

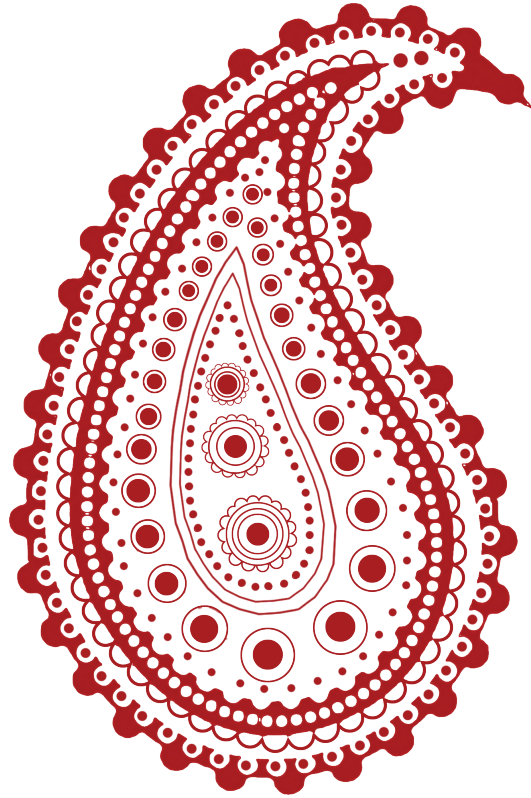
DĀNESH

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

Published under the auspices of the OU Iranian Studies Program, the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, the Department of International and Area Studies, and the College of International Studies at the University of Oklahoma.

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

Unlikely Compromise: A History of the Iran-United States Claims Tribunal, 1981-2015

Patrick Weigant

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The Iran-United States Claims Tribunal was one of the twentieth century's most important tribunals of international arbitration.¹ Furthermore, it stood apart from the likes of the arbitral tribunals following the peace settlements of WWII, in that the parties involved were two hostile states without diplomatic ties.² To illustrate the Iran-United States Claims Tribunal's influential place in international law and politics this paper will be broken up into three major sections. First, will be a recount and explanation of how and why the Claims Tribunal came into existence. Second, the internal structuring and the jurisdiction of the Claims Tribunal will be described and explained. Finally, this paper will provide a summary of the Claims Tribunal's history of operations, with case studies to display how the Tribunal operates and comes to different decisions. By doing so, this paper will show how even two countries that seemingly hate each other can still come to compromising agreements in dire circumstances.

Origins of the Crisis

By January of 1979, there only remained around 2,000 U.S. citizens in Iran, drastically down from the 45,000 military advisors, engineers, advisory personnel, businessmen, and family members who had once lived in the country.³ For a quarter of century, the U.S. had intensely cultivated economic and military relations with the Iranian Imperial Government, and as a result the U.S. and its citizens had become the target of much of the Islamic revolutionaries' rage. Therefore, many U.S. citizens, upon leaving the increasingly inhospitable country, were pressured by Revolutionary Guards to leave behind substantial property and assets in Iran.⁴

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¹ Wayne Mapp, *The Iran-United States Claims Tribunal: The First Ten Years 1981-1991* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), xii.

² Kenneth Katzman, "Iran: US Policy and Options," in *Iran: Outlaw, Outcast or Normal Country?*, ed. Albert Benliot (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2001), 64-66.

³ Mapp, *Iran-US Claims Tribunal*, 3.

⁴ Katzman, "Iran: US Policy," 59-65.

More importantly, following the success of the Islamic Revolution in February, 1979, the new government quickly canceled a significant amount of large defense contracts with the U.S. and curtailed other purchases as well. However, the major reorganizing of Iran's economy via nationalization would not begin until June, becoming official with the national referendum for a new Constitution in December of the same year.⁵ Article 44 of the new Constitution stated:

The economic structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran is composed of three sectors — governmental, co-operative and private — which shall be stabilized by systematic and sound planning. The governmental sector shall consist of all major industries; foreign trade; large mines; banking; insurance; production of power; dams and large irrigation systems; radio and television; postal, telephone and telegram systems; transportation by air, land and sea; railroads; and the like which shall be publicly owned and administered by the Government.⁶

This drastic restricting of the Iranian economy affected both Iranian and foreign-owned enterprises, and as a result firms owned both wholly and partially by U.S. citizens came under the control of the Iranian government. Furthermore, all contracts with U.S. companies were canceled or prevented from being acted upon in the future by their new governmental management.⁷ Millions of dollars that belonged or were owed to U.S. citizens were simply seized by the new government, with no compensation offered. The severity and intensity of this already complicated situation heightened when on November 4th, 1979 militants stormed the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, and took prisoner sixty-one U.S. diplomatic personnel.⁸ On the following day, Ayatollah Khomeini endorsed this act. It was an unprecedented defiance of international law by the Iranian government, and signaled the crisis would not be quickly resolved.⁹ No one, especially those who lost assets, could now assume that the revolutionary fervor would give way to moderate reasoning.

U.S. Appeal to the International Court of Justice

In response to the hostage crisis, the U.S. government attempted to settle the matter through the International Court of Justice. The U.S. applied to the Court for a ruling that the seizure of the embassy and the hostages was in direct violation to the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, the 1973 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes against Internationally Protected Persons, the 1955 Treaty of Amity, Economic and Consular Rights between the U.S. and Iran, the United Nations Charter, and customary international law. Despite Iran's letter to the Court stating that the actions were within their national sovereignty, the Court handed down a unanimous judgment in December of

⁵ Mapp, *Iran-US Claims Tribunal*, 3-4.

⁶ Changiz Vafai, trans., "Iran," in *Constitutions of the World* (New York: Oceana, 1980).

⁷ Mapp, *Iran-US Claims Tribunal*, 4.

⁸ Shireen Hunter, *Iran and the World* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 56.

⁹ Mapp, *Iran-US Claims Tribunal*, 5.

1979 that agreed with the charges brought against Iran by the U.S., and called on Iran to release to the U.S. the hostages and its property.¹⁰

Iran did not comply. In May of 1980, the Court reiterated its previous judgment and found Iran guilty of all charges. The Court did not find acceptable Iran's argument that alleged U.S. involvement in the 1953 coup d'état, which restored the Shah to power, justified their actions. This was because diplomatic law already provided the prescribed actions of declaring individuals *persona non grata*, cutting off diplomatic relations, and ordering the immediate closure of the offending mission by the sending state.¹¹

As a result, the Court determined unanimously that Iran must release the hostages. By majority decisions, the Court ruled that Iran was obligated to make reparations to the U.S.¹² This ruling had no immediate impact, but they would provide legal precedent for later negotiations. Instead it would require other actions, both on part of the U.S. and of Iran, before any real progress could be made.

U.S. Economic Pressure

Even by November 12th, 1979, it had become clear to the U.S. that diplomatic pressure alone would not produce a quick end to the hostage crisis. For this reason, President Jimmy Carter ordered all oil purchases from Iran to cease. In response, the acting Foreign Minister of Iran, Abol Hassan Bani-Sadr, indicated Iran would remove all of its assets from U.S. banks.¹³ However, President Carter beat them to the punch by ordering that all Iranian bank accounts in U.S. banks be frozen, regardless of which country the funds were actually located in, affecting some \$12 billion.¹⁴ Furthermore, in April 1980, as the condition deepened, two more Executive Orders blocked all commerce and travel between the countries with exceptions for food, medical supplies and journalists.^{15,16}

Further intensifying the economic pressure on Iran, litigation for damages by private claimants against Iran had been filed in U.S. courts almost immediately after nationalization.¹⁷ On November 26th, 1979, the Treasury was given the authority to allow these claims to move forward and affect compensation to claimants with Iranian assets. Thus, the U.S. found its source of real leverage against Iran, by not only withholding their money, but also threatening to disperse it among U.S. citizens¹⁸

Additional Developments in Iran

By April of 1980, the U.S. had become convinced that diplomatic means would not free the hostages in a timely manner, and a military contingency plan was put into action. However, one day after its commencement, the mission was aborted as the result of

¹⁰ Ibid., 7-9.

¹¹ Mapp, *Iran-US Claims Tribunal*, 11.

¹² Ibid., 10.

¹³ Ibid., 6.

¹⁴ Exec. Order No. 12,170,44 FR 65729,3 C.F.R. (14 November 1979).

¹⁵ Exec. Order No. 12,205,45 FR 24099,3 C.F.R. (7 April 1980).

¹⁶ Exec. Order No. 12,211,45 FR 26685,3 C.F.R. (17 April 1980).

¹⁷ Mapp, *Iran-US Claims Tribunal*, 4.

¹⁸ Ibid, 6-7 and 21-22.

equipment failures.¹⁹ This utter failure was most likely, in the end, fortunate for the U.S. This is because, despite its characterization as a rescue mission and not a military operation, the plan would have likely resulted in casualties and damage to Iranian property disproportionate to the threat faced by the U.S. hostages. Thus, the U.S. would have been in violation of the rules of jus ad bellum as laid down by Articles 2(4), 33, and 51 of the U.N. Charter and customary international law.²⁰ The U.S. could have lost not only the lives of many, if not all, of the hostages during the rescue attempt (as the inherent ineptitude of the mission leads one to assume would have happened), but also an overwhelming legal high ground from which a peaceful end might be possible.

This failed operation certainly helped stall developments toward negotiations. However, Iran's post-revolution political situation had also not settled enough until August of 1980, when the Majles was able to nominate a speaker and approve the appointment of a Prime Minister and Cabinet. This was especially important, as Ayatollah Khomeini had already given the Majles authority to negotiate with the U.S. over the hostages.²¹ However, perhaps nothing pushed Iran to the negotiation table as much as Iraq's invasion the following month. Iran now saw that it was isolated from the international community, was without large swaths of its assets and economic capabilities needed to wage war, and the U.S. was looking to soon elect a more hawkish president.²² An amicable and hasty end to the hostage crisis was now of grave importance to both sides.

First Steps Toward Negotiation

In September 1980, Ayatollah Khomeini stated that the hostages could be released if certain conditions were met. As a result of this, the Majles established a commission to set out the conditions for the hostages' release. In a display of their urgency in the matter, even though the country was preoccupied with the Iraq war, the commission reported their recommendations during the last week of October. By November 2nd, the Majles had already adopted the recommended demands to the U.S., known as the Majles Resolution.²³

The Majles Resolution had four conditions for the U.S. to fulfill to secure the release of the hostages:

1. A pledge not to interfere in the affairs of Iran.
2. That the Freeze on Iranian assets should be lifted.
3. The cancellation of all economic sanctions against Iran, and the cancellation of all claims against Iran, and the assumption of financial responsibility for claims against Iran.
4. The return to Iran of the assets of the Shah and his close relatives.²⁴

¹⁹ Katzman, "Iran: US Policy," 61.

²⁰ Mapp, *Iran-US Claims Tribunal*, 10-11.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²² Hunter, *Iran and the World*, 104-107.

²³ Mapp, *Iran-US Claims Tribunal*, 11-13.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

Once these conditions were met, the hostages would be released, if they were not they would be tried as spies. However, the hostages were finally transferred from the militants to the government. As well, the Iranian Prime Minister stipulated that Algeria would serve as intermediary between the two. The U.S. quickly let it be known that they viewed this as a positive step and basis for negotiations, and immediately sent Secretary of State Christopher to Algeria.²⁵

While the U.S. accepted the Majles Resolution in principle, the U.S. government still had certain concerns. The U.S. would not accept financial responsibility for claims against Iran, and instead required an international claims tribunal. Furthermore, all the U.S. would do in regards to the Shah's assets was facilitate litigation by the government of Iran in U.S. courts for the assets' recovery. After intense negotiations in Algeria during November and December of 1980, the Iranian government began to accept the modifications to the Resolution. Soon, the matter was being formulated as a declaration of the Algerian government to which each side would adhere.²⁶ The Majles agreed to what would be known as the Algiers Declarations on January 14th, 1981, and President Carter implemented it in the U.S. on January 19th with the help of Executive orders. After 444 days, and 30 minutes after Ronald Reagan assumed office, the hostage crisis was over.²⁷²⁸

General Declaration

The Algiers Declarations were made of two declarations with three additional supplementary agreements to help implement the two declarations. The first agreement was an "undertaking" by Iran and the U.S. to the Declarations made by Algeria, and the other two settle the role of escrow agents for the two parties.²⁹

Of the two actual declarations, the first was the General Declaration, which provided the primary basis for the entirety of the declarations, broken down into four major points. In its preamble, it was established that Iran and the U.S. were not able to deal directly with one another, and while the Majles Resolution was its basis, it also reflected the concerns of the U.S. Government. The first point took the form of a pledge by the U.S. Government not to interfere directly or indirectly, militarily or politically in the internal affairs of Iran.³⁰

Points two and three cover the return of Iranian assets and the settlement of U.S. claims. First, it was established that there would be an independent central bank during the arbitration, with the Bank of England being decided on later.³¹ Paragraph three was perhaps the most important of the entire declaration, as it explicitly tied the transfer of Iranian assets to the safe release of the hostages.³² In theory, this was what would require

²⁵ Mapp, *Iran-US Claims Tribunal*, 12.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

²⁷ Katzman, "Iran: US Policy," 64.

²⁸ Mapp, *Iran-US Claims Tribunal*, 13.

²⁹ Government of the Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria, *The General Declaration* (Algiers: 1981), 3, <http://www.iusct.net/General%20Documents/1-General%20Declaration%E2%80%8E.pdf> (accessed: November 28, 2015).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Mapp, *Iran-US Claims Tribunal*, 14.

³² Algeria, *The General Declaration*, 4.

both sides to carry out their side of the promise. After this, the agreement specified the ways Iranian assets would be returned and where they would be held after (Iran itself, the Banque Centrale d'Algerie the Bank of England etc.).³³ By keeping some of the money out of Iranian hands, Iran would have a reason to stay committed to the arbitration process.

It was then required of the U.S. to revoke its trade sanctions against Iran, agree to withdraw its claims before the International Court of Justice, and bar itself and its citizens from raising claims related to the hostage crisis or any popular movements during the Islamic Revolution that were not the act of the Government of Iran.³⁴ While this does not prevent the U.S. from imposing later sanctions or raising later claims, it did provide the fledgling Islamic Republic a very significant shield from economic pressure and international scrutiny at vulnerable time in its history.

The final point referred to the requirement in the Majles Resolution for the return of the Shah's Assets to Iran. As previously stated, the U.S. would not do this outright, and would instead settle it in U.S. courts. However, paragraph fourteen removed the principle of sovereign immunity for the Shah and his heirs in the matter, fifteen guaranteed the U.S. would enforce its courts' rulings, and sixteen established that any disputes over said rulings would be resolved by the Claims Tribunal.³⁵ In addition, at the end of the declaration it also stated that any and all dispute over the obligations of the General Declaration would be solved in the Claims Tribunal, essentially establishing that it will be a self-contained system.³⁶

The Claims Settlement Declaration

As its title suggested, the second part of the Algiers Declarations called for the creation the actual Iran-United States Claims Tribunal. In its first Article, the Declaration established the precedent that Iran and the U.S. would help promote the settlement of any claims under the jurisdiction of the Tribunal.³⁷ This jurisdiction was established in Article II and fell into three major categories.

The first category of jurisdiction encompassed claims from citizens of Iran against the U.S. Government, as well as U.S. citizens against the Government of Iran. This, however, was limited to debts, contracts, including transactions subject to letters of credit or bank guarantees, expropriations and other measures affecting property rights, all of which had to be outstanding at the time of the agreement.³⁸ This essentially made sure that the Claims Tribunal did not come into conflict with domestic legal systems, by allowing citizens to bring claims against their own governments. The second category of jurisdiction covered claims of one state against the other over contractual agreements for

³³ Ibid., 4-6.

³⁴ Ibid., 6-7.

³⁵ Ibid., 7-8.

³⁶ Ibid., 8.

³⁷ Government of the Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria, *The Claims Settlement Declaration* (Algiers: 1981), 9, <http://www.iusct.net/General%20Documents/2Claims%20Settlement%20Declaration.pdf> (accessed: November 28, 2015).

³⁸ Algeria, *The Claims Settlement Declaration*, 9.

the purchase and sale of goods and services.³⁹ Thus, the final category of jurisdiction, of course, covers the interpretation and performance of the General Declaration.⁴⁰

Structure of the Iran-United States Claims Tribunal

On the actual structure of the Tribunal, Article III established that it will have nine members, with the possibility of higher multiples of three, though this would not be the case.⁴¹ Each state would appoint three judges. These six would then appoint three more from neutral states. Cases could be heard by three members, with the same division as above, or the whole tribunal. While all three judges are assumed to make unbiased opinion, the politically charged nature of the situation certainly made the third judges the most important in the majority of cases. Furthermore, Article III stipulated these appointments and the general conduct of the Claims Tribunal would follow the arbitration rules of the UN Commission on International Trade Law, a factor that in time would help set an extremely important precedent for the Claims Tribunal.⁴² Also, a one-year statute of limitations was put in place stating all claims would have to be filed within a year of the agreement entering force, the requirements for this being laid out in Article VIII, on January 19th, 1982.⁴³ This helped set some scope for the Tribunal, and prevented it from merely becoming a venue for Iran and the U.S. leveling any and all complaints against each other.

Logistical considerations were covered in Article VI: that the Tribunal shall be at The Hague, that each government shall appoint an agent to represent it, and that costs for its operations would be equally covered by both governments.⁴⁴ This of course helps illustrate that the Claims Tribunal operated at the highest levels of international law. Article IV established that all rulings were final and there was no appeal process.⁴⁵ Article V, however, in contrast to such definitiveness, gave wide discretion to which laws were applicable in the Tribunal stating:

The Tribunal shall decide all cases on the basis of respect for law, applying such choice of law rules and principles of commercial and international law as the Tribunal determines to be applicable, taking into account relevant usages of the trade, contract provisions and changed circumstances.⁴⁶

Analysis of the Iran-United States Claims Tribunal

While most international arbitral tribunals were founded on an ad hoc basis and dealt with one subject or deal out a lump sum, the Iran-United States Claims Tribunal has had

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁴¹ Mapp, *Iran-US Claims Tribunal*, 18.

⁴² Algeria, *The Claims Settlement Declaration*, 10.

⁴³ Ibid., 10 and 12.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 11.

to deal with over 4,000 individual claims.⁴⁷ As such, the Tribunal was set up as its own court system, with functions such as a Secretariat and an extensive and sophisticated registry. As a further measure to expedite the hearings, almost all arguments are presented in writing, with only a few days of oral arguments for multi-million dollar claims, and claims under \$250,000 are presented by the citizens' government.⁴⁸

Yet, nearly 35 years later, according to the Tribunal's official website, several large and complex cases between the governments of Iran and the U.S. are still on its docket. This is because they mostly cover non-performances by the U.S. on such things as not delivering military hardware Iran paid for before the Revolution.⁴⁹ Complicated and charged subject matters such as this could, especially in the beginning, stall the process and cause politically maneuvering to take precedence over legal proceedings. This was most common in relation to the appointment and actions of third party arbitrators.

The most famous examples of this surround Judge Nils Mangard of Sweden. Within six months of the appointment of the first neutral arbitrators, Iran argued that Judge Mangard was unqualified to serve fairly on the Claims Tribunal because of comments he had allegedly made condemning executions carried out by the Government of Iran.⁵⁰ However, the Tribunal ruled against this, on the grounds that Iran did not have enough hard evidence, nor did Iran follow the UNCITRAL protocol for requesting disbarment. This in turn set a positive precedent that the proceedings (and thus integrity) of the Claims Tribunal could not be undermined by undue weight being given to extrajudicial political actions.⁵¹

However, this did not mean that such actions would not take place, or even that Judge Mangard would not be involved again. Perhaps in response to two years of Mangard's perceived favor of U.S. interests, Judges Mahmoud Kashani and Shafei Shafeiei assaulted Judge Mangard as he entered the Claims Tribunal on 3 September 1984.⁵² Instead of sending the Tribunal into chaos, the Iranian government quickly appointed two new judges, and the matter did not go any further. It could be argued that this event is what spurred the Tribunal into the co-operation and expediency not seen in the first period of its existence. Instead of trying to unreasonably defend its judges' actions, Iran demonstrated that now it was not only just willing to, but also wanted to play by the rules and make the Claims Tribunal a viable route.⁵³

This is incredibly important because, although both countries were officially bound to partake in the Claims Tribunal, international law is a horizontal. This means that all laws and treaties essentially require a country's continual consent to stay in effect. For example, if Iran became angered by a series of adverse outcomes it could halt participation, and refuse to replenish the escrow account to avoid further losses. As well, if the U.S. came to view the Claims Tribunal as a poor substitute for domestic courts, it

⁴⁷ Katzman, "Iran: US Policy," 65.

