

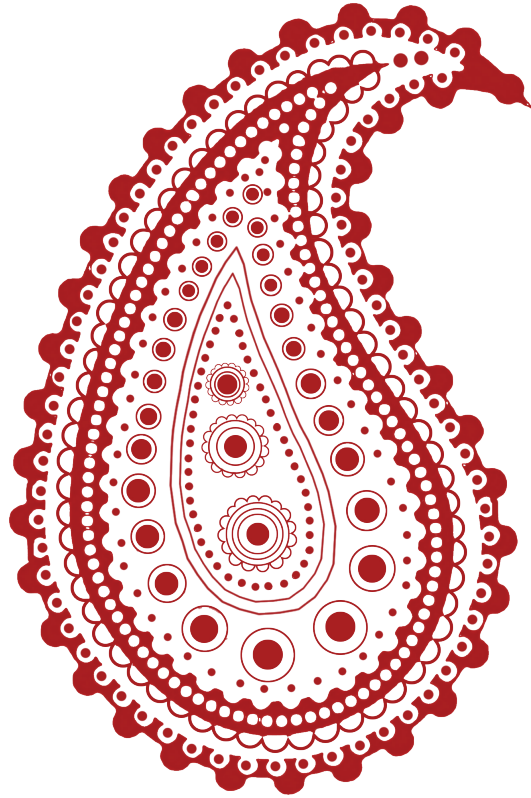
# DĀNESH

THE OU UNDERGRADUATE  
JOURNAL OF  
IRANIAN STUDIES



*The* UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA®  
*College of International Studies*  
Department of International and Area Studies

Volume 1 (2016)



# Iranian Studies Program

*The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA®  
College of International Studies*

***DĀNESH: The OU Undergraduate Journal of Iranian Studies***

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Volume 1 (2016)

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## From the Faculty Advisor

It is with great pleasure that I introduce this inaugural issue of *DĀNESH: The OU Undergraduate Journal of Iranian Studies*. The initiative for this journal grew from the hard work and dedication of undergraduate students in the University of Oklahoma's Iranian Studies Program. In particular, I would like to acknowledge **Andrew Akhlaghi** (MA 2016) and **Elena Gharipour** (BA 2016) for their tireless effort in leading this project from its inception, in the spring of 2015, to the publication of this inaugural issue.

Since the founding of the OU Iranian Studies Program in 2011, our goal has been to promote knowledge regarding all aspects of the history, culture, society, and politics of Iran and the Persianate world. As the program has grown over the past five years, the work of OU undergraduate students in the field of Iranian Studies has become truly outstanding. The publication of *DĀNESH*, a peer-reviewed journal published under the auspices of the OU Iranian Studies Program and the OU College of International Studies, is dedicated to highlighting the research of a growing undergraduate program in Iranian Studies at the University of Oklahoma. As we continue to mature, we are confident that the vitality of the program will be reflected in the pages of this journal.

The name of the journal, *DĀNESH*, comes from the Persian word meaning *knowledge*, *learning*, and *wisdom*. We believe this is a fitting name for a journal that seeks to foster deep and compassionate understanding of one of the world's most culturally rich and historically complex civilizations. It is with this goal in mind that we inaugurate the publication of *DĀNESH*.

Afshin Marashi  
Farzaneh Family Chair in Iranian Studies  
Director, OU Iranian Studies Program

## **From the Editors-in-Chief**

We are extremely proud to have been a part of this project. We are proud of both the quality of research in the journal and to have been part of such a wonderful process. Each of these papers addresses an important aspect of U.S.-Iranian relations. We hope that these papers will provide much needed context and perspective to the ongoing debates on U.S.-Iranian relations.

We are also privileged to have had such a positive experience editing the journal. Our associate editors worked extremely hard on each of these papers and they were a joy to work with throughout the process. Ultimately, any journal is only as strong as the writers and in this regard we were very fortunate. All of the writers came into this process with the utmost professionalism. We are also indebted to the University of Oklahoma Libraries for helping us archive and host the journal through the SHAREOK system.

