and, in fact, by the vast majority of newspapers in both East and West Germany – learned the following: the source of the news was a news bureau, in this case *Allgemeiner Deutscher Nachrichtendienst* (ADN). Furthermore, a correspondent of ADN was physically present in Baghdad, at least at the time the news was written. *Neues Deutschland* was also listed as source/author. By implication, this means that an editor in *Neues Deutschland*’s East Berlin head office must have edited the news further and might have added details available to him or her from other sources. This seems to contradict the previously made

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statement that ADN-reports had to be printed in their original wording and that editing was not allowed. That *Neues Deutschland* could on occasion edit and even rewrite an ADN news-items regardless, is another indicator of the special status it occupied in East Germany.

The news itself, however, was almost entirely based on an opinionated article in the Baghdad-based Iraqi newspaper *Al Nour*. The newspaper was labelled ‘independent’. It is not clear, what ‘independent’ actually signifies in the particular context of this news item. The term might have been used to characterise *Al Nour* as a newspaper that belonged neither to the government nor the ruling Ba’ath Party. The label might also have been used to suggest independent journalism, independent thinking, and unbiased opinion. The ADN correspondent then simply summarized *Al Nour*’s article. What the reader learned from the summary was that Iran had (seemingly) voluntarily subordinated its own foreign policy to the interests of Imperialism. At this time, Britain was in the process of reducing significantly most of its naval and military presence in the Gulf. Iran sought to fill the vacuum the British withdrawal generated and to establish its hegemony in the Gulf region.

In the language of East German Marxism-Leninism, ‘imperialism’ was a collective noun for all ‘imperialist’ states, which were in principle the USA and their European allies, including West Germany. However, used without further qualification, ‘Imperialism’ also served as signifier for the US in particular. Because in the 1960s the USA had since the Suez crisis (1956) increasingly established themselves as the dominant foreign player in most of the Middle East, replacing the former European colonial powers, the term was most likely used as a synonym for the USA.321

Iran’s ruling elites were described as expansionist reactionaries who were more than willing to aid the world imperialist’s conspiracy. Was there anything else said in that article? The readership of *Neues Deutschland* would not know. Neither would they know of any purposefully or just accidental omissions, of incorrect translations or misinterpretations of what was said in the Arabic original. The German article gave

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321 Klaus Taubert, *Generation Fußnote: Bekenntnisse eines Opportunisten* (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 2008). Taubert, a former editor for ADN, provides a deep insight into the editing processes at East Germany’s state run news agency.
no indication of the context of the Arabic original, either. Why had *Al Nour* picked on Iran? Was there conflict brewing between the two countries? Did Iraq feel threatened by its neighbour? If so, why? Also, why were Iran’s rulers described as reactionaries, a pejorative term used to label, among other usages, ultra-conservative and strictly anti-communist groups and elites? These were questions to which *Neues Deutschland* did not provide any answers. What remained was the perception that Iran seemed to be a rather nasty country, ruled by reactionaries, ready to attack Iraq in order to grab some land from its neighbour. At the same time, the image was promoted of Iraq as a progressive, peaceful Arab country that, like all the other progressive Arab countries, had fallen victim to a far-reaching imperialist conspiracy. On the surface, the author took a neutral stance, just summing up what someone else, *Al Nour*, had said, without making any apparent attempt to comment on it.
Rally in Astara.

On 29 October 1970, Neues Deutschland dedicated an unusually (for 1970) long and detailed article to an event that had taken place in Iran. The article stretched over two columns and a total of fifty lines, which roughly equals 330 words. It was illustrated with a map of Iran, which also showed some of the Trans-Caucasian republics of the USSR. The headline read: 'Gasleitung Iran-UdSSR eingeweiht' (Opening celebration for Iran-USSR gas pipeline). The subheading run: 'Kundgebung in Astara' (Rally in Astara). The German 'Kundgebung' can be a bit tricky to translate. It can be used in the sense of 'a demonstration/protest for or against something'. It can also mean 'rally' as in 'Union rally'. In 'Parteichinesisch' (Party Chinese), the flowery speech used by the SED and its media, it usually had the latter meaning. The headline already gave away some of the content of the article: a gas pipeline had been built between Iran and the USSR, and the opening celebration took place in the Iranian city of Astara. Also, there was a rally in Astara.

The location from which the news was reported was identified as Astara. As sources/authors were named ADN and ND. Later in the text it was revealed that ADN had apparently received the basic details of the event from its Soviet partner agency TASS. The events took place on Wednesday, 28 October 1970. The article opened with the line:

On Wednesday, the first Trans-Iranian gas-pipeline, built with support from the Soviet Union, was opened in Astara, near the border with the Soviet Union. Present at the ceremonial inauguration were Nikolai Podgorny, chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, Shahanshah Mohamed Reza Pahlevi, and thousands of workers.

The reader had by now learned that Astara was a place in Iran, located near to the country’s border with the Soviet Union. Surprisingly, Astara, although the geographical focal point of this article, however, could not be found on the map

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which illustrated the article. The reader also learned that a gas pipeline had been built, one that spanned the whole of Iran, and that had been constructed with the help of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the event seemed to have been an important one, so much so that two representatives of the highest ranks of their respective countries, the chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi – here addressed with his full title ‘Shahanshah’, which emphasised the importance Neues Deutschland attached to this meeting – had both found it worthwhile to travel to Astara in person. Finally, there were thousands of workers present at the rally.

The other important information offered was that Iran and the USSR were not only neighbours, but also maintained a good neighbourly relationship, so good indeed, that their leaders met on occasions which signified remarkable improvements in their economic relations, such as the ceremonial opening of a gas pipeline, the construction of which had been assisted by the Soviet Union.

Next the reader learned that after the ceremony Podgorny and the Shah had a ‘Gedankenaustausch’ (informal talk, exchange of thoughts) about topics such as the relations between the two countries and current international problems. 324 ADN subsequently quoted the Soviet news agency TASS:

TASS reports that both head of states expressed their satisfaction with the amicable relationships between their countries. The Shah gave a dinner in honour of his guest. On his journey back to the USSR, Nikolai Podgorny was accompanied by the Shah to the border.

The impression given was that of a good and amicable understanding not only between the USSR and Iran but also on a more personal level between the two heads of state. Any notion of Iran as an aggressive power and as an American stooge, which was the very dominant theme in the two previous articles, and in most articles that had appeared in the GDR media throughout the late 1960s, was completely absent. The following two sentences added even more colour to the way in which the relationship between the two countries was represented:

324 As with Howeida, in 1970 the GDR press had likewise not yet decided on a uniform spelling of the Shah's name and title. The version used in this article is just one of several found in Neues Deutschland at different times. Other variations include Resa Mohammed Pahlawi, Reza Pahlewi, and Resa Mohamed Pahlavi Aryamehr.
At the opening ceremony, Mohamed Reza Pahlevi declared that the border between both countries had become a border of peace, friendship and cooperation. In his speech, Nicolai Podgorny had stated that the relations between the two countries are built on a foundation of equality, and mutual benefit.

The language used was the clichéd speech of diplomacy. Regardless, it confirmed the impression that the two countries did at that time maintain friendly relations. Yet, there was an indication that this might not always have been the case: 'Mohamed Reza Pahlevi declared that the border between the two countries had become a border of peace'. The 'had become' clearly indicated that there must have been times where relations between the two had been not quite as friendly. It also indicated that improving the relations might have been a long process.

Equally interesting was Podgorny's statement: 'the relations between the two countries are built on a foundation of ‘equality’ and ‘mutual advantage’. The emphasis on 'equality' suggests that Podgorny was contrasting Iran-USSR relations with Iran’s relations with the other big power, which could be regarded as less than equal. Even more interesting is the value, the 'mutual advantage’. This is the aspect that Neues Deutschland picked up on. In style and use of language, the second part of the article differed from the first, which suggests that the second part was added by Neues Deutschland's editors in Berlin. It was introduced by the sub-headline; ‘Gegenseitiger Vorteil’ (Mutual benefits).

The 1,000 km pipeline between the USSR and Iran, constructed with the help of the Soviet Union, benefits both countries: up to ten billion cubic metres of natural gas will per annum stream from Iran’s southern provinces to the Trans-Caucasian Soviet republics. In addition, the needs of Tehran and other cities in the proximity of the pipeline will also be met. Until now, Iran had not exported one single cubic metre of natural gas. In exchange, the Soviet Union will deliver machinery and equipment for Iran’s industry and provide technical assistance.

In short: the USSR aided Iran’s industrial development and received in turn valuable natural gas. It is easy to see how both parties benefited from the deal.

The real question to be asked, however, was this: why was this story presented so prominently in the first place? Why should the readership of an East German party newspaper have any interest in an economic deal struck between the USSR and Iran?
which offered no apparent benefit for East Germany? The answer could not be found in the article itself, but in the GDR’s foreign policy which was tied into the Soviet-dominated foreign policy framework of the Warsaw Pact and that had left the GDR, in general, less room to manoeuvre than other Eastern Bloc countries such as Romania or Poland.\footnote{Helmuth Borges, ‘Der Tod als Wahlhelfer’, \textit{Wochenpost} (Berlin GDR, 19 March 2010), 12/60 edition, p. 5.} Where the USSR led, GDR’s foreign policy had to follow. In other words, what was of benefit to the USSR, had to be of benefit to the GDR, too. This also implies that if the USSR had decided to pursue a policy of amicable relations with Iran, then the GDR press might have been advised to refrain from too harsh criticism of Iran and to paint a more subtle picture.

From early 1971 onwards, a remarkable shift in the representations of Iran could be seen. Suddenly the East German papers paid attention to aspects of Iran they had previously almost entirely ignored. They focussed on the long history of the country and the fact that Iran was home to one of the oldest civilisations in human history. For example, on 12 May 1971 the \textit{Berliner Zeitung} reported that archaeologists had discovered the relics of an ancient fortress and sea port near the city of Bandar-e-Siraf in Iran’s Bushehr province.\footnote{‘Antiker Seehafen entdeckt’, \textit{Berliner Zeitung} (Berlin GDR, 12 May 1971).} Surprisingly, so the article stated, three to five hundred years ago the Sassanids had already used merchant ships. Why it was so surprising that the Sassanids had merchant ships, the author failed to tell, though. When Iran and the People’s Republic of China opened formal diplomatic relations in June 1971, the \textit{Berliner Zeitung} saw this as a pretext for an article that highlighted that relations between these two countries reached back almost 2,000 years.\footnote{‘Beziehungen China-Iran’, \textit{Berliner Zeitung} (Berlin GDR, 18 June 1971).}

The Shah himself provided ample reasons for the GDR media to engage with Iran’s long history when he prepared the country and the world for a pompous celebration of (imagined) 2,500 years of the Iranian monarchy in October 1971. However, the event was reported quite critically. Interestingly, only the introduction to the article the \textit{Berliner Zeitung} issued on the occasion of the event was actually written by the newspaper’s own staff.\footnote{‘Unsummen für 2500-Jahr-Feier’, \textit{Berliner Zeitung} (Berlin GDR, 6 August 1971).} The very critical main body, on the other hand, had been taken from a British newspaper, the \textit{Guardian}, and translated into German. Why the
translation from a Western publication? The answer can only be guessed. Most likely, the press had already been made aware of intensifying contacts and negotiations between the GDR and Iran, which would lead to the establishment of formal diplomatic relations in 1972. Thus it would have been instructed to refrain from the very harsh kind of criticism with which it had earlier treated Iran. If that was the case, then the implied message was twofold: The domestic readership was presented with a very critical assessment of the Shah’s big birthday party, while Iranian anger over the harsh wording could be countered by pointing out that the *Berliner Zeitung* had not expressed its own opinion, but merely reiterated what the *Guardian* had to say.

The GDR media was much more cautious than in the past in its assessment of Iran’s attempts to establish itself as the regional hegemon in the Persian Gulf. When Iran occupied the three islands of Abu Musa, Big Tunb and Small Tunb, which were claimed by the sheikdoms of Sharja and Ras al-Kheima, papers such as *Neues Deutschland* or the *Berliner Zeitung* reported on Iran’s actions in a very neutral manner. They only pointed to the strategic and economic importance of the islands but failed to provide any further context. Only *Horizont* offered some additional background. In June 1971, the foreign affairs magazine reported that Iran had acted in a fashion resembling that of the island’s past occupier, Britain, and that it had justified its occupation with a historical claim to the islands.329 Although Iran’s action was portrayed as an aggressive act by the press, all GDR papers resisted any temptation to condemn it and remained neutral.

The German Democratic Republic and Iran opened formal diplomatic relations in December 1972. Throughout 1972 the East German media’s interest in Iran had completely shifted away from the topics they were concerned with in previous years. Instead, they now portrayed Iran as a country with a rich culture, a long and proud history and as one of the oldest civilisations in human history. Author’s such as Fred Renz, writing in *Horizont* reminded readers of the magazine that German literary giants such as Heinrich Heine and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe had not only admired classical Iranian culture and literature but had also been deeply inspired by the works of Hafiz and Ferdowsi.330 Other texts emphasised the oil-fuelled rise of Iran

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into one of the world’s leading economies. Finally, the programme of reforms called the White Revolution was increasingly admired. One of the several long texts on Iran which appeared in 1972 within publications such as *Neues Deutschland*, *Horizont* or the *Berliner Zeitung* was an article published by *Horizont* in its December 1972 issue. This particular piece, authored by Frank Heine, focussed primarily on Iran’s rise as an economic power and its improving good-neighbourly relations with the USSR, but it also included references to all the other aforementioned topics which dominated the GDR media’s discourse on Iran in 1972 and may therefore serve as an example of how Iran was then viewed by the press. The article was titled ‘Iran – Gestärkte Wirtschaftspositionen’ (Iran – strengthened economic positions). The layout was dominated by a photo of a massive blast furnace which occupied two-thirds of the space given to the entire article. The caption explained that the picture showed the first blast furnace in the Iranian town of Isfahan’. One explicit claim made by Franz Heine was that Iran’s economic rise would not have been possible without the help of the Soviet Union:

A milestone in Iran’s rapid post-war development was the re-establishment of good neighbourly relations with the Soviet Union on the basis of peaceful coexistence. Economic cooperation with the USSR contributed considerably to Iran’s successful maintenance of its independence and to the catapulting of the country’s economy in the mid-1960s.

Since the mid-1950s, peaceful coexistence was one of the core structural principles of the Socialist Bloc’s foreign policy towards countries with diametrically opposed socio-economic systems or with countries whose social orders were neither capitalist nor socialist. The aim was détente, the easing of the tensions that dominated the ‘hot’ phases of the Cold War. The definition of the principle of peaceful coexistence can be traced back to Lenin. Introduced by Malenkov in 1954 and further developed by Khrushchev after 1956, it was understood as being an objective precondition essential for achieving, establishing and maintaining world peace. Peaceful coexistence was regarded as the only rational alternative to a nuclear war that would with certainty lead to the extinction of the human race. During the period between the end of the 1960s and the early years of the 1970s, both the USA and the USSR slowly arrived at

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the conclusion that the nuclear destruction of their opposite number could only be achieved at the price of risking their own physical existence. Consequently, both sides moved away from the politics of direct confrontation and sought to establish relations that were based on equality and respect for the other’s sovereignty. In the case of the GDR, Ingrid Muth points to the essentially ideological function implied in the formula of peaceful coexistence. In the SED’s definition, the formula did not exclude the struggle of opposites in the international relations between states with divergent socio-economic orders. Therefore ideological coexistence, a peace between the exploited and the exploiters, was not implied in it. For the socialist countries this reading left open the option of simultaneously maintaining official relations with a state, and with parties and forces opposed to the governing elites of the very same state. Muth also makes the case that in the 1960s the doctrine of peaceful coexistence became an essential part of the GDR’s foreign policy because it allowed for some leeway to develop international relations in Europe and to consequently break out of the isolation in which the country still found itself. Recognition by the Western countries of the GDR’s sovereignty and therefore of its territorial integrity – especially the borders with West Germany – was of the utmost importance for the security of the GDR.\textsuperscript{333} The appliance of the doctrine finally also allowed for steps to establish a framework of bilateral relations between the two Germanys which were less confrontational and which left space for cooperation in some matters.

Back to the article: Heine then put forward the argument that Iran’s steadily improving relations with the USSR had strengthened the country’s position in its struggle against imperialism. This was a bit of positive spin, since Iran was still a member of CENTO and maintained close relations with the USA and other Western countries. Implicitly, it acknowledged also that the Shah was able to use the dichotomies in the bipolar world of the Cold War to Iran’s advantage by playing the superpowers against each other. The real news, at least from a GDR point of view, he reserved for the last paragraph: ‘In accordance with the general trend in international relations, formal diplomatic relations have now been established between Iran and the GDR. Not only in these two countries will this step be regarded as a constructive

\textsuperscript{332} Muth, pp. 44–45.
\textsuperscript{333} Muth, pp. 45–47.
contribution to peaceful coexistence.’

The wording is interesting. The GDR’s diplomatic recognition by Iran was represented not so much as an important event in itself but as just another step in a development that would finally establish the GDR as a fully sovereign state. Furthermore, the development would not only be welcomed by other countries but could also be regarded as a contribution to peaceful existence.

In the years after the establishment of full diplomatic relations between the GDR and Iran, the press focussed almost entirely on Iran’s economic development, the relations between Iran and the USSR and the reforms pushed through by the Shah’s government. The reforms were generally presented in a positive light, and the Shah was increasingly represented as an enlightened monarch with a progressive agenda. On 13 July 1973, for example, *Neues Deutschland* carried a very short news item, of just 31 words, in which the newspaper highlighted positive changes in the role women had begun to play in an Iranian society transformed by the Shah’s reform programme.