⁴⁸ Mapp, *Iran-US Claims Tribunal*, 19 and 25-32.

⁴⁹ Katzman, "Iran: US Policy," 65.

⁵⁰ Rahmatullah Khan, *The Iran-United States Claims Tribunal: Controversies, Cases and Contribution* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1990), 65-71.

⁵¹ Mapp, *Iran-US Claims Tribunal*, 47.

⁵² Khan, *Controversies, Cases and Contribution*, 72.

⁵³ Mapp, *Iran-US Claims Tribunal*, 52.

could find ways to do the same.⁵⁴ However, while there was cooperation, this in no way means that there was a lack of contention between these two antagonistic countries. To demonstrate this, three cases will be examined of varying size and complexity

Case Study: Iran vs. U.S.

In line with keeping both sides involved, the most recent ruling and award to be given by the Claims tribunal was as recent as July 2nd, 2014. In it, Iran was the claimant with the U.S. as respondent. Essentially, Iran successfully argued that in 1981 a variety of cases including that of a New York law firm were awarded money from the escrow fund by U.S. courts. The U.S. attempted to argue that the case did not fall under the jurisdiction of the Tribunal. This, however, was not found to be the case, and for failing to uphold Executive Order 12294 per the requirements of the Algiers Declarations, the U.S. had to pay damages with interest to Iran.⁵⁵ The incredibly drawn out nature of this case helps to display the especially complicated and charged nature of many of the claims between the two Governments. However, while all claims by individuals have now been settled, many of those cases too were marked by intense contention and longevity.

Case Study: Ebrahimi vs. Iran

In 1994 the joint claim of siblings Ms. Shahin, Ms. Cecilia, and Ms. Christina Ebrahimi was finally settled. Their father, Ali Ebrahimi, was an Iranian citizen, but because their mother Cecilia Louise DeFreis was a U.S. citizen, as were the three sisters. As U.S. citizens they were seeking compensation for the 19% stock in the nationalized construction company, Gostareh Maskan Company, which their father had bought in their names. In this case, Iran's primary defense was that as minors during the time in question, the money belonged to their father, an Iranian citizen, taking the case out of Tribunal jurisdiction. This was not found and the sisters were awarded over \$5 million plus interest, and Iran was required to pay an additional \$50,000 for their arbitration fees. Though drawn out over decades, the Ebrahimi sisters finally received justice, especially considering the original investment was estimated at \$20,000.⁵⁶ This is an example of Tribunal working (eventually) exactly the way it should for people who lost assets in the revolution. However, in other cases the strict guidelines for jurisdiction could work against an individual.

Case Study: Etezadi vs. Iran

In this case, also settled in 1994, the primary claimant was Mrs. Catherine Etezadi, a U.S. citizen who married Hooshang Etezadi, an Iranian citizen, in Maryland in May, 1955. Over the course of their marriage, the couple and their children split their time between California and Tehran. During their time in Iran, they invested in a plastic company, land, and had equity in a condominium. Furthermore, Mr. Etezadi served in the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1951 to 1974, qualifying for a pension. For the sake of convenience, all of their dealings in Iran were placed under Mr. Etezadi's name,

⁵⁴ Khan, *Controversies, Cases and Contribution*, 73.

⁵⁵ *Iran vs. the US*, Iran-U.S. Claims Tribunal, NO. 602-A15 (IV)/A24-FT (2014).

⁵⁶ "Ebrahimi vs. Iran," in *30 Iran-U.S. C.T.R.*, ed. Edward Helgeson (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 171-236.

with a verbal understanding that the spouses shared their capital 50/50. However, as the Tribunal has no jurisdiction for a claim against one's own country of citizenship, Mr. Etezadi's involvement in the hearing was barred. As a result, when Mrs. Etezadi attempted to claim her half of the \$629,393.42 of lost assets, the claim was dismissed on lack of evidence.⁵⁷ This case clearly illustrates that while the Tribunal does a lot of good, it cannot right every wrong, especially for Iranian citizens and their families now in the U.S.. However, sticking to its principles of doing things judicially, and not from emotion, the Tribunal has continually kept both sides involved so at least most if not all can receive the justice they deserve.

Conclusion

The Iran-United States Claims Tribunal was born out of necessity after an unprecedented violation of international law. Yet, as its development and these individual cases show, somehow, this egregious violation of international laws and human rights allowed for countless other wrongs to be settled, in the most fair and impartial manner possible. Instead of differing opinions derailing the Claims Tribunal (as can often be the case in similar systems), the Tribunal's handling of itself and of controversies galvanized both Iran's and the U.S.'s faith in it.

As a result, the two countries were able to not only solve the immediate problem of the hostage crisis in a peaceful and compromising manner, but to continue to work together, if through intermediaries, to settle thousands of other disputes. Furthermore, the fact that this all happened over nearly four decades in which each government has used nearly every other possible avenue to voice their distaste or even outright hatred for the other, makes the Iran-U.S. Claims Tribunal that much more surprising and inspiring. It shows two countries do not have to agree with each other on everything to compromise and work towards something they can both agree on, given the right willingness and circumstance. A lesson that has once again become especially important to Iran and the U.S., as they seek to achieve some sort of positive outcome from their nuclear negotiations.

⁵⁷ "Etezadi vs. Iran" in *30 Iran-U.S. C.T.R.*, ed. Edward Helgeson (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 23-44.

Unintended Consequences: The Impact of Sanctions on the Iranian Pharmaceutical Industry

Elizabeth Vernon

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The United States first imposed sanctions on Iran after a breakdown in diplomatic relations following the end of the 1979 Iranian hostage crisis. Many have debated whether these sanctions have had an actual effect on the Iranian government. While the United States originally imposed unilateral sanctions on Iran, it later collaborated with the European Union and United Nations to put multilateral sanctions on Iran with better success. But while the U.S. has been targeting the Iranian government, these sanctions have also had an impact on the Iranian citizens. While sanctions have been intended to pressure the government to stop or reduce enrichment of uranium, they have also had an impact on the population, particularly in the medical arena. Although the US allows for some exceptions to the sanctions in order to provide Iran with the necessary products for the pharmaceutical and medical industries, sanctions still have a direct impact on patients. As shown by trends in the pharmaceutical industry and by the failed Vienna Agreement in 2009, intended to discuss a fuel swap for the Tehran Research Reactor, the required treatment for about 850,000 patients went unmet.¹

One must wonder if sanctions, particularly under the Obama administration, have had their intended effect on the Iranian government or if they have had a greater impact on the Iranian population. Only after examining the histories of the Iranian pharmaceutical industry, the sanctions on Iran, and the impact of sanctions on the industry today can we determine how sanctions have actually affected the Iranian population.

Beginnings of the Iranian Pharmaceutical Industry

Pharmaceutical practices in Iran can be traced back more than 3000 years. Iranians have had a vast knowledge not only of the medicinal value of herbs but of food and different minerals.² One of the earliest records of pharmaceutical practices in Iran was a Zoroastrian text,

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¹ Trita Parsi, *A Single Roll of the Dice: Obama's Diplomacy with Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 115.

² Manizeh Abdollahi and Ehya Amalsaleh, "The History of First Modern Pharmacies Founded in Iran," *Revue d'Histoire de la Pharmacie* (N.D.), 3-4.

which discussed the health benefits of different herbs and plants.³ There are also records of various pharmacies from 1502-1722.⁴ These early establishments ultimately paved the way for future pharmacies.

The first modern pharmacy in Iran was established about 100 years ago in Tehran by German, French, and Austrian pharmacists. In 1851, Amir Kabir founded Dar al-Funun, a science university where pharmacology was taught.⁵ In order to establish the university, the Amir sent a special representative, John Daud Khan, to Vienna to gather a group of professors to teach in the university. One of these men was Dr. Jacob Edward Polak, an Austrian who ultimately taught medicine and surgery at Dar al-Funun. Polak also worked at the first modern hospital in Tehran and educated Europeans about Iran.⁶ Polak is considered to be highly influential in the history of Iranian medicine and is praised for his contributions to the industry. Following the establishment of Dar al-Funun, the first pharmaceutical company, Abidi, was established in 1946, paving the way for further advancement of the pharmaceutical industry.⁷

Nationalization and the Pharmaceutical Industry

In 1951, Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh successfully nationalized the oil industry in Iran. Following Mossadegh's removal from power, the concept of nationalization lived on in Iran and this sentiment carried over to the pharmaceutical industry, which was nationalized after the 1979 Revolution. Abbas Kebriaeezadeh of the Tehran University of Medical Science noted that after the revolution, "two major motions caused fundamental changes: nationalization of the pharmaceutical industries and the generic scheme."⁸ Hashemi-Meshkini et al. note that the generic scheme employed by the Iranian government required all pharmaceutical companies to "produce and market their products only by generic names and with a unique price determined by government for the same products of all companies."⁹ The generic scheme helped to nationalize the industry and ultimately place it under the control of the Iranian government. By requiring that all pharmaceuticals were a generic brand and by setting a price for these products, the government successfully nationalized the industry.

It should also be noted that Iran adopted a second policy on the generic scheme in 2000. While the generic scheme made a positive contribution to the pharmaceutical industry, Hashemi-Meshkini et. al argue that the brand-generic scheme did not have a positive impact. Although implementing the generic scheme, in which companies sold a certain brand of a product, was a good concept, the brand-generic scheme ultimately failed. This failure was attributed to outside

³ Mohammad-Hossien Azizi, M.D., "Dr Jacob Eduard Polak (1818-1891): The Pioneer of Modern Medicine in Iran," *Archives of Iranian Medicine* 8, no. 2 (2005): 151-152.

⁴ Abdollahi & Amalsaleh, "History," 3-4.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Mohammad Hossien Azizi, "Dr. Jakob Eduard Polak," 151-152.

⁷ Abbas Kebriaeezadeh, "Trend Analysis of the Pharmaceutical Market in Iran; 1997–2010; Policy Implications for Developing Countries," *DARU Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences* (28 June 2013): 1, (accessed: November 15, 2015, <http://www.darujps.com/content/pdf/2008-2231-21-52.pdf>.)

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Amir Hashemi-Meshkini, Mehdi Varmaghani, Mehdi Yousefi, Saeed Yaghoubifard, Hedieh-Sadat Zekri, Shekoufeh Nikfar, and Abbas Kebriaeezadeh, "From Generic Scheme to Brand-Generic Scheme: Have New Policy Influenced the Efficiency of Iranian Pharmaceutical Companies?" *Journal of Research in Pharmacy Practice* 3, no. 3 (2014): 88.

factors, such as the lack of international companies in Iran as well as the pricing policy.¹⁰ In more recent years, the pharmaceutical industry has shifted towards privatization rather than nationalization.¹¹ Iran now subsidizes medication, which helps to reduce the cost of medical treatments for its citizens. One may wonder how it affords to do so under international sanctions. Ultimately, the Persian state has no other choice than to subsidize goods such as medication, oil, and food, as many of its citizens would be otherwise unable to afford these products.

Abdol Majid Cheraghali of the Iranian Journal of Pharmaceutical Research noted that, “over the past decades, the government subsidized local production of medicines in order to increase the availability and affordability of the medicines... the government pays direct subsidies to the importers of these medicines in order to reduce their costs.”¹² While subsidies have made these products more affordable for Iranian citizens, there are two major issues with the program. Firstly, it encourages reckless behavior, thereby increasing the population and the amount of energy consumption. Secondly, the program increases the wage gap between poor and wealthy Iranians.¹³ However, the program still has problems obtaining certain types of medication and treatment for patients. As a result, subsidization seems to be unsustainable under international sanctions.

To keep the cost of some treatments low, Iran implemented a plasma fractionation plan for patients in need of a blood transfusion.¹⁴ Fractionation is a method in which plasma is recycled so it can be used for patients in need rather than letting the plasma go to waste. In using this process, Iran saved money as opposed to spending precious resources to obtain more blood for plasma transfusions. Furthermore, fractionation made the cost and accessibility of plasma derived medicines (PDMs) much more manageable and realistic for patients.¹⁵

History of Sanctions on Iran

Following the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the hostage crisis, the United States severed diplomatic relations with Iran and placed economic sanctions on the Persian state. While there were multiple acts concerning sanctions on Iran, three in particular stood out in relation to the pharmaceutical industry. These acts included the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act of 1996, the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010, and the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012.

First, the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act of 1996 had main four objectives. It discussed US national security in terms of Iranian/Libyan “attempts to acquire weapons of mass destruction and sponsor [...] of acts of international terrorism, multilateralize U.S. efforts to isolate Iran,” authorize [...] economic sanctions on individuals that “made investments in Iran of at least \$40

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Kebriazeeadeh, “Trend Analysis,” 2.

¹² Abdol Majid Cheraghali, “Iran Pharmaceutical Market,” *Iranian Journal of Pharmaceutical Research* 5, no.1 (Winter 2006): 1-7, (accessed November 15, 2015, http://ijpr.sbmu.ac.ir/article_646_5.html).

¹³ Semira N. Nikou, “The Subsidies Conundrum,” *The Iran Primer* (August 2015), (accessed November 15, 2015, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/subsidies-conundrum>).

¹⁴ Abdol Majid Cheraghali, “Impacts of International Sanctions on the Iranian Pharmaceutical Market,” *Daru: Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences* 21, no. 1 (July 2013): 63, (accessed November 15, 2015, doi: 10.1186/2008-2231-21-64).

¹⁵ Thierry Burnouf, Jerard Seghatchian, “‘Go No Go’ in Plasma Fractionation in the World’s Emerging Economies: Still a Question Asked 70 Years After the COHN Process was Developed,” *Transfusion and Apheresis Science* 51, no. 2 (October 2014): 113-114.

million in any one year that directly contributed to Iran's ability to develop petroleum resources," and put extra pressure on the Libyan government to cooperate with the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 731, 748, and 883. These resolutions demanded that Libya end the sponsorship of international terrorism and the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction.¹⁶

Second, the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010 prevented foreign companies from doing business with Iran.¹⁷ This act is a third-party act, which allowed the United States to punish foreign companies if they did not comply. This act had an impact on companies like Siemens, a German technology company that at one point provided Iran with medical and other technology. The German company formerly had a relationship with Iran and enjoyed trading with the Persian state. However, due to international sanctions, the company decreased or halted its business with Iran. Sanctions therefore took away the medical technology and resources that Siemens provided.¹⁸ The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012 followed the same lines as the aforementioned act. This act stated that "under Section 1245 of the Act, foreign financial institutions that knowingly facilitate significant financial transactions with the Central Bank of Iran ("CBI") or with Iranian financial institutions designated by Treasury risk being cut off from direct access to the U.S. financial system."¹⁹

Impact of Sanctions on Iran's Medical and Pharmaceutical Industry

While many may be aware that U.S. sanctions placed on Iran were intended to pressure Iran to decrease or stop production of nuclear materials/uranium, many may not be cognizant of the other consequences these sanctions have had on the Iranian population. In particular, these sanctions have had a major impact on the Iranian medical and pharmaceutical industries, and, consequently, the health of Iranian citizens in general. Current sanctions against Iran hindered the ability pharmaceutical companies to obtain and distribute medication to Iranian citizens. Cheraghali wrote that "obvious reduction in public resources allocated for health sector along with restrictions on importation of vital medicines and equipment will ultimately result in a weakened physical and medical infrastructure and strain the ability of health systems to provide medicine and services to the patients."²⁰ While Iran was able to produce many medications and treatments on its own, it did rely on imports from other countries for certain types of treatments and medical equipment. One notable case is that of the Tehran Research Reactor. This reactor was a point of contention in 2009, and again in late 2011 and 2012, which will be discussed later.²¹

¹⁶ Lucien J. Dhooge, "Meddling with the Mullahs: An Analysis of the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act of 1996," *Denver Journal of International Law and Policy* 27, no. 1 (Fall 1998): 3-4.

¹⁷ Department of the Treasury, *CISADA: The New U.S. Sanctions on Iran* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Treasury, N.D.), 2-3, (accessed November 15, 2015, http://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Documents/CISADA_english.pdf).

¹⁸ David Crawford and Vanessa Fuhmans, "Siemens Business Surges in Iran: Company Weighs its Contracts Against Risks of Working in a Sanctioned State," *Wall Street Journal* (5 April 2011).

¹⁹ U.S. Department of State, "Section 1245 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012," *Diplomacy in Action* (Washington, D.C.: November 8, 2012), (accessed November 15, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/e/eb/tfs/spi/iran/fs/200286.htm>).

²⁰ Cheraghali, "Impacts," 64.

²¹ David Cutler and Fredrik Dahl, "Factbox: Tehran Research Reactor," *Reuters*, February 16, 2012, (accessed November 15, 2015, <http://af.reuters.com/article/energyOilNews/idAFL5E8DF21720120215>).

As previously mentioned, Iran has a long history of pharmaceutical and medical knowledge. In their Al-Jazeera article, Maziar Shirazi and Sammy Almashat discussed the impact of sanctions on the Iranian healthcare system. They wrote that, prior to the tightening of sanctions in the past two years, Iran was a regional leader in the healthcare industry.²² Furthermore, Iran was a pioneer in terms of treating people in rural areas throughout the 1980s. “The Iranians built ‘health houses’ to minister to 1,500 people...Each house is a 1,000-square-foot hut equipped with examination rooms and sleeping quarters and staffed by community health workers.” These staff members provided services to local people by providing nutrition and family planning advice, administering immunizations, and monitoring the quality of water. Today, Hansen noted approximately 23 million Iranians are served by 17,000 health houses in rural areas.²³

In 2012, however, drug shortages increased, not only due to a lack of resources to produce them, but the imports of “newer, more advanced medicines from US and European drug manufacturers decreased 30 percent in 2012.”²⁴ Shirazi and Almashat further wrote that, although the Obama administration has claimed the sanctions are intended to hurt the government and not the people, this shortage in medical supplies nevertheless impacts the civilian population.²⁵ Therefore, sanctions consequently targeted both the civilian population and the government, regardless of whether or not they are designed to have a negative impact on the population. Although sanctions seem to be aimed at the government, they have a big impact on the citizens of Iran. When citizens cannot access the goods that they need, they lobby the government to change policies. Consequentially, the Iranian government felt the impact of the sanctions both internally and externally.

Cancer Patients

In terms of the patients themselves, cancer patients have perhaps been the most affected by sanctions. Not only have the high costs of cancer treatment been a factor, but also the number of Iranians with cancer has increased. Cancer rates have increased due to smoking and air pollution, though patients with diseases such as HIV/AIDS and heart disease are equally at risk.²⁶ The research indicates, however, that cancer is one of the fastest-growing diseases in Iran and the shortage of medical treatment has only increased in the period after the implementation of sanctions. The International Institute for Peace, Justice, and Human Rights (IIPJHR) noted that, “About 85 thousand cancer cases are detected in the country annually from which 30 thousands result in death...the number of newly diagnosed patients from 17,765 in 2000 had increased to 55,855 cases in 2005 and the latest statistics show that it had reached 85,000 cases

²² Maziar Shirazi and Sammy Almashat, “Sanctioning Iranians' Health,” *Al Jazeera*, February 23, 2014, accessed: November 15, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/02/sanctioning-iranians-health-2014214124138767459.html>.

²³ Suzy Hansen, “What Can Mississippi Learn from Iran?” *New York Times*, July 27, 2012, (accessed: November 15, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/29/magazine/what-can-mississippis-health-care-system-learn-from-iran.html?_r=0).

²⁴ Maziar Shirazi and Sammy Almashat, “Sanctioning Iranians' Health.”