The quality and overall process of making the journal are a reflection of the kind of academic environment in the Iranian Studies program and the University of Oklahoma. Finally, we would like to acknowledge the crucial role of Dr. Afshin Marashi. Without his guidance and dedication to the Iranian Studies program, none of this would have been possible.

Andrew Akhlaghi  
Elena T. Gharipour  
Editors-In-Chief

## **Who Lost Iran?: A Critical Reassessment of U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Iran, 1953-1979**

Nicholas Eckenrode

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The air was crisp as President Jimmy Carter entered the building. Uncharacteristically cold, even by Iran's standards. It was New Year's Eve 1977 and Carter was making his first trip to Iran to continue the long standing relationship between the two countries. Raising his glass, Carter toasted the Shah claiming him to be the one leader in the world he felt to have the most "personal friendship."<sup>1</sup> Carter had been in office just under a year. This was barely enough time for a President to build a relationship strong enough with any leader, let alone one man that took precedence over all others. In reality, Carter had inherited a relationship with the Shah that had begun decades prior—a relationship built on lofty promises, weapons sales, and oil production. The two were dependent on each other.

Much has been written on U.S.-Iranian relations leading up to 1979. The fall of the embassy came as a shock to the American public who previously thought of Iran as their chief ally in the Middle East. The ensuing crisis not only saw Iran fall out of favor with America but left President Jimmy Carter being viewed as a pariah for the loss of a key U.S. ally. The perceived weakening of American influence all but eliminated Carter from winning office again in 1980.

President Carter let Iran slip away only for the world to watch it become the Islamic Republic while undermining US strength on the international stage. For decades, this has been the accepted rhetoric. To accept this without consideration is not only a disservice to Carter, but it also overlooks a myriad of steps taken by preceding Presidential administrations and the Shah's own miscues in the decades prior. The truth is that the U.S. led coup of Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq in 1953 triggered a series of events that led to impending disaster. What followed with geopolitical issues, mutual interests, and economic greed played a crucial role in US-Iranian relations. So intertwined were the two countries that when President Carter assumed the role of President he was inheriting a force in motion which he could not possibly have control over.

### **Developing Relations**

Dating back to the Allied occupation of Iran during WWII, the Iranians had a favorable view of the U.S. Seemingly uninterested in imperialistic matters, the U.S. was viewed as a potential ally and counterbalance to the intrusive Soviet and British empires. At the conclusion of the

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**\*Author Bio:**

<sup>1</sup> Dominic Sandbrook, "After the Revolution," *New Statesman* (January 26, 2009): 30.

Azerbaijan Crisis, a Soviet land-oil grab in Iran, the U.S. seemed to be the only superpower that could assure and respect Iranian independence in the developing Cold War world.

It was clear early on that Iran was unique compared to other Third World countries. It was an oil rich state, which dominated the Strait of Hormuz, a vital checkpoint in which 55% of the world's oil passed. Coupled with the fact that it shared a 1,200 mile border with the Soviet Union, the need for American influence in Iran became a priority.<sup>2</sup>

Upon entering office in 1953, President Eisenhower, with an up and coming Richard Nixon as Vice President, looked to continue the approach that the Truman administration put in place. Calling it the New Look Strategy, the idea was to contain the Soviet Union through perimeter states by strengthening those countries themselves versus actual American involvement on the ground.<sup>3</sup> In regards to Iran, the plan was not prepared for the emergence of a charismatic Prime Minister by the name of Mohammad Mossadegh.

The Shah was merely twenty-one when he received the throne from his father in 1941. As the Shah was inexperienced and ill-equipped for the world stage, Iran's power was vested into the Iranian Parliament, the Majles. Once simply a rubber stamp institution to the Shah's power, the Majles was now a serious force in Iran's post-war development. During the war, Iran had experienced a growth of civil society and culture. Political parties formed, voices were heard, and public opinion became a factor in the country. These conditions allowed for a leader like Mosaddeq to rise through the Majles and become an influential leader within Iran.