Headlined ‘Farokhru Parsa ist minister’ (Farokhru Parsa is minister), the article informed the readership that Faroukhru Parsa, the newly appointed Minister for Education, was among a growing number of women who occupied leading positions in Iran’s political, economic and social life.\(^{334}\) It also stated that women had become members of parliament. However, it did not mention that in Iran’s autocratic system, the parliament merely represented a democratic fig leaf on what was for all intents and purposes, a dictatorship. Until the Shah entirely disposed of the multi-party system in 1975 and replaced it with a one-party system, there were only two official parties in the 1970s: the officially oppositional People’s Party (*Mardom*) and the governmental Nationalist Party (*Melliyun*). Both parties had been created by the Shah and if there were any differences between them, then they were at best marginal.\(^{335}\)

In a full-page article published on 14 August 1974, the Dresden-based daily newspaper *Sächsische Zeitung* focussed on what it perceived as Iran’s development into a major power on the world stage. Accordingly, the title of the piece was ‘Iran an


\(^{335}\) Keddie (2003), pp. 139–141.
der Schwelle zur Großmacht?’ (Is Iran about to become a major power?). In its first paragraph the article referred to a deal that had made headlines in the business sections of newspapers all over Europe: Iran had bought 25% of the shares of West Germany’s industrial giant Krupp. From here the author(s) reiterated Iran’s recent economic success stories, remarked on the good relations the country had with the USSR and the GDR as well as on the Shah’s reform programme that had catapulted Iran from an almost medieval society into a rapidly developing modern one and finally highlighted its strategically important position in the Gulf region. Again, the article exclusively focussed on the ‘positive’ developments and entirely ignored any aspect of contemporary Iran that did not fit the picture.

Very notably, in this period the GDR press abstained from any serious criticism of Iran and the dictatorial regime the monarch had established. Although the Tudeh, after all a party the SED was on friendly terms with, was brutally persecuted, the papers kept eerily silence about these aspects of the Shah’s reign. Instead one was able to read voluminous articles about Iran’s plans to become the ‘Japan of the Middle East’ by authors such as Dr Heiner Winkler who celebrated the country’s economic success-story as much as the improving relations with the USSR, the Shah’s attempts to reform the country and his attempts to free the country from imperialist control.

Two years later, the same Dr Winkler, by then assistant editor of the influential foreign policy magazine Horizont, would become the first GDR journalist ever to interview the Shah at the Niavaran Palace. The report stretched over two full pages and was titled ‘Audienz im Niavaran-Palast – Mit dem iranischen Herrscher Schahanschah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi Aryamehr sprach Dr. Heiner Winkler’ (Audience in the Niavaran palace – Dr Heiner Winkler talks with the Iranian ruler Shahinshah Mohammad Reza Pahlevi Aryamehr). Invited by Iran’s Ministry for Information, Winkler had travelled to Tehran in December 1974. His account of the trip and the interview with the Shah was almost obsequious in tone and quickly destroyed any hope that the wording of the headline meant to express irony or

sarcasm. The term ‘audience’ describes a relationship of power. It is the superior who grants the subordinate an audience. Seemingly unquestioning, the communist Winkler accepted the role he was assigned in this meeting, with the same person his own publication had in previous years readily demonised as a reactionary, a ruthless absolute monarch. *Horizont* did not print the transcript of the interview which Winkler had recorded on his tape-recorder. Instead the whole article was more of a summary, the conversation retold by Winkler from his point of view. The text contained very few direct quotes and some of those appeared to have been taken out of their original context. Content-wise, the main topics were Iran’s relations with both the capitalist and the communist world and the Shah’s views on a number of pressing topics such as peaceful coexistence, the establishment of a regional security system and the question of American military bases in Iran; but also the securement of a nuclear-free Middle East; and, of course, Iran’s rise as an economic power of global importance. At no point in the interview did Winkler question any of the Shah’s statements. Rather, to the contrary, his role seemed to have been reduced to that of a stooge who dutifully fed the right lines. When the talk turned to the massive reform programme under way in Iran, he inserted a quote that demonstrated the Shah’s contempt for Western liberal democracy:

He [the Shah] said of the sources of the new developments: 'The Persian people learn quickly, and they are willing and able to work very hard. Furthermore, as already mentioned, there are our natural resources. There is stability and – a very important source – the programming is based on long-term planning wherever necessary.

At this point the Shah inserted a sneering remark on ‘... those countries in which the government comes up with a programme that it will then not be able to push through, which consequently leads to the government being voted out after a few months. In other countries governments turn into lame ducks because new elections loom in one or two years’ time. Once the elections are over, the governments then need another one or two years to fix all that had been missed. That does not leave much time for proper planning.’

Winkler did not find it necessary to comment on this quote, thereby indicating that he was pretty much in agreement. Finally, the talk turned to the relations between Iran

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and the GDR. Here he quoted the Shah extensively. What the monarch had to say on those relations and on the future must have sounded promising not only to the readership but also the GDR foreign trade officials:

I believe that our relations can develop in a very normal way, much like the relations we have with Poland, Bulgaria and similar countries. Your country is a very young country. With Poland we have relations which date back some 500 years. However, the principles are the same for your country, which is a sovereign and internationally recognised state. If we both stick to the same pattern that marks our relations with Poland, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia or the other socialist countries, our relations will probably develop the same way. As for the integration of these relations with practical life: this must be studied, since the GDR is a very highly developed industrial country whose industrial sector competes internationally, with respect to quality and prices. This is certainly one aspect of our relations with the German Democratic Republic.

This text exemplified the degree of pragmatism the GDR press was capable of in its representations of Iran. In the name of peaceful coexistence and to further good economic relations, ideological differences were conveniently papered over and it cynically kept silent over the continuing persecution of Iran’s communist opposition and the brutally oppressive nature of the Shah’s authoritarian regime.

Ancient Iranian history and culture also continued to fascinate East German authors such as Ralf Bachmann, whose report of his journey through the province of Fars was printed by National Zeitung under the title of ‘Fars – Herz der antiken Welt’ (Fars – the heart of the ancient world)\(^\text{340}\) and also, one month later, by Die Wahrheit, based in West Berlin and the official organ of the West Berlin branch of the SED, SEW,\(^\text{341}\) this time with the headline ‘Fars ist mehr als nur eine Provinz – Die Wiege der persischen Kultur’ (Fars is more than just a province – the cradle of Persian culture).\(^\text{342}\) Bachmann was full of admiration for Iran’s great past and its ancient civilisations. He visited Shiraz and described in an almost euphoric way how the city had managed to keep alive the memory of its glorious past while developing into one of Iran’s centres of heavy industry. He introduced his readers to the life and work of Hafez and


\(^{341}\) SEW= Sozialistische Einheitspartei West Berlins (Socialist Unity Party of West Berlin).

emphasised the Persian poet’s influence on the writings of Goethe. Although the author contrasted in a few short sentences the wealth of the few with the misery of the urban and rural masses, this was merely paying lip-service to ideological requirements. In the main body of all three texts, he went on and on about the grand ancient culture of Persia, about Persepolis (or Parsa), or the mild climatic conditions, and he avoided any further controversial political or social issues.

Articles such as those by Bachmann and Winkler indicated that relations between Iran and the GDR were at a high. They were perhaps at their peak when the chairman of the GDR’s Council of Ministers, Horst Sindermann, visited Tehran in November 1975. The GDR press dedicated several long articles to the visit. The *Berliner Zeitung am Abend* based its article ‘Horst Sindermann heute beim Schah’ (Horst Sindermann today at the Shah’s) primarily on material from ADN, which had provided the paper with details on Sindermann’s schedule as well as with translated excerpts from comments on the visit which had been published in the Iranian press.\(^{343}\) *Neues Deutschland* had its own correspondent, Rolf Günther, in Tehran who had presumably travelled to Iran as part of Sindermann’s entourage. His article bore the headline ‘DDR-Ministerpräsident beim Schah von Iran’ (GDR’s Prime Minister meets Iran’s Shah).\(^{344}\) *Neues Deutschland* also followed the story up on 21 November 1975. All the reports on Sindermann’s visit to Iran and his meeting with the Shah, prominent Iranian politicians, and economic leaders emphasised the same aspects of his journey and hence clearly demonstrated the GDR’s priorities in its relations with Iran. As a footnote, even as late as in 1975 the GDR’s press had not agreed upon the spellings of Iranian names. Amir Abbas Hoveida for instance, Iran’s Prime Minister at the time of Sindermann’s visit, would one day be spelled Hoveida, on another day but in the same paper Hoveyda. The same was true for the Shah’s name: Mohammad Reza Pahlavi one could read in the *Berliner Zeitung am Abend*, while *Neues Deutschland* preferred Mohammed Reza Pahlawy.

While the GDR’s media mainly focussed on the modernisation of Iran, the

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country’s strategic positioning and its rise as an economic power, they failed to notice
the growing discontent among large sections of the population and seemingly did not
recognise the role the Islamic clergy increasingly played in channelling and
organising resistance to the regime. Throughout 1976 and 1977, the representation of
Iran as an economic heavy-weight that was rapidly modernising and maintained
friendly relationships with the USSR, the GDR and the rest of the Socialist Bloc
while simultaneously attempting to loosen ties with the West and with the USA in
particular, was the pre-dominant one.

Even as late as 1978, the press still continued to paint a picture of Iran as a stable
country which might have had some internal problems but none of them severe
enough to potentially jeopardise the country’s stability. This at least was the
conclusion at which the Soviet analyst Pawel Mesenzew arrived in a three-page
article in the Moscow-based German-language publication Neue Zeit which had
served as a guideline for all East German foreign editors as to how Moscow officially
saw Iran.345 How little the GDR’s press cared for the opposition to the Shah’s
government at this time is exemplified in a brief news item from 28 February 1978.
On this day, Neues Deutschland reported that a group of Iranians resident in West
Berlin had entered East Berlin on a day-visa and then gone to visit the Iranian
Embassy.346 What happened then, Neues Deutschland described in the following
words:

After they had turned violent, the Iranian ambassador asked members of the
People’s Police to remove these persons from embassy premises. They were
temporarily arrested for violation of extraterritoriality and an investigation was
started against them for trespassing. Observers noticed that correspondents from
the FRG, some of whom worked for television, and who are accredited in the
GDR, had arrived at the embassy in three vehicles almost immediately after the
events had started.

The last sentence implied that the West German media had somehow been
complicit in the action undertaken by these Iranian citizens. However, given that there
had been hardly any reporting of the Tudeh’s plight in Iran and that, since 1972,

345 Pawel Mesenzew, ‘Petrodollars und Politik’, Neue Zeit (Moscow, January 1978), 147/5
346 ‘Iraner aus Westberlin aus Botschaft Irans in der DDR entfernt’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin
GDR, 28 February 1978).
Tudeh members had not been provided with a forum in East Germany’s press, the impression made by Neues Deutschland was that in their strive to keep up good relations with Iran, the SED had clearly forgotten about the principles of socialist solidarity.

On 6 September 1978, Neues Deutschland printed the text of an interview with Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, that was also distributed by ADN and the recorded version of which was broadcast by East German television (Fernsehen der DDR). The interview followed a pattern that was similar to that of the Winkler interview from 1975. The interview was part of a media campaign in preparation for a planned visit of the Shah to the GDR later in the year. Iran’s monarch was allowed to portray his government and his policies in the best light. There were no critical questions at all, instead the questions and answers seemed carefully staged and radiated an aura of deference. The interviewer addressed the Shah as ‘His imperial Highness’ and did not dare question any of his answers. There was no hint of the storm, either, that was gathering in Iran at the same time the interview took place.

When revolutionary events began to gather pace and power in Iran, the East German media apparently were as unsuspecting and taken by surprise as most of their Western counterparts at that time. For most of 1978, all the GDR media had to write on Iran was news on the Shah’s visit to Budapest and his announcement that he would come to East Berlin later that year. There were also occasional further stories on the country’s economic successes. Finally, there was a report on the GDR’s foreign minister’s, Oskar Fischer, meeting with the Shah in Teheran. Fischer’s visit to Iran was an exercise in damage limitation. Iran had reacted angrily to the sacking of Iran’s embassy in East Berlin by Iranian students and had withdrawn its ambassador from the GDR. Fischer hurried to Iran to mend fences and to restore the relations between the countries to a more friendly level.

That not all was well in Iran, East German readers first learned five days after the publication of the interview with the Shah. On 11 September 1978, Neues

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348 ‘Schahanschah von Iran empfing DDR-Außenminister’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 14 April 1978).
Deutschland published an article that bore the headline: 'Iran: Parlament behandelt Kriegsrechtsbestimmungen' (Iran: Parliament discusses martial law provisions). The piece was primarily based on material sourced from ADN who in turn had to some extent relied on dispatches from other news agencies. In the body text it said that the government of Iran had imposed martial law on Tehran and eleven further Iranian cities on Friday 8 September 1978, precisely two days after the interview with the Shah had been printed and broadcast. Neues Deutschland did not seem to be too sure about what was going. All the newspaper could tell was that

Some agencies report that traffic on the main roads appears to be moving and that last Saturday there were a few occurrences in the southern parts of the city where army units broke up a number of small crowds. Martial law forbids gatherings of more than three people. Except for a few food shops, Tehran’s main bazaar remains closed.

The next paragraph contained a short remark on the Shah’s meeting with Pakistan’s head of state, General Zia-Ul-Haq, before focus returned to a last bit of news that was seemingly related to the main story: ’According to an official statement, the Shahinshah has accepted the resignation of Court Minister Amir Abbas Howeida. No reasons were given for the resignation of Howeida, who had served as the country’s prime minister until 1977.’

In the weeks to follow there were more short reports of demonstrations, clashes between protesters and the military, and strikes, mostly taken from ADN dispatches which were based on either transmissions from Radio Tehran or on material obtained from other, unnamed, news agencies. Still, neither Neues Deutschland nor any other East German publication provided a bigger picture of what was going on. The first hint of who the opposition might be, who it was who was taking on the Shah’s security forces, was offered in a very brief news item Neues Deutschland printed on 17 October 1978. Again, the news was provided by ADN who had based it on material obtained from other agencies and on reports in Iranian newspapers. The headline ran: ’Aufruf zum Generalstreik in Iran landesweit befolgt’ (Call for general strike in Iran was heeded nationwide) For the first time, an East German newspaper

350 ‘Aufruf zum Generalstreik in Iran landesweit befolgt’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 17
explicitly mentioned that Muslim clerics were playing a leading role in the opposition movement: ‘According to reports from agencies, a call for a general strike that had been issued by the Iranian opposition, which includes among others religious leaders as well as the leadership of political parties, has been heeded nationwide.’

In the autumn of 1978 the press of the GDR reported several incidents such as strikes, clashes between protesters and the police or the military. One of the most significant events, however, the massacre that happened on Friday 9 September 1978 on Tehran's Jaleh square when military units opened fire with machine guns on a large group of protesters and killed several of them, seems to have escaped their attention entirely. The Jaleh massacre, also known as 'Black Friday', proved to be one of the defining moments of the revolution.

In October, November and December of 1978 there were further reports of demonstrations, violent clashes between security forces and protesters, strikes and mass demonstrations. Towards the end of November 1978, the GDR press had certainly realised that the unrest in Iran had the potential to threaten the stability of the country. There was also the feeling that the events in Iran might prompt the West to intervene. When Leonid Brezhnev, secretary general of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and chairman of the highest Soviet of the USSR, issued a warning to the West to abstain from any kind of military threat against or intervention in Iran and stated that the Soviet Union would consider any such act as directed against the security interests of the USSR, Neues Deutschland printed that statement prominently.351

Most reports still ignored the Muslim element in the opposition movement, though. Only very slowly did the GDR press start to take notice of the involvement of the religious forces as is demonstrated by a very brief piece that Neues Deutschland printed on 29 November 1978. Titled ‘Religiöse Prozessionen wurden in Iran verboten’ (Religious processions have been banned in Iran); the article informed the readership that Iran’s military government, led by General Azhari, had issued a ban on all religious processions for the duration of the month Al-Muharram, the Shiite

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month of mourning, that would begin on 2\textsuperscript{nd} December.\textsuperscript{352} Again, the news was based on an ADN dispatch whose sources were other agencies who had monitored broadcasts from Iran’s state television. The text provided no further explanation why religious processions were banned for the duration of that particular month.

It appears that until December 1978 the GDR press had misjudged or simply not understood the significance of developments in Iran. There was clearly no awareness of the strategies employed by the ulama, who had managed to turn Shiite mourning rituals into a powerful weapon against the Shah’s government. Nikki Keddie describes the effectiveness of the strategy:

\begin{quote}

The ulama and bazaar leadership, sensing their new power and the grievances of their constituency, helped in 1978 to organize massive memorial demonstrations for those killed in previous incidents, taking place at traditional forty-day religious intervals. Here was a brilliant example of political use of Shi’i traditions; the government would risk truly massive demonstrations if it outlawed traditional mourning gatherings occurring at the proper and traditional intervals: such a prohibition would have been unheard of, even under the Shah.\textsuperscript{353}

Against this backdrop, the decision by the military government to ban all processions in the month of Muharram almost amounted to political suicide.

In retrospect, what is perplexing is the degree to which the GDR’s media misread and ignored the events of 1978. In their eagerness to portray the Shah as an enlightened monarch and Iran as an emerging economic big power, they failed entirely to notice the early warning signs of the threat the rapidly growing opposition posed to his reign. The significance of the stiffening resistance of the powerful bazaaris to the government was as little realised as the equally powerful role the ulama played in the opposition. At a time at which the seemingly ubiquitous and almighty secret police of the Shah had managed to either shut down or to tightly control all oppositional publications and organisations, the ulama provided the opposition with a network of mosques which could be used organise effective resistance on a massive scale. Also not on the radar of the GDR’s press was Ayatollah
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{352} ‘Religiöse Prozessionen wurden in Iran verboten’, \textit{Neues Deutschland} (Berlin GDR, 29 November 1978).