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Economist Intelligence Unit, “Iran Pharma Impeded by Sanctions,” *The Economist*, August 20, 2013, (accessed: November 10, 2015, <http://www.eiu.com/industry/article/790872263/iran-pharma-impeded-by-sanctions/2013-08-20>).

in 2011.”²⁷ Dr. Nasser Parsa of the American Cancer Society further noted that cancer rates will likely increase significantly in 2015.²⁸ In Iran, cancer is the third leading cause of death, after cardiovascular diseases and accidents. Many believe that the high number of cancer cases comes not only from smoking and air pollution but a “modern lifestyle,” which means diets that include alcohol, are high in fat and sugar, and are low in fiber.²⁹

In addition to these issues, the lack of access to treatment further exacerbated the problem. The fact that Iranian medical facilities have trouble obtaining the necessary treatment means that they have long waiting lists and high prices. Although Iran has subsidized medicine, it is often not enough for citizens to be able to afford treatment. Many have died while on a waiting list and many more simply cannot afford the treatment.³⁰

Medication is certainly one resource that is difficult to obtain, but another resource, and one possibly far more affected by international sanctions, is that of radiation therapy. Although the United States allows for exceptions to sanctions, many treatments are still difficult to obtain due to the type of therapy or radiation required for treatment. The Center for Research on Globalization stated, “the usage overlap of radiotherapy pieces and some military devices (like radars) has made the sanctions focused on these pieces.”³¹ This was why obtaining the treatment necessary for cancer was so difficult and the fact that the Obama administration placed stricter sanctions on Iran makes it even more so. Although the sanctions previously placed on Iran made it difficult for Iran to provide cancer treatments and other resources, there is hope that the recent talks between the US and Iran will make the process of obtaining crucial treatment for cancer and other diseases easier.

U.S. Policy under the Obama Administration

Though U.S. sanctions on Iran were tightened under the Obama administration, there have recently been talks between the US and Iran in hopes that Iran would scale back its nuclear program in exchange for an ease in sanctions. Although the Obama administration first attempted to take a more diplomatic approach to sanctions on Iran, it tightened sanctions after talks failed in 2009 and 2012. The main reason for these particular talks was that Iran wanted more fuel for one of its reactors, the Tehran Research Reactor, in order to provide treatment for 850,000 heart, kidney, and cancer patients. To be able to provide such treatment and create the required number of medical isotopes to produce this, the reactor would need more fuel pads.³²

In response to this request, President Obama proposed a plan: the Iranians would send 1200 kilograms of low enriched uranium (LEU) to Russia, which would turn the LEU into 19.75% enriched uranium and, ultimately, create the fuel pads necessary for the research reactor. Parsi noted that this would buy the Obama administration more time and leverage for negotiations as the enrichment process would take about one year.³³ Erdbrink added that the enrichment that would take place in Russia would be supervised by the IAEA and Iran would be

²⁷ International Institute for Peace, Justice, and Human Rights, “The Impact of Sanctions on the Iranian Peoples’ Healthcare System,” *Center for Research on Globalization* (October 18, 2013), (accessed: November 15, 2015, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-impact-of-sanctions-on-the-iranian-peoples-healthcare-system/5354773>).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Parsi, *Single Roll*, 115.

³³ Ibid., 116.

unable to enrich any remaining uranium itself as it would be left with an insufficient amount to develop “weapons-grade uranium.” Many of the parties to the plan were suspicious. Although the general director of the IAEA, Mohamed El Baradei was optimistic about the plan, US allies including France, in particular, were skeptical that it would be successful. Before the talks set for October 1, 2009 could occur, Iran revealed that it had a facility in Qom, which was a violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation agreement. Despite this setback, the U.S. and Iran had productive talks in Geneva, Switzerland. But ultimately, the deal fell through after disastrous negotiations in Vienna.

This case demonstrates the lack of trust between the United States and Iran and shows that, in order to have successful negotiations, there should be a gesture of good faith on both the Iranian and American sides. Negotiations cannot work unless there is some level of trust that each side will uphold an agreement. Yet many Westerners have not fully understood the medical implications of the plan. One interesting aspect of the Erdbrink article is that it does not mention the medical aspect of the fuel swap. Perhaps if the media had focused more on the medical reasons for the Tehran Research Reactor there would have been more public support and negotiations would have been more productive. However, many Westerners seem to be unaware of the medical impact that sanctions have had on Iran and seem to only consider nuclear weapons and the potential threat to national security. The medical and humanitarian aspect should be more publicized and further considered in talks. It is understandable that some American officials may be skeptical of Iranian motives but they should still take into account the need for humanitarian and medical resources.

Exceptions to Sanctions

Exceptions to sanctions are necessary. Despite the fact that the United States has placed sanctions on Iran, there are humanitarian-based exceptions. The Department of the Treasury’s Joint Plan of Action allows for a “financial channel to facilitate humanitarian trade for Iran’s domestic needs using Iranian oil revenues held abroad...This channel could also enable transactions required to pay Iran’s UN obligations...and direct tuition payments to universities and colleges for Iranian students studying abroad.”³⁴ These channels provide a way for the UN or other countries to send aid to Iran without fear of reprisals from sanctions.

Recognizing that Iran cannot fully provide for its citizens under the sanctions and that some foreign aid is necessary, the United States allows for exceptions to sanctions in the form of commodities and medical and agricultural resources. Medical exceptions to sanctions include things like medical kits, catheters, antiseptic wipes, prosthetic limbs, and equipment for measuring patients’ vital signs.³⁵ As previously discussed, these resources are helpful. However, they cannot provide the treatment necessary for certain diseases like cancer. The Obama administration recognized this problem and took steps in July 2013 to further ensure that humanitarian aid to Iran would not be impeded by sanctions. The United States Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) expanded the list of medical supplies to include “electrocardiography machines (EKGs), electroencephalography machines (EEGs), and dialysis

³⁴ U.S. Department of the Treasury, *Guidance Relating to the Provisions of Certain Temporary Sanctions Relief in Order to Implement the Joint Plan of Action Reached on November 24, 2013, Between the P5+1 and the Islamic Republic of Iran, as Extended Through June 30, 2015* (25 November 2014), <http://www.state.gov/p/nea/rls/220049.htm>.

³⁵ Office of Foreign Assets Control, *The Iranian Transactions and Sanctions Regulations*, 31 C.F.R., Part 560 (Washington D.C.: Office of Foreign Assets Control, 25 July 2013).

machines.”³⁶ While the OFAC argues that humanitarian aid is not impeded by sanctions, access to critical medical resources remains limited.

Despite these further exemptions, difficulties remain in obtaining medicine and treatments that require materials such as Technetium-99 for the research reactor. Furthermore, even with the exemptions, “many companies and financial institutions remain reluctant to trade with Iran out of fear of penalties. In March 2012, all Iranian banks deemed to be in breach of EU sanctions were disconnected from the global system.”³⁷ Despite the fact that there are exemptions to the sanctions, many companies fear conducting business with or providing resources to Iran and accidentally stepping outside of the boundaries of the exemptions.

Even if the companies do take this risk, Cheraghali wrote that, “many international companies failed to fill orders from Iran due to restriction on money transaction, proper insurance, and sometimes assurances that the item indeed was exempted from the embargo. On the other hand, local pharmaceutical companies find it extremely difficult to access lines of credit for importing medicines or APIs.”³⁸ The World Health Organization defined an API as an “Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient” which is a substance or mixture of substances designed to further the pharmacological activity in a medication. In layman’s terms, it helps the medication work.³⁹ Therefore, if Iranian pharmaceutical companies cannot obtain APIs, they will be unable to fully provide medication that will actually help their patients.

Although the United States does have some exceptions concerning humanitarian aid to Iran, sanctions have impacted patients’ abilities to obtain the medication they need. Cheraghali further wrote that the difficulty paying for and obtaining “health services” often severely affects citizens. He went on to note that economic sanctions actually increased hardships for civilians—particularly for minorities and those who have chronic diseases and that “medical infrastructures” suffered as a result of sanctions.⁴⁰ The sanctions must be revised.

Conclusion: Looking Forward

The most recent negotiations between the United States and Iran suggest that the diplomatic talks under the Obama administration have been heading in the right direction. Yet to continue to have successful negotiations, there must be some level of trust between the two states. U.S. sanctions have greatly impacted the Iranian medical and pharmaceutical industry, making it difficult for Iranian companies to obtain the required equipment and resources for treatment. Ultimately Iranian citizens have suffered. One way to build more trust would be to allow Iran to have technology like the Technetium-99 so that Iran would be able to have nuclear technology for medical purposes. While U.S. politicians are understandably wary about allowing Iran to possess such technology, a sign of good faith may help to rebuild the relationship between the two countries and help improve the Iranian medical industry.

³⁶ U.S. Department of the Treasury, *Treasury Expands List of Basic Medical Supplies Authorized for Export to Iran and Further Clarifies Export and Financing Mechanisms Available for Humanitarian Goods* (25 July 2013), (accessed: November 30, 2015, <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl2123.aspx>).

³⁷ Economist Intelligence Unit, “Iran Pharma.”

³⁸ Cheraghali, “Impacts,” 63.

³⁹ World Health Organization, “Definition of Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient,” *Working document QAS/11.426/Rev. 1* (July 2011), http://www.who.int/medicines/areas/quality_safety/quality_assurance/DefinitionAPI-QAS11-426Rev1-08082011.pdf.

⁴⁰ Cheraghali, “Impacts,” 63.

Iran-Contradiction: The Implications of the Arms-for-Hostages Scandal for U.S.-Iranian Relations

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The legacy of the Iran-Contra scandal in the United States is irrefutable. Not only did Iran-Contra tarnish the Reagan administration, traumatizing the federal bureaucracy with criminal indictments, but it also exposed “the chronic tension between America’s democratic domestic political system and its nondemocratic national security system.”¹ However, its overall repercussions for Iran remain more opaque. This paper seeks to ameliorate this lopsided coverage. This paper will examine the implications of the Iran-Contra affair on U.S.-Iranian relations in response to the following inquiries: Was the ostensible U.S. goal to sustain Iranian moderates merely window dressing? Which factions actually benefited from American military largesse? Was the U.S. responsible for the later political ascendancy of the pragmatists? And how did the conduct of foreign policy proceed afterward?

The Iran-Contra Affair first captured the popular imagination through Al-Shiraa’s anecdotal account of the bewildering choice of gifts the May 1986 Tehran delegation sought to woo its Iranian interlocutors with: an autographed bible and allegorical cake. According to Oliver North, the chocolate confection, which was later unceremoniously devoured by Revolutionary Guardsmen (during Ramadan nonetheless), was actually intended for the arms dealer Ghorbanifar’s mother. During the flight, a key had fallen into the icing and North opted to leave it there to conceal the dent with a deliberate looking flourish.² This purported symbol of reconciliation succinctly describes the actual relegation of détente to an afterthought during this chain of events.

To address these queries, this paper will focus solely on the eastern theatre of operations and analyze the significance of the Iran-Contra affair within a trio of contexts: its germination via initial arms transactions under Israeli auspices, the blossoming of the scandal through greater American control over project management, and the aftermath from the end of the Reagan administration through the presidency of Rafsanjani. To conclude, this paper will make suggestions to improve future diplomatic relations between the United States and Iran based on this experience.

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¹ Kenneth E. Sharpe, “The Real Cause of Irangate,” *Foreign Policy* 68 (1987): 19.

² Oliver North, *Under Fire: An American Story* (New York: Harpers Collins, 1991), 41-42.

The evidence suggests that the Iran-Contra affair was an overt manifestation of the U.S. strategy to liberate hostages held in Lebanon by Iranian proxy groups and that the tactics employed actually undermined the stated aim of bolstering the moderate Iranian opposition. Nonetheless, indigenous factors, such as the need to consolidate the revolution and military contingencies, contributed to the later preeminence of pragmatists in the Islamic Republic, in spite of U.S. interference. American ambivalence and subsequent strategic calculations would actually serve to undermine this precarious political position in Iran.

Initial Exchanges and their Geopolitical Context (1979-1986)

After overthrowing the Pahlavi dynasty, Ayatollah Khomeini sought to establish a universal Islamic political order by exporting the revolution. According to Khomeini, Islam is not peculiar to certain states or even Muslims, but should strive to encapsulate all of humanity.³ In practical terms, this notion has been implemented through the destabilization of neighboring countries via sponsorship of the political party and militia Hezbollah. This blatant rejection of nationalist prerogatives within the established international order was egregiously manifested by its utter contempt for the standard principle of diplomatic immunity during the American Embassy hostage crisis.⁴ Such blatant defiance of the status quo seemed to preclude the possibility of normalization between these two nations. For U.S. spectators, the conduct of post-revolutionary Iranian foreign policy was tantamount to terrorism and forbade the political possibility of negotiation without regime change.

This radically unprecedented ideology prompted the United States to intercede on behalf of Iraq during the First Persian Gulf War (1981-1988), in spite of professed neutrality. To U.S. policy makers, the Iranian military offensive into southern Iraq presented an ominous specter of an expansive Shia crescent that could jeopardize the flow of oil and inhibit commerce in the Hormuz strait. Thus, the subsequent rapprochement with Baghdad, accomplished through gestures such as the facilitation of arms shipments via third parties and generous U.S. Department of Agriculture (U.S.D.A.) credit provision for agricultural commodities, represented a distinct tilt toward Iraq.⁵ This containment strategy toward Iran merely bolstered the new regime (by promoting national unity through opposition) and incentivized support for militant proxies abroad to project its influence.

Following a resumption of diplomatic ties with Baghdad, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld claimed that an arms interdiction effort against Iran was necessary to placate Saddam by demonstrating that his new allies sought to end the conflict, rather than perpetuate it in order to neutralize him.⁶ Therefore, the State Department launched Operation Staunch, which branded Iran as a sponsor of terrorism and sought to substantially curtail its import of arms through U.S. allies. Subsequent Israeli attempts to

³ R.K. Ramazani, "Ideology and Pragmatism in Iran's Foreign Policy," *Middle East Journal* 58, no.4 (2004): 555.

⁴ Henry Kissinger, *New World Order* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 154.

⁵ Maryam Panah, *The Islamic Republic and The World: Global Dimensions of the Iranian Revolution* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 89-90

⁶ Kenneth R. Timmerman, *Death Lobby: How the West Armed Iraq* (London: Bantam Books, 1992), 190-191.

circumvent these strictures with tacit U.S. executive approval precipitated the Iran-Contra affair. However counterintuitive, Israel ignored the vociferously anti-Zionist rhetoric in Tehran by pursuing a peripheral strategy, which sought to court non-Arab states to assuage its relative isolation in a hostile region. This stance acknowledged the fact that Tehran's religious posturing was for domestic consumption and often belied a pragmatic foreign policy with frequent recourse to *realpolitik*.⁷ In realization of Sadaam Hussein's fears, cooperation with the scheme was sold successfully to the U.S. due to U.S. hegemonic aspirations in the Persian Gulf, which stood to benefit from a prolonged stalemate.

The seminal Israeli plot to transgress Operation Staunch was hatched during the Hamburg meetings of July 8, 1985 between David Kimche (of the Israeli foreign ministry), Al Schwimmer (an Israeli arms dealer with ties to Shimon Peres), Yaacov Nimrodi (a former Israeli military attaché to Iran), Adnan Khashoggi (a Saudi entrepreneur), and Manucher Ghorbanifar, an Iranian arms dealer. Prime Minister Peres refused to proceed without U.S. endorsement, so Michael Ledeen, an NSC consultant, was established as an intermediary. As an incentive, Ghorbanifar vouched for the moderation of hypothetical recipients and dangled the possibility of William Buckley's (the captive Beirut CIA station chief) release. Ghorbanifar was notorious for his inordinate failure to pass polygraph exams for CIA recruitment, so his credibility was established by the production of a senior Iranian official- Hassan Karoubi- with ties to both Khomeini and Rafsanjani.⁸ U.S. intelligence on Iran was negligible following the disintegration of diplomatic ties and this subsequent naïve reliance on self-serving third parties served to sabotage tentative relations from their onset.

Ghorbanifar's claims were further buttressed by the Iranian response to the hijacking of TWA Flight 847 by Hezbollah. To curry favor with the U.S., both Rafsanjani and Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati collaborated with Syrian officials to orchestrate the release of hostages.⁹ The perpetrator, Imad Mughniyah, was also complicit in the Beirut kidnappings. This episode prodded recalcitrant U.S. officials, such as Secretary of State Schultz, to support the Israeli initiative. President Reagan granted authorization to Robert McFarlane, his National Security advisor, to pursue it further.¹⁰ Aware of the political repercussions to Jimmy Carter for failure to solve the Embassy crisis, the fate of the hostages was the main concern of President Reagan, not rapprochement with Iran per se. Thus, by maintaining that the goal of negotiations was *détente* rather than mutual concessions, such covert diplomacy delegitimized the overall process and was politically untenable.

On August 30 1985, with U.S. approval, Israel delivered the first batch of 100 TOWs (Tube launched, optically tracked, wire-guided, anti-tank missiles) to Iran, which was soon accompanied by an additional shipment of 408 missiles. Mutual misgivings regarding the sequence of payment and delivery between the American-Israeli

⁷ Barbara Ann Rieffer-Flanagan, "Islamic Realpolitik: Two-Level Iranian Foreign Policy," *International Journal on World Peace* 26, no.4 (2009): 8.

⁸ Malcolm Byrne, *Iran-Contra: Reagan's Scandal and the Unchecked Abuse of Presidential Power* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2014), 63-67.

⁹ Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the U.S.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 115.

¹⁰ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 70-71.

partnership and Iranians had threatened to create a stalemate until Khashoggi advanced credit. These transactions secured the release of the U.S. hostage Reverend Weir from his Lebanese captors. In a subsequent presidential briefing, McFarlane stated that, “you would have to be a fool not to see that whatever our intentions were, the reality was apparently arms for hostages.”¹¹ Clearly, a sea change in Iranian politics was not the chief objective of these endeavors. This clumsy utilization of unofficial parties and the consequent chronic inability to communicate with clarity constantly threatened to derail proceedings by reigniting mutual historical suspicions. If greater diplomacy were the prime objective, proper channels would have been opened to ameliorate distrust and achieve greater parity in discussions.

In November 1985, the United States became more deeply embroiled during the abortive sale of 120 HAWK air-defense missiles to Iran, through the provision of logistical support via a CIA proprietary airline. Lamentably, crass opportunists in Tel Aviv attempted to pawn off outdated equipment in order to replenish their own arsenals with the American largesse. Not only did the missiles arrive with incriminating Star of David markings, but also one was even proven defective in a routine test. The Iranians had anticipated technologically advanced HAWKS that even Iraqi surveillance aircraft could not elude. These expectations were swiftly rebuked by the paltry arrival of 18 derelict missiles. To perpetuate the negotiations after such a grave affront necessitated a refund and the guarantee of future discounts.¹² Rather than build confidence, their clumsy execution merely fed Iran’s anti-American animus. In grappling with the persistent righteous indignation of Iranians over the U.S. orchestrated 1953 coup d’état, Western interlocutors must be weary of rekindling that sense of betrayal through sloppy execution of missions.

After the HAWK debacle, Lt. Col. North prepared a draft presidential finding to calm the fears of Schultz and Defense Secretary Weinberger over the illegality of prior sales under the Arms Export Control Act (AECA). As opposed to a previous December version, the aim of bolstering moderates within the regime was emphasized over hostages. Yet again, executive privilege was claimed to prevent disclosure to Congressional Intelligence Committees.¹³ With Reagan’s consent, the CIA officially joined the endeavor and the United States seized the initiative from the Israelis. Shortly thereafter, Operation Recovery was launched with a shipment of 1000 TOW missiles and the sharing of highly diluted intelligence.¹⁴ The provision of worthless military data further undermined the sincerity of the United States during transactions; even inaction would have been less corrosive than such an empty gesture. Despite being the primary concern of the finding, Iranian moderates were a secondary consideration in reality. This myopic pursuit of hostage liberation curtailed the purported aim of catalyzing reform in Iran by emphasizing expediency over long-term objectives.

¹¹ McFarlane’s Statements About His Contacts with President Reagan During Interview with the Special Review Board, 12/11/1986, National Archives, (accessed: November 15, 2015, <http://www.archives.gov/declassification/iscap/pdf/2011-064-doc21.pdf>).

¹² Michael Arthur Ledeen, *Perilous Statecraft: An Insider’s Account of the Iran-Contra Affair* (New York: Scribner, 1988), 157-161.

¹³ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 154-155.

¹⁴ United States. *Presidential Commission on the Iran-Contra Affair: Report to the President* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1987), III 13-15.