In 1951, Mosaddeq nationalized Iran's oil in an effort to put more revenue into its treasury. The move was drastic and damaging to the prestige of the British Empire which had had a stranglehold on Iran's oil since the early 1920s. Looking to restore their assets, the British appealed to the U.S. that Mosaddeq be removed. Highlighting his political career up to that point, they argued that Mossadegh had socialist tendencies and that he could possibly align Iran with the Soviets in the future. Such a move would be a devastating blow to the U.S. Cold War policy in the region. The Eisenhower administration approved Operation Ajax which executed the 1953 coup to overthrow Mossadegh and replace him with the more favorable General Zahedi. The move would allow the Shah more control over the government.<sup>4</sup> The coup was a success but the events of that year would haunt U.S.-Iranian relations in the coming years.

With the Shah back in place, Eisenhower moved to consolidate his power. Still fearing aggressive Soviet intrusion, the CIA assisted heavily in undermining the communist Tudeh party and any candidates in Majles elections that could be viewed as detrimental to the Shah's power.<sup>5</sup> One of the biggest impacts in this time span was that the CIA equipped and trained Iran's Gendarmerie, National Police, and infant intelligence unit. These are the three establishments which would merge to become the SAVAK.<sup>6</sup> Trained up until the early 1960s by the CIA and other foreign powers, the paramilitary group would become a frequent tool used by the Shah to strengthen his reign.

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<sup>2</sup> Rouhollah K. Ramazani, *The United States and Iran: The Patterns of Influence* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982), 15.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Shah: Building a Client State in Iran* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 93.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Cottam, *Iran and the United States: A Cold War Case Study* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988), 106-108.

<sup>5</sup> Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Shah*, 91.

<sup>6</sup> Nikki Keddi and Mark Gasiorowski, *Neither East nor West: Iran, the Soviet Union, and the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 154-155.



The Shah had two overall goals: develop Iran economically at the fastest pace possible and to transform the country into a regional military giant.<sup>7</sup> To do this the Shah saw the need for further alignment with the U.S. The Kennedy and Johnson administrations of the 1960s were reluctant however to provide the kind of aid the Shah requested. Both Presidents adopted the “Two-Pillar” policy, which promoted Iran and Saudi Arabia as agents of stability and security in the Middle East. In addition, LBJ saw the region as the United Kingdom’s sphere of influence. With the growing conflict in Vietnam and an annual budget of \$100 million for arms spending to Iran, Johnson was reluctant to grant all of the Shah’s requests.<sup>8</sup> As it stood at that moment, there was no clear U.S. policy in place for the Gulf.

It is feasible that this approach would have continued into Nixon’s presidency had it not been for one unexpected development: the British withdrawal of influence in the Middle East in 1968. So sudden was the move that it sparked outrage from all facets of the U.S. government. Viewing this as the U.K. shirking its global duties, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, in a conversation with the British Foreign Secretary who delivered the news, famously remarked, “For God’s sake, be Britain!”<sup>9</sup> With LBJ dealing with the aftermath of the Tet Offensive in Vietnam, Britain withdrawing, and the reigns being handed over to Nixon in the following year, it was a tenuous time at best for what the future may hold concerning U.S.-Iran relations.

### **Nixon and the Shah**

From the first time they met, Richard Nixon liked the Shah. The two held deep admiration for each other. Upon the Shah’s first visit with Nixon as President in D.C. Nixon remarked that he believed Iran would make it “because of the personality and the strength and the character of the man who is our honored guest tonight.”<sup>10</sup> It was not posturing either as their friendship that began in 1953 would continue up until the Shah’s death in 1980.

Nixon and his Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, viewed their victory as a chance to enact major foreign policy changes. With public opinion of Vietnam sinking lower and lower, Nixon sought a resolution to the conflict. Nixon and Kissinger sought détente with the Soviet Union and China while simultaneously trying to withdraw from Vietnam under the guise of his campaign slogan “Peace with Honor.”

