九州大学学術情報リポジトリ
Kyushu University Institutional Repository

F. L. シールズ “Iran : The Unheard Revolution”（「イラン-曠古の革命」）邦文要約

シールズ, F・L
米国マーシー・カレッジ　歴史・政治学部助教授

https://doi.org/10.15017/1854

出版情報：法政研究. 52 (3/4), pp.124-168, 1986-03-25. 九州大学法政学会
バージョン：
権利関係：

KYUSHU UNIVERSITY

IRAN: THE UNHEARD REVOLUTION

F. L. シールズ "Iran : The Unheard Revolution"（「イラン――曠古の革命」）邦文要約

本論は、「1979年のシャー政権の崩壊はどれほどアメリカ外交政策の悲劇を深めたのか」、より詳細に言えば、「その悲劇はどうすれば防止しえたのか」という問題を解明せんとする。著者はイラン革命に対するアメリカの対応を、政策形成者自身が目の当たりにした通りに、すなわち大失態（a fiasco）と定義し、「してはならないこと」についてのあらゆる種類の教訓を引き出そうと試みる。

アメリカ合衆国がシャー政権再興の手助けをした1953年以来、繰り返し行われたアメリカの行動の前提は、イランを代表するのはシャーであり、同盟関係は彼に依存しており、それゆえに彼は無くてはならない存在だというものであった。したがって、シャーに対するアメリカの援助、とくに軍事援助は、膨大なものとなった。1978年の革命の成功には、シャーが不治の病に冒されていたこと、ホメイニ師のイスラム原理主義が浸透の度を増していたこと、そして軍縮およびエジプト―イスラエル交渉にアメリカが目を奪われていたことを含めた諸要因が、異常ではあるがしかし完全にもっともなかたちで結びついて寄与していたのである。1979年初めにはシャーはすでに国外に逃亡していた。けれどもその数カ月前までは、合衆国情報機関の予測担当者たちは、そのようなことはあり得ないと考えていたのである。

EREDERICK L. SHIELS was Fulbright Visiting Lecturer in Political Science and International Relations, 1985-86. He is an associate professor of political science at Mercy College in Dobbs Ferry, New York, U. S. A. This article is from his forthcoming book, *Preventable Disasters*.

2

Iran: The Unheard Revolution

To the caual observer and to too many Americans, it appeared that the Shah of Iran, in 1978 solidly entrenched in the front line of countries resisting Soviet communist influence, was toppled *inexplicably* by the second week of 1979. Was Iran "lost?" Could the United States have done something to stop the avalanche of Islamic fundamentalism and revulsion against 25 consecutive years of rule by the monarch? Should it have? There are convincing arguments that the Shah failed because of a failure of nerve, of an unwillingness to be brutal, to take the last cynical but necessary steps toward self-preservation. (much as Richard Nixon was unwilling to destroy the evidence and separate himself from the people of Watergate, thus ensurng his own downfall).

Our analysis suggests answers to these questions, but attempts to answer one question above all others: why did the U.S. not perceive the warning signals of the revolution coming? (in retrospect, they were so numerous) and how could the government have acted during the last year of the Shah's rule (and during the total period of the Shah's rule) to reduce the odds of such an upheaval occurring? In turn, two underlying considerations accompany these questions:

(1) Whether the Khomeini regime represented a disaster for the United States, if not Iran, and (2) Whether the preservation of the Shah's rule would have been as beneficial to the alliance as is generally assumed-- not the least by American presidents.

From the perspective of the American network of anti-Communist allies forged in the 1950s, the replacement of the Shah by the short-lived moderate government and then Khomeini *was* a disaster. Tehran had had close bilateral ties with Washington since 1946 (with the exception of the Mossadegh period in 1953), cemented further by the CENTO pact of 1959. The Shah had been afirmly anti-Soviet force in the Middle East, and importantly, a

moderating force in the Arab world on questions of Israel and relations with the West. To his friends he was an enlightened, but tough-minded modernizer, while to his enemies he was an arrogant and reactionarr anachronism. His loss and replacement by a distinctly anti-U.S. regime was, from this vantage point, one of the most serious losses sustained by the U.S. since World War II.

In strategic significance Iran occupied a higher place than Vietnam(which was not even an ally), for which the United States fought for 10 years and at a cost of 50,000 lives. From this alliance perspective, Iran's loss ranks rather with that of China (1949) and Cuba (1959), even though the friendly client ruler (Reza Shah) was replaced by an Islamic nationalist rather than a communist. In terms of strategic of magnitude Iran ranks with Turkey, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, which remain essentially pro-Western and above Iraq and Libya, which do not.

American leaders were almost unanimous in calling the end of the Iranian alliance a disaster. According to Zbigniew Brzinski:

> Iran was the Carter administration's greatest setback...
> The fall of the Shah was disastrous strategically for the United States and politically for Carter himself. [1]

There is another ways of looking at the Iranian revolution, which follows the example of the U.S. "loss" of China in 1949 with the defeat of Chiang Kai-shek. Iran, like China since 1949, has since 1979 not been a supporter of the Soviet Union, although it has been vocal in its condemnation of the United States. Khomeini has been critical of the USSR and has been engaged in a costly war with an anti-U.S. Arab state, Iraq, since 1980. In spite of the fact that intelligence (electronic listening) stations were lost in Iran, the loss of the country itself seen from what I call the *realpolitik* or nonideological perspective, has not been anything

1 Zbigniew Bryezinski, *Power and Principe*, (New York : Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983), p*l*. 359.

like as great as was feared. Any pat assessment of the revolution that terms Iran a disaster must take this into account.

One must nevertheless consider in this type of inquiry that the policymakers perception of failure in the Iranian case was a very real one. If means-ends analysis is used, then the U. S. was ultimately unsuccessful in promoting what those in power perceived as a worthwhile end: the preservation of the Shah's rule. Because a long series of presidential proclamations and toasts and policy statements declared the Shah's friendship to be valuable and the Washington-Tehran partnership almost sacred, the loss of that friendship and partnership must be judged a real failure.

We thus arrive at our second underlying consideration: whether the preservation of the Shah's rule would have been as beneficial as those who bemoaned its end believed. Because the enormous amounts of money and military hardware, at one time in grants and loans, and more recently in sales, were visibly used more to bolster the ruler's prestige, and equip a military force more geared toward the preservation and aggrandizement of the house of Pahlavi than defense against any plausible Soviet attack, there are those who correctly question whether the Americans were receiving the benefits they imagined

The Shah was also increasingly perceived in the Third World as a reactionary, a modernizer, but at best a trickie down theorist when it came to benefitting the masses. So an American association with him might be regarded as a decreasing asset. It might well be argued however that the Shah was in fact a continuing asset if not for the best of reasons and not for the reasons that American presidents were most aware of. The Shah's royal absolutism, increasingly out of step in a world populated by *mass-mobijizir* absolutists like Libya and Iraq and post-1974 Ethiopia, made him lean naturally toward the United States as most conservative non-Western regimes have tended to.