The Culmination of Events (February 1986-November 1986)

The fate of the Nicaraguan Contras and Iranian negotiations became entwined through the infamous “diversion” of funds, which was allegedly concocted by Ghorbanifar in an inauspicious restroom dialogue with Oliver North to evade wire-tapping. Preoccupied with sustaining the anti-Sandinista movement against the congressional obstruction of the Boland Amendment, Lt. Col. North and his cohorts had resorted to seeking private donations to fund the rebellion. During their furtive exchange, Ghorbanifar insinuated that the retail price of weaponry to the Iranians could be severely inflated in order to create a covert slush fund to support the Contras, restock the depleted Israeli arsenal, placate middlemen, et cetera.¹⁵ This facet of the scandal, which predominated later press coverage, exposes later arms transactions as crude profiteering, rather than merely injudicious diplomacy.

After the first installment of TOWs, preliminary official meetings were conducted in Frankfurt with Mohsen Kangarlou, “the Australian”. As an assistant to Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Mousavi, he was firmly apart of the radical faction the United States ultimately sought to eradicate. However, prior to the abolition of the monolithic Islamic Republic Party, such “extremists” comprised a reformist coalition with notable pragmatic figures, such as Rafsanjani and Velayati, against the conservatives.¹⁶ Discussions were monopolized by setting terms for the reciprocal acquisition of advanced weaponry and release of hostages. Despite the fact that successful arms transfers had failed to secure a release, the U.S. officials made another concession to a meeting on Kish Island (later relocated to Tehran).¹⁷ According to Ghorbanifar, President Khamenei would issue a conciliatory fatwa against terrorism prior to their visit.¹⁸ The general participation of diverse Iranian factions within the proceedings obfuscated which elements the U.S. officials were actually aiding. While it is conceivable that a lack of credible intelligence, due to the severely diminished U.S. presence in Iran, made it impossible to disambiguate the politics of the Islamic Republic, it is far more likely that the prevailing concern over the hostage crisis rendered U.S. politicians apathetic to the reform credentials of their Iranian interlocutors.

The U.S. delegation to Tehran in May 1986-composed of Robert McFarlane, Oliver North, George Cave (a former CIA operative), NSC Middle East expert Howard Teicher, Amiram Nir (the Israeli Counter-terrorism advisor), and a CIA communications specialist-was a fiasco. In a cable to Join Poindexter, McFarlane contemptuously captured the situation:

It may be best for us to try to picture what it would be like if after a nuclear attack, a surviving Tatar became Vice President; a recent grad student became Secretary of State; and a bookie became the interlocutor for all discourses with foreign countries.¹⁹

¹⁵ North, *Under fire*, 19-21.

¹⁶ Maziar Behrooz, “Factionalism in Iran Under Khomeini,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 27, no. 4 (1991): 598-599.

¹⁷ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 166-167

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹⁹ United States, *Presidential Commission on the Iran-Contra Affair: Report to the President*, B-101.

The former NSC Advisor was indignant at their chaotic reception and the lack of equals with which to confer. However, the failure of the meeting arose from poor communication, not incompetence. From the Iranian perspective, this was merely a prosaic arms transaction of little historical consequence, in which the U.S. had failed to deliver as promised. McFarlane's impatience to leave after a hostage ultimatum was unmet failed to recognize the Iranian desperation to oblige them. These unrealistic demands blindly ignored the overall autonomy of Hezbollah.²⁰ Such American hubris, devoid of cross-cultural sensitivity and insistent upon unobtainable objectives, immediately condemned these embryonic negotiations to failure.

Among the Iranians present-Mohsen Kargarlou, Fereidun Mehdinejad (the head of IRGC intelligence), and First Deputy Prime Minister Mustafavi-Dr. Ali Hadi Najafabadi (the chair of the Majles Foreign Affairs Committee) alone escaped McFarlane's scorn. According to Najafabadi, Iranian reticence toward rapprochement could best be encapsulated by the televised broadcast of the fatal handshake between Brzezinski (NSC Advisor during the Carter administration) and Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan, which resulted in the deposal of the latter. Although aloof from the proceedings, Ayatollah Khomeini, President Ali Khamenei, and Speaker Rafsanjani were all briefed on the encounter.²¹ During the deliberations, the mutual imperative of Soviet containment in Afghanistan was pursued as a potential avenue for cooperation.²² However, Iranian furtiveness betrayed a lack of commitment to long-term engagement. Rather than emphasizing corresponding regional goals as a foundation for future relations, a preoccupation with hostages led the United States to unwittingly sustain the revolutionary regime of its arch nemesis, through the necessity of collaboration with all factions.

The May 1986 Tehran Mission's objectives were further imperiled by government oversight. Due to the U.S. Army Logistic Command's failure to cancel Iran's subscription to their inventory catalogue, the grotesque price gouging of the proffered HAWK spare parts was inadvertently divulged to the Iranians. After various price increases were exacted to fund the contras or satisfy middlemen, such as Ghorbanifar and Khashoggi (who provided bridge-funding), the weapons tranche that sub-contractor Richard Secord originally paid the CIA \$6.5 million for, was sold to Iran for an astronomical \$25 million. Naturally, the Iranians were infuriated. Only through the skillful mediation of Ghorbanifar and Nir was the release of Father Lawrence Jenco obtained in July.²³ This hideously botched transaction further undermined diplomatic prerogatives by reconfirming Iranian suspicions of U.S. malevolence. Mishap aside, it was inevitable that both historically aggrieved nations would fail to be placated by a quid-pro-quo arrangement. However, a recurrent emphasis on immediate gains through token concessions- not longevity- came to characterize this novel U.S.-Iranian relationship.

Eager to ditch the much maligned Ghorbanifar, the United States prompted Albert Hakim (Secord's business partner) to establish an alternate channel: Ali Hashemi Bakhramani, the nephew of Majles Speaker Rafsanjani and an IRGC officer. In their

²⁰ Ledeen, *Perilous Statecraft*, 219-222.

²¹ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 197-199.

²² United States, *Presidential Commission on the Iran-Contra Affair: Report to the President*, B 79-82.

²³ Ledeen, *Perilous Statecraft*, 231-232.

professed anxiety to isolate moderates with which to deal, the Americans failed to ascertain the standard practice of politics in Tehran, which mandated shrewd factional maneuvering and consensus for political survival. During his September 19-21 Washington D.C. visit, Bakhramani himself insisted upon Ghorbanifar's inclusion as an associate of Ayatollah Montazeri (Khomeini's heir apparent), whose participation was deemed vital for success. Despite his revolutionary connections, as a member of the conservative-bazaari alliance, Montazeri was actually in favor of détente for economic reasons. Regardless, the U.S. balked at the prospect. In addition to the standard arms-for-hostages dialogue, Bakhramani also discussed strategic aims in the Gulf, such as the ousting of Saddam. Rafsanjani was in charge of perpetrating the war and had forged a close alliance with the Revolutionary Guard in the process.²⁴ Despite the diplomatic trappings of Bakhramani's White House tour, it was obvious that Tehran's main priority was victory (even at the expense of ideology) and that the U.S. was irrefutably sustaining the reviled revolutionary regime's war effort. Forsaking the opportunity to pursue mutual strategic aims together, such as the containment of Iraq, both parties denied the possibility of meaningful rapprochement through fixation on immediate goals.

On October 6-8, a series of informal bilateral meetings were convened including Feredun Mehdinejad, whose presence indicated increasing solidarity amongst the Iranians. Unfortunately, Oliver North, Richard Secord, and George Cave were quickly diverted from the scene by the ominous crash of a C-23 courier plane carrying supplies for the Contras in Nicaragua threatened to breach operational security. Negotiations were summarily delegated to Hakim, who was forced to scrap North's ambitious sequential plan for arms transactions and hostage releases in favor of a nine-point accord highly advantageous to the Iranians. Although this plan was initiated by the shipment of 500 TOW missiles from Israeli stock (later replaced by the United States), it disintegrated once former arms deals were publicized.²⁵ The devolution of U.S. representation to a private businessman underscores the marginalization of diplomatic goals. Furthermore, U.S. pretensions of providing a bulwark to Iranian moderates were brutally rebuffed by the continuous participation of hardliners within the Revolutionary Guard.

This initiative was ultimately doomed by the very same elite factionalism the U.S. desperately sought to avoid when radical students at the behest of Montazeri's supporters distributed fliers in denunciation of the Tehran delegation. Mehdi Hashemi, a radical Revolutionary Guard Commander, leaked the story to the Lebanese paper *Al-Shiraa* and it later became world news.²⁶ Humiliated, Rafsanjani adamantly denied the proceedings and was politically salvaged only through the direct intervention of Khomeini, who denied the need for an investigation in the Majles.²⁷ Ironically, the moderate forces, which the United States ostensibly sought to promote, were in fact jeopardized by the affair; it was the reprehensible Supreme Leader who actually buoyed the pragmatists out of military expediency.

Denouement (the End of the Reagan Era through Rafsanjani's Presidency)

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 234-236.

²⁵ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 248-252.

²⁶ Ledeen, *Perilous Statecraft*, 136.

²⁷ Ramazani, "Ideology and Pragmatism in Iran's Foreign Policy," 556.

The public revelation of Janus-faced U.S. foreign policy threatened to compromise its strategic Arab alliances. This calamity was doubtless a considerable factor in the Reagan Administration's decision to provide a naval escort for Kuwaiti oil tankers, in order to restore confidence with the Gulf States.²⁸ Iran viewed such commercial vessels as legitimate targets due to the sheikhdom's sponsorship of Iraq throughout the war.²⁹ Escalating tensions between the U.S. and Iran culminated in the tragic destruction of a civilian aircraft by the U.S.S. *Vincennes*, which resulted in 290 casualties. Khomeini's belated acceptance of a UN sponsored truce was doubtlessly made to avert further military confrontation with the United States.³⁰ These skirmishes reiterated the hostile status quo between these two nations, seemingly nullifying the negligible progress made during previous negotiations. With such grossly disparate regional aspirations, any relationship between the United States and Iran was doomed to remain merely shallow and tactical.

Following the ceasefire, the notoriously fractious political landscape of Iran was further polarized by the death of Khomeini and the controversial succession of Khamenei. To reinforce his theologically precarious position, Khamenei discarded the role of non-partisan mediator adopted by his predecessor and instead courted the conservative right.³¹ This faction sought to preserve the integrity of Islamic culture against the mental colonization of the West and perpetuated the demonization of the U.S. According to Khamenei "war, bloodshed, destruction, [and] annihilation are the results of [the United States'] satanic behavior."³² Conversely, President Rafsanjani's pragmatic coalition eschewed ideology, and favored a more conciliatory tone to lure foreign investors for the sake of post-war reconstruction. The exigencies of war that necessitated hypocritical arms purchases from the "Great Satan" exposed the flexibility of revolutionary ideals.³³ However, such compromises were ultimately in service to domestic preservation and not necessarily indicative of political ripeness for normalization with the United States. American disapprobation could still be circumvented through wooing alternative investment.

Miraculously unscathed from the scandal, George H.W. Bush addressed Iranians directly during his famous "Goodwill Begets Goodwill" 1989 inaugural speech, regarding the plight of hostages in Lebanon. Rafsanjani indicated that he was amenable to securing their release in exchange for a reciprocal gesture from the United States. UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar served as a respectable liaison between Washington and Tehran, in contrast to the unscrupulous intermediaries employed during the Iran-Contra affair. Although Iranian prerequisites, such as the thawing of assets and territorial concessions from Hussein, threatened to retard progress, the Islamic Republic nonetheless proved instrumental in the release of two hostages-Robert Polhell and Frank

²⁸ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 335.

²⁹ Ray Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 55.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 104.

³¹ Wilfried Buchta, *Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic* (Washington D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000), 55.

³² David Menashri, *Post-Revolutionary Politics in Iran: Religion, Society and Power* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), 188-189.

³³ *Ibid.*, 175.

Reed.³⁴ While the utilization of proper official channels marks a positive evolution in U.S.-Iranian relations, the stubborn persistence of quid pro quo arrangements had a pernicious effect on the diplomatic process.

Fortuitously, the ill-conceived Iraqi invasion of Kuwait further eroded Iranian intransigence by forcing Saddam to make favorable territorial concessions and accept the 1975 Algiers Accord in order to secure his eastern flank.³⁵ Although purportedly neutral during the conflict, the Islamic Republic lent airspace to the American military, expropriated Iraqi jets, increased communications with the United States for safety purposes, and abstained from promoting sedition amongst Iraq's restive Shia population.³⁶ This admirable conduct was repaid in scorn through the reconfiguration of the Gulf Cooperation Council defense network (via the Damascus Declaration), primarily in order to contain Iran's hegemonic aspirations. The disintegration of the accord later yielded bilateral security agreements with the United States, which consolidated its strategic presence in the Gulf.³⁷ Lack of U.S. accommodation to Iran politically undermined the pragmatists, as well as long-term prospects for regional peace and stability. If the United States had exploited the opportunity of enhanced military cooperation with Iran as a stepping-stone for future diplomatic relations, rather than reaffirmed the Islamic Republic's pariah status through miscalculated exclusion, then the impetus for support of militant proxies to project Iranian influence would have been removed.

Undaunted, Rafsanjani sought to enhance economic cooperation with the United States to facilitate future political rapprochement via the offer of a billion dollar oil contract to the American company, Conoco. However, this deal was thwarted by the frenetic lobbying efforts of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), in a dramatic reversal of its former Periphery Doctrine. With the existential Arab threat neutralized by the contemporary peace process, AIPAC endorsed a new cause celebre: Iranian containment. Public pressure prompted Bill Clinton to implement comprehensive sanctions through executive orders. These were later superseded by the Iran Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA), which passed unanimously in Congress.³⁸ Once again, American strategic interests were subsumed by Israeli prerogatives. The revolutionary regime has since proven remarkably resilient in the face of seemingly insuperable odds. Such hostile sanctions are not only of dubious efficacy after decades of economic estrangement, but also serve to embolden the antagonistic global stance of the Islamic Republic.

Conclusion

As this broad survey of the eastern theatre of the Iran-Contra affair has demonstrated, this scandal transformed not only the American political landscape, but that of the Islamic Republic as well. Both parties were motivated by their immediate interests instead of meaningful rapprochement. Rather than topple the fanatical regime, U.S. machinations actually sustained it during a protracted war. Paradoxically, the Islamic Republic began to

³⁴ John W. Limbert, *Negotiating With Iran: Wrestling the Ghosts of History* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2009), 140-145.

³⁵ Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution*, 135.

³⁶ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 142.

³⁷ Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution*, 137-138.

³⁸ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 185-188.

initiate the desired reforms (especially pertaining to foreign policy) of its own volition for self-preservation. The ensuing normalization process was sabotaged by U.S. miscalculations. However, this saga can be quite informative on the proper way to engage Iran in the future.

Once diplomatic ties were severed between Iran and the United States in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution, the State Department allowed Iranian expertise and Persian language skills to flounder.³⁹ This parlous fact only compounds cultural misapprehensions. To enable smooth negotiations, effective communication is essential. The training of a new coterie of experts, such as George Cave of the Tehran delegation, is critical to the demystification of Iranian politics. Greater cross-cultural proficiency would serve to elucidate the baffling behavior of superficially irrational actors. Such clarity could generate a more equitable relationship between the United States and Iran by diluting the contempt born from chronic misconception.

Furthermore, the stubborn reliance on quid pro quo arrangements to achieve détente is narrow and self-defeating. This format, characteristic of the Arms-for-Hostages scandal, was doomed to failure. Due to mutual historical grievances—such as the 1953 coup or American Embassy Crisis—each party feels entitled to compensation and balks at the necessity to make concessions. Additional logistical difficulties and divergent expectations only compound animosity. Rapprochement is best accomplished through joint cooperation over common interests. Contemporary to the Lebanese Hostage Crisis, the shared threat of Soviet expansion in Afghanistan, and desire to support the Mujahedeen resistance could have generated good will through collaboration.

Also, attempts to contain Iran and the subsequent zero-sum logic merely props up the regime through confrontational politics. Depriving the Islamic Republic of participation in international forums, such as the 1991 Madrid Conference, only gives it further incentive to sponsor Islamic belligerents in order to be heard.⁴⁰ Prevention is the best cure: to curb terrorism, Iran must be given a legitimate means of political expression, commensurate with its status.

³⁹ Limbert, *Negotiating With Iran*, 121.

⁴⁰ Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution*, 169.

Painful Desires: The Creation of the Iran-Contra Affair

Heath Rosenberger

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The Iran-Contra affair was one of the most significant scandals in 20th century U.S. history. Although the name, Iran-Contra, appears to mainly involve the Islamic Republic and the Nicaraguan rebels, the affair heavily involved the U.S. and Israel. The U.S. provided arms to Iran through Israel and South Korea long before Hezbollah took U.S. citizens hostage.¹ Through Israel, the U.S. illegally sold weapons to Iran in the 1980s in order to free U.S. citizens held hostage in Lebanon by Hezbollah. Before the affair even began, all three countries were involved in spawning the event. Israeli and U.S. presence in Lebanon birthed Hezbollah.²

From the administration of President Eisenhower to administration of President Nixon, the U.S., Iran, and Israel all cooperated unofficially to halt the Soviet Union's progression to the Middle East and to weaken the Soviets' Arab friends.³ All three states greatly feared the Soviet Union.⁴ Working together for a common goal was not a new phenomenon that began in the affair. After the Islamic Revolution, Iran publicly sneered at the "Great Satan" and the "Little Satan," the U.S. and Israel, respectively. However, they were able to look past this when they needed to.

The events of the Iran-Iraq war played a vital role in leading to the Iran-Contra affair. The U.S. enforced Operation Staunch, which stopped third party allies of the U.S., like Israel, from supplying weapons to Iran during the war. This outraged the Israelis.⁵ As the

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¹ Alan A. Block, "The Origins of Iran-Contra: Lessons From the Durrani Affair," *Crime, Law, and Social Change* 33 (2000), 6.

² Malcolm Byrne, *Iran-Contra: Reagan's Scandal and the Unchecked Abuse of Presidential Power* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2014), 37.

³ Samuel Segev, *The Iranian Triangle: The Untold Story of Israel's Role in the Iran-Contra Affair* (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 29.

⁴ Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 118-119.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

Iran-Iraq war raged on, U.S. citizens were held hostage for longer, and Israel longed for stronger relations with a non-Arab neighbor. Thus, the Iran-Contra affair was born. This triangle played an integral role in beginning the scandal.⁶ Israel desired stronger relations with Iran, while Iran desperately needed more arms to fight Iraq in their long war. Meanwhile, the Reagan administration obsessed over freeing the hostages in Lebanon.

Envoys from both the U.S. and Iran independently approached Israel, each hoping to establish stronger connections with the other.⁷ The hostages entered the conversation here. The hostages were a valuable negotiating piece for the Iranians and gave the Israelis an opportunity to sway the U.S. to strike a deal with Iran.⁸ This triangle greatly influenced the entire affair and relations between countries for years after.

Each country had a specific goal they were trying to reach that involved one or both of the other two countries. Each country's dependency on the other ultimately resulted in one of the largest scandals a U.S. administration has faced. The desperation of each state created the perfect environment for an affair to birth the Iran-Contra scandal.

Israeli Relations

Since the creation of the Jewish State, Israel has made it her priority to have strong international alliances. After Israel's war for independence in 1948 against the surrounding Arab states, the Israelis became aware of the necessity of having non-Arab friends who could help them. David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister, developed Israel's Periphery Doctrine.⁹ The idea behind this doctrine was that Israel must develop strong alliances with its non-Arab neighbors - Iran, Ethiopia, and Turkey - in order to survive.¹⁰ This was an understandable desire, as even the Shah of Iran once said "neither Israel nor Iran want to be alone in a sea of Arabs."^{11 12}

However, after the Islamic Revolution, Israel lost a key member of her Periphery Doctrine. Ayatollah Khomeini publicly lambasted the Jewish State. It was out of the desire of Shimon Peres, Israel's Prime Minister at the time, to rebuild the Periphery Doctrine with Iran that the Iran-Contra affair was spawned.¹³ Peres was said to have been willing to try out "crazy ideas" in order to attain better relations with Iran.¹⁴

The Iran-Iraq war provided the perfect opportunity for Israel to recreate her alliance. Israel did not really desire either side to win the war. Iraq was already very hostile to Israel, and Israelis feared that with an Iranian success more Islamic fundamentalism would spread throughout the Middle East.¹⁵ Israel certainly did not want an Iraqi win in

⁶ Ibid., 116.

⁷ Jon Kimche, "Iran: The True Scandal," *Midstream* 33, no. 2 (February 1987), 4.

⁸ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 112.

⁹ Ibid., 21.