Khomeini who, although in exile in Paris, had in the second half of 1978 finally emerged as the uncompromising figurehead of the opposition. Partly, this failure appears to be due to a lack of resources on the ground. Almost all news items portraying the activities of the opposition and their clashes with the state’s security forces were based on agency reports. ADN did not have a permanent correspondent in Iran. Therefore, ADN in turn had to make the best of what material it could obtain from sources such as other Western and Eastern news agencies, the Iranian press, Iranian news broadcasts transmitted by both radio and television, Western radio and television and, finally, Western and Soviet newspapers. What is surprising about this scenario is that there was no sign of the Tudeh members still resident in the GDR providing any further intelligence to the GDR’s press. Although some of the Tudeh’s organisational structures inside Iran were destroyed, they must still have received detailed information on the opposition’s struggle with the government. What seems a likely possibility, although one that cannot be verified by this research, is that the Tudeh members in the GDR probably had access to some information and had passed it on to their contacts in the SED, but that this input was deliberately ignored for political reasons.

On 30 December 1978, *Neues Deutschland* reported that the Shah had tasked the opposition politician Shapour Baktiar, leader of the National Front, with the formation of a new government.\(^{354}\) Once more, the article was primarily based on material sourced by ADN from Western news agencies, here in particular the French agency AFP. The piece also offered more details on the continuing clashes between protesters and the military. Although reporting on Iran had acquired a sense of urgency, by December 1978 the GDR’s press still offered no indication that the reign of the Shah would come to an end in only slightly over a month’s time and that the civil unrest was indeed developing into a full blown revolution. Still, news on developments in Iran could now be found almost daily in the GDR’s leading newspapers. However, even if one followed the reporting day by day, the picture that emerged was far from clear. For example, the first time the Ayatollah Khomeini was mentioned prominently was much later, on 22 January 1979. The article, titled

\(^{354}\) ‘Erneute Zusammenstöße in zahlreichen Städten Irans’, *Neues Deutschland* (Berlin GDR, 30 December 1978).
‘Weitere Zusammenstöße in Iran – Oppositionsführer Khomeini kündigte Rückkehr nach Teheran an’ (More clashes in Iran – opposition leader Khomeini announced his return to Teheran) was based on material obtained by ADN from AFP, Radio Tehran and a number of not further specified ‘Westagenturen’ (Western agencies). The text told of further bloody clashes between protesters and security forces. More interestingly, it also informed the readers about Khomeini’s announcement that he would return to Iran. It did not tell the reader, though, who Khomeini was, why he was considered the leader of the opposition and what he was doing in Paris in the first place. Since the GDR press, especially Neues Deutschland, had in the past ignored Khomeini almost entirely, readers had reason to be baffled about the importance suddenly attributed to this particular character. The way events in Iran were presented, therefore, remained very sketchy at best and a lot of necessary context was simply not provided. Also, the press of the GDR and ADN still relied heavily on input from foreign news agencies and media when it came to Iran. Another impression that all the reporting on the events had given so far was that the press had no clear idea what was going on in Iran and from what ideological perspective the revolutionary events should be viewed. This changed at about the time the revolutionaries could justly claim victory.

After a long period of silence, the voice of the Tudeh once again was given space in Neues Deutschland. However, this time it was not the writing of a prominent Tudeh leader one could read in Neues Deutschland, but rather, the summarised German translation of an interview which Nureddin Kianouri, secretary at the Central Committee of the Tudeh, had given the American weekly magazine Newsweek. In this interview Kianouri declared that the Tudeh would fully support the Shiite leadership in its goals to overthrow the monarchy, to establish an Islamic republic and to convocate a constitutional assembly. The Tudeh would also support the draft of a new constitution which would allow for the establishment of a national government. The article then continued:

356 ‘Tudeh-Partei zur Situation in Iran - Eintreten für die Gewährleistung demokratischer Rechte betont’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 25 January 1979)
The secretary of the Tudeh party emphasised that the party, which was declared illegal in 1949, has managed to survive with its structures intact although it suffered from cruel persecution from the Iranian secret police SAVAK. 'We are prepared to cooperate with all political forces who are willing to end the reign of American imperialism and who will guarantee that there will be no further purchases of expensive weapon-systems,' declared Nureddin Kianouri. 'We have no objections against working together with those circles of the national bourgeoisie who were not directly interlinked with the imperialistic monopolies.

Although the article was relatively short and presented less prominently than the other news Neues Deutschland had on the same page on developments in Iran, it was more significant for a number of reasons.

First it was the clearest sign yet that the GDR was prepared to 'change allegiance'. There was acceptance that the days of the Shah were over and that, therefore, there was no more reason to show any regard for him and his government. Second, the revolution, although led by religious forces, was understood to be anti-imperialist, democratic and consequently progressive. It would establish forces hostile to imperialism, capitalist monopolies and American attempts to establish and to maintain a military and strategic hegemony in the Gulf region. Although the Iranian revolution did not fit any of the established Marxist and Marxist-Leninist theories of liberation movements and revolutions, it was therefore initially accepted as a progressive revolution. In the months to come, the GDR press would adopt this view entirely and elaborate on it further.

A couple of weeks later, Wochenpost published the translation of an article which had originally appeared on 2 February 1979 in the French communist newspaper l’Humanité. According to the background provided by Wochenpost, the article had been published one day after the 'leader of the Shiite opposition', Ayatollah Khomeini, had arrived back in Tehran. On 5 February Khomeini had appointed the politician Bazargan as the head of the 'provisional government'. For the time being, the 'provisional government' existed side by side with the Bakhtiar government. At this time observers in East and West had not yet arrived at a clear understanding of

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358 ‘Der Schah ging - wo steht die Armee?', Wochenpost (Berlin GDR, 16 February 1979).
what role the powerful and excellently equipped army would decide to play in the conflict between revolutionaries and Shah government.

*L’Humanité*’s analysis confirmed the views already hinted at in *Neues Deutschland*’s edited reprint of the *Newsweek* interview with Kianouri. Khomeini was represented as a progressive Shiite leader and an uncompromising fighter against imperialism, western monopoly-capitalism and colonialism. He would lead the people of Iran to freedom and self-determination. In short: Khomeini was portrayed as the charismatic Iranian Shiite-Muslim version of Lenin, Fidel Castro, or Ho Chi Minh. Indeed, the article made explicit comparisons between Indochina and Iran. Analysing the strengths and weaknesses of Iran’s armed forces and the likelihood that the army might, or might not, intervene in the internal struggles, thus securing the Shah’s hold on power, the newspaper came to the conclusion:

One knows now that before he departed from the country the Shah left instructions to his general staff to prepare for a long civil war. […] Even though the Iranian army decided to remain invisible yesterday (on the arrival of Khomeini in Tehran), it had ostentatiously paraded through the streets of Tehran the day before that. Will the army return from the barracks? Although it is excellently equipped and well trained, Iran’s army suffers from the same weaknesses as the American expedition corps in Indochina. A weakness that is, which is not due to the consumption of too much marijuana but results from the missing support from the people. However, they [Iran’s armed forces] have all the means available to them necessary to cause more tragedy for Iran if they wish to do so. In this case it would be the United States of America suffocating responsibility whose tens of thousands of ’military advisers’ continue to train the army of the Shah.

The question as to what role the army would play in the revolutionary struggle continued to attract the attention of the East German press. The *Berliner Zeitung* was among the first to provide more detailed information on the disempowerment of Iran’s armed forces by the revolutionaries. On 21 February 1979, the newspaper published an article with the headline ‘Gharani kündigt Bildung einer Nationalgarde an – Vier iranische Generäle hingerichtet’ (Gharani announces the formation of a national guard – four Iranian generals have been executed). The article was authored by ADN, whose sources included AFP and additional unnamed agencies.

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Surprisingly, when ADN obtained material from other agencies for its news dispatches on Iran, the agency seemed to have primarily relied on Western news agencies rather than, as might have been expected, on Soviet or other East European agencies. The text gives a careful account of how the revolutionaries proceeded to control and restructure the army in an ultimately successful attempt to minimise any risk the forces could potentially pose to the revolution. According to the article, General Gharani, the newly appointed commander-in-chief of the Iranian army had announced that all people’s militias of the provisional government would be integrated into the regular army. He had also forced into retirement all commanders of the army and the generals of the infantry regiments as well as many other high-ranking officers who had served under the Shah. Finally, four generals had been sentenced to death by the Islamic Revolutionary Courts and were executed immediately after the trial.

What the press of the GDR at all stages of the revolution seemed to either ignore or to willingly accept as an perhaps not so nice but ultimately necessary aspect of it, was the brutality of it. Islamic Revolutionary Courts, led by Hojatoleslam Sadeq Khalkhali, established a reign of arbitrary judicial terror that appalled Western observers such as the British journalist Robert Fisk. The judges and jurists presiding over the Islamic courts demonstrated extraordinary cruelty and were all too willing to torture and to kill out of impulse rather than following proper legal procedures. In his book *The Great War for Civilisation – The Conquest of the Middle East*, Fisk recalls a meeting with Sadeq Khalkhali. His impressions of the man are worth reiterating:

> At the end of the eight-year Iran-Iraq war, this [torture and executions] would meet its apogee in the mass hangings of thousands of opposition prisoners. But its characteristics were clearly evident within days of the Shah’s overthrow; and no one emphasised them more chillingly than the Chief Justice of the Islamic Courts, Hojatoleslam Sadeq Khalkhali, the ‘Cat’, who had told me in December 1979 how he intended to ‘string up’ the Shah. When he said that, and despite his ferocious reputation, I thought first it was a joke, a cliché, an idle remark. Of course, it was nothing of the sort. […] In truth, Khalkhali did not look the part. He was a small man with a kindly smile – Islamic judges at that time all seemed to smile a lot – which he betrayed when making inappropriate jokes. Asked by a reporter two weeks earlier how he felt when the number of executions in Iran was decreasing, he replied with a chuckle: ‘I feel hungry’. It would have been a
serious mistake, however, to imagine that Iran’s most feared judge – the wrath of God to his admirers – did not take his vocation seriously.\textsuperscript{360}

The press of the GDR mostly either ignored the increasingly bloody side of the revolution or seemed apologetic for it, justifying the violence as necessary part of rooting out the remainders of the Shah’s regime and especially his feared secret police SAVAK. Much more attention was paid to the first steps of the revolutionaries on the international parquet. \textit{Neues Deutschland} listed some of the moves in a lengthy article on 7 March 1979.\textsuperscript{361} The piece was based on an ADN dispatch and listed among the sources used the official Iranian Television, unnamed news agencies, West Germany’s DPA and Swiss and American newspapers. Its main content was that Iran’s defence minister Madani had issued an order to halt the construction of a giant naval base in the Gulf of Oman. Additional information provided included that Iran had decided to sever relations with South Africa on all levels and that Iran’s judiciary was busy preparing the court process against the Shah who at that time was in exile in Morocco.

Although Khomeini and the Shiite clergy had emerged as the apparent winners of the revolution, in East German and Soviet perception the ‘progressive forces’ still had a major role to play in the how the post-revolutionary period unfurled. That the ‘progressives’ were capable of mobilising 100,000 or more people at any time was a point A. Stepanow drew attention to in an article that appeared in the March issue of the German language publication \textit{Neue Zeit Moskau}.\textsuperscript{362} He, too, was an apologist for the Revolutionary Courts, describing them as a necessary evil that aided the new government’s stringent endeavour to prevent counter-revolution. Proof that the latter was still a very real possibility, at least in Stepanow’s judgement, was provided in his last paragraph. Quoting from a piece that had been published by the Tehran-based newspaper \textit{Ettela’at} on 24 February, he stated that the Shah had made available his entire fortune, of an estimated two billion USD, for the organisation of a counter-revolution. He then alleged that CIA agents were already cooperating with the former


\textsuperscript{362} A Stepanow, ‘Stets wachsam’, \textit{Neue Zeit Moskau} (Moscow, March 1979), 03/79 edition.
SAVAK officer Parviz Sabeti, who had fled to Switzerland. Their strategy was, so Stepanow claimed, to provoke clashes between Islamic groups and leftist forces which would hopefully lead to a bloody civil war.

Stepanow seemed acutely aware that the majority of both the Islamic and leftist groups, although working together in opposition, would make for uneasy bedfellows after the revolution and that the rifts between them could well be exploited by outsiders or by groups close to the old regime. To demonstrate the strength of the left he then pointed to two mass rallies organised by the leftist People’s Partisans and by the, likewise left-leaning, Mojahedin, either of which had attracted crowds of more than 100,000. According to Stepanow, speakers of both organisations emphasised that: ‘they acknowledged, respected and admired the Ayatollahs Khomeini and Talegani as the leaders of the anti-imperialist struggle.’

What was clear from this piece was the view that, for the time being, Khomeini and the clerics were in a position of strength that could not be easily challenged. Therefore the strategy of the left could only be to maintain a united front with the religious forces while at the same time building up their own support and trying to impose as much of their agenda as possible on the constitution that was still being drafted.

By March 1979, the GDR press appeared to cautiously reconsider its initial very sympathetic stance toward Khomeini and the Islamic Republic of Iran. A first hint of criticism could be seen in Horizont No. 31 (March 1979). Horizont printed in full text the German translation of what was claimed to be the letter of an Iranian mother to Khomeini (this time spelled ‘Chomeini’). It is not known how Horizont got hold of this letter, who translated it or if it was at all authentic. It also provokes questions about the purpose behind its publication. If, as one might assume, members of the Tudeh based in East Germany had passed it on to Horizont, then this letter might be

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363 It is not clear which of the Marxist groups active inside Iran in early 1979 he was referring to. The use of the term ‘partisans’ seems to indicate that the group in question were the Fadajyan, who at the time the article was published already had the first of three clashes with the Islamic Republic of Iran which led to the final destruction of most of the Fadajyan’s structures in 1980.


seen the first indication that the party was cautiously reconsidering its support for the Khomeini-government.

The letter named two SAVAK agents, a captain Azari and a police agent Abdi, who the mother accused of torturing her son. She claimed that both Azeri and Abdi had appeared before the Islamic Revolutionary Court and had been sentenced to two-year prison terms. The mother believed the sentences to be too lenient and made her case by detailing the treatment her son had received at the hands of his torturers, treatment which ended in his death. The final paragraph turned the letter into a politically charged document that accused the Khomeini government of not only being lenient in their treatment of former SAVAK torturers, but to actually re-employing them, making use of their ‘specialist’ knowledge. The mother expressed her disgust with this practice and demanded from the leader of the revolution to stop the re-employment of former SAVAK agents and to instead prosecute them in a manner that fitted the crimes they had committed.

However, this article stands out as a rare exception from the generally very sympathetic ways in which the East German press portrayed revolutionary developments in Iran for the remainder of 1979. The wave of executions of members and alleged supporters of the old regime was also represented in a positive light. In an opinion piece published in *Horizont* in July 1979, Gerald Hübner justified the rough justice passed by the Revolutionary Courts and accused Western critics of the executions of employing double standards. He introduced his argument with the sad tale of Dafar Gharemani, an ‘Iranian revolutionary’ who had been arrested in 1946, sentenced in 1947 and spent the next 32 years of his life in several prisons, subjected to different kinds of torture which the author explained in some gruesome detail. He then estimated the number of Iranians who had suffered similar treatments from SAVAK as numbering somewhere being between 60,000 and 100,000, if not more. Thus, he concluded, there was nothing wrong with the death sentences the Iranian Revolutionary courts were passing on those allegedly responsible for torture, mass executions, murder and corruption. After all, they deserved nothing better. He then turned to the West German media who were accusing the Iranian Revolutionary

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Courts of spreading terror instead of justice and claimed the courts were responsible for many atrocities themselves. His engagement with the coverage of Iran in the West German media was foremost an acknowledgement that significant parts of East Germany’s population had easy access to it and therefore to alternative narratives. Thus, Hübner’s piece was as much an attack on West German narratives as a portrayal of events in Iran. This became very clear in passages such as the following:

The execution of the murderers of the Iranian people – understandably, we can name but a few of these monsters – has provoked a telling response in the bourgeois mass media of the West and in particular in that of the FRG. These media have never had a word to say about the crimes of SAVAK. They have even praised SAVAK as a necessary measure for keeping order. Until the Revolution of February 1979, the ‘Gendarme on the Persian Gulf’ had matched the Western media’s imperialistic, anti-socialist thrust. Now these same media break out into vociferous lament. They talk of the ‘ravage of the firing squads’, of ‘witch hunts’ and of Khomeini’s rolling execution machine, of the return to medieval times and so forth. They pretend to care for the Iran’s future and detail the executions, while at the same time they remain silent on the brutal crimes of those who are called to justice there. Of course, that would not fit the picture.

What Hübner conveniently forgot to say, was that East Germany’s media had been every bit as guilty of remaining silent on the cruel aspects of the Shah’s regime – if not more – as their Western counterparts. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Iran and the GDR through to the final overthrow of the Shah’s government in February 1979 there was little to nothing to be read about the SAVAK’s terror in the GDR press, instead it had portrayed the Shah as an enlightened, progressive monarch.

The piece was not so much a defence of the revolution but much more an attack on the West German media; it tried to emphasise West German complicity with the Shah’s dictatorship. Interestingly, it also criticised the West German media for not recognising the modernity of the revolution and to resorting to stereotypes such as ‘medieval witch-hunts’ or ‘religious nutcases’.