The Shah's downfall, I believe will be seen as one of those

catalytic events like the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 or the sinking of the Titanic that shakes the collective mind profoundly. In this case it shakes Americans' beliefs in their own perceptions of what is going on in other countries and in our intelligence officers' ability to *tell* us what is going on.

Even the President's top foreign policy advisor, Brzezinski, was widely criticized for either ignoring or being ignorant of the explosive potential of the country, especially among the urban poor. Interestingly, in his memoirs he makes no attempt to address this naïveté. It is an uncomfortable subject, no doubt.

With these caveats in mind, we can devote the balance of our inquiry to the main question: why the warning signals of the revolution were not perceived and to what extent such signals even existed. To do this, we need to review briefly but critically the development of Iran and its client relationship with the United States after 1945.

BEFORE EISENHOWER

Iran has the distinction of being the locus of one of the earliest Cold War crises (1946) and one resolved favorably for the interests of the United States. By early 1946 Soviet troops, had moved into northern Iran during World War II (in concert with the British army from the south) to keep the area from German hands. They had virtually created an autonomous area in Azerbaijan. This was in violation of the tripartite treaty of 1942, which had set a 6-month limit on foreign troops in Iran after the war, which was considered at an end with Japan's surrender in August of that year. American and British troops left by March 1, 1946, but the Soviets had not. Rather, they had established a second satellite state in Kurdistan.

The wily Prime Minister of Iran, Qavam es-Sultanah, had used the Russian presence to extract pledges of assistance from the United States, moved in early March to get them out. This

was accomplished with U.S. and United Nations pressure by December, 1946. As Soviet troops withdraw, Qavam's occupied the region. The following year the Iranian Majlis, or parliament, voted not to honor pledges of oil concessions given to Moscow in exchange for the Russian back-off.

During this period the young shah, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, had the role of constitutional monarch, but he was becoming more and more the spokesman for his country. He had been placed in that position by the Allies in 1941 as his anti-British father, Reza Shah, was deported to Mauritius. Very early in the postwar relationship with the United States, the shah displayed a keen interest in building up Iran's military power and obtaining maximum—perhaps Marshall Plan-style aid from the U.S., pointing to Iran's desire to be as self-sufficient as possible in countering the Soviet threat.[2] It bears noting that at this stage the Soviet threat to Iran's integrity was palpable and there was of course no Israel Arab dispute nor were there other regional quarrels in which the Shah had any great interest. This point gave some weight to the shah's long standing claim that Iran's interests were anti-Communist first and foremost, and only secondarily directed toward a regional policeman role. The State Department's Office of Greek, Turkish, and Iranian affairs was in charge of the region and underscored the early linking of Iran to the Truman Doctrine.

The next 6 years saw a steep rise in the shah's autonomous power and influence and his demands for assistance in meeting external threats. His popularity increased for at least two reasons: (1) the public *perceived* that he was on the side of social progress, in contrast to the Majlis (parliament), seen as dominated by reactionaries, and (2) an unsuccessful assassination attempt was made on the shah's life in which he faced his attacker,

2 Barry Rubin, Paved Wirh Gnnd Intentions : The American Experience and Iran, (New York : Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 38-42.

displaying courage.

In 1949 the shah met with Secretary of State Dean Acheson, who attempted to convince the ruler that excessive military acquisitions could rob the shah's reformist goals of an economic foundation and leave him vulnerable in the same way that the recently defeated Chiang Kah-shek had been in China.[3] The next two years were dominated by Iran's efforts to secure a more favorable revenue sharing arrangement with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, with the United States to some extent supporting Iran's demands. In 1950 America upgraded its embassy but had not much upgraded its strategic assistance. In fact Iranian leadership perceptions of the country's importance and what was perceived as the U.S. failure to live up to its aid commitments led to early mistrust of the U.S. by Iranians.

The United States came to a 50/50 profit distribution accord with the Saudi Arabs in early 1951, spurring the AIOC to do the same for Iran, after prolonged company resistance to such concessions. Iranians embittered by difficulties with the AIOC, led by Dr. Mohammed Mossadegh, passed legislation in April nationalizing the company. The moderate Iranian Prime Minister Rahman was assassinated paving the way for the new and mecurial Prime Minister Mossadegh.

Mossdegh's premiership was heady stuff for reformists and nationalists in Iran, but it was traumatic for the United States, not yet accustomed to Third World leaders playing it off against the Russians for aid and the British for greater oil revenue concessions.

Tehran and Eisenhower

By 1953 the Prime Minister and his supporters activated the Eisenhower CIA under Allen Dulles. That agency began a plot

3 *Ibid.*, p. 42.

to oust him. Before that could be accomplished the Shah had fled to Italy in the face of increasingly anti-U.S. and anti-shah Tudeh and Communist led demonstrations.

The U.S. mission enlisted pro-shah forces and sweetened their sentiments with the widespread distribution of Iranian money, especially to poor Tehranians, who staged counter-demonstrations. The United States also engineered the shah' return and his appointment of F. Zahedi as the new Prime Minister. Barry Rubin points to the limits of saying that the United States simply manipulated the situation in Iran, however :

> Equally, it cannot be said that the United States overthrew Mossadegh and replaced him with the Shan. The CIA merely provided minimal financial and logistical aid for Iranians to do so. Many of them were genuinely frightened by the prospects of a Tudeh take-over, were distressed by Mossadegh's steps toward dictatorship, and were disillusioned by his inability to maintain order. As Richard Cottam, an Irans cholar noted for his sympathy to the nationalist cause points out, "Regardless of foreign participation, Mossadegh could not have been overthrown if significant elements of the population had not lost faith in his leadership."[4]

The only reason the CIA succeeded was that conditions were ripe for Mossadegh's overthrow — he had offended too many groups, they had lost faith. But the CIA over-played their success and failed to transpose the Iranian good fortune to other coup operations. A new era now opened in U.S. Iranian relations, one with less turmoil and experimentation, one quite openly collaborative between the United States and Shah, and one that forgot all too quickly the resentment and fear stirred by the American foray into Iranian national politics in 1953.

---

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

In the late 1950's the former supporters of Mossadegh were either coöpted by the Shah or faded into oblivion, some forming a kind of loose but very low-profile legal opposition front. The Iranian parliament and prime ministership went into decline and the shah's attention was focused on combatting the influence of the Tudeh party and Communism.

Iran also gained substantially more control over its own oil interests, a new international oil consortium, the NIOC (National Iranian Oil Company) having been formed. Larger amounts of U.S. aid including, between 1953 and 1961, about $1 billion in economic and military aid combined.