Stemming from this new approach came the Nixon Doctrine. Announced during a speech he gave in Guam, Nixon made it clear that America would always aid its allies but when it came to a nation’s security they would have to fend for themselves. The line was drawn. The U.S. could not be the protector of all nations. While the events in Southeast Asia were clearly the catalyst for this doctrine, it applied through extension into the Middle East.

Ironically, despite his friendship with the Shah, Nixon had instructed Kissinger to not waste time with the Third World as “what happens in those parts of the world is not...going to have any significant effect on the success of our foreign policy.”<sup>11</sup> For Nixon, the big fish to pursue

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<sup>7</sup> Alexander Moens, “President Carters Advisers and the Fall of the Shah,” *Political Science Quarterly*, 106.2 (1991): 213.

<sup>8</sup> Roham Alvandi, “Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: Origins of Iranian Primacy in the Persian Gulf,” *Diplomatic History* 36.2 (April 2012): 345.

<sup>9</sup> Roham Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 33.

<sup>10</sup> James Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: the Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 212.

<sup>11</sup> Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: the United States and Iran*, 38.

were Russia and China. Everything else was peripheral to their foreign policy aims. Furthermore, Kissinger readily admitted that he had no understanding of Gulf politics upon entry into office. His only priority was get the Soviets out of the Middle East. How this would come about had yet to be determined.

With a new President in office, the Shah renewed his aggressive lobbying for Nixon to place their faith in Iran. While they were indeed friendly, it was not certain that Nixon would concede to the Shah's request. Iran was already the biggest military buyer of U.S. weapons when Nixon entered office, which was due in part to Iraq recently becoming a Soviet allied government. Nixon did not deny that the Shah should play a role in the Nixon Doctrine, but both the State Department and Kissinger urged they continue the balancing act between Saudi Arabia and Iran until they had a more purposeful agenda.

The Shah was undeterred and pressed Nixon using his own doctrine against him: Iran alone could be the policeman in the Gulf and contain the Soviets. With U.S. aid they could bring stability and ensure the interests of the U.S. and other western powers. Upon the cautious recommendation of Kissinger and Ambassador MacArthur, the US extended the 1968 Foreign Military Sales agreement by an additional four years.<sup>12</sup> This was the first real shift in Nixon's administration tilting towards Iran as their chief ally in the region. This was confirmed with the signing of National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM) 92 in November of 1970. Viewing Iran as the preeminent political power in the region, virtually all conventional arms sales restrictions were lifted off of Iran, allowing them to become a military power that would act as a regional deterrent for communist aggression.<sup>13</sup>

There were some concerns that this blank check would spark a regional arms race leading to future hostilities. While that did not completely emerge, US military sales to Iran rose from \$94.9 million in 1969 to \$2.55 billion by 1977.<sup>14</sup> Iran became the uncontested military power in the Gulf just as NSDM 92 had intended. Iran followed through on its promises as they deployed their military to Oman from 1972-79 to defeat the communist-backed insurgency against Sultan Qaboos bin Said, which could have threatened other weaker nations in the Arabian Peninsula. Iran had become the policeman Nixon was seeking.

### **The Monster Within**

The era of good feelings came to a quick close. With the Watergate scandal becoming larger each day, President Nixon resigned in 1974. While Kissinger remained in office under new President Gerald Ford, the Shah had lost his chief ally in D.C. Ford could have maintained Nixon's policies with the Shah, but rumblings of conditions under the Shah's regime began to sprout up in the U.S. media.

Having a client state whom you pour resources into to further your foreign policy is a risky endeavor, as it assumes the leader of said state will run it competently. By 1975, a new CIA psychological profile was released stating that the Shah was a dangerous megalomaniac who was interested in furthering his own aims at the expense of the U.S.<sup>15</sup> This is ironic as the CIA, amongst others, was endorsing him only decades before. Regardless, the warning signs were

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 54-55.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>15</sup> Babak Ganji, *Politics of Confrontation: the Foreign Policy of the USA and Revolutionary Iran* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2012), 13.

present from the start. The British viewed the Shah in the early 1940s as a young upstart, and compared him to the flamboyancy and pomp of Charles de Gaulle.