This piece made clear, in a rather unmistakeable manner, that the GDR press had now fully sided with the revolutionaries. It also followed the familiar pattern of representing Iran as a country which was caught up in a continuous struggle with US imperialism and Western monopoly capitalism.
In issue 34 *Horizont* printed a long article that investigated the close links between the Shah’s notorious secret police SAVAK and West Germany’s authorities. The article retold and interpreted the content of a West German television programme that had investigated the activities of SAVAK in West Germany. The programme included an interview with Sadeq Tabatabai, who was Iran’s deputy minister of the interior and an official government speaker at the time the article went into press. In April 1979, Tabatabai had been ordered by the new government to search the SAVAK premises in the West German capital, Bonn, and had found ample proof for close cooperation between West German authorities and SAVAK. *Horizont* used the findings presented in the West German TV programme to prove Bonn’s involvement with the Shah’s government. The aim was to portray the other Germany not only as a capitalist and neo-imperialist power but also as a state in which the legacy of the fascist past was still alive.

At the same time, the press of the GDR continued to describe post-revolutionary Iran as a progressive, modern country. Particular attention was paid to the constitutional assembly and the first drafts of the new constitution. In July 1979, Eberhard Amme analysed the draft that was presented in June 1979, and came to the conclusion that the constitution, despite its specific Islamic components, was progressive and anti-imperialistic. Although he noted that, according to the constitution, the basis for the Islamic Republic of Iran was going to be a ‘Mohammedan-Shi’ite understanding of jurisprudence’, he regarded the state as democratic and in particular emphasised that the constitution explicitly granted political parties and religious organisations full rights and protection, as long as they did not act against the principles of independence, freedom, national unity and the Islamic Republic. This assessment of the Islamic Republic of Iran was to prevail in the GDR’s press reporting on Iran in the first few years of the 1980s. However, as the next chapter will show, the initial enthusiasm for the revolution should soon be replaced with a much more pragmatic approach.

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**Period 4: 1980 – 1989**

*Don’t mention the war*

In many respects, the 1980ies were a crucial decade for both Iran and the GDR. In the four years from 1979 to 1983, the clerics around Khomeini emerged as the winners of the post-revolutionary struggle for power in the new Iran. Shrewdly and rather successfully they first out-maneuvered and then violently suppressed all other opposition forces including the Tudeh, and the National Front.\(^{369}\) The revolution and its aftermath also changed the balance of power in the Persian Gulf region and in the wider Middle East. The US lost one of their staunchest and most powerful allies in the region. The new Islamic Republic adopted an openly hostile stance towards America in particular and to the West in general, an animosity that was symbolised by the hostage crisis that lasted for 444 days from 4 November 1979 to 20 January 1981. The same can be said for the Islamic Republic’s relationship with Israel. Before the Revolution, albeit the Shah paid lip-service to the Palestinian cause, Iran had mostly quite good relations with Israel. Now Israel was portrayed as an enemy. Furthermore, the new Iranian leadership attempted to play to the ‘Arab Street’ by portraying themselves as the protectors of the Palestinian cause, a role that – according to Tehran’s narrative – the Arab states had blatantly failed to fulfil.

On 23 September 1979, *Horizont*, the East German foreign affairs magazine, printed the German translation of an article by A. Achmedsjanow\(^{370}\) that had first been published in the Soviet daily newspaper *Izvestija*. While *Pravda* was the official organ of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, *Izvestija*, founded 1917 by the local Soviet in Petrogard, was regarded as the official mouthpiece of the Soviet government. Therefore, any opinion expressed by *Izvestija* had to be taken seriously by East German media and officials alike.

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\(^{369}\) For comprehensive accounts of the formative years of the Islamic Republic suggested readings would include Nikki Keddie’s “Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution”, Ervand Abrahamian’s “Tortured Confessions”, and Nikkie Keddie (ed) “The Iranian Revolution & The Islamic Republic”, and Shaul Bakhash’s “The reign of the ayatollahs : Iran and the Islamic Revolution”.

In his analysis of the Iranian Revolution, the article outlined the Soviet perception of the still unfolding events, and Moscow’s position towards the revolutionary regime in Tehran. The article set the tone for the official Soviet and East German interpretation of events in Iran at this particular point in time.

The introduction suggested that Achmedsjanow reported from inside Tehran. He began the article with a short description of people discussing matters in Tehran’s bakeries, from there leading straight to social conditions in the capital and the matter of housing, or the lack of, for the poor. He then detailed social measures undertaken by the revolutionary regime aimed at easing the conditions of those worst off and he finally focused on the Chomeini\(^{371}\) Foundation which had been tasked with the construction of homes for the poor. With some delight, he reported that the government had also taken steps to expropriate the lackeys\(^{372}\) of the Shah (he did not give any clue as to who the term lackeys was applied to, though). Furthermore, he emphasised the changes to property and rent laws which apparently strengthened the legal position of tenants.

Recognising the role religious motives and the Islamic clergy played in mobilising the masses, he acknowledged that the leaders of the Revolution intended to create a state based on the principles of Islam. Reading this Isvestija article, it appears that the Soviet media might in their analysis of the revolution have been far more willing than their Western counterparts to acknowledge the diversity of the groups and forces involved in the revolution and that they were also more likely to recognise the decisive role Islam played. This observation was also made by Richard Hermann, who states that

\[\ldots\] no one in the Soviet press expressed any surprise that Islam had been the glue that held the opposition together. The Shah, they said, had destroyed all other organizations that might have served as revolutionary institutions. And besides, the standard line continued, most Iranians had not yet had any access to ideological systems other than religious and nationalistic-religious ones. The

\(^{371}\) Spelling as in the original German text. There does not seem to have been a universal agreement on the spelling of Iranian names and place-names. The same paper might prefer Khomeini one day while happily using Chomeini the next.

\(^{372}\) The German term used is ‘Lakaien’ which is best translated as ‘lackeys’. It is unbeknown to the author whether the German is a literal translation from the Russian original.
revolution, the Soviets explained, was spontaneous and broadly popular, and the clergy was well positioned to channel its fury.\(^{373}\)

Achmedsjanow then stressed the difficulties the Iranian revolutionaries faced due to the refusal of western governments to cooperate with the new leadership both economically and politically. This was especially true for Iran’s relationship with the USA. To demonstrate that there was no love left between the US and Khomeini, he quoted the Ayatollah:

> Ayatollah Khomeini marked pre-revolutionary relations between the USA and Iran as resembling those between ‘...a tyrant and an oppressed, between a robber and his defenceless victim, a relationship that does not allow for any agreement between the two’.

Following from that, Achmedsjanow began to clarify the Soviet line towards the Islamic Republic:

> The Soviet Union has supported the Iranian Revolution. Our country has declared that it is fully prepared to work together with the new Iran in the spirit of good neighbourly relations, of mutually advantageous collaboration while not interfering into the other’s internal affairs. This offers a solid foundation for cementing the amicable relations between our countries and the development of close economic collaboration between Iran and the Soviet Union.

When turning to the implications the Iranian Revolution had for the strategic situation in the Persian Gulf and in the wider region, he expressed what can be taken to be the official Soviet assessment of events and their consequences:

> As a result of the revolution, Iran is no longer attached to the American military machine. The country has left the military-political CENTO alliance, and it has ceased to act as the [American] gendarme on the Gulf. The new Iran has dismantled the staging bases for electronic espionage which were built close to the Soviet border on Iranian soil. This can only be appraised as positive for universal détente and the strengthening of peace.

While the blow to American strategic and economic interests in the Persian Gulf was certainly welcome from Moscow’s point of view, the dismantling of the US

electronic espionage facilities near the Soviet border must have given the Soviets particular reason for satisfaction. Those US listening posts had been uncomfortably close and fed into the Soviet fear of military encirclement by the Western powers.

The rather diplomatic language used by M. Mokri was not quite as clear cut as Achmedsjanow might have hoped, though, since it did not entirely support his reasoning. As it turns out, Achmedsjanow’s primary intention in using Mokri’s statement was not so much to make a point about the supposedly good relations between the Soviet Union and the Islamic Republic but to counter allegations that those relations had actually turned sour since Achmedsjanow finishes by stating: ‘With these words M. Mokri refutes all those who denigrate the relations between the two countries because they are opposed to any kind of Soviet-Iranian friendship.’ Achmedsjanow left it to the readers’ imagination who those opponents were. However, the tenor of the article was clear. It can be interpreted as a directive for the correct socialist ‘reading’ of events in Iran. The fact that Horizont re-printed it at full length indicates that it was indeed intended as such for the editors of all other East German media. Nevertheless, as events in Iran and in the wider region unfolded, Moscow soon found itself positioned awkwardly between the old ally Iraq and a potential ally Iran who went to war with each other.

On 22 September 1980, as the Islamic Republic was still in the early stages of consolidating itself, Iraqi armed forces invaded Iranian territory by air, land, and sea, starting what has since become known as the ‘Iran-Iraq War’, one of the longest and bloodiest conflicts in modern history. The war lasted until 20 August 1988 and brought the country almost to its knees, economically as well as politically. Furthermore, it left the Islamic Republic internationally isolated. Only after

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374 Initially, Moscow recognised the Islamic Republic of Iran as an anti-imperialist state and hence regarded her as a potential ally or as at least not hostile towards the Soviet Union. However, Khomeini’s foreign policy dictum of ‘Neither East Nor West’ positioned the Islamic Republic almost as far away from Moscow as from Washington. Yet, despite the Islamic Republic’s violent crackdown on the Tudeh and despite Teheran’s anger over Soviet engagement in Afghanistan, relations between the two countries never deteriorated to the same level as those between the Islamic Republic and the United States. See also Richard Herrmann “The Role of Iran in Soviet Perception and Policy” in “Neither East Nor West: Iran, The Soviet Union, and the United States” (ed: Nikki Keddie and Mark J. Gasiorowski).

Khomeini’s death, with Khamenei as his successor and under the presidency of Rafsanjani, did Iran begin in earnest to embark on a programme of economic recovery and of mending fences internationally.

By the start of the 1980s, the GDR, on the other hand, appeared to finally have achieved full international recognition and had, at least on the surface of it, developed into a mature and stable society. The two Germanys had found ways to live with each other and there were occurrences of cooperation between the two on regional and European levels, most notable in the framework provided by the OSCE where both countries demonstrated some degree of independence from their respective superpower. The relationships between the two reached new heights when Erich Honecker visited West Germany in September 1987, followed by the West German chancellor’s ‘secret’ return visit to the GDR. Rather more spectacular was a deal the GDR, notoriously short of cash, had in all secrecy arranged with West German’s maverick former Defence Minister and later State Premier of Bavaria, the conservative politician Franz Josef Strauß. In return for an easing of its border regime and a relaxation in travel restrictions imposed on GDR citizens who wanted to visit relatives in the West, Strauß arranged a loan worth one billion (West-) Marks for East Germany. Nobody could foresee at that time that only two years later a non-violent revolution would start in the GDR that first finished off the SED and then subsequently the GDR as a separate German state. Very much like the Iranian Revolution ten years ago, which had a lasting impact on world politics, the East German revolution of 1989/1990, preceded by Gorbatchev’s rise to power in the Soviet Union, initiated major upheavals in the post-World War II order. It ended the Cold War and triggered significant shifts in the global political landscape, leaving the USA as the only remaining superpower throughout the 1990’s.

In the light of these developments, how and what did the media of the GDR report on Iran in the period for between 1980 until and 1989?

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Our Encyclopedia: Iran

On 3 May 1980 Horizont published an encyclopaedic article on the country. Titled ‘Unser Lexikon: Iran’ (Our encyclopaedia: Iran), the entry grouped the details offered into the four sections territory, population, religion, and economy. The basic data on population, urbanisation, ethnic mix and languages spoken in Iran was based on statistics from 1977. The information presented was sparse. The largest part of the entry was dedicated to religion, making an attempt to explain the role of Islam in Iran, to mark the difference between Sunnis and Shiites and to locate Khomeini in the political spectrum in a way that would perhaps make sense to European socialists:

Iran is the centre of the Shiite section of Islam which, in contrast to the Sunnis, only recognises descendants of the prophet Muhammed as his legitimate successors. Until today, Shiism is closely connected with the people, its national interests and its roots and traditions in the people are still very strong. The direction represented by Khomeini shows explicit anti-imperialist, democratic and popular traits.378

The last and rather short part of the entry refers to the overthrow of Mossadegh through a ‘military revolt supported by the CIA’ and to Iran’s status as one of the world’s most important producers of oil.

In the early 1980s, there were a number of issues in revolutionary Iran that occupied the attention of the East German press, so much so that on some days there were up to four articles and news item regarding the country in publications such as Neues Deutschland. For instance, on 3 January 1980 Neues Deutschland in its section ‘Außenpolitik’ (foreign) brought five different pieces related to Iran on just one page. One brief item covered a statement by the Tudeh, in which the Tudeh in the party’s official publication Mardom had laid out their economic policies for Iran’s future. These were in short: Less capitalism, more state and the establishment of cooperatives.379 A second piece reported continuing unrest in Iran’s North, where several thousand unarmed followers of the ‘Kurdish Democratic Party’ protested the

379 ‘Tudeh-Partei zur Lösung der Wirtschaftsprobleme’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 3 January 1980).
presence of the Revolutionary Guards in the city of Sanandaj. A slightly bigger article, titled ‘Treffen Waldheims mit Ghotbzadeh – UNO Generalsekretär: Nützlicher Gedankenaustausch’ (Waldheim met Ghotbzadeh – UN Secretary General: useful exchange of thoughts). According to the text, UN secretary general Kurt Waldheim and Iran’s Foreign Minister Sadegh Ghotbzadeh had discussed possible strategies to peacefully resolve the most pressing problems. The talks were to continue during Waldheim’s stay in Tehran. The ‘problems’ which were important enough to induce the UN’s Secretary General to fly to Tehran, were not further specified, though.

Waldheim’s mission was to act as an intermediary in a serious conflict between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States of America that had the potential to lead to a full blown war between the two nations. The problems referred to were foremost a result of events that had taken place two months previously. On 4 November 1979 students had seized the US embassy in Tehran, taken hostage the embassy personnel and appropriated all files and documents they could find in the premises. The radical students, belonging to a group that called itself ‘Students Following the Line of the Imam’ (SFLI) refused to follow an order by Prime Minister Bazargan to evacuate the embassy. Because the SFLI ‘[...] enjoyed the support of Khomeini who saw in it a chance to get rid of the liberal government, radicalize the revolution, and increase his power’, Bazargan and his government consequently saw no other option for themselves than to resign. A carefully selected few of the documents found in the embassy, all of them linking moderates and liberals with American officials, were released. While the seizure of the American Embassy and the conflict with the USA and her allies resulting from it made headlines in the Western media for months to come, the GDR’s press kept mainly silent about the whole matter. Only those who followed the developments in the hostage crisis through alternative media such as West German radio and television broadcasts were aware of the events and could thus read between the lines.

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A fourth news item emphasised the tension between the USA and the Islamic Republic of Iran even further. Titled ‘US-Flugzeugträger werden verlegt – Einsatz im Golf von Oman geplant’ (US- aircraft carrier dispatched – deployment planned in the Gulf of Oman), the text informs the reader that the USA were reinforcing their flotilla of warships patrolling Iran’s coast in the Persian Gulf with yet another aircraft-carrier. And finally there was coverage of anti-Soviet activities in Iran. Exiled Afghans had taken not further specified actions against the Soviet Embassy in Tehran and the consulate of the USSR in Mashad.

There was no explanation in this article as to why exiled Afghans might have held a grudge against the Soviet Union. However, over the previous few months the press had provided extensive coverage of the Soviet engagement in Afghanistan, therefore it can be assumed that frequent readers were aware of what was going on in Iran’s neighbouring country. The attack on their embassy and their consulate in Iran posed a dilemma for both, the USSR and the GDR. While both had expressed at least some sympathy for the students who had seized the American embassy, they were also aware of the precedent set thereby and the consequences implied for the safety of embassies and consulate all over the world, should the principle of the extraterritoriality of diplomatic representations be weakened in a way that states could no longer rely upon it. A statement issued by the headquarters of the Revolutionary Guards that Iran would respect the status of the Soviet diplomatic representations and would regard any violation of that status as directed against the Islamic Revolution must therefore have been perceived as a valuable reassurance. Accordingly, Neues Deutschland emphasised the importance of this statement and added to it a quote from Ayatollah Qodousi, the Attorney General of Iran, who claimed that counter-revolutionaries were plotting actions like that and were prepared to use any means available to them to harm the revolution and who called on all Iranians to be on their watch. The same article also quoted from a statement that Ayatollah Dr Mohammad Hossein-Beheshti had issued in a press conference.

382 ‘US-Flugzeugträger werden verlegt’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 3 January 1980).
383 ‘Revolutionsgarden verurteilen antisowjetische Aktionen in Iran - Ajatollah Qodousi ruft zur Wachsamkeit gegen Verschwörer’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 3 January 1980).
384 In January 1980, the writer and jurist Mohammad Hossein-Beheshti was the secretary general of the Islamic Republic Party and also the Chief Justice of Iran. He was
saying that Iran’s history provided clear evidence that not the Soviet Union but rather the USA were the real enemy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The article hinted at a number of dilemmas the USSR, and by implication the GDR, found themselves in. While they cautiously welcomed and verbally supported the revolution and regarded the newly created Islamic Republic as a potential ally, not least because of the radical anti-imperialist and anti-Israel stance the IRI took, they also were aware of the possibility that the new powers in Iran might at any time turn against the Soviet Union, too. Especially so since the USSR was meddling in the internal affairs of an Islamic neighbour, Afghanistan, who linguistically and to a degree also culturally and historically was close to Iran. Finally, the revolutionary fervour of the ulama, their expressed willingness to export the revolution, must have caused some unease in Moscow, where the leadership was well aware of the danger that the Soviet Union’s own Muslim minorities might respond to the revolutionary Islamic message from Iran and turn against ‘godless’ Moscow.