Iran had joined the Baghdad Pact (with Britain, Pakistan and Turkey) in 1955 without first getting the American blessing. With heightened tension and instability in nearby Iraq and Lebanon by 1958, the shah was more interested than ever in building a formidable military machine, and gradually did so. Too often overlooked was the fact that many Iranians — and not just Islamic zealots — viewed America's cultural influence as corrupting and its political influence (e.g., on the shah's prime ministers) as clumsy and, when effective, inappropriate. Washington's bilateral security alliance of 1959, part of a series of such arrangements with the Turks and Pakistanis, together comprised CENTO, the Central Treaty Organization. Yet a problem several knowledgeable observers have commented on was that too often the American alliance network reduced it members to geopolitical game players, without generating enough sophisticated knowledge about real problems going on inside the countries' polities.

Yes, there were country specialists on the scene in Iran, some of whom urged reforms by the Shah, through upper level Washington policymakers. But the imperative of maintaining the Shah's confidence loomed much larger and impelled the Americans to depend on the regional power chessboard image of Iran's affairs rather than getting bogged down in the complex internal mesh of

its problems, pressures and anomalies. This allowed American trained state security officers in Iran to enforce the shah's iron rule riding in American jeeps.[5]

THE 1960s

In 1961 the regime of Prime Minister Ali Amini moved toward a more substantial land refom policy after the Shah's creation of a limited two party system in 1957. Amini wanted to procede with land reform that had teeth, as well as central economic planning and curbs on official corruption. As the U.S. had been instrumental in his appointment despite some opposition from the Shah, the early 1960s can be viewed as a period of temporary loosening of the Shah's tight grip, in this case facilitated by Washington. There was some political instability and some freedom of debate was allowed, prompting journalist Harrison Salisbury to comment:

> Nowhere in the world, in all probability, is so much free-swinging comment and criticism hurled at the Government and chief of state.[6]

The Kennedy administration followed with a plan to develop Iran's economy, augmenting aid in return for a shift in emphasis by the shah toward economic programs and a reduction of the armed forces. The shah very reluctantly submitted in the face of this pressure but at the same time moved toward opening contacts for aid and trade with the USSR.

In 1962 the shah's land reform decrees led to significant trouble with Muslim clerics, including the firebrand Ruhollan Khomeini, and to riots in Qom and Tehran. Six months later, in 1963, Tehran riots led to large numbers of dissident deaths at

5 *Ibid.*, p. 103.
6 *New York Times*, December 4, 1961.

the hands of government forces and the embitterment of large numbers of these clergymen. The importance of this this confrontation in sewing seeds of anti-shah feeling cannot be overemphasized. His fate, it might be argued, was sealed at that point. The reason for the clerics' opposition, missed in the American media, was that they knew that the reform would enhance the shah's popularity. Also, some of the land that wauld be redistributed was land whose revenues would be used by the cldrgy for their own purposes, including the support of charities. Election sheld by the shah, with limited independent opposition allowed and some women voting (for the first time) heralded the White Revolution so praised in the Western press, and so despised by Khomeini and similar traditional leaders. Khomeini was arrested in June of 1963 and deported to Turkey in 1964, moving to Iraq shortly thereafter.

So while the shah moved along with some reforms, he incurred the enmity of those whom the reforms benefitted only superficially or not at all. U.S. intelligence on the White Revolution was not sanguine: planning was said to be weak, and few provisions for adjusting agricultural methods to compensate for the new small peasant holdings were made. Military aid was augmented between 1964 and 1970. This aid brought new attempts to steer Iranian policies, which the shah resented. And he said that the lack of U.S. support for Pakistan in the Indo-Pakistani war of 1965 troubled him. Periodically he threatened to improve ties with the Soviet Union (he visited Moscow in 1965).

By 1967 oil revenues and the ensuing rapid improvement in Iran's trade balance had led to more sustained economic growth and the end American developmental aid as such. Further military aid would mostly take the form of sales of ever more advanced military technology (considering the country's actual needs), particularly after the signally destabilizing Middle East war of 1967.

It is worth noting, before briefly summarizing the shah's

relations with the Nixon and Ford administrations that charges that the Shah was an American puppet, made by both Commuists and Islamic fundamentalists, loses credibility when one sees how many disputes with the U. S. occurred, and the increasing frequency with which the ruler one such disputes, particularly in the area of weapons acquisition. Often it seemed that he was more adroit at manipulating Washington than the reverse.

NIXON & FORD, 1969-77

Analysts of U. S. /Iranian relations, whatever their differences, agree one thing: that the high water mark of close ties with the shah occurred during the Nixon-Ford years. The period did not so much represent a departure from previous trends as an acceleration of some of them. This pocess was aided by the 1969 Nixon Doctrine, which encouraged devolution of American power and responsibility to selected regional leaders. The shah was among the most important and ideally suited of such leaders. In the World's most unstable region, against the distant backdrop of the Indochina War, the shah's apparent stability and essential loyalty — or at least reliablity made him ever-more indispensible. His role was enhanced by the British withdrawal of forces from the Persian Gulf region and the Nixon administrations need to provide a counterweight against what it saw as radical Arab movements and Soviet backed agitators in the area. All of this was bolstered by Nixon's own personal friendship with and affinity for the shah.

The increasing American appetite for Iranian petroleum coincided with the 1973 Mideast War and OPEC oil embargo. The shah, as if to teach the Americans a lesson in loyalty, defied heavy Arab pressure and continued to supply the U. S. during the embargo. As Iran shared an Islamic heritage with the Arabs and a common antipathy for the Israeli "neo-colonialism", the shah's

actions proved that geopolitics can sometimes be thicker than blood.

As the 1970s progressed, some of the fault lines and stress points in Iran's foundation began to lengthen and multiply, to the gradual alarm of academics and journlists. The shah's limitless appetite for helicopters and jet fighters seemed more and more out of tune with a domestic reality of rapid population growth, housing shortages, and gross regional and urban-rural living standard inequities. All of this was subtle and incremental from the satellite's eye view of Iran as a "key Third World player" on the strategists, chessboard. But it was all moving, as were the shah's isolation and megalomania (dramatized in the 1971 Persian anniversary celebration at Persepolis) toward grave risk, if not ruin.

A factor undoubtedly working in the Shah's favor was his relative moderation and mildness compared with other headstrong and sometimes brutal leaders in the region. He managed somehow to distance himself from the excesses of SAVAK in a way that enhanced his benign image in the Western newspapers.

Some Iran-observers predicted the ruler's downfall in the face of these stresses, while others emphasized the shah's long history of weathering crises. The endurance of the Peacock Throne during most of the period since Roosevelt gave a sense of false alarmism to warnings from those who predicted real upheavals to come. As Betts and other strategic surprise specialists have demonstrated, the false alarm syndrome had the effect of desensitizing people to the signals of real dangers. [7]

By the mid-1970s, the U.S. Iranian trade relationship was tighter than ever, with the Persians supplying ever increasing percentages of America's imported oil (which itself had incresed dramatically and ironically since the 1973 boycott). In return,

---

7 Richard Berrs, *Surprise Attack* (Washington : Brookings, 1982), Rhapter 5.

according to the 1975 Iranian American trade agreement, the superpower would provide nuclear power plants, housing, highways, and agricultural equipment, among other benefits. In spite of such ambitious cooperation, Iran's economic prospects were not the best, as military costs ate into the oil revenues, which were in any case rising much more slowly than they had been.