¹⁰ Donald Neff, "The U.S., Iraq, Israel, and Iran: Backdrop to War," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 20, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 24.

¹¹ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 34.

¹² Neff, "Backdrop to War," 24.

¹³ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 109.

¹⁴ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 65.

¹⁵ Hillel Schenker, "The Iranian Connection," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 16, no. 3 (Spring 1987): 201-202.

the war. An Iraqi success would strengthen the “Arab hand” which would undoubtedly be turned against Israel after the war.¹⁶ The Israelis wanted to sustain the war as long as possible so that Iraq and Iran would be focused on each other rather than on Israel.¹⁷

Israel had to decide between the lesser of two evils. Ultimately, Israel decided that Iraq was the greater threat in the war because it was closer to Israel, heavily armed with military experience, and belligerent in every Arab attack against Israel.¹⁸ As a result, Israel elected to support Iran. The Israelis hoped that if they could drag the war out longer by supporting Iran, Iranians would grow weary and no longer desire the Khomeini regime and put in place a more moderate government.¹⁹ This put a rift between the U.S. and Israel as the U.S. supported Iraq in the war.²⁰ Israel was going to have to sway the U.S. administration in order to best carry out their plans.

Peres and his administration felt strongly that Khomeini and his extremists were simply a fad that would pass. Peres and Reagan both felt it was their duty to ensure a more moderate government would follow that would be pro-West.²¹ The Israelis could not easily forget the previous good relations with the Shah.²²

Peres and the Iranian arms dealer, Ghorbanifar, argued extensively to the Reagan administration that the arms to be shipped would go towards strengthening moderates within Iran that wanted relations with the West.²³ It was apparent that whichever faction within Iran succeeded in lifting the U.S. embargo and supplied the army and Revolutionary Guard with arms would be the one to come into power after the death of Khomeini.²⁴ This pushed the Israelis even harder to ensure that they could sway the U.S. to their advantage.

Israel used its ability to export arms as a diplomatic tool to establish international relations.²⁵ Cooperative agreements on intelligence and nuclear issues, a weaker Iraqi state, permission for Iranian Jews to immigrate to Israel, and the money from the sales were just some of the strategic benefits Israelis accounted for with an arms deal with Iran.²⁶ If Israel could strike a deal with Iran, Peres truly felt that a new tide would turn between Israel and Iran.

Since Israel was boycotted by all the oil-rich Arab states around it, the price of oil in Israel was very high. Israel hoped to regain oil exports from Iran by securing an arms

¹⁶ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 34.

¹⁷ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 112.

¹⁸ Marie Syrkin, “The Higher Authority and Israel,” *Midstream* 33, no. 2 (February 1987): 15.

¹⁹ Mark Tessler, “Israel, Arms Exports, and Iran: Some Aspects of Israeli Strategic Thinking,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (Winter 1986): 121.

²⁰ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 104.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

²² Syrkin, “The Higher Authority,” 15.

²³ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 64.

²⁴ Segev, *The Iranian Triangle*, 130.

²⁵ Tessler, “Israel, Arms Exports, and Iran,” 113.

²⁶ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 34-35.

deal.²⁷ Furthermore, Peres felt that by supporting Iran in the war, he split the focus of the Arabs, therefore contributing to Israel's security.²⁸

U.S.-Israeli relations would be affected as well by reaching an arms deal. Israel attempted to appeal to U.S. interests by arguing that if the U.S. removed its ban on Israeli arms sold to Iran, then a stronger Iranian military could help bolster the Soviets to the North.²⁹ By developing stronger ties with Iran, Israel hoped to display to the U.S. that it was a very strategic ally.³⁰ This was especially important to Israelis at the time because many Arab states were having warmer relations with the U.S., which threatened their influence on Capitol Hill.³¹ If Israel could get the U.S. to support Iran, the Arab states would dislike the U.S. more. This would also elevate Israel's position in the Middle East.³²

Israel's desperation for greater long-term relations with Iran was an essential driving force for the Iran-Contra affair. Their desire not only involved themselves, but Israel pushed both Iran and the U.S. to become greatly involved in the affair as well. The unique desire to return to the Peripheral Doctrine helped create the Iran-Contra affair.

Iran's Arms

The Iran-Iraq war arguably played the most essential role in bringing about the Iran-Contra affair. These two great powers of the Middle East viciously fought throughout the 1980s. The demographic, military, and economic consequences of the battles placed Iran in a desperate position for more arms to continue her fight against the Iraqi regime. Financially, to adequately reconstruct and resupply the Iraqi and Iranian militaries, it would cost more than \$200 billion.³³ The Iranians realized that they would be unable to win this war alone. The Iraqis were growing stronger, and Khomeini's regime feared that the longer the war dragged on, the more the Iranian people would be upset with their government.

Iran was in a peculiar place because of their weapons needs. Because the Shah had good relations with the West, Iranian military arms and supplies were U.S.-based. Operation Staunch was quite successful according to its purpose. The law exhausted all of Iran's arms.³⁴ Khomeini was so desperate for more arms that he chose arms purchases over food purchases.³⁵ Iran was also in a tight position because all of her key allies, Syria and Libya, required Soviet weapons which were easily accessible, but Iran needed U.S.-made weapons, which were unavailable due to Operation Staunch.³⁶ Iran needed to

²⁷ Tessler, "Israel, Arms Exports, and Iran," 114-115.

²⁸ Trita Parsi, "Israel-Iranian Relations Assessed: Strategic Competition from the Power Cycle Perspective," *Iranian Studies* 38, no. 2 (June 2005): 255.

²⁹ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 36.

³⁰ Tessler, "Israel, Arms Exports, and Iran," 122.

³¹ Parsi, "Israel-Iranian Relations," 255.

³² Mansour Farhang, "The Iran-Israel Connection," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 94.

³³ Segev, *The Iranian Triangle*, 12.

³⁴ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 34.

³⁵ Segev, *The Iranian Triangle*, 18.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 130.

quickly rebuild, and the U.S. was the only country with the means to assist them in doing that, because the Soviets could not.³⁷

Tehran did not want any attachments to the West, but they accepted the fact that they needed help if they were going to survive this war.³⁸ Iran had no option but to go to Israel. Israel not only had the arms Iran needed, but was also willing to violate the U.S. moratorium of arms sales to Iran.³⁹ Iran studied the Israelis and hit them at their most valuable point: better relations with Iran. Iran confronted the Israelis, promising better relations if the Israelis could secure an arms deal for U.S. military supplies with Iran.⁴⁰ In 1985, Iraq acquired new tanks. If Iran was to stop these tanks, they needed the U.S.-made anti-tank TOW missiles. Israel had a supply of these, but Prime Minister Peres would only sell these with U.S. approval, since they were U.S.-made. The Israelis were assured that these arms would go to the moderates in Iran to strengthen their position. In order to best sway the U.S. officials, Iranian arms dealer, Manucher Ghorbanifar, the main representative of Iran in the negotiations, offered to release the CIA agent held hostage in Lebanon, William Buckley.⁴¹ Once again, the Iranians hit their negotiating partners in a place they could not resist. William Buckley had knowledge of extensive U.S. secrets that, in the wrong hands, could deal a devastating blow to the U.S.. Reagan was desperate to free Buckley because he was being tortured.⁴² Ghorbanifar knew that the U.S. was too eager to pass on any opportunity to free Buckley.

The arms transactions between Israel and Iran involving TOW missiles and other arms, like artillery shells, continued with the approval of the U.S., with a few occasional mishaps.⁴³ However, the sales took a turn for the worse once the U.S. was solely in control of the sales and sold the arms at an inflated price of 370% in order to use the profits to fund the Nicaraguan Contras. When Tehran found out that the price of TOW missiles was being marked up significantly, they were outraged.⁴⁴ This led to the eventual breakdown in negotiations. Iran's desperation to win this long war was an integral part of creating the Iran-Contra affair.

Iran was not truly interested in having better relations with Israel, but Iran needed the U.S.-made arms Israel possessed. Iran put its desire for arms at the highest level on its list of priorities. This directly involved both the Israelis and the U.S., therefore creating the Iran-Contra affair. The toll of the Iran-Iraq war put Iran in a desperate position that could only be aided by outside help. Iran's need for arms forced them to reach out to the West to secure the U.S.-made military supplies from Israel.

Reagan's Dilemma

³⁷ Kimche, "Iran: The True Scandal," 5.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Farhang, "The Iran-Israel Connection," 88.

⁴⁰ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 115.

⁴¹ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 63.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Block, "The Origins of Iran-Contra," 56-57.

⁴⁴ Lawrence E. Walsh, "Political Oversight, the Rule of Law, and Iran-Contra," *Cleveland State Law Review* 42 (1987): 590.

The U.S. Government's involvement in the Iran-Contra affair can be traced back to well before 1985, even before the Reagan administration. President Carter's failures during the Iranian hostage crisis were the key motivators for President Reagan while U.S. citizens were held hostage in Lebanon. Reagan learned from Carter's blunders that he must do whatever necessary in order to keep the crisis from dragging out.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Reagan felt he owed his landslide election to Carter's plight handling the hostages held in Tehran.⁴⁶ As a result, Reagan made it his mission to not become another Jimmy Carter.

The Israelis were equally aware of Reagan's position following Carter. They realized that this would be the most opportune time to strike a deal with Iran because the Iranian hostages were freed on Reagan's inauguration day.⁴⁷ To say Reagan and his administration were obsessed with freeing the hostages would be an understatement. William Casey, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency under the Reagan administration, said before the affair that he expected Reagan to be willing to risk much in order to secure the hostages' freedom.⁴⁸ It was clear that Reagan was willing to take charges of illegality rather than pass on a chance to free the hostages.⁴⁹

But the President did not act alone. Robert McFarlane, one of the National Security Advisors to Reagan, felt deep conviction that the U.S. should have been more aggressive in affecting the return of hostages.⁵⁰ Oliver North, a member of the National Security Council, constantly pushed for the U.S. to make more arm sales to the Iranians because he felt that the hostages could be executed at any moment.⁵¹ The U.S. public was also on the President's side. In 1985, two-thirds of the U.S. public felt that the U.S. ought to negotiate with hostage takers as a practical matter. And later in the decade, three-quarters of the U.S. public strongly approved of being in communication with the hostage-takers.⁵² As a result, the President strongly felt that it was his duty to bring back the hostages.⁵³ As much as the administration and the population wanted the hostages freed, the U.S. Government had a clear policy against negotiating with terrorists and hostage takers.⁵⁴ So if this administration was going to free the hostages, it had to take a different route and keep quiet about it. Here entered Iran.

Every arm sale to Iran was essentially centered on the hope that it would free more hostages in Lebanon. In the perspective of the Reagan administration, the more arms sold to Iran, the more hostages that would be released. Iran assured the administration that it could free the hostages as long as its need for arms was met. But the truth was, Iran was misrepresenting its capabilities. Freeing the hostages was more of a talking point in the

⁴⁵ Dominic Tierney, "Prisoner Dilemmas: The American Obsession with POWs and Hostages," *Orbis* 54, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 142.

⁴⁶ Segev, *The Iranian Triangle*, 130.

⁴⁷ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 351.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 106-107.

⁵⁰ Segev, *The Iranian Triangle*, 168.

⁵¹ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 146-147.

⁵² Ronald H. Hinckley, "American Opinion Towards Terrorism: The Reagan Years," *Terrorism* 12, no. 6 (1989): 389.

⁵³ Tierney, "Prisoner Dilemmas," 139.

⁵⁴ Walsh, "Political Oversight," 589.

negotiations than a reality for the Iranians. Iran knew that without being able to secure the freedom of Shi'i prisoners held in Kuwait and Israel, they would not be able to do much.⁵⁵ As a result, the U.S. greatly miscalculated Tehran's influence and control of Hezbollah, the hostage takers.⁵⁶ As the administration realized this, the morale went from hopeful to quite unhappy. The first U.S.-approved Israeli delivery of TOW missiles to Iran provided no free hostages. The administration was not pleased.⁵⁷ After two shipments, only one hostage was freed. This time, both the U.S. and Iran were upset at the Israelis for sending the wrong shipment, weapons marked with the Israeli insignia of the Star of David.⁵⁸

The administration wanted the hostages freed, but was very cautious to make sure that publicly there could be no direct connection between the sale of arms to Iran and the release of hostages in Lebanon.⁵⁹ When news broke of the scandal, the administration was forced to take a stance on its role in the affair. Reagan first assured the population that he would never make concessions to terrorists because that would just feed them and give them what they desire.⁶⁰ Attempting to clarify further, Reagan stated that there was no way the U.S. traded arms for hostages because his administration traded with Iran, not Hezbollah, and that Iran had no hostages.⁶¹

Reagan defended himself throughout the affair by emphasizing his role in embarking towards noble foreign policy goals.⁶² Oliver North especially tried to show that the purpose in selling the arms were for geopolitical reasons and to ultimately end Shi'i terrorism.⁶³ However, the public could see through this and knew that separating the sale of arms and the freedom of the hostages was impossible. Still Reagan, did not regret the scandal because, in truth, it freed some hostages.⁶⁴ That was all that mattered to his administration. The hostages were always at the forefront of the decision-making, and Iran was the one the administration turned to. Without the administration's desperation to free the hostages in Lebanon, the Iran-Contra affair certainly would never have taken place.

The U.S. trust in the Israelis to carry out the arms deal was integral in order to free the hostages. Reagan's belief that Iran possessed the power to free the Hezbollah-taken hostages helped push the U.S. to be an actor in the Iran-Contra affair.

The Aftermath

⁵⁵ Farhang, "The Iran-Israel Connection," 90.

⁵⁶ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 205.

⁵⁷ Segev, *The Iranian Triangle*, 174-175.

⁵⁸ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 120.

⁵⁹ Segev, *The Iranian Triangle*, 169.

⁶⁰ William L. Benoit, Paul Gullifor, and Daniel A. Panici, "President Reagan's Defensive Discourse on the Iran-Contra Affair," *Communication Studies* 42, no. 3 (1991): 279.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 289.

⁶³ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 147-148.

⁶⁴ Tierney, "Prisoner Dilemmas," 142.

Fallout from the scandal had many detrimental effects on international relations between these countries and others. Reagan essentially allowed Israel to shape U.S. foreign policy towards the Middle East. It was his conviction that Israel possessed superior knowledge of the governments of the Middle East.

Israel truly had nothing to lose by selling the arms, but the U.S. had little to gain.⁶⁵ Reagan announced later in the scandal that there would be no more sales to Iran, but Israel continued to sell, claiming it was their right.⁶⁶ Israel's role in the whole affair was also overlooked by the trial of Oliver North and the Tower Commission.⁶⁷ Relations between the U.S. and Israel were not pleasant following the affair. Immediately, the Iranians denied any negotiations at all with Israel.⁶⁸ The Iranians knew they had to protect their image with the Arab countries to attain their support. Iranians felt that the Arab states would surely join up against Iran if they knew that it had made concessions with Israel.

The U.S. was betrayed by Iran as well. The chief moderate the U.S. had supplied in hopes that he would take power after Khomeini and foster better ties with the West publicly mocked the U.S. and Israel after the affair was made public.⁶⁹ This dealt a devastating blow to the hopes of the administration on having Iran back as an ally.

The scandal's consequences on the Arab states may have been the most severe. In 1986, when Jordan's King Hussein became aware of the affair, he was the first Arab leader to publicly condemn the behavior of the U.S.⁷⁰ The Iraqis also felt they had been lied to after the scandal. They felt that U.S. government support in the war was really intended to harm Iraq and overthrow its government.⁷¹ Ultimately, the Arab States were upset with the U.S. for secretly helping Iran during the war, and the Arab States were also upset with Iran that they would consider entering relations with Israel.

The Iran-Contra affair backfired for all the state actors involved. Each country's desire for a different goal blinded them in the long run. The U.S., Iran, and Israel were each so desperate to attain their respective goals that they failed to foresee the consequences of their actions, thus creating the Iran-Contra affair.

Conclusion

The U.S., Iran, and Israel all had individual goals that when combined created the Iran-Contra affair. These countries together created a triangle that changed international relations in the Middle East. Israel hoped to rebuild its Periphery Doctrine and have greater ties with Iran. The Israelis hoped that with an ally of Iran, the Arab states surrounding Israel would think twice before attacking. Israel greatly pushed the U.S. to become involved in this affair hoping that Iran would take Israel more seriously with the

⁶⁵ Farhang, "The Iran-Israel Connection," 89.

⁶⁶ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 125.

⁶⁷ Jonathan Marshall, "Israel, the Contras, and the North Trial," *Middle East Report* 160 (Sep.-Oct. 1989): 35.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Syrkin, "The Higher Authority," 15.

⁷⁰ Segev, *The Iranian Triangle*, 28.

⁷¹ Neff, "Backdrop to War," 31.

U.S. officials present. Iran was in a desperate position in the Iran-Iraq war. The Iranians knew that their position of superiority was in jeopardy if they lost the war with Iraq. They needed more arms- and fast. While Iran's military primarily used equipment made in the U.S., the U.S. had an embargo on Iran. Iran then went to the only other country that could help them: Israel. Israel's surplus of U.S.-made arms and willingness to supply them to Iran created a perfect trade, as long as the U.S. administration would sign off.

Although the U.S. government had an embargo on Iran, Reagan was desperate to free the hostages, and was willing to violate the embargo. The Iranians assured him that they if they received U.S. arms, U.S. citizens held hostage in Lebanon by the Shi'i militant group Hezbollah would be released. Reagan, out of eagerness to become the hero that returned the hostages home swiftly, unlike Carter before him, who dragged his hostage crisis out, agreed to this. This short period of time of cooperation between enemies was a peculiar point in history. It had serious, negative consequences for each country afterwards, but this affair has always left a memory of the Great Satan, the Little Satan, and the Islamic Republic working together.

Operation Eagle Claw: The Ramifications of Political Divisions in U.S. Decision-Making during the Iranian Hostage Crisis of 1979-1981

Mary Bowman

© University of Oklahoma

The taking of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in the fall of 1979 began a long, complicated 444 days of negotiations and frustrations in insuring the return home of the hostages. In early April 1980, President Jimmy Carter came to the decision that diplomatic negotiations were coming to a dead end, and the time had come to act. With this decision, Carter was faced with divisions among some of his key advisors, especially between his hawkish National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and his dovish Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance. However, the President made the final call to conduct a rescue mission to free the hostages. Unfortunately, the rescue mission, by the code name Operation Eagle Claw, came to a disastrous end in the Iranian desert. The decision to conduct Operation Eagle Claw led to the resignation of Cyrus Vance, Carter's loss of the re-election, and the United States' international credibility being destroyed.

On April 24-25, 1980, a rescue mission to free the hostages in the Tehran embassy in Iran by the code name Operation Eagle Claw went under way. Unfortunately, the operation would never reach the embassy hostages. The operation was very complex in nature, and a very improbable mission due to the fact that the group was trying to free over fifty hostages within a heavily guarded facility in the middle of a hostile city in a country halfway around the world. The very possibility of a successful mission seemed impossible. In fact, one of the students within the embassy who was informed of the failed attempt reply was 'Impossible!'¹ The students had long believed that a rescue attempt was unmanageable and had reduced their guard of the embassy. A rescue mission was not the first idea in freeing the hostages. Therefore, the operation was designed to limit commitment and consequences.