In the first half of 1980, in their coverage of Iran the GDR press mainly focussed on very few topics. They paid special attention to the ongoing conflict between the Islamic Republic and the USA, but also reported on guerilla activities directed against the Islamic Republic. The language used to describe groups behind the actions is interesting. Although most armed resistance was performed either by ethnic minorities such as the Turkman and the Kurds or by left-wing guerillas, in early 1980 there was no distinction made between them, and they all were just labelled ‘terrorist’. In Iran, the years 1980 and 1981 were a period of fierce internal struggle over the future political layout of Iran which pitted moderate against conservative and radical Shi’ite clerics, Marxists and nationalists against liberals and conservative bazaaris and all of them against monarchists and the remainders of the old regime. In early 1980, the country still enjoyed a period of relative political freedom, too, which gave the the Tudeh a fresh lease of life and the opportunity to rebuild her organisational structures inside Iran.  

385 assassinated on 28 June 1981.

385 Behrooz, pp. 100–104.
A recurrent theme in the East German coverage were attempts to demonstrate how badly the Western press misrepresented the revolution and the Islamic Republic of Iran. On 2 February 1980, for example, *Neues Deutschland* quoted from an interview that Iran’s ‘Director for the foreign press’, Dr Sadek, had given West German television:386

Looking at the mass media of the Federal Republic of Germany, one might want to conclude that the FRG is even more hostile toward our revolution than the United States of America. In my opinion, they have attacked everything that this country holds sacred including all the people in charge, beginning with Ayatollah Chomeini. They [the media of West Germany] view everything solely from the point of Western interests.

By reiterating Iranian criticism of West German media, *Neues Deutschland* implicitly claimed that representations of Iran in the media of the GDR were of a much fairer and more sympathetic nature. The message to both Iranians and the domestic audience was that, unlike West Germany, the GDR had sided with the Iranian revolution and supported its anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist stance. The theoretical foundation for the GDR media’s analysis and discussion of the ideological background and the self-perception of West Germany’s media with regard to Iran had been outlined by Wolfgang Clausner in an article that appeared in *Horizont* in autumn 1979. The piece was titled ‘Meinungspluralismus und Klassenkampf’ (pluralism of opinion journalism and class struggle).387 It scrutinised in great detail West German reporting on the Iranian revolution and thus provided an analytical tool kit that could easily be applied in the analysis of East German representations of Iran, too. First he listed a number of examples which highlighted the real and perceived deviousness of the Western media who habitually employed double standards wherever it suited West Germany’s ideological, political and economic interests. One paragraph in particular is worth quoting in full:

> These very carefully measured and applied double standards, dependent upon

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386 ‘Scharfe Anklage gegen imperialistische Medien’, *Neues Deutschland* (Berlin GDR, 2 February 1980).

the state of interests, determine the actions of the authorities as well as the line of reasoning followed by the mass media of the West German lands when it comes to the hijacking of air planes and other terrorist activities. Here, they deliberately and cautiously differentiate between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ terrorists. Those who commit acts of piracy against western passenger planes are regarded as ‘bad’. So are those, too, whose violent actions lead to the loss of lives of industrialists or federal prosecutors. To fight those, the bourgeois media demand more effective deterrents such as highly restrictive criminal laws and the license to kill to be granted to so-called anti-terror special commandos. On the other hand, depicted as ‘good’ terrorists are all those who hijack air planes from socialist countries or double murderers such as Weinhold who cold-heartedly killed GDR border guards. For bandits such as these, the media of the FRG embark on sympathy campaigns. If they are sentenced at all, their media deplore the sentences as being to harsh. And in such cases the sentence will usually later be suspended anyway.

From here he then turned to the depiction of the Iranian revolution in the media of West Germany, which was in Clausner’s reading similarly prejudiced and dominated by the interests of West Germany’s ruling elites. The concluding paragraph is an utilisation of classic Marxist-Leninist media theory according to which the state is the ruling elites’ instrument through which they exercise power. Hence, the mass media are regarded as belonging to the superstructure and therefore tied to class. Accordingly, in the Federal Republic of Germany state and bourgeois media alike serve the interests of monopoly capital, which occupies all relevant positions of power: ‘The monopoly capital’s interests equally determine political action and ideological impact’. And finally:

Therefore, the fiction that there exists freedom of information and pluralism of opinions as a precondition for the unrestricted forming of opinion proves to be nothing more than an iridescent soap bubble, although the case is being made in a sophisticated manner. Occasionally, though always only in questions of secondary importance, they stage an impressive demagogical show, which certainly has the potential to fascinate the political naïve but which does not

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388 He apparently refers to the activities of the Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF) in the Federal Republic of Germany. RAF commandos had killed West German Federal Prosecutor Siegfried Buback on 7 April 1977. Other victims of the RAF included the head of the Dresdner Bank, Jürgen Ponto, and Hanns Martin Schleyer, who was then head of the German Employers Association and thus one of the most powerful men in the Federal Republic. Some of the RAF terrorists later hid in the GDR from the West German authorities. For more on the RAF and on what has become known as Deutscher Herbst (German Autumn) read the excellent account Der Baader-Meinhof Komplex by Stefan Aust.
hold up to any further scrutiny. [...].

The steadily increasing number of articles, such as the ones above, which directly or indirectly engaged with alternative narratives of events provided by West German media seems to have been a response to the fact that by the end of the 1970s and in the 1980s, except for a small area in the south-east of the country, citizens of the GDR could easily receive West German radio and television broadcasts. Not only ordinary citizens made use of West German media as alternative sources, but also ADN and subsequently the press of the GDR. Throughout the 1980s and until the demise of the GDR in October 1990, a significant number of articles published on Iran were based on either material obtained from Western news agencies or from Western newspapers, magazines and broadcasts. Another source that once again gained in importance, especially in the early 1980s, was the Tudeh and its publication Mardom. For example, when Neues Deutschland printed a piece on Iran’s presidential elections in January 1980, it was based on material from the following sources: a report from an ADN correspondent who was in Tehran at the time to monitor the election, a transmission from radio Tehran, an article that had appeared in (the Tudeh’s official party organ) Mardom and also on additional material obtained from the news agency INS.\(^{389}\) The article, titled ‘Präsidentschaftswahlen in Iran – Tudeh-Partei warnt vor Anschlägen reaktionärer Kräfte’ (Presidential elections in Iran – Tudeh party warns against attacks from reactionary forces),\(^{390}\) first provided some figures detailing the number of voting booths in the entire country and voter turnout. Then it led straight into the Tudeh statement that had been published in a special elections issue of Mardom. It is not known whether ADN’s correspondent in Tehran at that time spoke Persian or whether he had to rely on a translator. According to ADN and Neues Deutschland, the Tudeh expressed the fears that the USA might conspire with reactionary circles inside the country, including former members of SAVAK, to overthrow the Islamic Republic. The last part of the article, based on a report obtained from the news agency INS, was dedicated to the situation in Kurdistan, where the majority of the population had decided not to vote because the Kurdish issue had not

\(^{389}\) An Iranian news service active in the early 1980s. Neues Deutschland and ADN occasionally quoted from INS bulletins.

\(^{390}\) ‘Präsidentschaftswahl in Iran - Tudeh-Partei warnt vor Anschlägen reaktionärer Kräfte’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 26 January 1980).
yet been settled. No further details were given as to what the 'Kurdish issue' actually was.

Some attention also focussed on the re-structuring of the Iranian forces that followed the revolution and the purge of a number of officers who were suspected of being followers of the Shah. On 20 February 1980 for example, Neues Deutschland covered Khomeini’s appointment of Iran’s president Abolhasan Bani Sadr to the new chief of the combined armed forces391 and also took note of the national mobilisation in preparation for a potential American attack on Iran. A few days later, on 1 March 1980, Neues Deutschland reported that the former chief of the Iranian navy, Admiral Alavi, had been an American agent.392 The news was provided by ADN’s Tehran correspondent, whose source seems to have been a programme on Iranian state TV.

Admiral Alavi had been incriminated by documents the hostage takers had found in the American embassy. Further documents were released throughout the year. On 4 March 1980 for example Neues Deutschland reported that Iran had accused the US of maintaining links with forgers and money launderers393 and had presented secret documents found in the embassy to prove the allegation. The article was based on news dispatches from ADN’s Tehran-based correspondent. The correspondent’s placement in Tehran was temporary. While he stayed in Iran, his output was significant, though. On this one day alone, Neues Deutschland printed five different news items attributed to the unnamed ADN - correspondent. News agencies do very rarely identify their correspondents in news dispatches. ADN was no exception from the rule in this matter. However, on 21 March 1980, the identity of ADN’s correspondent placed in Tehran was revealed. In response to a reader’s question, Eberhard Amme gave a short but vivid description of how people in the capital Tehran celebrated the Iranian New Year.394 Eberhard Amme was one of ADN’s Egypt-Middle East correspondents and normally based in Cairo. From Cairo, he also

391 ‘Präsident Irans übernimmt Oberkommando der Armee’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 20 February 1980).
392 ‘Marinechef Irans war Agent für die USA’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 1 March 1980).
covered Iran and other countries in the area. He very rarely stayed in Iran for periods longer than just a few days.

Articles on the tensions between the USA and the Islamic Republic appeared on an almost daily basis in March and April 1980, highlighting the Carter administration’s attempts to establish a worldwide regime of sanctions on Iran, the USA’s and NATO’s military build up in the Mediterranean and in the Gulf, and the war of words that continued between the two. On 14 May 1980, *Neues Deutschland* yet again returned to Iran’s military capabilities and preparations for a potential American strike, thus creating a sense of urgency. From this article, which focussed on a series of combined manoeuvres involving land, air and naval forces, one could get the impression that a military showdown between Iran and the USA was inevitable. By detailing the different exercises the forces performed the article emphasised the readiness of the Islamic Republic to take on the might of the US military if needed. However, it also pointed out some apparent weaknesses in Iran’s armoury, most notably Iran’s problems with the US-built air defence systems and the growing realisation that it might be very hard if not near impossible to acquire spares for the system. What also was described as an obvious obstacle in the article was that specialist advise by American technicians would not longer be available if the relations between the two countries would remain hostile. Ironically, by the time the article was published, the GDR was already stepping in to offer solutions to some of these difficulties the Iranians faced.

Not all news items from Iran were dealing with international tensions and internal moves to secure the revolution’s lasting success. Occasionally there also was good news, at least from a GDR point of view. That the relations between the two countries, that could have been described as cordial at the time when the Shah was still in power, had not suffered in the aftermath of the revolution, was a point *Neues Deutschland* made on 22 April 1980 when it reported that an Iranian official was in East-Berlin to discuss trade between the two countries. Pragmatically, the GDR was

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395 ‘Streitkräfte Irans erhöhen Verteidigungsbereitschaft’, *Neues Deutschland* (Berlin GDR, 14 May 1980).

willing to establish as good trade-relations with the Islamic Republic as it had enjoyed them with its predecessor, the Shah’s regime. In a further article in its issue from of 24 April 1980, the newspaper also reiterated the hope expressed by the GDR’s minister for foreign trade, Horst Sölle, that the relations between the two countries would improve further.397

On 28 April the focus was firmly back on the tensions between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the US. On its front page, Neues Deutschland surprised its readers with a brief news item that bore the headline ‘USA-Aktion gegen Iran ist Teil eines Umsturzplanes’ (USA action against Iran is part of a planned coup d’état), followed by the sub-heading ‘Bani Sadr vor Presse / Operation Washingtons weltweit verurteilt’ (Bani Sadr before press / Washington’s operation condemned worldwide).398 What exactly had happened? Neues Deutschland could not actually tell their readers. At least not the full story. Neues Deutschland wrote:

The failed US military action against Iran was part of a wider plan to reverse the revolutionary developments in this country. With this statement, issued last weekend at an international press conference, Iran’s president Bani Sadr replied to a declaration from [US president] Carter that the American airborne operation had been intended as a rescue operation and not as a hostile action. […] According to reports from Western news agencies, while escaping from the scene the commando unit had left secret documents in one of the burned out helicopters. Allegedly, the documents contained detailed information on the schedule for the military operation. What the reader learned from this piece was that Iran’s president Bani Sadr was responding to a statement concerning a failed rescue mission that US president Jimmy Carter had made earlier. We also learn that commandos fleeing from the scene had left behind them secret documents which were later found in a burned out helicopter. Apparently, the news referred to events that already happened. However, there was no report on those events themselves, neither in Neues Deutschland nor in any of the other newspapers I have had access to from this particular point in time. Still, the article seems to suggest that the readership, or at least a greater portion of it, had

398 ‘USA-Aktion gegen Iran ist Teil eines Umsturzplanes - Bani Sadr vor Presse / Operation Washingtons weltweit verurteilt’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 28 April 1980).
already learned about the events and would therefore be able to contextualise the event. The 28 April 1980 was a Monday. In its weekend edition from dated 26 April 1980, *Neues Deutschland* had not reported anything as unusual as an American military operation inside Iran. Therefore, the action must have happened before either Saturday, 26 April or Sunday, 27 April\(^\text{399}\). Since the wording of the article suggests that *Neues Deutschland* must have assumed that the majority of its readers was already familiar with the recent dramatic developments in Iran, the newspaper’s editors obviously relied on their readers having watched East and/or West German television news and/or have listened to radio broadcasts from both sides of the Iron Curtain. The presumption, obvious from a few of the texts analysed, that readers had access to radio and television and used both media as alternative sources for information could rarely be observed in the years leading up to the late 1960s, but became increasingly apparent in the later part of the 1970s and throughout the 1980s. Which also indicates a shift in how the press positioned itself in a media landscape that was rapidly changing. The rise of television as a true mass medium and the impact of the alternative narratives provided by West German radio and television broadcasts, both widely receivable in almost all parts of the GDR, had as a consequence that the leadership of the GDR finally had to abandon any hope of ever being able to achieve total hermeneutic hegemony.

The failed US military operation and the reactions to it in the world’s press, in Iran, in the USA and, of course, in neighbouring West Germany not only dominated page five of this particular issue of *Neues Deutschland* but also the reporting on Iran for weeks to come as further details of the operation and its true scale emerged. The impression given by East Germany’s press, and one that was shared by foreign socialist publications such as *Pravda*, was that the American commando operation was just a first step in what was presented as an almost inevitable escalation of the conflict between the USA and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The socialist press had clearly identified the culprit as the German translation of an article taken from the Soviet paper *Pravda* and published in *Neues Deutschland* on 02 May 1980 demonstrates. The article bore the title ‘*Prawda: Washington zog keine Lehren aus*’

\(^{399}\) The failed American operation actually started on 24 April 1980.
dem Fiasko’ (Pravda: Washington none the wiser for the fiasco).\textsuperscript{400} \textit{Neues Deutschland} presented the gist of an article that Juri Shukow, the political commentator of \textit{Pravda}, had written for the Soviet publication. Shukow reiterated the view that the botched American rescue mission was part of a greater American military strategy whose realisation had only temporarily been halted. In his analysis, at least according to the translation \textit{Neues Deutschland} provided, Washington was still in the process of working towards regime change in Iran. He also alleged that the USA had infiltrated Iran with a high number of agents, and finally came to the conclusion that preparations for a coup d'etat similar to that of 1953 were still being undertaken by the American secret service CIA.

Other developments such as the parliamentary elections in May 1980 received comparably less attention, and even short articles on the suspected outcome such as the one \textit{Neues Deutschland} brought on 12 May 1980\textsuperscript{401} inevitably also dealt with issues of national security and international conflict. Generally, the GDR press continued to show the Islamic Republic in a positive light. Improvements in the trade relations between the Soviet Union and Iran were reported in brief articles, and so was the stiffening of Western sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic. The naval presence of the US and Britain in the Persian Gulf was a continuously recurring theme and so were the reports on counter-revolutionary activities in Iran. Interestingly, the identities of the alleged counter-revolutionaries were hardly ever revealed. All news and articles in this period were based on ADN bulletins and on special reports by a correspondent of the agency, who was not permanently based in Iran but seems to have travelled forth and back. For their bulletins, ADN and the agency’s correspondent sourced information from press releases, radio and television broadcasts, other news agencies, Iranian newspapers, press conferences and occasional interviews.

On 28 July 1980, \textit{Neues Deutschland} reported the death of the Shah.\textsuperscript{402} While the GDR press in the past decade had often dedicated significant editorial space to

\textsuperscript{400} ‘“Prawda”: Washington zog keine Lehren aus dem Fiasko - Neue gewaltsame Aktionen gegen Iran in Vorbereitung’, \textit{Neues Deutschland} (Berlin GDR, 2 May 1980).

\textsuperscript{401} ‘Erste Wahlergebnisse in Iran’, \textit{Neues Deutschland} (Berlin GDR, 12 May 1980).