So even before the Carter administration took office in January 1977, several kinds of factors, too dimly seen were conspiring to weaken the regime in Iran. The ratio of expenditures for arms to a reasonable level of domestic improvent was getting too high again, especially for a country where the basic assumption of even the minimally informed part of the population was that the shah's foreign policy was not designed to help the Iranian people and nation, but only perpetuate his own power. Secondly, more and more people were hurt and embittered by the widening scope and savage methods of the state security agency, SAVAK. Thirdly, such improvments as were made in the lot of the average peasant or urban sweller, were as is often the case where piecemeal reform is occuring, not enough. People saw small improvements, but also saw vast expenditures for things unrelated to their lives and resented that. Finally, the Shah, himself, was entering his twilight years, hastened by grave physical illness that manifested itself clearly by 1975. The disease turned out to be cancer, although this was not known to the outside world for some time.

THE CARTER YEARS

The Carter Administration's handling of the Iranian problem, like other problems, was complex and ambivalent — in that case dangerously so. Experts on the matter point to Carter's idealism and human rights campaign on the one hand, and the heavy baggage inherited from his predecessors commiting him to support the Shah, on the other. These commitments included aid and strategic sales to Tehran, a network of State and Defense de-

partment bureaucrats, and non-governmental friends of the Shah's Iran in the business community.[8] The geopolitical realities and layers of support for the Shah tempered Carter's freedom of action in supporting human rights reforms for the country. On the other hand, key American officials, like Vance and Christopher, within the administration favored the human rights campaign and pressure for the Shah to reform, may have critica[ly, if unintentionally, undermined his position during the turbulent days of fall, 1978, by signalling a new distance between Washington and the Pahlavi dynasty.

The Carter administration did not inaugurate a sharp break with previous administrations in its Iran policy. Three sets of factors determined the direction of that policy as Rubin notes:

1. There was tremendous momentum from earlier American commitments regarding regional security and arms sales. Most of the career officials supported the "two-pillar" and Nixon Doctrine premises of Iran's vital role, and those few who disagreed with the policy did so on tactical grounds... Furthermore Carter's administration in 1977 was dealing with schedules on arms deliveries planned for 1981 and beyond—in other words for the President's entire first term...

2. The American response to Iran's problems both before and during the revolution was conditioned by the administration's international vision... Coming to power in the aftermath of the Vietnam war, Carter and his advisers were reluctant to commit the U. S. to helping repress overseas political unrest, particularly if military intervention was necessary. To some extent this reluctance was a logical continuation of the Nixon Doctrine.

3. The Carter administration was slow to recognize the signs when the Iranian situation did go into crisis (the White House

8 Seyom Brown, Brown, *The Faces of Power*, New York : Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 510-511.

didn't seem to understand the seriousness of things until November. 1978, after 10 months of rioting and demonstrations in Iran because its own image of the country was based on perceptions it had inherited from its predecessors. Few among the new officials challenged the belief that the shah was a relatively successful modernizer capable of keeping order at home.[9]

In the intra-government debate over arms sales, those urging restraint based their arguments on President Carter's injunction that the U.S. not be the first to introduce new kinds or quantities of weapons into the region. They expressed fears of a regional arms race. Supporters thought the Gulf so important and so unstable that the Shah had to be given the equipment he demanded in order to defend it. They pointed to Iraq's own build-up and Soviet gains in the Horn of Africa, South Yemen, and Afghanistan as justifying strengthening the shah's forces. In these debates the advocates of large scale arms sales always won, arguing that denial of these weapons would be a vote of no confidence in the shah's leadership at a time when America needed Iran's help, but also futile, since the shah would buy what he wanted elsewhere. 1977, the first year of Carter's administration was also a period of liberalization in Iran — at least relative to what had gone before.* Amnesty International had been invited into the country by the shah, who was anxious to improve his public image, and their recommendations were acknowledged publicly.[10] This did not mean that dramatic reforms occurred, however.

---

9 These three observations are closely paraphrased from Rubin, *op. cit.*, pp. 190-192.

* Our chronological treatment of Iran policy in the Carter years is short here because of detailed treatment of the period in the analytic latter half of the article.

10 Iran specialist James Bill called 1977 the "Year of Liberalization" for Iran. Discussed in Rubin, pp. 192-193.

In the fall of the year, amdst debate over arms sales to Tehran (which were championed by the administration in spite of its human rights position), studies by the Defense and State Departments were showing serious problems in the way weapons purchases and procurment were being handled and the way in which they were affecting the Iranian economy. The State Department Policy Planning Staff study noted that there was more potential than ever for instability in Iran, but strangely this assessment seemed to be ignored.

In November the shah's prime miniser, Hoveyda, resigned after finding himself unable to deal with civil unrest, which was in turn related to proliferating shortages of consumer good, power blackouts and a new wave of demostrations. The Shah visited Washington in that month, but Iranian demonstrators in both Washington and Tehran marred the occasion. In the American capital police riot control gas wafted over the White Houss ceremonies and reduced the official gathering, including the president and shah, to tears.[11] In the Iranian capital students demonstrated and professionals associated with the National Front openly called for an end to SAVAK and other reform measures.

On the last day of December Carter arrived in Iran for a short reciprocal visit and declared the country "an island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world." Clearly the critical distance the President wanted to ertablish between himself and authoritarian regimes was being compromised.

1978 began badly for the shah, undercutting evaluations of the country as a stable and secure ally. In January shere were riots in the Shiite holy city of Qom and the following month saw major riots in Tabriz. In March, Tabriz saw further vioient protest. American intelligence reports continued to emphasize the long term durability of the shah in the face of adversity and

11 Carter discusses the experience in his *Keeping Faith* (New York : Bantam, 1982), pp. 433-434.

forecasts of doom were scoffed as or, in the official intelligence pipeline, apparently filtered out.

It is essential to note that during the middle to late parts of the year, key presidential advisers were pre-occupied with other issues, such as SALT II and the preparations for the Camp David talks. The first truly negative reports from the field came in August, during which time the ambassador (William H. Sullivan) was on vacation. In the fall Sullivan continued to be supportive of the shah and not supportive of negative reportage about the Tehran regime, although he was clearly groping for options and guidance as the ruler's position deteriorated and the shah looked for solutions from the American embassy. By late September "Washington" had become sufficiently concerned about developments to establish a working group under Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher.