Operation Eagle Claw was designed in such a way that at each step, the mission could be shut down with limited consequences. The plan included a combination of Delta Force, Army Rangers, Air Force Pilots, and Navy helicopters. The plan was to fly Delta Force into Iran at a site called Desert One. There, they would meet six helicopters, which would then take them to

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¹ Warren Christopher, *American Hostages in Iran: the Conduct of a Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 154.

the outskirts of Tehran. Then they would be dropped at a Delta hide-site where the force would meet up with Department of Defense agents who would then lead them to a site sixty-five miles outside of Tehran. There, Delta Force would be split into three groups: Red Element, White Element, and Blue Element. Red was responsible for rescuing the hostages in the western part of the compound and taking care of any guards in the area. Blue was responsible for the eastern part of the compound. Once the hostages were in the hands of the Delta Force, they would then bring in helicopters to extract the hostages. The White team would be responsible for making sure Roosevelt Avenue was secure and then eventually aid the withdrawal of Red and Blue. While the attack on the Embassy was happening, another group of Special Forces would be responsible for the retrieval of the three hostages within the Foreign Ministry building. After the operation was over, the helicopters would take the hostages out of the area to an airfield that had already been secured by the Rangers. There, the hostages and their rescuers would be taken out of Iran, while the Rangers would provide security and then withdraw.²

Unfortunately, the operation never advanced past Desert One. Delta Force arrived at Desert One; however, only six of the eight helicopters needed to transport them arrived. Two of the helicopters experienced mechanical malfunctions and were unable to leave. However, when they began to load the helicopters, they found that only five were flyable. The sixth helicopter had hydraulic problems. As the operation needed six helicopters, the operation commander decided to abort the operation.³ Unfortunately, as one of the helicopters began to lift off it crashed into a C-130 refueling aircraft. The result was the death of eight U.S. Personnel and five injured. Furthermore, it caused the abandonment of the other helicopters, which eventually would fall in hands of the Iranians.⁴

The decision to carry out this mission was not an easy one. The Carter Administration tried to use every avenue of diplomacy before turning to military force. Leading up to the decision, there were divisions within the administration about the use of military force, especially from Secretary of State Cyrus Vance. Jimmy Carter had recommendations on both sides of the argument. However, National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, advised the President to use military action. The decision to carry out Operation Eagle Claw, and the unfortunate failure of the operation, led to political divisions within the administration, Vance's resignation, and the failure of Jimmy Carter's re-election campaign.

The Secretary of State under the Carter Administration "believed that the hostages were pawns in a power struggle and valuable as long as they were unharmed."⁵ This belief led to the idea that the hostages were in no immediate danger; however, the administration was deeply concerned about the conditions and the instability of the hostage's surrounding environment. These concerns and the idea that U.S. force would lead to the Shi'ite passion for martyrdom led to the decision to "use patient diplomacy and concerted international pressure" instead of using force.⁶ The main goals of the President were to protect United States' honor and interests, as well as free the hostages. To do this, the early strategy was to maintain all lines of

² Charlie A. Beckwith and Donald Knox, *Delta Force* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 253-256.

³ *Ibid.*, 276-278.

⁴ Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran* (New York: Random House, 1985), 297.

⁵ Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy* (New York; Simon and Schuster, 1983), 377.

⁶ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 377.

communication with Iranian leaders to ensure safety and wellbeing of the hostages, and to negotiate for their release. The United States would also attempt to increase “political, economic, and legal pressure on Iran through the United Nations and other international bodies, to increase Iran’s isolation from the world community.”⁷ The goal was to make sure Iran understood the ramifications of their revolution and breaking international law by holding hostages. In order to impose international pressure, the United States went before the United Nations Security Council. The Council strongly disagreed with the seizure of the embassy and demanded the hostages be returned. This meeting showed the world that the U.S. was using every diplomatic avenue possible. Furthermore, the U.S. went to the International Court of Justice, which could increase international pressure on Iran. On November 17th, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) persuaded Ayatollah Khomeini to release thirteen female and black hostages. In December, the U.S. proposed the use of economic sanctions on military sales and trade other than food and medical supplies to the United Nations.⁸ After the use of economic sanctions and pressure, the United States had exhausted every avenue and began to look into military force.

Vance strongly opposed the use of military force. In March, a group consisting of Carter, Mondale, Brzezinski, Brown, Jones, and Vance met at Camp David to discuss the crisis. There, they began to discuss the idea of military force. At the meeting, Vance gave his reasons for opposition. As long as the hostages were not harmed and in no danger, he did not think that military action was necessary. He pointed out that the use of military force could risk the lives of the hostages, U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf region, and U.S.-Soviet relations. Vance thought that the hostages would be released as soon as Khomeini was sure that the revolution had served its purpose and the Islamic Republic was in place. Once these things were in order, Vance thought the hostages would be released, because they would no longer be of value.⁹

However, with each passing month without the return of the hostages, there was growing impatience and resentment towards the cautious policy that repeatedly produced failure and humiliation. Brzezinski argued in favor of an ultimatum “that promised unilateral action highly disruptive of Iranian society” if a resolution had not come to pass by a certain date.¹⁰ In response, Warren Christopher argued that military action would not work because Iranians “welcomed the chance to become martyrs.”¹¹ Vance continued to promote the idea of waiting because, “the need to protect the lives of our fellow Americans dictated we continue to exercise restraint.”¹²

In Brzezinski’s book, *Power and Principle*, Brzezinski discusses how he had come to the conclusion to act. With growing impatience, he decided that the administration “could not sit” while negotiations continued with no end in sight.¹³ When negotiations began to close and it seemed that there would be no future success in that manner, they began to look at military

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 378 and 381.

⁹ Ibid., 408.

¹⁰ Sick, *All Fall Down*, 283.

¹¹ Ibid., 283.

¹² Ibid., 295.

¹³ Zbiginew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Advisor, 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983), 486.

options. However, still hopeful that negotiations would re-open, they began the first steps of reconnaissance. In response to these first steps, Vance continued to openly oppose military action. President Carter responded to this with the question of whether or not he was willing to wait another year while the hostages were still imprisoned. Furthermore, the President agreed with Brzezinski that U.S. allies might provide more aid if they thought that they were planning a rescue. In the beginning of April, the negotiations closed. Carter realized the necessity to perform some form of action. The time had come to deal forcefully with the crisis.¹⁴ He thought they 'were no longer dealing with kidnapers...but were, in effect, dealing with a hostile government...'¹⁵ Brzezinski's recommendation was brought forth due to the fact that they could no longer prolong the stalemate. Also, the rising public frustrations with the fact that the hostages were not home led him to this difficult recommendation.

By early April, National Security Advisor Brzezinski had convinced President Carter that the time had come to pursue the military option. In his assessment of the situation, Brzezinski wrote that, "We have essentially run out of peaceful steps we can take to put pressure on the Iranians, are we prepared for more significant military action?"¹⁶ The policy of restraint had run its course. At the same time, the Soviet Union had invaded Afghanistan in December of 1979. The invasion had put into question the United States leadership role in world politics. Brzezinski's idea to "reassert [U.S.] global leadership" through a demonstration of its 'deterrent capabilities.'¹⁷ This was to be achieved by following through with a military action to free the hostages.

Carter knew that the military was ready to fulfill the mission; however, he also understood Vance's desire to continue to pursue diplomatic solutions. Vance's opposition, found in Brzezinski, believed that "a careful and boldly executed rescue operation represents the only realistic prospect that the hostages- any of them-will be freed in the foreseeable future."¹⁸ Between the two opposing sides, Vance had been the "go-to-guy for Carter in the early years with his policy of human rights, engagement with the Soviet Union, and his patient approach to international relations. However, Carter started to lean away from Vance's view on international affairs after the invasion of Afghanistan and the long wait for the freedom of the hostages. Because of these failures, Carter embraced Brzezinski's assumption of Soviet malice and the United States' need to show that it was still a world power. Carter's political advisor, Hamilton Jordan, suggested to President Carter that "...a punitive response to the crisis was absolutely essential to your own re-election and to America's image in the world..."¹⁹ Many of the President's advisors believed that it was necessary for him to act to save his presidency and the world's view of the U.S. The exception was Vance, who thought that there was still a chance for diplomacy to secure the release of the hostages.

While Vance and his wife were on vacation, a meeting was held by the National Security Council to decide whether or not a rescue mission should be attempted. In his place, Warren Christopher defended his ideas to not turn to military action. However, he had not been

¹⁴ Ibid., 487.

¹⁵ Ibid., 491.

¹⁶ David Farber, *Taken Hostage* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 170.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 171.

¹⁹ Ibid.

completely briefed on the rescue. Christopher did not take a position on the mission and continued to argue for the use of diplomatic relations. However, Christopher was outnumbered in his thinking, and the Council voted in favor of continuing the mission. After the vote was made, Carter set the tentative date for the April 24. Upon Vance's return, Christopher informed him about the meeting. After being informed, he went to the President to voice his dislike of the decision and asked to bring for his view to the Council.²⁰ After Vance presented his views to the Council, Carter himself responded to his views. The President's first argument was that U.S. allies were not making a huge effort in showing support for the U.S. and would be relieved that the crisis was over if the operation was successful. Secondly, the operation was designed so that it could be shut down at any point if necessary. Furthermore, putting Iran in its place would please the other Persian Gulf states in the region. Finally, the other U.S. citizens in Iran understood the risk when they decided to travel there. With these points made, the President had finally decided to go forward with the operation.²¹

Based on the President's decision to follow through with the operation, Vance decided that he could no longer be Secretary of State. He decided that he could not stand by the President, as he strongly disagreed with the President in what he believed was in the best interest of the country and the hostages. Vance turned in his resignation before the operation took place and said that he would resign whether or not the mission was successful. He would remain in office until the operation occurred and continue to give the President advice. After the mission went through, he would then publicly resign. On the day of the operation, Carter called Vance into the Situation Room to inform him of the decision to abort the mission. However, not long after the President told him, they were informed of the helicopters crash and the loss of U.S. personnel. True to his word, Cyrus Vance publicly resigned four days later after helping inform the world of the incident.²²

The Vance and Brzezinski dynamic complemented the President in different ways. Vance appealed to the President's "...desire to go down in history as a peacemaker, idealist..."²³ Vance's policies of humanitarianism and diplomatic reasoning before military action worked towards a slow but eventual goal of the release of the hostages. Vance was willing to wait until the hostages were no longer necessary for Iranian goals. However, Brzezinski's "restless energy and persistent pursuit of rash approaches complemented the President's 'activist side.'"²⁴ Brzezinski's interests were more in "national interest and honor, while on the other hand, Vance placed his concerns with 'human values.'"²⁵

After the operation's failure, the public's belief that the President was incompetent increased. After the initial failure, Carter realized that hostage situation would continue and would severely hurt his chances of re-election. Within the media, the President was openly attacked. The Times

²⁰ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 409-410.

²¹ Betty Glad, *Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 264.

²² Vance, *Hard Choices*, 410-413.

²³ Betty Glad, "Personality, Political and Group Process Variables in Foreign Policy Decision-Making: Jimmy Carter's Handling of the Iranian Hostage Crisis," *International Political Science Review* 10, no. 1 (1989): 48.

²⁴ Glad, "Personality, Political and Group Process Variables in Foreign Policy Decision-Making," 48.

²⁵ Rose McDermott, "Prospect Theory in International Relations: The Iranian Hostage Rescue Mission," *Political Psychology Special Issue: Prospect Theory and Political Psychology* 13, no 2 (June 1992): 249.

wrote, “While most of Carter’s political foes tactfully withheld criticism, his image as inept had been renewed.”²⁶ Furthermore, the Washington Post wrote that Carter was “...unfit to be President at a time of crisis.”²⁷ According to the *Time* article, “Shock, Anger - But Also Sympathy”, “the aborted mission was the reinforcement of an already strong conviction Carter is not up to leading...”²⁸ With these ideas, the nation leaned toward the idea of new leadership. The 1980 election brought forth the Republican face of Ronald Reagan, who used these ideas in his favor. As Reagan put it, ‘I will not stand by and watch this great country destroy itself under mediocre leadership...’ Reagan used this to undermine Carter’s ability to lead the country.²⁹

While the campaign dragged on, the Carter Administration tried in vain to keep the public eye away from their inability to end the hostage crisis. In December of 1979, Carter’s ratings in the approval index for his handling of the crisis was at 75 percent.³⁰ As the hostage crisis continued, Carter’s popularity among the populace continued to decline. By April 8, Carter’s approval index on Iran dropped to 40 percent and may have led Carter to approve the rescue mission.³¹ However, after Carter made the decision to go through with the rescue mission, his approval ratings went up to 46 percent.³² Furthermore, when people were asked if Carter made the right decision in going through with the mission, 71 percent said yes.³³ In June of 1980, when asked which President could handle the situation the best, Carter scored the highest with 34 percent.³⁴ Unfortunately, Carter hit the lowest point of his approval ratings in July of 1980 at 21 percent.³⁵ With the first anniversary of the taking of the U.S. embassy fast approaching, public frustration and pressure were placed on the President. Unfortunately, the President’s oath to not campaign while the hostages were still in Iran made his political condition much worse, and he was advised to leave the Oval Office.³⁶ The crisis and the failed rescue attempt took a huge toll on President Carter and his possibility of re-election. In the *Time* article “A for Effort, F for Execution,” the author thought that if the rescue mission had been successful it would have swayed the voters to back the President. Unfortunately, it did not and the result was a negative response in Carter’s approval ratings.³⁷ With this, Iran came to the conclusion that Carter would do anything for a resolution to the crisis and he would be easier to work with than the newly elected President Reagan.

Carter worked tirelessly to insure the hostages return home; however, he withdrew from publicly campaigning. The operation’s failure finally allowed the President to leave the confines of the Oval Office and return to the campaign he had postponed towards the beginning of the

²⁶ Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 175.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ “Shock, anger- but also sympathy,” *Time*, May 5, 1980, 31.

²⁹ Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 176.

³⁰ David L. Larson, “The American Response to the Iranian Hostage Crisis: 444 Days of Decision,” *International Social Science Review* 57, no. 4 (Autumn 1982): 206.

³¹ Larson, “The American Response to the Iranian Hostage Crisis,” 206.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 207.

³⁶ Steve Smith, “Policy Preferences and Bureaucratic Position: The Case of the American Hostage Rescue Mission,” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 61, no. 1 (Winter, 1984-1985): 13.

³⁷ ‘A for Effort, F for execution,’ *Time*, May 5, 1980, 31.

crisis.³⁸ Senator Byrd encouraged Carter to leave the Oval Office and talk to the people. In his view, “The Ayatollah Khomeini doesn’t just have fifty-three hostages...He also had the President hostage.”³⁹ A few days later, Carter came out of the White House to resume a “limited campaign schedule.”⁴⁰ Before the election, the Carter Administration worked hard to bring the hostages home before Election Day. Unfortunately, the deal that they believed they had made with the Iranians to get them home before Election Day did not follow through. In his diary, Carter wrote that they were “getting some very disturbing public opinion poll results, showing a massive slippage as people realized the hostages were not coming home...this apparently opened up a flood of related concerns...that we were impotent.”⁴¹ The next day, he lost the presidency. The political ramifications of the failure may have been limited if they had decided to act sooner; however they believed they had to allow the negotiations an opportunity to succeed.

Even though the release of the hostages did not occur until minutes after Reagan took office, the Carter Administration was able to secure a deal for their release before the election. The deal was the release of the hostages in exchange for unfreezing Iranian funds in U.S. Banks. After the election, the Algerian government offered their services as mediators between the U.S. and Iranian governments. With this knowledge, Carter sent Christopher and another selection of State Department officials to Algeria to complete the negotiations. While they were there, Carter enforced a deadline for a compromise. If the Iranians did not make a deal, they would have to restart negotiations. Newly elected President Reagan backed Carter by stating that he would back any arrangements between Carter and the Iranians. Finally, they reached a deal, where Iran agreed to pay any loans to the U.S. back. Due to technicalities, the deal took longer than expected. Therefore, the hostages were not released until right as Reagan was sworn into office. This means through all of the work Carter had done and all the grief that he had gone through, the hostages were not released while he was still president.⁴²

While the President was unable to secure the timely release of the hostages, he was able to prevent other situations such as a war in the region, loss of lives on both sides and Iran running to the Soviets. When it got to the point where nothing diplomatically could be done, the operation was approved. In the event of failure, he undertook complete responsibility.⁴³ Furthermore, the failed attempt also relieved the President of the pressure from the public to react to Iran militarily. This relief led to the ability to continue diplomatic negotiations with Iran. In Brzezinski’s opinion, “I felt that we owed it to all concerned to try to rescue the hostages once we had a reasonably good change of being successful.”⁴⁴ On top of the failure of the operation and public humiliation, Carter faced the task of re-election. Because of the press’s implication of the President being incapable of doing his job, Carter could have made rash decisions that cost the hostages their lives or tremendous global political ramifications. Instead, he refused to make

³⁸ Glad, *Outsider in the White House*, 268.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 269.

⁴¹ Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 179.

⁴² Glad, *Outsider in the White House*, 275-277.

⁴³ Warren Christopher, *American Hostages in Iran*, 171.

⁴⁴ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 500.

any other military decisions while there was still the ability to negotiate. Because of this, he succeeded in saving lives and U.S. interests. Unfortunately, this cost him his presidency.⁴⁵

The rescue mission was the complete opposite of Carter's initial policy of "humanitarian emphasis," and it was an extreme decision from a military perspective as well.⁴⁶ When the President made the decision to attempt the rescue mission, he was looking towards a situation that was poor and progressively getting worse. Iran was refusing to negotiate, 60% of the populace that thought he was 'too soft on Iran', his campaign was going poorly, and 70% of the populace believed that it was time for a new president.⁴⁷ Carter needed something to boost his popularity and hopefully save his presidency. The operation had just the right amount of risk. If the operation was successful, the hostages would be free, Carter would be viewed as a 'hero,' and United States international credibility would be restored.⁴⁸ However, the absolute failure of the mission demonstrated just how detrimental a decision to perform a rescue mission could be politically. Carter lost his Secretary of State, the hostages were removed from the Embassy and scattered across Iran, were not released for another nine months, the United States' international credibility was destroyed, and it cost him the election.⁴⁹ Many people within the United States questioned if it would have been better to wait instead of attempting an extremely difficult rescue mission, even some of the hostages agreed with this opinion. After the failure at Desert One, Carter's "reelection became impossible."⁵⁰

Operation Eagle Claw was a risky endeavor; however, the decision did not come easily. The President's first plan of complete humanitarian and diplomatic policies were completely exhausted before the President became restless and came to the conclusion that it was time to act. The decision to carry out the military option brought forth debates and divisions within Carter's Administration caused by the President's two main advisors being completely opposed on the subject. Secretary Vance was more dovish and wanted to continue the diplomatic path based on his belief that the hostages would not be harmed due to the fact that they were pawns in the formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. On the other hand, National Security Advisor Brzezinski was more hawkish in the decision. He believed that the United States needed to act to preserve its honor and credibility in the international sphere. Also, he thought that a mission was the best way to free the hostages in a timely manner. Eventually, Carter began to see that action was necessary. Unfortunately, the end result of the mission was not what anyone expected. Before the mission took place, Vance decided to resign as Secretary of State whether or not the mission was successful based on principle. With the unfortunate failure of the operation, Carter lost the remaining faith that the people had in him to be a successful president and with that the election. Furthermore, the President made the U.S. look like it no longer had the ability to handle conflict quickly and decisively. President Carter's decision to follow through with the military option, as a last chance effort to save his presidency and to bring the hostages home faster,

⁴⁵Ibid., 508-509.

⁴⁶McDermott, "Prospect Theory in International Relations," 237.

⁴⁷Ibid., 240.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 244.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 257.

⁵⁰ Charles G. Cogan, "Desert One and Its Disorders," *The Journal of Military History* 67, no. 1 (January 2003): 216.

completely backfired. The ramifications of this decision were devastating from the terrible loss of military personnel to Carter's loss of the people's faith in him as a President.

Celebrity on the Peacock Throne: Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's Superstar Portrayal in U.S. Popular Culture, 1965-1978

Elizabeth Ennenga

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Foreign policy is not a science; it is an art. The creation of policies, the opinions formed towards other countries, and the relationships between nations are all part of the delicate balance that leads to foreign relations between countries. Within the U.S., foreign policy and international relations are prevalent topics of discussion not only amongst policy specialists, but average citizens as well. Because of this fascination, there is a demand for media coverage on this topic. International issues, more specifically foreign affairs, are common topics covered by news organizations, namely magazines, like *Time* and *Life*.

While these reporting bodies play an important role in sharing information with U.S. citizens, one wonders what factors influence the opinions held by the authors of these articles. Scholars, such as Alexander Craig, make critical observations about the relationship between media and international relations, asserting that these reporters influence “international relations most noticeably in (their) home country.”¹ With their opinions being revered by U.S. citizens, it is important to know how journalists come to form opinions on foreign affairs in a “socio-historical context.”²

In order to answer this question, that is to say, “How do American journalists come to their opinions on foreign affairs?” one must look at what the actor most involved in foreign affairs in the U.S.: the federal government. Craig discussed the interests governments have in influencing media, as the media publicizes their beliefs to their own country and abroad.³ Governments influence the opinions of these journalists in order to make sure their views are publicized. This has created a culture in which the U.S. media's depiction of foreign affairs shift with the government's rather fluid opinions on other nations. In a matter of years, the media's representation of other nations or foreign leaders can undergo dramatic transformations. This trend is apparent throughout history, but was most clearly represented in America's relationship with Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, specifically from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s.