\textsuperscript{402} ‘Ex-Schah von Iran in Kairo gestorben’, \textit{Neues Deutschland} (Berlin GDR, 28 July 1980).
interviews with or stories on Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, Neues Deutschland had only 45 words for the death of the monarch. More room was given to another occurrence that hinted at internal struggles between the different forces which had been allies in earlier stages of the revolution and during the establishment of the Islamic Republic. The article was titled 'Gegen Verfassung und Interessen Irans – Justizbehörde erklärte die Bürobesetzungen für ungesetzlich' (Against the constitution and the interests of Iran – Iran’s judicial authority declares illegal the occupation of offices).\footnote{‘Gegen Verfassung und Interessen Irans: Justizbehörde erklärte die Bürobesetzungen für ungesetzlich’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 28 July 1980).} In 137 words, ADN’s correspondent reported that Iran’s general state prosecutor had declared illegal the occupation of offices of the Tudeh party, the National Front, the daily newspaper Bamdad and of the Ministry for National Leadership in the city of Isfahan by revolutionary and religious groups.
War, neutrality and double-dealings

The piece was brief and could have been overlooked easily. On 19 September 1980, Neues Deutschland printed a short article of just 48 words, titled ‘Grenzvertrag Irak-Iran wurde aufgekündigt’ (Border treaty between Iraq and Iran has been terminated). The text, based on an ADN bulletin, stated that Iraq’s President Saddam Hussein had announced at an extraordinary session of Iraq’s National Assembly the termination of the 8 March 1975 border treaty. The only additional information provided was that in the past few days there had been armed clashes at the border between Iran and Iraq. Despite its brevity, the news was significant because it was nothing less than the first report in the GDR’s press of what would become one of the bloodiest and longest-lasting wars in post-World War II history. The outbreak of the war between the two countries created a considerable dilemma for the East German press since the GDR was on friendly terms with both and did under no circumstances want to appear partisan. Thus, in the very early days of the conflict the SED issued a directive all media of the GDR had to strictly adhere to: No party to the conflict should be favoured! Quickly, the GDR’s press developed a standard model for reports on the war that would be applied until the end of the war. One of the first articles following this model appeared in Neues Deutschland on 24 September 1980 and bore the headline ‘Kämpfe Irak-Iran ausgeweitet’ (Battles between Iraq and Iran have escalated), followed by the sub-headline ‘Agenturen über militärische Auseinandersetzungen / Sitzung des UNO Sicherheitsrates’ (Agencies on military clashes / UN Security Council in session). The article consisted of four separate news items, each highlighting a different aspect of the conflict. The first two established the pattern that Neues Deutschland would follow through in the years to come. Piece number one featured the Iraqi angle, made clear by identifying the geographical location where the news was generated:

404 ‘Grenzvertrag Iran-Irak wurde aufgekündigt’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 19 September 1980).
405 ‘Kämpfe Irak-Iran ausgeweitet’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 24 September 1980).
Baghdad (ADN). According to reports by the Iraqi news agency INA, on Tuesday [23 September 1980] morning Iraqi troops received an order to invade Iran. In a communiqué issued by the supreme command in Baghdad it says: 'To secure strategic positions, our forces have today advanced towards previously defined targets in Iran.' Simultaneously, Iraq’s air force has attacked several Iranian air bases.

Right underneath followed the Iranian view:

Tehran (ADN). Radio Tehran has stated that alongside several military targets, Iranian air planes have also attacked petrochemical plants in Iraq’s interior. Furthermore, the station reported that Iranian forces were involved in fighting in the Khorramshar area. On Tuesday, Iran requested all ships currently in the Shatt-al-Arab to immediately leave the area.

On the war between the two countries, the GDR press attempted to report from a point of strict neutrality. Editors and journalists had to abstain from comments or any expression of opinion that might have appeared biased in any way. The obsession with neutrality bordered on the ridiculous when editors began to carefully watch the space dedicated to each country’s angle and to ensure that neither’s portion of text extended that of the other. Also established as part of the pattern was that Iraq was named first. Therefore one would always read Iraq-Iran war and Baghdad first, then Tehran.

The other two separate items included in the article engaged with the international reaction to the conflict. The first covered the extraordinary session of the UN’s Security Council which had met following a call from UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim. The other focussed on UNESCO’s General Conference in Belgrade, on to the agenda of which the topic of the outbreak of war between Iraq and Iran also had been pushed. For the remainder of 1980 there were only very few articles on Iran, almost all presenting developments in the course of the war, and of those all followed the pattern described above. Only on 22 December 1980, did Neues Deutschland have a different matter to report. The article bore the headline ‘Proteste gegen Anschlag auf UdSSR-Botschaft’ (protest against attack on USSR embassy). According to the article, based on a bulletin from ADN who in turn used material provided by the

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Soviet news agency TASS, a ‘bunch of rioting rowdies and bandits’ had attacked the Soviet embassy in Tehran, leading the USSR to sharply protest the violation of the extraterritoriality of the Soviet Union’s diplomatic representation. The harshly worded protest, as it was presented by Neues Deutschland, stood in contrast with the reporting on the seizure of the US embassy a year ago that was almost sympathetic to the cause of the hostage-takers. The hint of ‘schadenfreude’ that could be sensed back then, had no place in the reporting this time. Instead, one could get the impression that the Soviets feared that the seizure of the US embassy in autumn 1979 had somehow set a precedent.

Since the start of the war, the GDR’s press had fallen eerily silent on Iran. In the early years of the 1980s, a number of brief news pieces informed the readership on the state of several unsuccessful attempts by the UN, the Organisation of Non-aligned Countries and the Organisation of Islamic Countries to broker a peace deal between the warring parties. Again, the press went to some lengths to appear non-partisan. However, when Iran and the USA finally reached an agreement over the release of the 52 American embassy employees still being held hostage in the country, this was one of the few developments that were covered to a slightly greater extent. To cover this event, ADN made use of a number of different sources, though the primary ones were once again news bulletins issued by other news agencies and also a press conference Iran’s government speaker Behzad Navabi had given on Monday 19 January 1981. The article was distinctly partisan. The treaty was presented as a clear victory for Iran which had, in the words of Navabi,

[...] forced through against stiff resistance from the USA all their demands. For a long time the USA had refused to sign vital points such as the return of all Iranian property and non-interference in Iran’s internal affairs.

In contrast, there was no attempt at all in the text to portray the American perspective on the treaty. Although tensions between the USA and Iran never significantly eased during the 1980s, from late 1981 to 1988 they were only occasionally covered in the GDR’s press. Instead, the attention focussed on a few

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continuously recurring topics. Chief among those were the improvements in the relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the GDR. Despite ideological differences and despite growing evidence of the Islamic Republic turning violently not only against the remnants of the old regime, but also against groups and forces which had taken part in the revolution, articles dealing with the issue of bilateral relations indicated that the GDR again seemed to have pursued a rather pragmatic approach which reflected the GDR’s policy of re-establishing the kind of friendly relationship with the Islamic Republic she had enjoyed with the Shah’s Iran. The duty fell to Neues Deutschland to meticulously recount all the congratulatory messages the SED’s leadership sent over the years to Iran’s presidents and to Khomeini as well as their replies. The impression thus generated from from 1981 until 1989 was that of an amicable partnership between the two countries on several levels.
The war – an economic opportunity for the GDR

The war between Iran and Iraq left the GDR’s foreign policy makers with a dilemma because East Berlin was eager to remain on good terms with both entities. The notoriously cash-strapped East Germans, however, also spotted an economic opportunity and engaged in remarkably cynical double-dealing; selling arms and spares to both parties. They were by no means the only ones to do so though, as Joe Stork pointed out as early as in 1984; the list of arms merchants happily selling to both parties, published in 1984’s MERIP Reports, included the US and Israel.\textsuperscript{408}

The two main actors on the GDR’s side were Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski and his mentor and sponsor Günter Mittag.\textsuperscript{409} Soon after the Iranian revolution, figures close to the inner circles of the newly established regime informally approached the GDR’s Tehran embassy and expressed the Islamic Republic’s interest in establishing some sort of technological and military cooperation between the two countries. In the wake of the seizure of the American embassy by revolutionary students and the ensuing hostage-crisis, the Islamic Republic had severed all ties with the USA, hitherto the almost exclusive supplier of military equipment and advanced technology to the Shah’s Iran. The revolutionary government was therefore keen to utilise alternative sources for spares, military equipment, modern technology and for the maintenance of existing equipment. Another reason for this move was the deep distrust in which the revolutionaries held the American trained Iranian engineers and technicians charged with the maintenance of the military hardware. The fear was that they would be too friendly toward America and therefore might be disloyal to the new regime. The wish-list presented to GDR officials thus included the training of Iranian specialists in the GDR. The Islamic government regarded both superpowers with suspicion and had no intention to engage any further than absolutely necessary with the Soviet Union or to align in any way with either Cold War bloc-alliance.\textsuperscript{410}

\textsuperscript{410} Harald Möller, \textit{DDR und Dritte Welt: die Beziehungen der DDR mit Entwicklungsländern, ein
driving forces behind the Iranian move to approach the GDR appear to have been Sadegh Tabatabai, a relative of Khomeini, and the influential Ayatollah Khameini. Only a very small group of top ranking GDR leaders knew of the deals struck between the two countries. Besides Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski, the head of the section *Kommerzielle Koordination* (KoKo) of the *Ministerium für Außenhandel*, and Günter Mittag. The others who were directly involved were Erich Honecker, Willi Stoph, Hermann Axen, Klaus Willerding and Werner Fleißner. Hardly any information on the arms deals with Iran and Iraq leaked from this inner circle to official party and state bodies. One can therefore assume that even the editors of *Neues Deutschland* or ADN had no deep insights, if any at all, into the secret agreements between the Islamic Republic and the GDR. Most operations, led and supervised by Schalck-Golodkowski, were of a clandestine nature. Not least because of the involvement of Willi Stoph, however, who was commonly regarded as Moscow’s man in the leading circles of state and party, it is highly likely that the Soviet leadership was always in the loop. Interestingly, in the years before the start of the war, there had been hardly any arms-dealing between Iran and the GDR.\footnote{Möller, p. 230.} Naturally, Iraq was alarmed by the prospect of the GDR, hitherto considered a friendly nation, providing the Iranian enemy with weaponry and modern defence technology. In an attempt to counteract developments, Iraq staged a diplomatic offensive. In March 1981 a delegation of high ranking Iraqi B’ath party officials travelled to East Berlin to meet Willi Stoph and to discuss the state of relations between the two countries.\footnote{Möller, p. 237.} One outcome of the meeting was a close collaboration between the two in the field of chemical warfare, which included the training of Iraqi experts in the GDR and the installation of a chemical training ground. The existence of the latter only became known after the demise of the GDR. The secret double-dealings between the GDR and the two warring states would explain a little better why the press was under such strict order to adhere to an utmost degree of neutrality whenever the conflict was covered.

\footnote{neues theoretisches Konzept, dargestellt anhand der Beispiele China und Äthiopien sowie Irak/Iran, Beiträge zur Friedensforschung und Sicherheitspolitik, Bd. 14, 1. Aufl (Berlin: Köster, 2004), p. 226.}

\footnote{Ministry of Foreign Trade.}

\footnote{Möller, p. 230.}

\footnote{Möller, p. 237.}
**Opposition to the Islamic Republic**

On 2 October 1981, *Neues Deutschland* also printed the SED Central Committee’s eulogy for the Tudeh Party who celebrated their 40th anniversary. It included the following assessment:

"[...] After the overthrow of the Shah who was hated by the people, the Tudeh party stood unflinchingly by the side of those forces which determinedly defend the still very young revolution against the aggression of imperialism and all reactionary attacks from within and outside. In the process and despite the very short time that has passed since the beginning of the Iranian revolution, as a Marxist-Leninist party she has managed through consistent action in the service of the people to occupy the place of a significant political factor in the social fabric of the country.[...]

Notwithstanding the awkward wording of the passage, exemplary for the kind of language employed in official party statements, the SED’s assessment of the Tudeh’s role in the Islamic Republic was clear. The ‘brother party’ was still seen as a significant actor in post-revolutionary Iran, though not one of the main driving forces, who was in a safe alliance with Khomeini.

Throughout the decade, the GDR’s press reported on bombings, attempted and/or successful assassinations of high ranking figures of the Islamic Republic and of guerilla activities directed against the Islamic Republic. However, the press hardly ever provided any further information as to the backgrounds of these guerilla activities. Rarely, there were vague hints at ‘reactionary’ forces taking on the government, mostly though no further context was provided.

A significant part of the internal violent resistance that the Islamic Republic faced and fought was put on by the Mojahedin-e Khalk (MEK), an Islamic-Marxist organisation that had originally participated in the revolution but later turned against Khomeini. In the early 1980s, the group managed to kill several leading supporters of

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Khomeini, among them Khomeini’s close companion, the Ayatollah Seyyed Mohammad Beheshti,\textsuperscript{417} who had been, together with Rafsanjani, the leader of the Islamic Republic Party. Among other leaders close to Khomeini who were targeted also was today’s supreme leader Ali Khameini, who was Khomeini’s deputy when he was injured following an assassination attempt on him on Saturday, 27 June 1981.\textsuperscript{418} After they were crushed in Iran, the MEK continued to fight the IRI from their exile in Iraq. The support they received from Iraq’s Ba’ath party while Iraq was at war with Iran finally discredited the Modjahedin-e Khalk even among those in Iran who had initially been sympathetic to their cause. Other formidable resistance groups that had embarked on guerilla campaigns included the Kurdish Democratic Party, fighters for an independent Azerbaidjan and the Fedayin-e Khalq.\textsuperscript{419} None of this background information, which was essential if one wanted to fully understand the context to the attacks, was provided. On occasions, when assassinations of politicians had made new elections necessary, the press reported on the elections but supplied no little further details as to what had led to these extraordinary elections.

While readers were mostly kept in the dark about internal struggles in the Islamic Republic and learned little about the war between Iran and Iraq other than the carefully balanced accounts provided by Iraqi and Iranian news outlets, the press continued to emphasise the good relations between the GDR and the IRI. Especially, since the West’s relations with the country apparently went downhill. On 2 July 1982, for example, \textit{Neues Deutschland} gleefully reported that the Islamic Republic had closed all her representations in the neighbouring Federal Republic of Germany.\textsuperscript{420} The GDR’s press also took notice of the unhappiness the Islamic Republic displayed with the manners in which Western news agencies and media represented the country. The actions undertaken against some media and agencies as a result of this disaffection were dutifully reported in cases such as that of the closure of Reuter’s office in Tehran on 6 July 1981 which had been preceded by the closure of the offices

\textsuperscript{420} ‘Iran schließt alle seine Vertretungen in der BRD’, \textit{Neues Deutschland} (Berlin GDR, 2 July 1982).
of UPI and AP a few days earlier.\textsuperscript{421} Against this backdrop, \textit{Neues Deutschland} had another reason to celebrate when the reporting of the GDR’s press on Iran apparently was not only approved of by the Islamic Republic but also rewarded with a contract that established close cooperation between Iran’s news agency IRNA and East Germany’s ADN.\textsuperscript{422}

In its issue from 7/8 August 1982, \textit{Neues Deutschland} dedicated one quarter of its entire front page to a visit from an Iranian trade delegation led by the Minister for Industry, Mustafa Hashemi.\textsuperscript{423} In two articles and in full detail, \textit{Neues Deutschland} covered the meetings of the delegation with Günter Mittag\textsuperscript{424} and Werner Krolikowski.\textsuperscript{425} The summary of the meetings provided by \textit{Neues Deutschland} was a statement for the GDR’s stance towards Iran at that particular moment in time, too, which would, incidentally, remain largely unchanged until 1988. In that view Iran still was a progressive country that had successfully fought imperialist designs on its independence and that was involved in a major struggle for its survival. At the same time, the GDR was portrayed as a successful industrial economy that reached out to support the struggling Islamic Republic. Furthermore, according to \textit{Neues Deutschland}, the countries also shared some views on the situation in the Middle East and especially on Israel:

During the talks which took place in an amicable atmosphere thoughts were exchanged regarding the state of international affairs and the further developments of the bilateral relations, and here especially in the field of business and trade. In accordance with each other, the dialogue partners condemned Israel’s barbaric acts of aggression against the peoples of Palestine and the Lebanon.\textsuperscript{426}

The last sentence also seems to clarify the GDR’s position on Israel. Unlike the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{421}‘Büro der Agentur Reuter in Teheran geschlossen’, \textit{Neues Deutschland} (Berlin GDR, 9 July 1981).
\item \textsuperscript{422}‘Zusammenarbeit von ADN und IRNA’, \textit{Neues Deutschland} (Berlin GDR, 5 June 1983).
\item \textsuperscript{423}‘Freundschaftliches Gespräch mit iranischem Minister - Mustafa Hashemi zu Gast bei Günter Mittag ...’, \textit{Neues Deutschland} (Berlin GDR, 7 August 1982).
\item \textsuperscript{424}Günter Mittag was Secretary for the Economy at the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party (SED).
\item \textsuperscript{425}First Deputy of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the GDR.
\item \textsuperscript{426}‘Freundschaftliches Gespräch mit iranischem Minister - Mustafa Hashemi zu Gast bei Günter Mittag ...’.
\end{itemize}
Federal Republic of Germany, which at least officially had accepted responsibility for the horrendous crimes against the Jews and the peoples of Europe committed by the German people, the GDR regarded itself as ‘the other Germany’. The slightly bizarre logic here was that all Nazis had somehow disappeared westwards and that the GDR was the truly first socialist state on German soil. The GDR also claimed that thanks to a rigid de-nazification programme after 1949 no remnants of the Nazi past and the administrative structures of the Third Reich were left in the GDR. As Andrew I. Port demonstrates in the case of the East German town of Saalfeld, this stance was at best naïve. In the small industrial town of Saalfeld alone, for example, in the early 1950s still one fifth of all active school teachers had earlier been members of the Nazi party.\textsuperscript{427}

However, the assumption that the GDR could not be held accountable for the Nazi past also led to a policy towards Israel that was the complete opposite of that of West Germany. While West Germany, in recognition of its historical obligation towards the people and the state of Israel, supported Israel and its policies unquestioningly, the GDR, following the Soviets’ lead, allied with the Arab nations states and with the Palestinians against Israel. In this matter, the GDR and the Islamic Republic of Iran clearly sang from the same hymn sheet.

On 17 May 1983, \textit{Neues Deutschland} printed a long statement by the Tudeh party. The communiqué was issued by the ‘Auslandskomitee der Tudeh Partei Irans’ (International Committee of the Tudeh Party of Iran) and it was addressed to ‘compatriots’ and ‘the peoples of the world’.\textsuperscript{428} The statement was not reprinted in full but in an edited version. It is not known who translated it. Since the original text was not available at the time of writing, it cannot be said with certainty in which language it was received by \textit{Neues Deutschland} and how and to what extent the text had been pruned or altered. The procedure common in cases such as this was that communiqués and similar material provided by other governments or the leadership of sister-parties would be passed on in print-ready form to the editors by officials of the Presseamt.