At the same time in Iran, the government was making a variety of stop-gap concessions to demonstrators now clearly guided by Ayatollah Khomeini from his Paris exile. These included major wage increases for workers, a return to the Islamic calendar, and the closing of theatres and gambling establishments. The parliament (Majilis) was convened in early October, reminiscent of other late crisis convenings of dormant legislatures.

At the end of October Khomeini flexed his muscles again with a dramatic call for a strike from oil workers. They respoded. Officials in Washington rapidly evolved through the stages of attetion to concern to alarm and by the latter part of November security advisor Brzezinski and Energy Secretary James Schllesinger were weighing the possibillity of sending warships into the Indian Ocean in the direction of Iran.

The Carter public relations people continued to speak positively of the shah, albeit with mounting concern, and to underscore she heightened state of anxiety no fewer than four high level American vistors journeyed to Tehran : the treasury secretary

(Michael Blumenthal), the head of the CIA's analysis division (Robert Bowie), the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency (Gen. E. F. Tigue), and Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd. The first and last of this group were particlarly preturbed at what they found, especially with regard to the shah's state of mind and his seeming inability to decide on any course of action. In turn the American government had been giving its client mixed and confused signals about what it was willing to do.

Carter sharply chastised his intelligence advisors, primarily aiming at CIA head Stansfield Turner, but including Vance and Brzezinski to save Turner's self-esteem. An outside advisor with long diplomatic experience, George Ball was called in to collate the various overlapping and confused intelligence reports and made a recommendation of a regency council, or coalition of civilian notables with the shah reduced to the status of constitutional monarch. Brzezinski and Carter, ultimately, rejected that solution, although really events in Iran by this time were sharply less susceptible to American solutions of any sort.

In December the idea of sending a top level advisor of the President (such as Schlesinger or Brzezinski) to Tehran in a show of support for the shah was discussed but rejected in favor of a mission by General Robert Huyser (deputy NATO commander) to sound out the military and hold them together the face of pressure to abandon the shah or stage a coup.

As the shah rejected harsh solutions to his predicament, street riots, power and fuel shortages, and arson spread, so that the new military government of Gholamreza Azhari, appointed from the throne, was forced to react with occasional but inconsistent violence, despite the distaste of the shah for such measures. The predicament was rapidly becoming no-win for the regime as both concessions and displays of force seemed to generate intensification of the crisis. Belatedly, after some pressure from the beleaguered American ambassador, Carter made indirect approaches to Kho-

meini, but she latter was adamant in rejecting any role for the shah, any significant compromises — even any American support for the new civilian prime minister appointed by the shah, Shahpour Bakhtiar (December 27th).

Bakhtiar moved rapidly to try to establish some sort of support base, but many of the potential supporters of the provisional coalition were either fleeing Iran or moving toward Khomeini. By January 16, 1979 the shah vas flying out of the country, ostensibly for a short period until the crisis subsided. But few believed he would return in the manner he had in 1953. Bakutiar was strongly supported by Huyser, who had become a kind of alternate ambassador in the country, but the real ambassador, Sullivan, was much more concerned wlth evacuating Americans and encouraging Washington to do business with the Ayatollah while there was still time. By February that mysterious and powerful individual felt it was safe to return to Iran for the first time since 1963. He was greeted by tumultuous crowds of supporters (seemingly the whole country) and soon managed to appoint his own prime minister, Mehdi Bazargan, whereupon Bakhtiar protested, fought briefy with concessions like the Iranian withdrawal from the U. S. alliance, and then fled the office, February 11.

The balance of this article is devoted to assessing the American participants in the struggle to deal with the Iranian crisis, after it was identified as such, followed by a brief assessment of short and longer term mistakes concluding with an evaluation of alternative policies that might have allowed the United States to achieve something closer to "a desirable solution" or at least avoid the worst, which was, arguably, the outcome.

The Players: *Individual and Organizational*

As in earlier sketches of disaster cases, we here try to draw fuller portraits of the main American and Iranian characters in the anti-shah revolution episode. The characteristics of such

individuals, followed by sketches of organizational postures, will together from the basis for a more complete dissection of the decisionmaking, its weaknesses and breakdowns of communication.

A balanced but quick study in each case is attempted by taking into account all available sources rather than relyiog on any *one*. The portraits are drawn from memoirs, journal articles and reportage in the *New York Times*.

Jimmy Carter (President)-Had ultimate responsbility for the U.S. position; doveloped a personal acquaintanceship with the shah. Strong human rights ideology but this outweighed by the strategic alliance perspective and the Persian Gulf Doctrine. Carter was deeply enmeshed in the Camp David negotiations (including preparation and follow up) during the critical August to October phase of the Iranian turmoil. He was also heavily preoccupied with weapons acquisition matters.

* Would another President have acted differently? Very possibly, although probably not in crucial areas. Nixon or Ford or Reagan, for example would have been less concerned about reform in Iran, not inclined to limit arms sales, and perhaps more willing to give strong diplomatic support for a hardline shah policy in the face of rebellion, but almost certainly *not* U.S. intervention given the recentness of the Vietnam problem.

Cyrus Vance (Secretary of State) - Former Secretary of the Army and Vietnam negotiator; later Wall Street lawyer. A Trilateral Commission acquaintance of Carter; a moderate liberal regarded as a bit soft by more aggressive colleagues; a big promoter of the human rights policy; a diplomat, not a politician or ideologue. (Vance was a low key compromiser who eventually resigned over the Iran hostages rescue attempt in April of 1980). He tended to be equivocal in his support of the shas, and more concerned about U.S. interests being protected, even open to overtures to the opposition, including Khomeini.

* Was Vance pivotal in Carter's witholding more active support for the Shah? Was he critical on the question of whether hardline solutions were an option or significant U. S. support for a military coup? The answers here are probably yes, but the question remains whether a tougher, more assertive U. S. policy in support of the shah could have stemmed the tide.

Zbigniew Brzezinski (Assistant for National Security Affairs)-Academician, Trilateral Commission Member, Polish *émigré*; enlightened hardliner on USSR. A firm supporter the shah, not so much personally as because of the need for stability. He loathed American equivocation regarding the shah and prodded Vance and Carter to firmer support; He was not sufficiently aware of the weakness of the Shah's position, but was vociferous in trying to turn the situation around when he did become aware.

William Sullivan (Ambassador to Iran) - Career diplomat with experience in the tough posts in Laos and the Philippines. Described as agile and tough, a good person for the difficult Iran embassy. Close to the Shah but quick to explore other options when the shah's position eroded in November, 1978. Unfavorably characterized by Brzezinski as hysterical and undermining the shah's position, and also being too quick to support overtures to Khomeini.

Warren Christopher (Undersecretary of State) - Heavily involved in Iranian matters, moderate and inclined like Vance and Sullivan to want reforms and concessions from Shah, but looked for alternatives when the Shah weakened. A patient compromiser, emerged as the key figure during the latter stages of the hostage crisis and negotiations.