Cracks in the Shah's foundation were seen as early as 1963 with the White Revolution. Receiving intense publicity, the Revolution promised sweeping reforms, mostly regarding land reform, that would move the country towards westernization while addressing the plight of the peasants working the land. In reality, the reforms only served to strengthen the Shah and weaken his political and religious opponents. Conditions at home were far from favorable for the Shah. Unrest was very much present in Iran. Riots broke out in Tehran, Qom, Shiraz, and other cities killing up to a thousand people.<sup>16</sup> The bloodless revolution was bloodier than originally planned. These events ushered Ayatollah Khomeini onto the political stage as he denounced the Shah's rule and practices. Viewed as just another nationalist, the US dismissed him as a one of many opposition leaders challenging aggressive reforms.

Even with all of this unfolding, the US was quick to overlook the events. The Shah's regime was a necessary ally for containing the Soviet Union. Even American journalism was willing to compromise itself, as an editorial in the *New York Times* appeared just four days after the riots stating, "The great mass of the Iranian people are doubtless behind the shah in his bold new reform efforts. The national plebiscite he called early this year gave emphatic evidence of this."<sup>17</sup> The public perception of the Shah for Americans was to remain positive.

While those in the government should have been aware of the Shah's activities, the American people or those not "in the know" of the government were presented with a burgeoning Iran. The protests, when later reported, were painted as an irrational cultural reaction to progress and the US press did little to faithfully express what the core of the complaints were.<sup>18</sup> They failed to realize that the Shah was seeking to suppress all popular political activity and isolate potential opposition, while assuring the US and the world that he wanted to steer his country in the right direction. The absence of any real accountability on the part of the Shah only emboldened him further to do what was necessary to keep control.

The 1953 coup not only stuck in the minds of the Iranian people, but even the Shah himself. In addition to megalomania, the Shah was paranoid about being overthrown himself. By the mid-1960s, he already had two assassination attempts made on his life. As a result, he worried about disloyalty through all aspects of his government. The SAVAK was not only used to suppress his people, but also to find possible dissenters and jail them with next to no evidence. Human rights were routinely infringed upon and having a voice became dangerous.

The Shah would remain in power though as long as he maintained a close relationship with the U.S. The two countries were so intertwined economically that it seemed a sure bet that relations would continue. However, the Shah's increasingly erratic behavior and human rights complaints began to undermine the support for the relationship. After Nixon's resignation, the camp loyal to the Shah in D.C. would quickly shrink.

That same year, oil prices had skyrocketed forcing the US toward a recession. The recent Tehran Oil Agreement planned on increasing the price even further, possibly quadrupling the price over the next year. Treasury Secretary William Simon, hoping to avoid the crisis, pleaded with Nixon before his resignation and then Ford that to avert the crisis they needed to request a

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<sup>16</sup>Cottom, *Iran and the United States*, 128-129.

<sup>17</sup> William A. Dorman and Mansour Farhang, *The U.S. Press and Iran: Foreign Policy and the Journalism of Deference* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987): 89-90.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

drop in the price of oil from the Shah. Instead of considering a compromise, the Shah steadfastly refused any talks. When the idea was brought forth that the Saudis were willing to auction off oil to drop global prices, the Shah immediately declared he would reduce oil production to keep prices in place.<sup>19</sup> After years of blank checks for arms in return for oil, the Shah was now purposefully keeping oil prices up for his own gain despite the potential economic crisis on the international stage.

The Shah was betting on himself in a dangerous game. In order for his country to continue building at a rapid pace they needed the profit from oil sales. He was so sure of his plan that the Shah never considered the possibility that the West would turn away from Iran for oil primacy in the region. The dependency on Iran to stabilize the region in the 60s and 70s had bolstered the Shah's confidence to make bold moves and virtually pin his Western allies into a corner.