\textsuperscript{427} Port, p. 25.

\textsuperscript{428} ‘Erklärung des Auslandskomitees der Tudeh-Partei Irans’, \textit{Neues Deutschland} (Berlin GDR, 17 May 1983).
The communiqué brought news of a significant shift in Iran’s domestic politics. What it made very clear was that the Islamic Republic had finally turned against the Tudeh, although the party had in the past few years gone through considerable lengths to reassure the Khomeinists of their unflinching loyalty towards their cause. The communiqué told of mass arrests, torture and executions of party members who found themselves accused of preparing a coup d'état. The Tudeh leadership vehemently denied this accusation and reiterated that the party had at all times been fully cooperative with the government. Interestingly, although Neues Deutschland reprinted most of the communiqué, the newspaper did not comment on it. Nor did it provide any further context, analysis or opinion.

Again, as it was the case in the 1970s when the GDR made considerable efforts to improve her relationship with the government of the Shah, the press saw apparently no reason to take on the cause of what was after all officially regarded as a socialist sister-party of the SED. The reason for this must be sought in a matter-of-fact choice made by the leadership of the GDR. Very pragmatically, they made a difference between the interests of the state and its desire to keep up good relations with oil-rich Iran and the ideological ties that bound together the SED and the Tudeh party. In this conflict of interests, the GDR leaders opted for maintaining a good relationship with the Islamic Republic. Consequently, the Tudeh lost out for most of the 1980s. While the press remained mostly silent on the plight of the Tudeh inside Iran, Neues Deutschland found several further occasions to report on the strengthening of economic ties between the two countries. As an example, on 23 September 1983 Neues Deutschland covered economic talks between the two countries which had just been concluded and had been held in a very friendly atmosphere.429

One of the few articles on the situation of the Tudeh that made it into the press could be found on 7 December 1983 in Berliner Zeitung. Titled ’Prozeß gegen Führer der Tudeh-Partei’ (Tudeh leaders put to trial) and based on material provided by Iran’s official news agency IRNA, the brief news told in just 33 words that the trial against five leading members of the Tudeh had begun before a military court.430

429 ‘Wirtschaftsgespräche zwischen DDR und Iran’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 23 September 1983).
offered no further information as to what the Tudeh leaders were accused of and why the trial had been held at a military court rather than a civil one. Two weeks later, 

*Neues Deutschland* delivered some of the missing context. Once more, it was not a piece authored by a staff writer, but yet another official statement emanating from the Tudeh. This time it was issued by the party’s Central Committee, and it gave some additional insights – from the party’s point of view – into events as they had unfolded. According to the statement, the Justice Ministry of the Islamic Republic was behind the campaign against civilian and military members of the party. In its statement, the party’s Central Committee accused the government of the Islamic Republic of barbarously torturing the arrested to extract confessions. The government was also accused of bending and breaking a number of laws of the Islamic Republic. Finally, they called for all democratic parties and international organisations to protest against the treatment of the Tudeh members by the Iranian government.431

For a while, the GDR’s press followed up on events involving the Tudeh. However, the articles grew shorter and shorter. On 24 January 1984, *Neues Deutschland* very briefly covered in just 45 words the sentencing of 86 Tudeh members by a military tribunal to long prison terms and to life in six cases.432 The news was based on a bulletin from ADN which in turn was summing up material received from Iran’s official news agency IRNA. On 28 February 1984, *Neues Deutschland* reported the execution of five of the Tudeh members.433 This article, too, was based on material ADN had received from IRNA and had passed on to the German press in an edited version. Although the coverage of the Tudeh’s fate through most of the 1980s was sparse and usually very brief, the picture had become clear very quickly, and it was not a pretty one. The Tudeh suffered heavy-handed persecution, scores of its members were arrested and tortured while some of the leadership were executed.

In contrast to the brief articles on the plight of the Tudeh stood the lavish coverage of the continuing talks between the two countries on trade and economic cooperation.

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431 ‘Erklärung des Auslandskomitees der Tudeh-Partei Irans’.
432 ‘Militärgericht in Iran verhängte Urteile gegen Tudeh-Parteimitglieder’, *Neues Deutschland* (Berlin GDR, 24 January 1984).
433 ‘Mitglieder der Tudeh-Partei hingerichtet’, *Neues Deutschland* (Berlin GDR, 28 February 1984).
On 10 August 1984 for instance, *Neues Deutschland* prominently covered on its front page a meeting between Iran’s Minister for the Industry, Mustafa Hashemi, with the President of the GDR’s People’s Chamber, Horst Sindermann.\(^{434}\) When Iran’s then Prime Minister Mir Hossein Mossawi – the highest ranking Iranian official to have ever come to the GDR – visited the GDR in October 1986 and met the Secretary General of the Central Committee of the SED and Chairman of the State Council of the GDR, Erich Honecker, *Neues Deutschland* on 14 October 1986 dedicated half of its front page to the event.\(^{435}\) One day later, the visit still was still worth half a page of coverage in the politics section of the newspaper.\(^{436}\) In a rather formulaic manner, in all the articles on talks, visits and agreements, the atmosphere in which the events took place would always be described as ‘amicable’, ‘relaxed’ or ‘spirited’. Again and again they also emphasised the degree to which both countries shared views on developments in the Middle East in general and on the Arab-Israel question in particular. If there was any mention of the war between Iran and Iraq at all, then only to express the vaguely shared opinion that the war would have to end at some point. The question of the Islamic Republic’s dealings with internal opposition, especially its treatment of the Tudeh, was not touched upon. In the years up to the end of the war in 1988, it was clearly the interests of the GDR’s foreign and trade policy which determined how the GDR’s press represented Iran. The picture that emerged was rather one-dimensional. Contrary to the often sympathetic manner in which the press had portrayed the years of the White Revolution and the ‘progressive’ and ‘enlightened’ policies of the Shah, however, the representation of the Islamic Republic after 1983 and up to 1988 was rather disengaged and neutral. The economic aspects of the good relationships between the two countries were appreciated and shared views on political developments stressed, but hardly anything would be written about domestic developments in Iran and the religious-ideological character of the Islamic Republic. Surprisingly, the references to Soviet-Iranian relations which

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\(^{434}\) ‘Iran's Industrieminister beim Präsidenten der Volkskammer - Horst Sindermann führte Gespräche mit Mustafa Hashemi’, *Neues Deutschland* (Berlin GDR, 10 August 1984).

\(^{435}\) ‘Begegnung mit Mir Hossein Moussawi im Staatsrat: Erich Honecker empfing Ministerpräsidenten Iran’, *Neues Deutschland* (Berlin GDR, 14 October 1986).

\(^{436}\) ‘Offizieller Besuch des iranischen Premiers in der DDR: Ministerpräsidenten erörterten Ausbau der Beziehungen zwischen beiden Ländern’, *Neues Deutschland* (Berlin GDR, 15 October 1986).
were always present in the previous three decades, had almost entirely disappeared. For certain, one of the reasons for this was that in the 1980s the GDR’s foreign policy had in some fields achieved a degree of independence from the supremacy of that of the Soviet Union which had previously restricted any room for manoeuvre. The other reason might have been that the relations between Iran and the Soviet Union after 1981 had been very uneasy, though not openly hostile. In the matter of the Iran-Iraq war, the USSR provided the lead on the line of strict neutrality which had been adopted by the GDR’s foreign policy. But there was also the USSR’s engagement in Afghanistan, the fact that the Soviet Union fought a war in a Muslim country against Muslim peoples. There, too, was the war with Iraq, which in Moscow’s view could well leave the USSR a loser regardless of which side finally won it. While the USSR and Iran both agreed to put the blame for the war firmly onto the USA’s doorstep, Moscow sought to maintain a working relationship with both countries. Not least for this reason, the USSR and her Warsaw Pact allies continuously called on both sides to cease hostilities and to enter peace-talks. At least in terms of trade, the relations between the two countries improved significantly. By 1983, the volume of Soviet trade with Iran had already surpassed that of Iraq.437

The press reported dutifully the developments in the war between Iran and Iraq and the numerous attempts made by the UN, the Gulf Council, the organisation of Islamic States and other organisations and countries to mediate in this conflict. However, the way events and developments were covered could best be described as formulaic and almost ritualistic. Until the end of the conflict, the press followed through the established pattern of strict neutrality. This would only change in 1988 when for the first time since the outbreak of the conflict there were signs that an end to the war might be in sight.

On 11 March 1988, Neues Deutschland published a short article in its section ‘Außenpolitik’ (Foreign politics) which bore the title ‘Irak und Iran wollen Städtebeschuss beenden’ (Iraq and Iran vow to end bombardment of towns).438 Still following the established pattern, the news consisted of two sections. The first section

437 Atkin, pp. 198–201.
represented the Iraqi view and was provided by ADN’s office in the Iraqi capital. According to the bulletin, a representative of the Iraqi government had announced that Iraq would call a halt to the bombardment of Iranian towns if Iran would agree to cease attacks on Iraqi towns. The second part of the piece contained the Iranian perspective and was also provided by ADN who had passed on a bulletin issued by its Iranian partner-agency IRNA. This section confirmed Iran’s willingness to come to an agreement with Iraq over the issue of attacks on each other’s towns and cities.

The cautious steps the two warring countries made towards a ceasefire and a later peace treaty continued to dominate the reporting of Iran for most of 1988. The only other relevant topic that came up was the shooting down of an Iranian passenger plane by an American warship. The incident that made the headlines globally and the rise of tensions between the two countries resulting from it dominated the coverage of Iranian affairs from 6 July until 19 July 1988 when Neues Deutschland reported on developments in the UN’s Security Council. ‘Iran akzeptiert Resolution des UNO-Sicherheitsrates’ (Iran accepts resolution of the UN Security Council) was the headline.\(^\text{439}\) The end of the war was there. That at least was the impression, the article gave. However, it would take a further few weeks until all armed confrontation really stopped.

With the end of the war, the focus of the GDR’s press returned to the fate of the Tudeh. Throughout the remainder of 1988, a number of articles focussed on the treatment which opposition to the Islamic Republic received from the authorities. The most remarkable piece was one that Die Weltbühne printed on 27 December 1988. It was titled ‘Mein Vater Ahmad Danesh’ (My father Ahmad Danesh) and was authored by Parvis Töpelmann.\(^\text{440}\)

Die Weltbühne offered Stefan Parvis Töpelmann, son of Ahmad Danesh, a forum to publicly bemoan his father’s death and to accuse the Islamic Republic of torture and the violation of the most basic human rights. Töpelmann’s piece included the German translation of what he claimed to be the uncut letter that his father had sent from

\(^{439}\) ‘Iran akzeptiert Resolution des UNO-Sicherheitsrates’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 19 July 1988).

prison to Ayatollah Montazeri, then still the designated heir to Khomeini. Analysing the reasons why Montazeri chose to break with the Khomeinists, the historian Ervand Abrahamian refers to this particular letter in his book ‘Tortured Confessions’.441

The letter described in gruesome detail Danesh’s life in prison, the torture he had to suffer and his ‘trial’. He called the conditions of his imprisonment and the treatment he received from the prison guards deeply un-Islamic.

Töpelmann’s article stood in stark contrast to the long established policy of the GDR media which thus far had been to treat the Islamic Republic of Iran with utmost caution and to refrain from any harsh words about on its dealings with opposition. Given the Weltbühne’s status as one of the intellectual flagship-publications of the GDR, the publication of the article indicated a clear change in direction. While the Islamic Republic had so far been exempt from any moral or ideological criticism from the GDR’s press – except a very small number of Tudeh-statements that had been reprinted as they were –, this would now change.

On 19 February 1989, Khomeini issued a fatwa which sentenced the British author Salman Rushdie to death and called on all Muslims to kill Rushdie. The reason for the fatwa was Khomeini’s anger over The Satanic Verses, Rushdie’s new book that had been released in late 1988. Khomeini had not read the book nor did he intend to do so. His anger was entirely based on hearsay. The fatwa forced Rushdie, who had good reason to fear for his life, into hiding. On 20 February 1989, Rushdie issued an official apology.

In Junge Welt’s issue from of 22 February 1989, Thomas Walther commented on the Rushdie affair. The piece provided some context to the Salman Rushdie affair. The primary source he referred to was Radio Tehran. For the part covering developments in the UK he provided no hint as to what his sources were. Most likely, the information had been gathered from a variety of Eastern and Western sources. The background to the fatwa he described as follows:

Rushdie, who Scotland Yard now hides in an unknown place, is accused of blasphemy. The Satanic Verses stand for a passage that according to historians

has been removed from the Quran. These verses are said to have been given to Mohammed by the devil and state that people would be allowed worship other gods in addition to Allah. According to Rushdie, it was his aim to use the story to come to a more realistic view of the history of Islam and the Quran.\footnote{Thomas Walther, ‘Schlagzeilen um ein Buch’, \textit{Junge Welt} (Berlin GDR, 22 February 1989).}

He continued with how Rushdie had officially apologised for any grief he might have caused, and then cited the Iranian news agency IRNA:

According to a bulletin the Iranian news agency IRNA has just issued, the leaders of Iran find the apology sufficient and have decided to withdraw the death threat. However, Iran’s reaction has already lead to some diplomatic consequences. For instance, the countries of the European Economic Community and also Sweden have decided to recall their ambassadors from Iran.

The last paragraph offered Walther’s own view of the whole affair:.

What Iran’s action has undoubtedly achieved: A book that reviewers have called a hard read, and that only those who have knowledge of Islamic history will fully understand, has already become a best-seller, although some publishers are too scared to publish it.

Others saw the matter differently, though. As an indication of how the GDR’s press was slowly opening to differing opinions and alternating views which were not as tightly tied to ‘official’ and ‘ideologically correct’ readings any more, \textit{Neues Deutschland} printed on 24 February 1989 a short piece which was titled ‘P.E.N. - Zentrum DDR setzt sich für Rushdie ein’ (the GDR’s PEN - Centre speaks up for Rushdie).\footnote{‘P.E.N.-Zentrum der DDR setzt sich für Rushdie ein’, \textit{Neues Deutschland} (Berlin GDR, 24 February 1989).} In the article, \textit{Neues Deutschland} reports that the East German section of the worldwide association of writers PEN (Poets, Essayists, Novelists) had openly condemned the Iranian leadership for putting a bounty on the head of British writer Salman Rushdie, the author of the \textit{Satanic Verses}. According to \textit{Neues Deutschland}, the PEN Centre’s statement also said that

[...] The order to kill Salman Rushdie not only violated the core principles of the Quran but would also severely discredit Iran, the Islamic Revolution and the religion of Islam.

The East German PEN-Centre not only supported Rushdie but, in a separate
statement issued a little more than a week later, on 3 March 1989, condemned Iran for the continuing executions of dissidents, too. Again, the wording of the statement, according to *Neues Deutschland*, was very harsh:

The General Assembly of the PEN Centre of the German Democratic Republic has addressed a resolution to the secretariat of the international PEN Club. In the resolution, it most emphatically condemns the mass executions, confirmed by the Iranian government, of dissidents among whom were many writers. The PEN Centre of the GDR protests against the continuing bloodthirsty terror justice that violates Human Rights and International Law.  

The GDR press’s tendency in 1989 clearly was to represent Islamic Republic in a more multifaceted manner than had been the case in the previous years of the decade. The changed attitude led to a more open and measured portrayal of aspects of the Islamic Republic which had hitherto been ignored for several reasons, primarily though because there perhaps was the fear that any negative reporting on the Islamic Republic would immediately impact on the amicable relations the GDR had wished to maintain with it.

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini died on 3 June 1989. His death was reported in a manner that appeared to be very calm and matter of fact. On 5 June 1989, *Neues Deutschland* featured three short articles, neatly grouped into one column, on its frontpage. The first one was titled ‘Führer der Islamischen Republik Iran verstorben’ and the sub-headline was ‘Beisetzung für heute anberaumt’ (Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran has died/ Funeral scheduled for today). Based on material provided to ADN by Iran’s official news agency IRNA, the article reported Khomeini’s death in very few words. The second article followed right underneath and covered the GDR’s official reaction to Khomeini’s death. It was simply titled “Staatstelegramm nach Teheran” (State telegram to Tehran) and informed the readership that Erich Honecker had sent an official telegram to the Islamic Republic’s President Hojatolesam Seyed Ali Khameini, in which he expressed his sincere condolence. The last sentence of the telegram emphasised the GDR’s wish to keep the

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444 ‘P.E.N.-Zentrum der DDR setzt sich für Rushdie ein’.
445 ‘Führer der Islamischen Republik Iran verstorben - Beisetzung für heute anberaumt’, *Neues Deutschland* (Berlin GDR, 5 June 1989).
good relationships between the two countries alive. Finally, the third short article informed the readers that the recipient of Honecker’s telegram, Ali Khameini, was no longer President but had been elected to succeed Khomeini as the new Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Four months later, on 18 October 1989, the SED’s Polit Bureau forced the telegram’s sender to step down from all his positions and the GDR entered into the last year of its existence as an independent state, which ended on 3 October 1990.

446 ‘Staatstelegramm nach Teheran - Beileid Erich Honeckers’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 5 June 1989).
447 ‘Neuer Führer der Islamischen Republik Iran’, Neues Deutschland (Berlin GDR, 5 June 1989).
Conclusion

Reading the history of one particular country exclusively through the lens of another country’s press was an experience, that was at times fascinating, at others confusing.