George Ball (Special advisor) - A liberal corporate lawyer and advisor to presidents Kennedy and Johnson, Ball was called in

to consult on the best course of action by President Carter. He advised that a coalition government or council be established and that the shah relinquish mest of his powers. Brzezinski opined that he regretted the decision to bring Ball in on the Iranian policymaking because the latter heightened division already present in the administration and made unhealthy suggestions about premature coalition governments to replace the shah, which Brzezinski founded unconscionable.

Robert Huyser (General and special emissary) - Entered the episode fairly late from his post as deputy to General Alexander Haig in NATO. His mission in January 1979 was "to reassure the military of continuing U. S. /Iranian military arrangements,"[12] and "to assist them in retaining their cohesion once the shah left."[13] He appeared to undertake the role reluctantly because of Haig's opposition (Haig subsequently resigned over the issue). Ambassador Sullivan in Tehran, who appeared to like Huyser personally, regarded his role as an infringement on the ambassadorial function and a device by Brzezinski to impose further controls on the conduct of American foreign policy from Washington. Huyser, selected because of high regard by Brzezinksi and Carter officials, had earlier served in Iran. Huyser regarded a military coup there as "an absolutely last resort." His role increased in sensitivity as the shah prepared to leave the country on January 16, 1979., and the military became increasingly fearful of a potential Khomeini takeover and optimistic about the role of the military leaders as an alternative.

With Khomeini's return on 1 February 1979 and the imminent fall of Bakhtiar, Huyser returned to Washington.

Harold Brown (Secretary of Defense) - was a moderate on

12 Brzezinski, *op. cit.*, p. 377.
13 *Ibid.*, p. 376.

most Iran related questions, located some where between Brzezinksi and Vance. He seemed to take a back seat on the issue, cautious about U. S. military involvemont, but supportive of U. S. strategic interests, and fully supportive of the later ill-fated rescue mission, which he himself recognized as risky but felt essential.

These eight individuals, while dependent on others for information about Iran, in varying degrees exercized the greatest influence on policy toward that country and collectively helped decide its fate, insofar as U. S. involvement was concerned.

James Schlesinger (Secretary of Energy) - Entered the President's councils on the Iranian problem in November and December of 1978 because of his military expertise and past post as Secretary of Defense in the Nixon and Ford administrations. He advised much stronger support of the shan than had thitherto been provided, much along, Brzezinski's lines, and favored some military actions if necessary to bail out the shah, because the strategic stakes were so high. He was also mentioned as a possible special high-level emissary to bolster the shah's morale, but he personally preferred that Brzezinski go. In any event the President decided on a more low-key approach, rejected most of Schlesinger's and Brzezinsk's suggestions about "show of force" options, and concluded by sending a lower level official than either of the secretaries, NATO deputy Commander General Robert Huyser.

Iranians

Mohammed Reza Pahlavi (Shah) - The enigmatic and pivotal figure in this case analysis. Because the Shah and his policies are extensively discussed elsewhere, we will only add a few things here. The ruler had a great deal of self-perceived legitimacy which allowed him to take certain liberties, and to emphasize the things he wanted to emphasize, namely: a powerful military establishment and a program of Westernization and gradual reform.

As one of the last nearly absolute rulers, he incited awe from many of his people but increasingly hatred and fear as well. Because of his desire for modernization, he was building the restless middle class that was influential in unseating him. He had little patience or respect for the orthodox religious mullah hierarchy in his land, and when necessary, treated them harshly, incurring their undying enmity.

His intelligence and original viewpoints were offset by 1978 with a failure of nerve coinciding with the discovery of his terminal illness. Never very decisive, and always semewhat in awe of the Americans, he displayed these tendencies even more when the going got difficult in the second half of 1978. It was unfortunate the he lost the services of one of his most trusted advisers, Assadollah Alam, with the latters death in 1977. Because the Americans would not openly approve a repressive military crackdown (not preventing it either) the shah was loath to take the brutal but decisive acition which might have bought him more time.

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini-The powerful absentee player in the drama who would finally take power in early 1979 and purge the revolution of its more moderate elements as well as many of the shah's old supporters. A fanatic who although not given to rational solutions and compromise, was an astute manipulator of the news media and, from his, exile in Paris literally orchestrated the waves of riots which swept over the shas in the fall of 1978. Khomeini's aim became installing a civilian regime but with himself has the religious power behind the state. A version of Islamic government.

Shahpour Bahktiar- A kind of social democrat and moderate oppositionist who despised the Shah and was in turn detested by the ruler. He became premier when the shah flew out of the

country January 16, 1985, until Khomeini's arrival in February. Bakbtiar had spent some years in exile or prisons during the shah's tenure and actually seemed to think that his shaky provisional government could compete with Khomeini successfully. Unfortunately for Bakhtiar and the moderates, the United States support for the shah with little contact with his faction, had left very little time to build up any kind of baking for his alternative movement.

Karim Sanjabi- Head of the National Front and a somewhat tougher opponent of the shah than Bakhtiar, Sanjabi was released from prison in early December and consulted by the ruler. He refused to participate in a constitutional monarchy or coalition government that permitted the shah or his son to remain. His uncompromising attitude is understandable, but in effect led to Khomeini's rise to power by dividing any remaining resistance to the latter as an alternative. Sanjabi had been a prime minister in earlier years, but had suffered at the hand of the shah.

Prime Minister Gholarem Azhari- A respected but prlitically inexperienced and physically ailing military figure who headed the shah's last governmeot in late 1978. His accession to power meant "martial law" although a real military crackdown never occurred. Azhari was a respected elderly military "unity" figure but he emerged too late to bolster the shah much or insure that the military remain loyal or at least opposed to radical alternatives.

Organizations

In addition to sketches of the individuals active in Iranian policy during the period, it is essential to get the organizational background in which these individuals operated. One good reason for this, as refelected in earlier chapters, is that sometimes the head of an agency or department is not representative of the

thinking or, somewhat different, the divergences of thinking present in the organization. As modern foreign policy is necessarily complex, collective, land bureaucratized, we learn from organizational climate as well as studying executive officers.

The Department of State- Represented a variety of points of view, and of course was the locus of the broadest experience in Iranian questions. Several writers have pointed out that the Desk Officer, Henry Precht, and lover level embassy diplomats were not sympathetic to the shah, and seemed to take every opportunity to decrease his image in the eyes of top officials and to quickly recommend exploring other options (such as a representative council when the revolution was in its early stages.[14] At least one knowledgeable commentator has noted that the career rewards for Iranian specialists were limited, affecting the quality of those officials. Also, the political history of considerable Presidential support for the shah made negative reporting of Iranian conditions and the shah's policies in particular, a sometimes fruitless exercise not likely to be helpful to the reporter's career. There were thus bureautic/systemic blocks to effective policymaking and intelligence. Arab specialists on the other hand enjoyed more glamor, a greater variety of posts in Arab speaking countries, and the kinds of reinforcement for candid reporting that the Iran people lacked. There were also antagonism between the Department and the National Security Council (a condition that antidated the Carter administration and the usual divergence from the opinions of military specialists in the Defense Department.)