The move was foolhardy. Prices were rising so high that an energy crisis loomed for the world. In 1977 the Shah was asking for another 20-25% jump in prices and the West became desperate.<sup>20</sup> By Secretary Simon's numbers the US government would sink into a recession. Britain was still recovering from its economic turmoil. Progress against communist activities in Italy and Portugal would be lost as the pro-West governments would be unable to economically sustain themselves. Something had to give, and it was clear the Shah would not be the one to budge.

Fearing an international crisis, the Saudis came to Ford in the eleventh hour to discuss a deal that would torpedo Iran's oil plan. With the next OPEC meeting in 1976 set in Doha, Qatar, the Saudis promised to fight the proposed rates. When OPEC tried to raise prices 15%, the Saudis fired back that they would increase their own output to ensure that prices were not raised any more than 10%.<sup>21</sup> With Ford on his way out of office, the gesture was meant to catch the attention of President Jimmy Carter. The Saudis' power grab succeeded. As a direct result of the Doha meetings, the Saudis emerged as the new Gulf ally for oil, offering far more forgiving rates to the Western powers. Iran was no longer the chief supplier.

While preventing an economic crisis was a victory, no one in the Ford administration had considered what effect the decrease in oil prices would have on Iran. In fact, the oil crisis created a situation where Ford and the Shah became antagonistic to one another. While Ford argued against the oil policies, the Shah fired back that the U.S. was purposely inflating the prices on their arms to offset oil costs. The Shah even wrote one final retort to Ford that was not delivered until it was official he would be out of office.<sup>22</sup>

Damaged relations with the U.S. were not the only consequence. With the chief supplier of oil to the West shifting to the Saudis, Iran's oil revenue dried up. The money needed to offset the Shah's spending ceased to exist and had immediate consequences. Iran, which had been importing the majority of its food, was no longer able to afford such luxuries. By the mid-1970s 40% of Iran's population was undernourished.<sup>23</sup> Infrastructure as a whole began to suffer. In Tehran alone streets were routinely jammed with traffic. Tower blocks were overcrowded as

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<sup>19</sup> Andrew Scott Cooper, "Showdown at Doha: The Secret Oil Deal That Helped Sink the Shah of Iran," *Middle East Journal* 62, no. 4 (2008): 571.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 578.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 587.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 583.

<sup>23</sup> Mark Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah: The First Battle in the West's War with Militant Islam* (London: Atlantic Press, 2007), 119.

more people poured into the city looking for work. It became normal for power to go out in four hour increments.<sup>24</sup>

Rather than acclimating to the current state of affairs, the Shah became ever more paranoid. Countless protests and strikes crippled the country. Rather than reform, the Shah utilized the SAVAK and the military to put down his own people. He lost the support of the local population and fell out of favor with the Shi'a religious leaders for what they perceived to be his regime circumventing Islamic culture at the behest of Western alliances.<sup>25</sup> As tensions continued to rise around the country, the Shah went into self-exile at the behest of his Prime Minister and staff in January of 1979. Ayatollah Khomeini was allowed to return that next month, and the collapse of the Pahlavi dynasty was complete.

### No Good Option

In a response to an article written by Walter Meade decades later, President Carter stated that “the Fall of the Shah was seen as unpredictable” and that when he assumed office “all...actions planned, or announced, [were in place] before I took the oath of office.”<sup>26</sup> When Carter took office in January of 1977, he inherited a longtime ally in Iran with whom relations were souring. Decades of goodwill were quickly evaporating after the events of Doha, countless human rights complaints at the hands of the SAVAK, and also the Shah's personal threats to turn to the Soviets if the Americans were not willing to acquiesce to his demands.

Carter was in between a rock and a hard place. Initially, his plan in Iran was to make it possible for the Shah to retain his leadership by urging him to adopt political reforms to prevent him from losing power. Much like Nixon though, Carter did not want to intervene as he felt it was the Iranians, and the Shah's responsibility, to get their affairs in order. He did not want to undermine the Shah, but he did not want to assist him either.