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¹ Alexander Craig, “The Media and Foreign Policy,” *International Journal* 31, no. 2 (1976): 320.

² William A. Dorman and Mansour Farhang, *The US Press and Iran: Foreign Policy and the Journalism of Deference* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 13.

³ Alexander Craig, “The Media and Foreign Policy,” 320.

During the history of the relationship between the U.S. and Iran, there have been key players who helped shape diplomatic ties between the two countries. Both the U.S. and Iran had important politicians and opinion makers that were well known in the two countries. One of the most important members that took part in U.S.-Iranian relations was Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. A well-known face to both the Iranian and U.S. publics, Mohammad Reza Shah ruled in Iran from 1941-1979, with a brief loss of power during the coup d'état of 1953, as a modernizing autocrat.⁴ He had a close relationship with many high-ranking officials in the United States, including President Richard Nixon.

Mohammad Reza Shah kept Iran politically close with the U.S., which allowed him to become a widely recognized politician to the U.S. public. There were an abundance of articles written about Mohammad Reza Shah in mainstream U.S. media, creating an Iranian celebrity that became a household name in the Western world. In Iran, he lived an opulent life, which intrigued the U.S. public and caused many to want to learn more about the mysterious Iranian ruler. There was an exuberant amount of vested interest in Iran by the U.S. public, and their fascination with the Shah's life led to an exceptional number of articles on the Iranian ruler to be written by U.S. magazines. Exploring U.S. media from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s, it is possible to see how the Shah was represented from his golden age all the way to the harsh criticisms of his ability to rule towards the end of his reign. More importantly, a critical examination of media in this era allows for an analysis of the intimate relationship between U.S. foreign policy and U.S. media coverage.

The "Golden Boy" Era

In the mid-1960s, Mohammad Reza Shah was in the midst of being the United States' "Golden Boy" from the East. This time period was at the height of U.S. support of the Shah and his policies. However, in Iran there were many disgruntled citizens who were not pleased with the Shah. U.S. media did not attempt to view Iranian issues through the viewpoint of Iranian citizens, but instead took to devaluing the reasons that led to various groups of Iranians finding faults with the Shah and his policies.

Mohammad Reza Shah was well liked in the U.S. during the mid-1960s. He was seen as a Middle Eastern ally with a life that suited a king. *Life* magazine's article in January of 1966, "Modern Monarch on the Peacock Throne" exemplified the positive opinion the U.S. media held about the Shah during the height of his power. The description of Mohammad Reza Shah in *Life* Magazine's January, 1966 issue was a friendly one, filled with information that would make anyone idolize his lifestyle. The mid-1960s were a critical time for Mohammad Reza Shah.⁵ While many Iranians were dissatisfied with the reinstatement of the Shah, the U.S. Government was extremely pleased to see the Shah back in power, as it was the U.S. government that had helped the Shah to get there.

In the article, the Shah was presented as one of only a few monarchical rulers whose power was more than symbolic. At this time, Mohammad Reza Shah was highly criticized by Iranians who were unhappy that the former, popularly elected leader,

⁴ Zhand Shakibi, "Pahlavism: The Ideologization of Monarchy in Iran," *Politics, Religion, and Ideology* 14, no. 1 (March 2013): 114.

⁵ Zhand Shakibi, "Pahlavism: The Ideologization of Monarchy in Iran," 115.

Mohammad Mossadegh, had been removed from power.⁶ However, the U.S. government was happy to see Mossadegh gone. The Red Scare caused the U.S. government to fear Mossadegh's populist movement as a prelude to a communist takeover. The article described the events leading up to the coup d'état as Mohammad Reza Shah allowing the citizens of Iran to choose who would govern them, with the Shah being their choice.⁷ The article asserted that the Shah's actions represented what the Iranian people wanted, but this was not entirely accurate. The *Life* article quoted the Shah stating, "Let the people make their choice—Mossadegh or me."⁸ After the 1953 coup d'état, the U.S. government was happy to see the Shah back in power, as they knew they had rid themselves of the threat of communism spreading to one of their allies.

Appreciation for the Shah was prevalent throughout the mainstream U.S. media during this period. He was portrayed as "the handsome and regal" ruler who was bravely modernizing Iran and "shucking the ancient traditions."⁹ In the wake of a great deal of opposition to the Shah's rule in Iran, *Life* used their article as a reminder of all the great qualities the Shah possessed. The article described the opulence of the Shah's palace, mainly focusing on the Peacock Throne Hall where important ceremonies were held.¹⁰ This description not only boasted about the wealth and celebrity-like life of Mohammad Reza Shah, but also reiterated the Shah's commitment to his country. The article praised the success of the "positive reforms" from the Shah's White Revolution, painting him as an empathetic ruler who desperately wanted to modernize and improve Iran.¹¹ By asserting that Iranian citizens wanted Mohammad Reza Shah to rule them, *Life* made the Shah look like a true humanitarian for the programs he implemented.

Not only did it describe the first roses to bloom and the beautiful nightingales, *Time* magazine's 1967 article, "Iran: Revolution from the Throne," gives a brief account of the great successes Iran has had in its antiquity.¹² Iran was represented as an alluring land with a rich history, with nothing but abundant success in their past. The article continued to talk about the modern successes Iran, an "underdeveloped land," was experiencing: a booming economy, developments in the oil industry, and no need for foreign aid.¹³ Emphasizing the U.S. was no longer giving large amounts of foreign aid to Iran, *Time* Magazine praised the country for its ability to stabilize itself after World War II.

All of the credit for the achievements enumerated in the article was given to Mohammad Reza Shah. *Time* Magazine praised the Shah for focusing on modernizing his country, while other Middle Eastern leaders "feuded, fussed, and fought with each other."¹⁴ Once again, U.S. media stated that the Shah was not like every other Middle Eastern political leader; he had goals that were transparent and friendly to the U.S., making him a positive role model. The article also mentioned that Mohammad Reza Shah was a pro-west leader who was able to have relations with countries like the Soviet Union

⁶ Homa Katouzian, *Musaddiq and the Struggle for Power in Iran* (I.B. Tauris: 1999), xiv.

⁷ Lee Griggs, "Modern Monarch on the Peacock Throne," *Life*, January 14, 1966, 47.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁰ Lee Griggs, "Modern Monarch on the Peacock Throne," 38.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹² "Iran: Revolution from the Throne," *Time*, October 6, 1967, 1.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

without fearing he would adopt their ideology.¹⁵ The article only listed positive qualities about the leader of Iran, as this was his “Golden Age.”

Not only did the article aim to shine a positive light on the Shah’s political decisions, but it also described the drama in his life almost as a fantasy. The style in which this information is shared reasserts that Mohammad Reza Shah was perceived as a celebrity in U.S. media. The narrative described the Shah as a shallow playboy who was not taking his role as the ruler of Iran seriously, until he left the trivial fun behind in order to be the respectable ruler the Iranians needed.¹⁶ He was viewed as coasting through his job, as he had plenty of money and -abstaining from engaging in global politics. It was not until the emergence of a “crusty old nationalist named Mohammed Mossadegh, who as Premier nearly overthrew the Shah” that Mohammad Reza Shah truly began to put effort into leading Iran.¹⁷ The U.S. government feared Mossadegh, as they felt he intended to create a communist regime in Iran, and was consequently misrepresented in U.S. media. This narrative of the Shah continued as *Time* quoted Mohammad Reza Shah on his realization that Iran was in need of modernization. The article stated Iran would either “develop or die.”¹⁸ Not only was this a misrepresentation of the events surrounding the 1953 coup d’état, it also dramatized the political decisions the Shah made once he was reinstated. The article created a villainous Mossadegh who was responsible for Mohammad Reza Shah’s moment of enlightenment, which led to yet another enumeration of the Shah’s successes.

Representations of Other Iranians

Another article, from *Harper’s Magazine* in 1965, perfectly exemplified the U.S. media’s positive coverage of Mohammad Reza Shah, no matter what his critics said. John Fischer of *Harper’s Magazine* wrote an editorial describing the tensions between Mohammad Reza Shah and his citizens, pointing out only the faults of different groups of Iranian citizens; he even titled the article, “The Shah and His Exasperating Subjects.”¹⁹ The article discussed the general complaints Iranians had against Mohammad Reza Shah, yet it presented the grievances more as the result of personal antipathy towards the Shah than valid claims that highlight real issues. These opportunistic grievances included businessmen who wanted to keep their “ancient habits and petty monopolies,” among many more.²⁰ Fischer addressed the general grievances commonly made about Mohammad Reza Shah, then delegitimized the fears of Iranians by stating that the Shah of Iran paled in comparison to other leaders, such as Adolf Hitler, when it came to creating a police state.²¹ The article presented Mohammad Reza Shah as a different type of ruler than what Iranians portrayed him to be.

The *Harper’s Magazine* article proceeded to defend the Shah by presenting the Iranian groups who vocalized their unhappiness with Mohammad Reza Shah in a

¹⁵ “Iran: Revolution from the Throne,” 2.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ John Fischer, “The Shah and His Exasperating Subjects,” *Harpers Magazine*, April, 1965, 24.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

negative light. Fischer asserted that the antiquated feudal lords were unhappy with the Shah's governance out of fear that the Shah would "break up their estates and distribute the land to the peasants who farm it."²² Muslim religious leaders disliked the Shah because of his drive to modernize the country through his program.²³ The article essentially made the argument that the Shah was being criticized for his reform policies, although the United States strongly supported these policies.

Another tactic used to negatively portray disgruntled Iranian citizens who were not satisfied with Mohammad Reza Shah was by claiming those vocalizing their anti-Shah opinions were communists who worried he would "ruin their chances of capturing Iran."²⁴ The Red Scare had more than adequately caused fear of the spread of communism in the United States and its allies. The Shah had been the United States choice of ruler, as he was also anti-communist. By claiming the negative opinions towards Mohammad Reza Shah were coming from communists, their accusations would be completely discredited by the U.S. public, as communists were not trusted and appeared bitter.

The First Lady of Iran

A further area of interest for the media was the Shah's family. Not only did U.S. media extensively cover the life of Mohammad Reza Shah, they discussed the help given to Iran by his wife—Empress Farah. Empress Farah was represented as a revered first lady figure in the U.S. media. Not only was she extremely beautiful, with U.S. media documenting her fashion decisions, she was also seen as an active advocate for issues such as Women's Rights, healthcare, and the environment.²⁵

The U.S. media presented the Empress to be quite like the first lady of the United States; she was seen as a vital asset to the development of Iran. The idea of American media portraying the Shah and Empress as celebrities was exemplified in this article on Farah in the 1975 *Saturday Evening Post*. The article did not focus on the political world of Iran, but the societal world of Empress Farah, which proved that U.S. citizens took interest in the lives of the First Family of Iran, like they did with the family of the U.S. President.

Empress Farah discussed her vitamin regimen and vacation destinations, which allowed people to get a peek into the life of real Iranian royalty.²⁶ This displayed the perks Empress Farah received due to the fairytale she was living in. The article made sure to note that Empress Farah was not only a fashionable woman on the arm of an important man. Her thoughts on Iran were also valued. She stated that helping her busy husband with his work was something she found riveting. The *Saturday Evening Post* described her as a sort of work partner to Mohammad Reza Shah, and she even claimed to pick up the slack for him. Empress Farah expressed her political role as "an advocate for the

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Joy Billington, "The Shah's Advocate," *Saturday Evening Post*, November 1975, 11.

²⁶ Ibid., 11.

causes she believes in.”²⁷ The description of Empress Farah’s life in the magazine made it apparent that the U.S. media truly did view the Imperial family of Iran as celebrities.

The Great Shift

Mohammad Reza Shah’s image drastically changed in the mid-1970s for multiple reasons. One of the greatest issues that caused the Shah to no longer be the “Golden Boy” to his American allies was oil. *Time* magazine’s article, “Oil, Grandeur, and a Challenge to the West”, described Western grievances with the oil the Shah controlled after the oil crisis.²⁸ With the Shah’s newfound control in the form of oil, the U.S. media began to paint him in a very different light.

Not only did the article state that Mohammad Reza Shah was seen as weak and insecure previous to obtaining a great sum of oil, they asserted that the West viewed him in a negative light.²⁹ This record was in stark contrast to the mid-1960 musings on the Shah, where he was revered as a selfless leader prepared to modernize his beautiful country. The divergence in these opinions highlighted an important point, that media portrayals were completely circumstantial, and the U.S. media could change its mind easily.

The emergence of the oil issue completely swayed the U.S. public’s opinion of Iran and the Shah, creating a juxtaposition with the description of the Shah given less than a decade earlier. In 1973, the emergence of the oil crisis significantly altered the foreign relations between the U.S. and Iran. While average production per well in the U.S. was only 17 barrels a day, Iran was producing an average of 11,838 barrels per well per day due to the Shah’s role in OPEC.³⁰ The article asserted that Mohammad Reza Shah did not have true power as a ruler until the oil was obtained.³¹ What was once seen as envy of the opulent lifestyle was seen as proof of the Shah’s “oil power”. *Time* gave an in-depth explanation of the grand celebration of Mohammad Reza Shah’s birthday in the opulent palace; it described his decision to pardon many prisoners and the “thousand courtiers and high officials” in attendance.³² The assertion was that he now has the power to have a grand celebration because his power had been legitimized thanks to the oil.

The article also attributed the transformations that came about in Iran to the money and power of Iran’s natural wealth. *Time* highlighted that, “no other member of the club of suddenly wealthy oil nations is advanced enough...to match Iran’s projected scale of social and economic growth over the next two decades.”³³ In earlier years, the U.S. media attributed the transformation of Iran to the reforms Mohammad Reza Shah was instating in order to modernize the country. The oil money was said to be supporting the improvements in the quality of life in Iran, and was even helping create gender equality.³⁴ These claims were not entirely untrue, as women were receiving new rights as early as

²⁷ Ibid., 12.

²⁸ “Oil, Grandeur, and a Challenge to the West,” *Time*, November 4, 1974, 28.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Cyrus Bina, “Internationalization of the Oil Industry: Simple Oil Shocks or Structural Crisis?” *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 11, no. 3 (1988): 359.

³¹ “Oil, Grandeur, and a Challenge to the West,” 28.

³² Oil, Grandeur, and a Challenge to the West,” 28.

³³ Ibid., 33.

³⁴ Ibid.

the mid-1960s. The Shah's new leverage over the U.S. was causing the U.S. media to criticize a man they once adored.

The Shah's image continued to be tarnished in the U.S. media, as the political conditions in Iran became increasingly complicated at the end of the 1970s. After years of reports on the Shah's human rights violations in the mid-1970s, the Shah was running out of allies, both foreign and domestic. This led to a revolutionary situation in Iran. The first traces of the Islamic Revolution can be seen in this time period. At this point, the United States and Iran had a remarkably different political relationship than they did during Mohammad Reza Shah's "Golden Era." The United States continued to condemn the Shah, particularly how he handled the opposition that was emerging against his rule.

In 1978 Steven Strasser and Paul Martin of *Newsweek* wrote an article that accurately exemplified Western criticisms of the events occurring in Iran. The article criticized the way the Shah had handled many of the trying situations that had previously occurred, such as "Black Friday" of September 8, 1978. On that day, many Iranians were killed for not following martial law.³⁵ The article listed a variety of issues occurring in Iran, some of which made the Shah look as if he was losing control. The first issue listed in the article was the Shah's use of "unprecedented television coverage" of debates that were occurring between him and members of the Parliament.³⁶ The purpose was for the Shah to be able to reach large quantities of citizens, but as *Newsweek* pointed out, the Shah did not think this through and was presented as foolish for not anticipating that his opposition would use the publicity to their advantage.

The article then discussed the Shah's investigation into the events that occurred on Black Friday, and described his actions as those of a politician trying to "soothe the opposition" who were outraged by the massacre.³⁷ No longer was Mohammad Reza Shah depicted as a selfless leader, but as a politician putting on a show in order to find some peace in his country. The description of the events insinuated that the Shah was creating a sort of police state as he saw his reign coming to an end. The article even stated his army was ready for any sort of disturbance from the opposition.³⁸

Depicting Mohammad Reza Shah as the ringmaster of a grand show for the public continued throughout the rest of the *Newsweek* article. Strasser and Martin criticized the Shah for his decision to fire court minister, Abbas Hoveyda, while trying to ease tensions for himself. They asserted the Shah terminated Hoveyda from his duties in an effort to concede some to the Mullahs, or Muslim leaders of Iran, who persecuted Hoveyda for practicing the Baha'i faith.³⁹ The article presented the Shah as willing to sacrifice anyone in order to save himself and his power.

The final blow to the Shah's image came in the conclusion of the article. Strasser and Martin argued that Mohammad Reza Shah is tarnishing the reputation of his family in the method he has taken to govern Iran.⁴⁰ This argument came easily after reading rest of the article, as they presented the Shah as making any attempt to save his rule. Ending the

³⁵ Steven Strasser and Paul Martin, "Iran: Carrot and Stick," *Newsweek*, August 25, 1978, 48.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

article with a critical, yet thought-provoking, question, *Newsweek* inquired whether the Shah could keep power while fully exercising the use of the military and giving no real concessions to critics.⁴¹ It was apparent that by the late 1970s, the U.S. media no longer praised their former golden boy.

Conclusion

Mohammad Reza Shah's image was perceived in a multitude of ways in the U.S. media during a relatively short period of time. From the mid-1960s, when the Shah was placed on a pedestal and viewed as the Middle Eastern "Golden Boy," to the late 1970s when American media became highly critical of the decisions made by Mohammad Reza Shah, the U.S. media had held a variety of opinions on the Shah. The historical relevance of the dates in which these articles were written were very telling, as U.S. media was very much swayed by global politics events happening around the world greatly affect public opinion on foreign affairs.

The case of Mohammad Reza Shah also demonstrated that the political opinions held by the U.S. government influence the media. The representation of Mohammed Mossadegh as a villainous communist that stood in the way of Mohammad Reza Shah's ability to modernize Iran, is an opinion the media received from the U.S. government.⁴² The earlier view of the Shah as the "golden boy" of the East represents a time in which he was seen as an ally to the U.S. In the end, he was persecuted in the U.S. media, as the oil issues and human rights violations displeased the U.S. government. The path that the U.S. media's opinion of the Shah follows confirms that the political climate in the U.S. affected how the U.S. public perceived Mohammad Reza Shah.

Looking back on articles from the 1960s and 1970s with modern knowledge shows that the U.S. media had a large bias in their depictions of Mohammad Reza Shah. Depending on the relationship the U.S. had with a country, the information given to the U.S. public may be less than accurate. This critical comparison of the U.S. media's bias following foreign policy could be applied to other foreign leaders, such as President Mubarak in Egypt, in an effort to see the extent of foreign policy's influence. Mohammad Reza Shah, once a type of international celebrity was now seen as a sort of Richard Nixon figure in Iran. While he was praised for certain decisions he made, he is also highly criticized for the numerous mistakes he made during his reign.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² "Iran: Revolution from the Throne," 2.

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

Nicholas Eckenrode

© University of Oklahoma

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."¹ 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

***Author Bio:**

¹ 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.²

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.³ 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.⁴ 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.⁵ 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.⁶ 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.

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

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

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

⁵ Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Shah*, 91.

⁶ 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.⁷ 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.⁸ 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!”⁹ 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.”¹⁰ 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.”¹¹ For Nixon, the big fish to pursue

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

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

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

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

¹¹ 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.¹² 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.¹³

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 1977.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ This is ironic as the CIA, amongst others, was endorsing him only decades before. Regardless, the warning signs were

¹² Ibid., 48-49.

¹³ Ibid., 54-55.

¹⁴ Ibid., 64.

¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ 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."¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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

¹⁶Cottom, *Iran and the United States*, 128-129.

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ *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.¹⁹ 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.²⁰ 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%.²¹ 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.²²

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.²³ Infrastructure as a whole began to suffer. In Tehran alone streets were routinely jammed with traffic. Tower blocks were overcrowded as

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 578.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 587.

²² *Ibid.*, 583.

²³ 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.²⁴

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.²⁵ 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.”²⁶ 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.²⁷ 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.²⁸ 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.

²⁴ Sandbrook, “After the Revolution,” 32.

²⁵ 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.

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

²⁷ Moens, “Carters Advisers,” 214-215.

²⁸ *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.²⁹ 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!"³⁰ 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.

²⁹ Bowden, *Guests*, 6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 211.