The Department of Defense - Because of the Shah's massive purchase of U. S. weapons and unquenchable thirst for U. S. mili-

14 Michael Ledeen and William Lewis, "Carter and the Fall of the Shah : The Inside Story," in *Washington Quarterly*, Spring, 1980, p. 15.

tary advisors, the Defense department had a considerably higher stake in supporting his policies than did State. Nevertheless, top military and civilian officials in Defense, notably Gen. Huyser and Secretary Brown, were by no means uncritical in their approach to the shah and how to aid (or avoid aiding) him as the situation worsened.

The National Security Council - The personal foreign policy evaluation arm of the president and the fiefdom of Zbigniew Brzezinski, this body was hurt and embarrassed by conflicting and inconclusive intelligence reports on Iran, and ultimately supportive of both propping up the shah and when that came to seem futile, going for military rule to avoid Khomeiniist influence and a full scale revolution. This body as, as it always is and perhaps should be, primarily concerned with the political welfare of the President within the general context of the national interest. Its composition being transient and much more tied to the President's personal success than the State Department, this is not surprising. The paradox is that Brzezinksi and his close advisor Gary Sick, may have cost the President some flexibility by urging unqualified support of the shah until fairly late.

The Central Intelligence Agency - Was affected by many of the same considerations as the state department. There were few rewards for reporting critical of the shah's regime or pessimistic about the country's stability. Those reports earlier in 1978 that showed real trouble for the Pahlavi rule, did not seem to get sympathetic attention from the top policymakers charcaterized in the previous section. More than one source, notably, singled out CIA Director Stansfield Turner for criticism in his knowledge of what was really going on in the country, if not his general competence.

ANALYSIS

Time Frame- The Iranian revolution, as we are defining it, and the American policy failure enmeshed in it, is pretty much co-extensive with the year 1978, although the latter stage—including the shah's abdication, the shaky provisional government, and the seizure of power by Khomeini — took place during the first five weeks of 1979. And as we have printed out, the forces that brought about the revolution dated well before this period.

The decision-time frame, that is the period in which American strategists realized that there was a *revolution* to contend with rather than just the usual problems in Iran, was a fairly long one. But as has been seen, various predispositions toward re-garding the shah's power as a given, and the U. S. 's position is Iran as tightly bound with that power, *made decisive action very difficult. Probably even more important were the divisions of outlook within th Carter administration, which made either support for a really tough solution by the shah or bold moves toward the alternatives of his stepping down in favor of a military or civilian council, unlikely.*

Stakes- The U. S. investment in the Shah's regime, that is the status quo in Iran were considerable: the country was deemed a pivotal state along the Soviet frontier, a major regional power, and a vital source of support for the American led anti-Communist and anti-radical-Mideast blocs. With this frame of reference it is instructive to look at two kinds of structural variables often analyzed in connection with high pressure decision making period—one a problem and one a solution. These are *the presence of groupthink* and the alternative of *multiple advocacy policymaking.* While groupthink, in this case the rigid adhering to support of the shah because of the above listed stakes, may have been a problem in delaying a critical review of American options early

enough for those options to be real ones, divisions and conflict over what to do about the regime's deterioration, lead to the conclusion that groupthink was not the major problem after about October 1978. The stage at which groupthink may be said to have occurred a done its damage, was the rather long period before the downward slide of 1978 during which alternatives to unwavering support for the shah were almost reflexively avoided. Paradoxically, groupthink began and ended at just the wrong times, giving President Carter the worst of all worlds in dealing with this corner of the world. If there had instead been effective devil's advocates prompting a reassessment of America's heavy investment in the personal rule of the shah, and *then*, if it was decided to stand by him, more cohesive support for him rather than debate and time-wasting, the outcome would have had more chances for being a favorable one for both the U. S. and Iranian governments. Multiple advocacy, again ironically, occurred at the least propitious time, when a unified, full-steam-ahead posture was needed. *It also bears repeating that no matter what the U. S. did in 1978 (or did not do) it may well be that forces within the Iranian society resistant to U. S. or any outside manipulation were already set in motion.*

Quality of Intelligence- As Rubin and other have pointed out, the quality of intelligence on adverse trends in Iran was almost systematically impaired and alternatives stifled by the deeply-set premises of policy toward the country. Nevertheless, specific kinds of information could have still been elicited and used to improve the odds for a better outcome. Some of these are: 1. Closer attention to the Shah's personal health and psychological state, especially in 1978; 2. A more realistic assessment of the power of Khomeini and the cumulative resentments in Iran that made this power so harmful to the U. S. and the shah's interests as they had been defined; and 3. A willingness to see the gravity

of the situation after the riots and strikes began in 1978 in such a way that the shah's own position, even assuming that it was prudent to bolster that position, could have been assessed as precarious.

Another complex of factors less often mentioned in post-mortems on the Iranian fiasco centers on the preoccupation of the President and his advisors with issues which competed with Iran for their time. Particularly after the summer of 1978, the Carter people were heavily focussed on the SALT II agreement, questions of strategic weapons alternatives, and, most importantly, the complexities of the Other Middle East problem, the louder and squeakier one of Arab Israeli relations and the impending Camp David summit talks. Of course Presidents always face a variety of competing demands on their attention, and it is much easier after the fact to say "that issue was ignored for too long." Arguably, for example, the period 1968-69 was laden with more demands on the Johnson and Nixon administrations vis a vis the economy, the Vietnam War, the Presidential elections and forming of the new administration, and strategic arms issues with the Soviet Union. 1945 and the massive problems of U. S. and world power reorganization and recovery was an even more difficult period. And after the Iranian revolution was an accomplished fact and American hostages then were seized in reaction to U. S. complicity with the shah, the Carter administration forced itself to put aside other priorities in the face of domestic outrage far more completely than it was able to do when Iran itself was in jeopardy.

Other Causes of the Ultimate Failure of the U. S. in Iran

At this stage it is essential to explore sysematically as many reasons for the disaster outcome of the Iranian problem in 1978-79, as can be isolated. Let us first look at factors which seem to have lain outside U. S. control:

1. *The Shah's declining vigor and health*- Clearly this important given lay outside American or indeed human control, although, as has been mentioned, better methods of getting Knowledge of leaders' conditions are badly needed. It is commonly the case that regimes in which power is centered in one individual are extremely tight-lipped about the true physical condition of that person. In this instance the shah had lymphatic cancer with no prospect for a cure. Not surprisingly, this state seems to have been accompanied by varying degrees of mental depression and disorientation not to mention physical exhaustion and probable loss of the earlier level of will power.