While there was anti-American sentiment present in Iran, most Iranians hoped Carter, who championed human rights, would be able to ease the Shah's ruthless methods. It was not to be though as Carter catered his human rights policies around the Shah.<sup>27</sup> In private, Carter admitted to wanting to take the Shah “down a notch”, but much like the administrations before him, geopolitical conditions and previous deals dictated the tone Carter could take. His hands were tied. The Shah was still the preferred ally in terms of keeping stability in the Gulf.

Perhaps inaction with the Shah was the worst option they could have chosen. As civil unrest continued to dwindle the Shah's control over his country, he turned to America for aid in any form. Carter and his staff, looking to salvage what they could of their ally's power, saw only two basic options: political reforms and liberalizations to appease the Shah's opponents or a violent military crackdown.<sup>28</sup> National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski favored the crackdown while Carter opposed it. Carter also opposed any reforms that may undermine the Shah. Falling short of explicit instructions, Carter advised the Shah to reconsider his policies in an effort to ease tensions and allow him a chance to regroup. Instead, the Shah went into self-exile not long after.

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<sup>24</sup> Sandbrook, “After the Revolution,” 32.

<sup>25</sup> William O. Beeman, *The “Great Satan” vs. the “Mad Mullahs”*: How the United States and Iran Demonize Each Other (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 126.

<sup>26</sup> Jimmy Carter, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Walter Russell Mead, “President Carter's Rebuttal,” *Foreign Policy* 178 (2010): 10.

<sup>27</sup> Moens, “Carters Advisers,” 214-215.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

A few short months later in October, Carter, at the urging of Kissinger, reluctantly granted the Shah entry to America to receive medical treatment in New York. What was supposed to be a brief stint for medical care sparked immediate outrage from the new Iranian government headed by Khomeini. In their eyes, America was now harboring the man who had terrorized Iran for decades. His very presence in America aided the perception that America was constantly meddling in Iranian affairs. After all, the main gate of the US embassy in Tehran was named after Kermit Roosevelt, the man who directed Operation Ajax in the 1953 coup.<sup>29</sup> It was a mockery of Iran's sovereignty as was the Shah's admittance. That same month, the embassy was overrun by Iranian college students in a spontaneous protest. Perhaps realizing they had gotten themselves in over their head, what followed was the prolonged hostage crises of 1979.

The standoff brought Carter's political career to an end. Rather than placing political aspirations in front of the lives of Americans in captivity, Carter purposely chose a non-violent course. He knew that any military action against the Iranians initially would ensure that all the hostages would die. It wasn't until six months into the crises that Carter finally approved a rescue attempt in Operation Eagle Claw which was a devastating failure, not only for him, but U.S. prestige worldwide.

The Iranians maintained that they would swap the hostages for the Shah. Still bound to him by previous administrations loyalty, Carter could not agree to such a deal. American public opinion of his handling of the crises plummeted. Protesters held signs in front of the White House reading, "Keep the Shah, Send Them Carter!"<sup>30</sup> The U.S. media was equally unforgiving as they consistently painted Carter as being incompetent and unwilling to bring the hostages home. It wasn't until Ronald Reagan was inaugurated in 1980 that the hostages were finally released after nearly 450 days. What remained was the destruction of U.S.-Iran relations and the emergence of a new chapter between the U.S. and the new Islamic Republic of Iran.

## **Conclusion**

The Hostage Crises of 1979 was not only the culmination of U.S.-Iran relations, but also ushered in the age of radical Islam. What followed between the two countries amounted to stony silence broken only when one accused the other of crimes against the other. Given his personality, it is possible that the Shah was always meant to fail. The greater sin is that the U.S. ignored the signs that he would, and continuously prompted him up as the beacon of Western influence in the Middle East through nearly five presidential administrations. Rather than garnering support with the Iranian people by alleviating the Shah's harsh policies, they empowered him to make them worse and gamble their economic development on hiked oil prices. President Carter inherited a situation that was only going to erupt instead of improve under his watch. In many ways, the sins of the United States' past with the '53 coup came back to haunt them again in '79.

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<sup>29</sup> Bowden, *Guests*, 6.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.