The Church Committee: Unveiling the Past and Unraveling the Future

Lisa Hackert

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The Central Intelligence Agency has long been shrouded in mystery and public speculation. The agency is often cast as the perpetrator of heinous conspiracies perhaps conceived from the public's imagination or the creativity of Hollywood. The tales of the organization's involvement in assassinations, wiretapping, and eerie experiments portray the organization as rogue and powerful, acting without restraint. One particularly intriguing story details an attempt to undermine Fidel Castro's public image by painting his shoes with a shoe polish designed to cause his trademark beard to fall out.¹ This may seem like a ridiculous conspiracy theory; however, during the course of the United States Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities (often referred to as the Church Committee) this story was found to be true. The validation of such a story created suspicions in Iran about what other CIA conspiracies, especially those surrounding the 1953 Coup against Mohammed Mossadegh, were also true.²

The history of U.S.-Iranian relations was greatly altered by the covert actions of the CIA during the 1953 coup that overthrew Mohammed Mossadegh. However, the most severe damage to the two countries relations was inflicted by the confirmation of this involvement during the Church Committee's investigation into the CIA. While many in Iran may have long suspected that the U.S. government was responsible for the 1953 Coup, the final report of the Church Committee confirmed the actions of the CIA and left the Iranians wondering what else the CIA was to do.³ The revelations of the Church Committee's final report were equally important to the history of U.S.-Iranian relations, as the covert action itself led to anti-U.S. sentiment and paranoia that fueled the storming

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¹ Bill Hall, *Frank Church, D.C., and Me* (Pullman, Washington State University Press, 1995), 73.

² *Ibid.*, 44.

³ Ervand Abrahamian, *The Coup* (New York and London: The New Press, 2013), 205.

of the U.S. embassy in Tehran and the severing of diplomatic relations between the United States and Iran after the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

History of the Coup

In order to fully understand the magnitude of the revelations made by the Church Committee, it is necessary to examine the history of the 1953 overthrow of Iranian Prime Minister Mossadegh. A charismatic politician, Mohammed Mossadegh rose to power on the platform of national independence and constitutional rule and eventually became Prime Minister of Iran. He and his Popular Front movement eventually came to symbolize the opposition to foreign intervention and manipulation by the Great Powers.⁴ This stance by Mossadegh was an obvious threat to British interests in Iran who had an oil concession and owned the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC). Mossadegh's designs for Iranian independence conflicted with these concessions and he urged the Shah to sign into law the nationalization of the AIOC. Both the British and the U.S. governments believed Mossadegh was a threat to their respective interests. For Britain, it was the loss of the oil concessions, while the U.S. feared political instability under Mossadegh and the potential of a Soviet-backed takeover by the communist Tudeh Party in Iran.⁵ Mossadegh became a thorn in the side of both governments, and each government became convinced that the only solution involved his removal.

The British government, specifically the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), initially approached the Truman administration to propose a joint operation against Mossadegh. However, Truman was not persuaded. He hoped that Mossadegh's popularity could be used against the Tudeh Party.⁶ The succeeding Eisenhower administration "favored an aggressive approach to communism" and was easily persuaded, and even accusing Truman of "allowing Iran to become a second China."⁷ The arrangement of the joint coup began through the coordination of the Dulles brothers, John Foster and Allen Dulles, who were Secretary of State and Director of the CIA respectively, with the British SIS. The actual proceedings of the 1953 coup, also known as Operation AJAX, would involve a myriad of actors. This group included Kermit Roosevelt (the lead covert operations agent in the Middle East), the Shah of Iran, paid Iranian political dissidents, and Iranian military officers.⁸ Thus, with the approval of President Truman and Prime Minister Churchill, the CIA embarked on the most significant action in the history of U.S.-Iranian relations, which would ever change relations between the two countries. In order to dispose a democratically elected leader in favor of a monarchy, the CIA would violate the sovereignty of the nation of Iran and act against its proclaimed principles of non-intervention and support for the spread of democracy.

The plan for the covert operation was based on six key elements in order to achieve success and avoid exposing U.S. and British interference. First, the Tehran CIA

⁴ Mark J. Gasiorowski, *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004), xiv.

⁵ Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2003), 164.

⁶ Gasiorowski, *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran*, 229.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 231.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 228.

station would initiate anti-Mossadegh propaganda. Second, the chosen replacement for Mossadegh, General Zahedi, would rally support from a network of military officers. Third, the U.S. Ambassador, Henderson, would solicit the support of Mohammed Reza Shah and guarantee his appointment of General Zahedi. Fourth, members of parliament would be bribed to pass a legal vote to dispose Mossadegh, followed by demonstrators marching to decry Mossadegh as “anti-religious.” Finally, if all else failed, General Zahedi’s officers would seize power militarily.⁹ The operation was not without setbacks, but was eventually successful, and resulted in the overthrow and arrest of Mohammed Mossadegh and the re-establishment of the Shah in Iran. The press reported the incident as “nothing more than a mutiny by the lower ranks against pro-Mossadegh officers.”¹⁰ Few inside the U.S. and Iran knew the truth. Until the Church Committee uncovered the CIA’s penchant for overthrowing governments, suspicions of CIA action would not be more than speculation. The CIA and SIS may have counted the operation a success at the time, but this act of betrayal would come to haunt the U.S. government and eventually contribute to the end of U.S.-Iranian relations.

Senator Frank Church

As previously stated, the full ramifications of the CIA’s covert action in Iran would not be immediately evident following the coup. Unknowingly, Senator Frank Church, Chairman of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, would play a major role in its revelation to Iran and the world. The revelation of the U.S. role in Operation Ajax would push anti-U.S. sentiment past its breaking point.

Senator Frank Church emerged from modest beginnings. He transformed from a sickly child from Boise, Idaho to an idealist and moralist Senator who aimed to weed out institutional lawlessness and expose government intervention abroad.¹¹ Senator Church’s Chairmanship of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Activities was more than appropriate due to his frustration with the United States’ handling of the Vietnam War and his anger over the revelation that the CIA had supported a coup against the President of Chile, Salvador Allende. Senator Church favored old-fashioned idealism and championed the idea that it was “impossible to insulate our constitutional and democratic processes at home from the kind of foreign policy we have conducted.”¹² In other words, Church believed the U.S. public had a right to know about the actions of CIA abroad and that the U.S. government must answer for its indiscretions.

Creation of the Church Committee

The establishment of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Affairs, which would later be known as the Church Committee on Intelligence Activities Investigation, followed closely behind the telling revelation of the Watergate scandal and the corruption that was previously concealed from the U.S. public. According to Senator Church’s press secretary, Bill Hall, “The press created the Senate Intelligence committee. It was a series

⁹ Gasiorowski, *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran*, 237.

¹⁰ Kinzer, *All the Shah’s Men*, 187.

¹¹ LeRoy Ashby and Rod Gramer, *Fighting the Odds: The Life of Senator Frank Church* (Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 1994), 1,453.

¹² *Ibid.*, 468.

of investigative reports, initially in the New York Times and subsequently elsewhere.”¹³ The CIA had long enjoyed a history of secrecy and lack of public oversight that could no longer be allowed following the media circus that surrounded the improprieties confessed by then CIA Director Colby. The Democratic Caucus debated the establishment of a Senate investigation of the CIA. Finally, in January of 1975 Senate Resolution 21 was introduced to create a “Select Committee to Study Government Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities.”¹⁴ The resolution, of course, passed and the eleven-member committee was to be headed by Senator Frank Church. Senator Mike Mansfield outlined the purpose of the committee. He insisted that the committee would neither destroy the intelligence community, nor would it serve as a witch-hunt, but instead would measure the activities of the community against current laws and policies.¹⁵

Opposition to the Church Committee

The creation of the Church Committee was not necessarily welcomed by the Ford administration. The administration feared damage to U.S. national security. Barry Goldwater openly objected on the grounds that there now existed “an increased possibility of inadvertent disclosure of information that could be damaging to America’s foreign policy.”¹⁶ The attacks against the Church Committee only intensified and the fears of putting U.S. national security and the intelligence community at risk were used to undermine the mission of transparency and accountability. In his memoirs, President Gerald Ford describes the Committee as “sensational and irresponsible” and Kissinger called it an “assault on American Foreign Policy.”¹⁷ The reality is probably somewhere in between.

While this paper does argue that the revelations of the Church Committee contributed to the breakdown of relations between the United States and Iran, and also supplied rhetoric to anti-U.S. entities hoping to dissolve ties between the two nations, the truth remains that people suffered at the hands of CIA covert action. Goldwater was correct in asserting that it would damage U.S. foreign policy, because it undoubtedly diminished the U.S. government’s reputation of idealism abroad and indicated to Iranians that they were still at risk to U.S. government meddling. That being said, the opposition was likely just as concerned about what indiscretions of the CIA or the current and previous administrations might be revealed if the Senate began to investigate. Richard Nixon willingly cooperated with the investigation, but his remarks about the Committee’s oversight and how it threatened the power of the Executive Branch was enough to indicate to the Senate that the CIA was indeed out of control.¹⁸ Senator was deeply concerned that the CIA and various administrations had carried out operations that, if revealed, would do irreparable damage to U.S. foreign policy. This was why Senator

¹³ Hall, *Frank Church, D.C., and Me*, 44.

¹⁴ David Rudgers, “The Church Committee on Intelligence Activities Investigation,” in *Congress Investigates: A Critical and Documentary History*, ed. Roger A. Bruns, David L. Hostetter, and Raymond W. Smock (New York: Facts on File, 2011), 932.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Hall, *Frank Church, D.C., and Me*, 50.

¹⁷ Rudgers, “The Church Committee on Intelligence Activities Investigation,” 947.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 950.

Church believed that the need for oversight of the intelligence community took precedence over the need to keep hidden the secrets of the CIA.

Church Committee Report on Assassination and Covert Action

The Church Committee launched “one of the most important congressional investigations in U.S. history” and what would be known in CIA history as the “first probe of any consequence that Congress had ever conducted into Agency operations.”¹⁹ The Church Committee’s investigation would reveal multiple foreign interventions and, perhaps unbeknownst to its participants, confirm Iranian suspicions that the U.S. government had betrayed Iranian trust and friendship. The cases that follow exemplify the methods of the CIA and reveal the true nature of U.S. foreign policy of the period.

The Committee’s investigation led to the revelation of CIA involvement, at home and abroad, in heinous and morally questionable activities. Such activities included assassination attempts on multiple foreign leaders including: Congo, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, South Vietnam, and Chile.²⁰ One committee member decried the findings and reportedly told the press, “It is simply intolerable that an agency of the United States government may engage in murder.”²¹ The findings of the report detailed CIA cooperation with assassins, but were unable to prove any direct actions taken by the CIA or the U.S. government. The final report on the assassinations attempt concluded that, “Administration officials failed to rule out assassination as a tool of foreign policy and to make clear to their subordinates that assassination was impermissible.” Although the investigation was a severe intrusion and embarrassment for the CIA, the wording of the hearings final documents leans towards leniency, and the Committee even faced criticism by government officials for conducting such an exposé. Kissinger himself declared that it “had done so much harm to this nation’s capacity to conduct foreign policy.”²² At the very least, the hearing revealed that the CIA had taken extraordinary measures to insure that any foreign opposition would be snuffed out if it felt that it was in the interest of the U.S. More shocking was the level of authorization of CIA operations and the power that the Executive Branch wielded in the form of the CIA. The comments by Kissinger and many others of the CIA’s defenders revealed the blatant disregard for transparency and the lack of morality governing the actions of the Agency.

Apart from the assassination plots, the Church Committee also found that the CIA engaged in covert operations abroad with the intent of interfering with the domestic affairs of foreign governments. The Committee focused on five specific programs conducted by the CIA and produced six different reports, but only made the report on Chile open to the public. The final report revealed that the CIA had conducted over 900 covert action projects and several thousand smaller projects, which were never released outside of the organization.²³ The section of the report that details the covert action in

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 933.

²⁰ U.S. Congress. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, “Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders”. (Washington, U.S. Government Press, 1975), III.

²¹ Rudgers. “The Church Committee on Intelligence Activities Investigation,” 939.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ David Rudgers, “The Church Committee on Intelligence Activities Investigation,” 946.

Chile confirmed that, between the years of 1970 and 1973, over 8 million dollars was used in attempts to support a military coup in Chile.²⁴ The possibility of CIA direct involvement and CIA funding of right-wing terror groups both raised concerns. In the end, the CIA's monetary contributions and its lack of transparency with supervising agencies such as the State Department were cited as its major indiscretions. No direct actions were ever documented in the public report.

Although the Church Committee only revealed the Chile report on covert action, and there exists only one minor speculative reference to CIA involvement Iran in the whole of the investigation's report, the final report on CIA covert action and assassination attempts did significant damage to the reputation of the U.S. government. The only reference to Iran was included as a statement to imply a mischaracterization of CIA action in Iran but not a denial of it. David A. Phillips, a then retired CIA officer, stated, "As you are aware, the popular characterization of the role played by CIA in Iran was that the CIA also got on the top of the tanks and led the troops into the palace."²⁵ The true and far reaching impact of the Church Committee's investigation was not only the confirmation of covert actions abroad, but also the policy that the U.S. government would maintain following the disclosure. The official government policy was to continue covert actions abroad, but they "should only be employed only in exceptional cases where vital U.S. interests were at stake."²⁶ This policy left U.S. foreign policy up to interpretation and speculation. The case of Iran was no different.

The Church Committee Findings and Iran

The Church Committee findings were particularly relevant to Iran in 1976. Following the 1953 Coup, the Shah returned to power unopposed and transformed the country from a democracy into a dictatorship. The Shah's unpopular policies and repression of dissent eventually reached a breaking point. The U.S. government's friendship towards the Shah made him appear as a puppet governor on behalf of U.S. interests.²⁷ Furthermore, the acknowledgement of the CIA's clandestine actions abroad painted the U.S. as an intervening power and threat to Iranian independence. If the CIA were manipulating governments in Cuba and Chile, surely they would once again protect U.S. interests inside Iran.

The legacy of the 1953 was not easily forgotten and even the Shah became paranoid. He believed that the CIA was plotting to dispose him.²⁸ This was significant that even while viewed as a U.S. ally, the Shah's very knowledge of the CIA's capabilities and its tendency towards covert actions made any opposition to his rule seem like the beginning of a coup. The actions of the U.S. government further inspired feelings of mistrust among anti-Shah Iranians and fueled the fires of anti-U.S. sentiment. Since the CIA was seen as crucial to returning the Shah to power, the Iranian people had no choice but to conclude that the U.S. also sponsored the repressive tactics of the Shah.

²⁴ U.S. Congress. Senate. Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, "Covert Actions," *Hearings: Volume 7*, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 1975, 9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁶ Rudgers, "The Church Committee on Intelligence Activities Investigation," 946.

²⁷ Abrahamian, *The Coup*, 219.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 223.

During the Senate investigations, there existed in Iranian publications an ongoing conversation about U.S. imperialism in Iran and also the threat posed by the CIA to the already destabilizing Iranian government. The Senate hearing occurred during a time of increasing political instability and resistance to the Shah's rule. As early as June 1975, radio broadcasts in Iran subtly mentioned that the U.S. was cooperating with Iran in espionage and that the U.S. set up a "huge radio electronic spy center in the Persian Gulf area."²⁹ It was evident that even the media was closely monitoring the possible actions of the U.S. in the region. The growing resentment against the Shah not only made him nervous, but also left the people of Iran holding their breath to see if the CIA would once again intervene. As the dawn of the revolutions drew near, the broadcasts of the Iranian opposition grew much more bold and inflammatory. When U.S. covert actions were openly admitted and the CIA's role in 1953 Coup speculation had been verified, the media in Iran expressed the responsibility quite plainly.

In an interview conducted in Paris that was subsequently broadcasted in Iran in November of 1978, the leader of the National Front spoke openly about the history of his party with the U.S. He described the National Front as "the heir to the oil nationalism movement of Mossadegh. It is the movement which led this struggle in the 1950s and which became the victim of repression after the coup of 1953 which was hatched by the American CIA."³⁰ In this commentary, the leader of the National Front did something very powerful that likely magnified any Iranian listeners' frustration with the U.S. He very directly made the connection between the National Front of Mossadegh and his movement that opposed the Shah in the present-day. He underscored that fact the Front was repressed at that time due to U.S. government interference and reminded the audience that the CIA was responsible. This connection was powerful, because it allowed the audience to connect past U.S. government opposition to the National Front to the present movement. From this statement, the audience could draw the conclusion that the U.S. government was against them in the past and was once again against them in their ongoing struggle.

The hostility towards the U.S. and the possibility of CIA action seemed to build as the outbreak of the revolution drew nearer. The National Voice of Iran radio broadcast spoke out directly against U.S. imperialism and no doubt caused widespread hysteria by announcing that "a large group of CIA agents arrived on two special planes and they are currently busy hatching plots against the Iranian people."³¹ Regardless of the truth, it was no longer farfetched for the CIA to be conducting actions in Iran based on what the Iranian people knew of the CIA. The Church Committee's open report confirmed the very recent covert actions of the CIA around the world, which proved that the Coup of 1953 was not ancient history for the CIA, nor was it uncharacteristic behavior.

Further heightening suspicions of U.S. government actions in Iran, broadcasts from outside Iran, specifically from the Soviet Union, served to reinforce fears for those expecting intervention by the U.S. government. In December 1978, broadcasts from Moscow by Soviet media, in Persian, attempted to incite anti-U.S. sentiment by stating the following:

²⁹ "U.S., Iran to Cooperate in Espionage Operations". *Iran Courier*. 2 June 1975, as published in Daily Report. Middle East and North Africa, FBIS-MEA-75-108 on 1975-06-04., R1.

³⁰ "National Front Leader Interviewed on Paris Radio," *FBIS-MEA*, November 7, 1978, R5.

³¹ "National Voice of Iran on Threat of U.S. Imperialism," *FBIS-MEA*, December 15, 1978, R13.

Frequently, when the United States expands its activities designed to interfere in the affairs of other countries and defend the plundering interests of the U.S. imperialists, the CIA, for the purpose of concealment creates a smokescreen of rumors about communist plots.³²

This broadcast was obviously self-serving on the part of the Soviet Union. It also went on to say that it was public knowledge that the U.S. operated inside Iran at the time and manipulated the government. Further, the broadcast highlighted that the U.S. government made billions of dollars off of arms sales to Iran.³³ The outside confirmation of Iranian suspicions was likely even more powerful than the legacy of suspicions against the CIA inside Iran. The rhetoric of such broadcasts compounded the existing frustrations with the Shah's government and the perceived U.S. support for his government. By 1979, it was not illogical for the Iranian public to fear CIA involvement in the country and it was not difficult for Ayatollah Khomeini to convince protesting students that the CIA was plotting "a repeat performance of 1953" from the U.S. Embassy and it was under this pretext that he convinced those same students to march on and overtake the U.S. Embassy. This began the 444-day hostage crisis and the end of U.S.-Iranian diplomatic relations.³⁴

Conclusion

The intent of the Church Committee to delve into the mysterious depths of the CIA's hidden history and hold accountable those who apparently felt above the law was well intentioned. The impact of the public revelations of the CIA's disregard for national sovereignty and its tendency to favor dictatorships over democratically elected leaders confirmed what many who were suspicious of the U.S. already knew. The U.S. government acted hypocritically and in contrast to their policies that supposedly supported self-determination for other nations. More importantly, the Church Committee's report verified the doubts of Iranians and transformed the legacy of friendship between the two nations into a story of betrayal and mistrust. The 1953 Coup was a deep wound in the history of Iran. By 1976, the tensions created by the Shah's government reopened this wound. The betrayal of 1953 and the continued U.S. government support for the Shah gave the opposition exactly what they needed to ignite the passions of the people and fuel a revolution. The Church Committee may have never explicitly confirmed CIA actions against Iran but the new image it painted of the U.S. was enough to foster anti-Americanism and make an enemy out of Iran. The U.S. government admission that the CIA disregarded the sovereignty of nations all over the world was broadcasted from Paris, Moscow, and Iran. It created hysteria and fears of impending U.S. intervention. The CIA actions of 1953 left a legacy that influenced the final breakdown in relations during the 1979 Revolution and continues to foster mistrust between the two nations up to present day.

³² "U.S. Propaganda Efforts Condemned," *FBIS-MEA*, 5 December, 1978, F1.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Abrahamian, *The Coup*, 225.