The experience was fascinating because the production requirements of the medium forced journalists and editors to condense complex developments and contexts into brief articles that attempted to present the essence of the news. The essence, of course, as it was seen and understood by the author. Even without expert knowledge of Iranian history, society, and culture it was possible to sense the omissions that had been made in the process of editing, and the particular angles that had been chosen for the portrayal of events could be identified.

It was confusing because the Iran portrayed by the press of GDR resembled a two-dimensional black and white photograph of a carefully selected piece of landscape. Hidden from the viewer were not only the surroundings - the context - but also the colours, the smells and the noises of the place. Moreover, the photo represented the view of the photographer, one could only see what one was supposed to see.

Attempting to read history entirely through the lens of the press leaves far too many blind spots and questions at best and can be dangerously misleading at worst. However, my analysis has also made me realise that using the published press as an additional source for the study of history can lead to the discovery of surprising and instructive details which would otherwise have gone unnoticed.

Learning about Iranian history by studying the press of the GDR was of course never the intention of this study, However, to make sense of the great amount of articles analysed and to fully grasp their respective contexts, it became a matter of necessity to engage with the study of modern Iranian history, international relations during the Cold War, relations between East and West Germany, global structures of the news business and the structures of power in the GDR.

In this concluding chapter, I will revisit the initial research questions and discuss
the findings. Some of these findings were expected. With those, the research simply reaffirmed the original assumptions, at least to a degree. There were, however, discoveries which were not anticipated as such and do therefore qualify as a valuable contribution to the understanding of how the media, and not only those of the former GDR, create and disseminate narratives of others. These will be discussed further below.

As I said, some findings were expected. When addressing the question of what impact the considerations of the GDR's foreign policy had on the GDR's press on Iran, the initial assumption was that there had to be an institutional link between the two. My study deftly confirms this assumption. Throughout the existence of the GDR, the state's foreign policy was closely tied and subordinated to that of the USSR. GDR press reporting on Iran reflected this. This was particularly apparent in the period leading up to 1972. A peculiar period were the years of the Iran-Iraq war, when both Moscow and the GDR found themselves in very awkward positions, since relations with both the belligerents were considered to be friendly. To make matters more complicated, from a GDR point of view, the GDR was involved in arms trade with both parties. Consequently, in their reporting of the war, the GDR press avoided at nearly all cost to appear partisan. In the period between 1981 and 1988 there were remarkably fewer articles on Iran than in any other of the periods researched.

The GDR had foreign policy interests independent from those of the USSR, too. In the first two decades, these were primarily affected by the rivalry with West Germany and the striving for international recognition as a sovereign state. This rivalry with the other Germany informed many of the articles on Iran in this period. Towards the late 1970s and in the 1980s, following cautious rapprochement with West Germany and also given the GDR's increasingly active role in international organisations such as the OSCE, the country's foreign policy gained a degree of independence from that of the Soviet Union, which was reflected in some articles.

Of particular interest in the foreign policy context was the duality of state- and party relations. While after 1972 the GDR was attempting to improve her official relations with Iran, the GDR still played host to the exiled leadership of the banned
Tudeh Party and indirectly supported activities the party undertook inside Iran. The question of parallel foreign policies – state to state relations which were the responsibility of the GDR's foreign office, and party relations which the SED retained with Socialist brother parties – were often mirrored in the media of the GDR. Also, the impact of the Tudeh on the reporting on Iran was at times significant. Occasionally, the GDR press printed long articles authored by members of the Tudeh leadership. This usually happened when a Socialist ‘insider’ perspective on specific events was needed. However, my study also shows very clearly that the ideological closeness between the two parties was outweighed by a very pragmatic approach that valued amicable diplomatic and trade relations with Iran, regardless of who was in power, much higher than any considerations for the interests of East Germany’s Iranian fellow Marxist-Leninists. During the periods in which the Tudeh suffered from violent persecution by the Shah's government and, later, by the Islamic Republic of Iran, their plight was almost entirely ignored by the press of the GDR.

In its international relations, Iran was very rarely represented as an independent actor. Instead, the impression created was that of country exposed to high levels of external pressure, a victim of aggressive British and American imperialism. In the view of the GDR press, the third major Western power with designs on Iran was West Germany, a claim that was repeatedly made, sometimes explicitly, in the first three decades researched. The reporting on Iran was clearly footed in a Cold War perspective of international relations which placed Iran in the unfortunate position of not fully belonging to either camp.

Ideological bias certainly informed the writing on Iran. However, it became also clear that some of what appeared to be bias or prejudice was indeed primarily rooted in a lack of knowledge.

What was rather less expected, however, was that the reporting of East Germany's media on Iran suffered from what I would like to call 'professionalism'. As is the case with any media, a news item went from event to publication through several stages of editing. Source material had to be translated, facts and details were omitted, complex matters condensed into one or two brief sentences. Context could not be provided,
simply because of the lack of space, a common problem for all print media. Also, the editor had to make assumptions about the degree of knowledge of the context that their readers had when deciding how to edit what he/she had received from correspondents or news bureaus. Surprisingly often, the editors seemed to have relied on their readers’ awareness of alternative or additional narratives provided by West German media.

Until 1961, Western print media could easily be accessed in East Berlin and, though less easily, throughout the GDR. In the 1970s and 1980s, despite of the GDR’s attempts to jam the broadcast signals, West German radio and television could be widely received. Thus the SED and the East German media never achieved an information monopoly. The GDR media simply acknowledged that there were alternative sources of information available and on occasion referred to content in West German media in their own articles. The obvious assumption was that some proportion of their readership had access to these. Also, ADN often made selected articles from West German media available to the editors of the East German press. In a similar fashion, ADN likewise provided the editors (and the SED leadership) with translations from articles that had appeared in other Western and Soviet media. Because ADN was linked in a professional relationship with many other major Western and Eastern Bloc news agencies, the vast majority of the news that found the way into the East German media was based on the same sources as those that could be read in other countries' media. Even the wording was only marginally different.

When research for this thesis begun, I was already aware of the massively important role news agencies have played, and still play, in Western/Capitalist news and communication environments. Oliver Boyd-Barrett and Terhi Rantanen are among the few scholars who have researched the dominant role news agencies play in today’s global media-environment in great detail. What soon became very obvious, was that, despite East Germany’s diametric ideological environment and despite the fundamentally different role that the GDR’s political system had assigned to the press and to journalism, East Germany’s press was as reliant on the input of the global news agencies as any Western media. This realisation was what shifted the focus of this thesis away from the question of cultural preconceptions of others and on to the
principles of information gathering, filtering and news dissemination.

The at times almost complete reliance on Western news agencies as sources for news on Iran challenged more than just the hermeneutic hegemony of the SED and the GDR’s press. After all, which news and information were made available to the media – East and West – by the news agencies was primarily determined by the business interests of the news agencies. In this environment, news is a commodity, and just that. What ended up as a news item on an editor’s desk, usually provided by ADN, was the end result of an extensive filtering process on which the editor had no influence at all. It was the news agencies who determined what was important and what not; it was them who omitted details and took events out of context while completely ignoring others. Only when ADN or one of the East German publications had a correspondent present at the time an event took place or when they could rely on their own sources, were they able to provide information to their readers that was put together and edited entirely from a GDR point of view. However, this was not very often the case and all that editors at Neues Deutschland or at any of the other publications with a foreign section could then do was to occasionally add an ideological twist to a story that had already been written elsewhere.

In the introduction to this thesis I raised the question whether representations of Iran in the press of the GDR could be characterised as ‘factual fiction’. Based on my all-encompassing and far reaching analysis of a vast amount of press coverage as presented in the chapters above I have come to the conclusion that this epithet is indeed justified. However my research has shown that there is an added twist to all of this. Indeed, the astonishing reality is that long before they reached East German news desks the main ingredients of this ‘factual fiction’ had often already been put together by a mix of authors that were fully beyond the control of an East German media regime that was as desperate for hermeneutic hegemony regarding foreign news as it was ultimately unable to achieve it.
Appendix 1

The printed press in the GDR, overview

In the GDR, each of the five political parties represented in the Volkskammer (People's Chamber) published one daily nationwide newspaper. These were

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Circulation as of 1988</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neues Deutschland</td>
<td>Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED)</td>
<td>1,098,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Der Morgen</td>
<td>Liberal Demokratische Partei Deutschlands (LDPD)</td>
<td>61,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bauernecho</td>
<td>Demokratische Bauernpartei Deutschlands (DBD)</td>
<td>94,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Zeitung</td>
<td>National Demokratische Partei Deutschlands (NDPD)</td>
<td>55,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neue Zeit</td>
<td>Christlich Demokratische Partei Deutschlands (CDU)</td>
<td>113,300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were three more nationwide daily newspapers, each of them also affiliated with an official organisation:

Page 224
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Circulation as of 1988</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Junge Welt</td>
<td>Freie Deutsche Jugend (FDJ)</td>
<td>1,435,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deutsches Sportecho</td>
<td>Deutscher Turn und Sport Bund (DTSB)</td>
<td>185,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribüne</td>
<td>Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (FDGB)</td>
<td>412,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: East German Publications and their circulations

All in all, there were 39 daily newspapers (from 1965 – 1975: 40) in the GDR. 14 of these were regional titles affiliated with the bloc parties, and 15 were SED Bezirkszeitungen. The remaining titles were BZ (Berliner Zeitung) Am Abend (East Germany's only newspaper sold on the streets) and NowaDoba, published by Domowina, the newspaper for the Sorbic minority.

The daily newspapers formed only a small part of the whole of East Germany's print periodicals. Figures for 1988 count a total 1,812 publications, including newspapers, magazines, journals, brochures, workplace-publications (Werkszeitungen) and others, which had a total circulation of 46,008,370 copies. Of these, around 500 journals addressed particular professions.

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Appendix 2

Structure of the GDR's Media System

Secretary General of the SED

- Secretary for Agitation and Propaganda
- Press of SED and Mass Organisations
- State Committees for Radio and Television

Department for Agitation

- Presseamt at the Chairman of the Council of Ministers
- Press of the Churches and the Bloc Parties

ADN

- Head of Pressaamt
- Assistant Head of Dept.
- Head of Secretariat
- 1. and 2. Editor in Chief

Information Department

Soviet Press

Sector Connections

Team Finances and Administration

Commission for Agitation at the Polit Bureau

Head of Agitation

Assistant Head

Sectors:
- Press
- Radio / TV
- Foreign Correspondents in the GDR
- Sector B
- Agitation
- Visual Agitation
- What and How / Information
- Library and Newspaper Archives
Appendix 3 – Articles

1. ADN Bulletin from December 1972 (source: DPA)

iran: fuenfjahrplan soll export steigern

heute an, 3. dezember (dpa) – irans neuer fuenfjahrplan hat jetzt seine endgultige gestalt bekommen, mit 30 milliarden dollar ist sein volume so gross wie das aller vier bisherigen zusammen.

ministerpraesident abbas hovellda verteidigte das ausmass des plans mit der feststellung, sein umfang und seine ziele seien "keineswegs ubertreiben".

dem plan, der am 1. maerz in Kraft tritt, soll iran zu einem exportland werden, dem die waertige asiens und afrikas fuer persische produkte geoeffnet werden sollen, irans zahlungsbilanz schloss in diesem jahr erstmals mit einem uberschuss ab, hauptsaechlich dank der starker als erwartet gestiegenen erdoelgewinnen, das nahert dem antlichen optimismus fuer die neuen planziele, die hauptsaechlich aus steuernahmen finanziert werden sollen, wahrend der planlaufzeit bis 1977 wird deren erhöhung von zwei auf fuem milliarden dollar pro jahr erwartet.

1,8 milliarden neue arbeitsplaae sollen geschaffen, sechs milliarden neue wohnungen und mehrere neue flughaeften gebaut werden.

even neun der 30 milliarden dollar der plansumme sind fuer industrie-investitionen geplant, iran entwickelt sich zu einem der wichtigesten kupferexporteure der welt, die riesigen kupferlager von sarvakir im sollen durch eine staatsgesellschaft ausgebaut werden, der schah kuendigte an, dass nach steigerung der jahresproduktion des neuen amschahr-stahlwerks auf 1,9 milliarden tonnen iran "in naechster zukunft stahlexporteur wird", die naturgasexporte in die sowjetunionen stiegen innerhalb jahresfrist um 62 prozent, soeben wurden naturgas-lieferungsabkommen mit usa und japan getroffen – innerhalb der naechsten zwei jahre werden hieraus fast zehn milliarden mark einnahmen erwartet.

selbst wenn orientalische statistiken nicht immer nachrichten sind, stimmt rechnerisch die juengste behauptung des schahs vor dem parlament, dass iran mit jahrlich 20 prozent die schnellste wirtschaftswachstumrate der welt habe.

schon und regierung suchen in der ganzen welt privatinvestoren und geben die zusicherung absoluter sicherheit vor verstaatlichungen.

wahrend offizielle kreise teherans ständig die enttauschung ueber mangelnde deutsche investitionsbereitschaft ausspielen, sind die sowjetische, amerikanische, japanische und britische wirtschaftsgesellschaften in rasend vormarsch. diese lasender bieten umfangreiche zusammenarbeit im Rahmen des neuen plans an, wahrend des moskauerseuchs des irans im oktober stand das sowjetische wirtschaftsengagement im gespraechsmittel. moskau hatte bereits riesige erdgaslieferungen aus iran vereinbart, vergroessert das stahlwerk isfah an und beteiligt sich kuenftig an bewaesserungs-, staue-, kraftwerk- und anderen projekten. eine umfangreiche gruppe japanischer investoren hat dabei ihre mitarbeit angeboten.
2. ADN Bulletin from 1970

![Image of ADN Bulletin from 1970]

3. ADN Bulletin, source: Reuter

![Image of ADN Bulletin, source: Reuter]
5. Neues Deutschland, 12/1971, source: ADN

Iran besetzte drei Inseln im Arabischen Golf


Es sind die Inseln Abu Musa, auf die das Scheichtum Sharja Anspruch erhebt, und die große und kleine Tumb-Insel, die von Ras al Khelma beansprucht wird. Howeida zufolge wurden sie mit Einverständnis dieser Fürstentümer besetzt.

6. ND, 02/1970, ADN correspondent

„Iran hilft Imperialisten“

Teheran (ADN). Divisionsgeneral Nasser Farbod ist laut Radio Teheran vom iranischen Ministerpräsidenten Basargan zum Generalstabschef der iranischen Streitkräfte ernannt worden. Er löst auf diesem Posten General Gharani ab, der zurückgetreten ist.

Prozeß gegen Führer der Tudeh-Partei

Gegen fünf führende Mitglieder der Volkspartei Irans (Tudeh-Partei) wurde gestern der Prozeß vor einem Tribunal der Streitkräfte eröffnet, meldet die iranische Nachrichtenagentur IRNA. Die Tudeh-Partei war im April dieses Jahres für illegal erklärt worden.

Schlagzeilen um ein Buch

Britischer Autor Rushdie zog sich den Zorn des Iran zu


Eines jedoch hat das Vorgehen Irans bewirkt. Das Buch, das von Kritikern als sehr schwer zu lesen eingeschätzt wird, und nur von Kenndimensionen der islamischen Geschichte verstanden würde, ist trotz der derzeitigen Zurückhaltung einiger Verlage bei der Herausgabe schon jetzt ein Bestseller.

Thomas Walther
10. Wahrheit, “Fars ist mehr...”, 1976

Fars ist mehr als nur eine Provinz

Die „Wiege der persischen Kultur"

Fars ist heute eine von nur drei administrativen Einheiten (Provinzen), die ihren Namen auf die Farnwüste bekommen haben. Sie liegt im Westen Irans und erstreckt sich über eine Fläche von etwa 100.000 Quadratkilometern. Bereits im Altertum war die Fars ein bedeutender Handelsweg, der vom Orient bis zum Mittelmeer führte. Die Provinz ist auch bekannt für ihre reiche Architektur und ihre historischen Stätten, die Zeugen der vorgeschichtlichen und historischen Entwicklung des Landes sind.

Mit dem Beginn der modernen Zeit wurde die Fars weiterhin aufgrund ihrer geografischen Lage und der Verfügbarkeit von Ressourcen eine wichtige Rolle im Iran und in der Region einnehmen. Heute ist die Provinz einer der wichtigsten Energiequellen des Landes und beherbergt mehrere bedeutende Energieprojekte, einschließlich der ersten Atomkraftanlage des Iran.

Neben der wirtschaftlichen Bedeutung ist die Fars auch für ihre kulturelle Vielfalt bekannt. Die Provinz ist die Heimat des Persischen Läns und der persischen Sprache. Die lokalen Traditionen und Kultur sind eine wesentliche Attraktion für Touristen und Forscher.

Mit der fortschreitenden Modernisierung des Iran gewinnt die Fars auch zunehmend an Bedeutung als wichtiger politischer und wirtschaftlicher Raum. Ihre Zukunft wird durch die Herausforderungen des globalen Wirtschaftsraums, aber auch durch die wachsende Bedeutung des Persischen Läns, bestimmt.

Die „Wiege der persischen Kultur”

Die Fars ist ein Land, das nicht nur kulturelle, sondern auch wirtschaftliche Bedeutung hat. Die Provinz wird auch als die „Wiege der persischen Kultur” bezeichnet, da sie die Heimat vieler berühmter Perser ist, die in der Geschichte und Literatur eine bedeutende Rolle spielten. Die kulturellen und historischen Stätten der Fars, wie Schiras und Qazvin, sind ein Zeichen der kulturellen Vielfalt und des historischen Erbes des Iran.

Mit der fortschreitenden Modernisierung des Iran gewinnt die Fars auch zunehmend an Bedeutung als wichtiger politischer und wirtschaftlicher Raum. Ihre Zukunft wird durch die Herausforderungen des globalen Wirtschaftsraums, aber auch durch die wachsende Bedeutung des Persischen Läns, bestimmt.
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