2. *Continuing repressive policies in an era of economic growth but social instability.* Iran's oil revenues in the 1970s created impressive wealth, which was, unfortunately visible, but not very well distributed. The shah's government initiated a number of reform and welfare programs which drew modestiy on this wealth (as part of the "White Revolution"), but many did not benefit. Political opposition, both from the large conservative Muslim factions and liberal Western oriented groups, was tightly circumscribed and dissent was dealt with very harshly. Political prisoners were large in number. The Shah during the 1960s and early 1970s coopted some of the latter group, but made more new enemies than friends.

3. *Sharp rise in activism among Islamic fundamentalists throughout Middle East, including Iran (also Shiites in Lebanon, and Libyans)*- The Shah's attempts to "westernize Iran, coupled with heavy arms purchases, a visible U.S. (24,000 by 1976) presence, and the resurgence of religious fundamentalism across the Middle East, combined to create a very volatile situation, and a particularly hostile Shiite clergy by the mid-1970s Paradoxically, the small but impressive land reform program also aroused the antagonism of the clergy (taxing their lands and removing them

from effective control of some church land). Open opposition meant imprisonment or exile.

4. *Careful exploitation of all of these factors by the Ayatollah*- The most notable exile of the above-mensioned group was Ruhollah Khomeini, who was forced to leave the country in 1963, and to watch from the outside as his political interests underwent systematic attack from the government. Bitterness against the shah, his repressive policies combined with an upturn in the appeal of traditional Islam, worked in Khomeini's favor and ultimately enabled him to seize power. The United States did not seem to be in a position to do much about this.

5. *Perception of the U.S. under Carter as perhaps weak, liberal and human rights oriented, limited by post-Vietnam sensibilities.* During the Ford and early Carter administrations, the anti-foreign involvement attitudes engendered by Vietnam and reflected in the American reluctance to play a role in Angola, added to Carter's emphasis on international morality and human rights, gave a signal of U.S. weakness and oportunity for dissenters against U.S. backed regimes. Some of these conditions could have been slightly altered by a conscious change in American policy such as not emphasizing human rights. But this would have meant sacrificing major broad administration goals for the sake of appearing "tougher," something Carter was certainly unwilling to do. There perception of the United States from this sensitive post-Vietnam condition was, moreover, not simply one of simple weakness, but also new sensitivity and a sense of being chastened and therefore more understanding of the "progressive" forces in the Third World.

MISTAKES MORE WITHIN THE REALM OF U.S. CONTROL AND WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN DONE TO PREVENT THEM (I.E., ALTERNATIVES)

We now enter the most crucial phase of this analysis: the determination of preventable mistakes and the offering of alternative policy choices that could have been made, this will be followed by an exploration of why such choice were not (as opposed to could not have been) made, and then a consideration of whether it would be possible to build in changes that would reduce the likelihood of such errors in the future, or in comparable cases (again our examples of Jordan, South Africa, Saudi Arabia come to mind).

Salient short-term mistakes leading to failure, mostly during the time of the Carter administration- These are areas closest to the notion of "preventable" in all cases occurring within two years of the fall of the shah. Whether and to what extent they could have been prevented is of course debatable. This discussion will be followed by an analysis of longerterm factors (going back as far 1953), which also contributed to the problems inherited by the Carter administration. Descriptions of these policy mistakes are deliberately brief, particulaly when they have been touched upon in the *chronology* section. Policy-alternative descriptions are also short.

1. *Sluggishness of lower level intelligence sources in ferreting out information about power of oppostion groups during 1977-78.*- Opponents of the shah remained fragmented and far more vocal outside of the country (students in the United States for example) than in it. Nevertheless, by 1978 dissident activity and demonstrations were intensifying. Higher level officials complained later of not getting enough basic information about Iran. This may be partly true, although the system, as previously described, did not favor the reporting of bad news about the country, or items that might reflect poorly on the shah's rule. Whether insufficient information was collected, or whether information was simply not passed up the intelligece chain is controversial.

2. *Failure to utilize what few high-level studies were available to look at shah's problems*: Most of the high level studies of the Iranian prognosis were not openly critical of the regime or worried about its prospects, but a few studies of this nature did exist: the Congressional Research Service report of July, 1978 and the Spring Department Seminar report, earlier cited, by James Bill projecting "Monarchy in Collapse." These papers, in different ways, talked of storm clouds on the horizon which required definite action on the part of the government. The action was not forthcoming. It has been noted that the American ambassador in Iran during the last sensitive years before tne Shah's crisis and the arrival of Sullivan was Richard Helms, former director of the CIA. Allan Goodman, a former senior staff official at the CIA, feels that Helms presence between 1973 and 1976 inhibited innovative intelligence gathering and promoted unquestioning acceptance to the status quo because of the U.S. dependence on Iran for two crucial listening posts collecting information on Soviet missile tests.

3. *Reluctance to pass bad information up regarding the conditions in Iran.* Goodman charges that analysts who did actually get to travel to Iran were carefully guided in their contacts to pro shah sources, and pro Western types, returning with the idea that the ruler's base of support was broader than it was. There was a chronic assumption throughout 1978 that the 1962 riots had beeen more serious and the shah had ridden them out. The staff of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence noted: "analysts were not required to consider the possibility that popular opposition might undermine the Shah's rule."[15] Consequently, those collecting information which seemed to spell trouble for the status quo were few and there incentives were almost non-exi-

15 Allan Goodman, "Dateline Langley : Fixing the Intelligence Mess," *Foreign Policy*, Winter, 1984-5, p. 167.

stence because of the belief that the information would not be accepted.

4. *Failure to consider comprehensively the wisdom of being locked into the Shah with no links to the moderate oppositon.* United States policy makers did not see any critical danger to the shah until late October, so there was no serious thought of contact with the moderates. Even in November Ambassador Sullivan was not authorized to deal with these groups, but confined to consulting the shah.

The shah refused moderate influence or participation in the government in December, although he released Sanjabi and other opposition moderates. The U.S. was effectively committed exclusively to the shah until virtually the eve of his departure in mid-1979. An alternative policy of discreet and moderate links to moderates during 1978, especially after November, when the situation seriously deteriorated, might have permitted more time to negotiate a stronger transitional regime with the power to say no to Khomeini's return, then ride out the storm. Such an alternative would not in any way be assured of accomplishing anything concrete, but would have broadened American *options* without undermining the shah.

5. *Fence sitting and debating in the Carter administration during the decline of the shah's position between August and December, 1978.* Hand in hand with a judicious policy of having openings to the shah's moderate opponents in 1978 would have been either a firmer (if not necessarily public) display of support for the shah or a policy of building a moderate provisional regime, *before* radical, irreconcilable Khomeinist elements had time to become dominant. Such debate, perhaps unavoidable in a pluralistic administration like Carter's, did not really help the shah's morale very much, nor encourage the moderate opposition, who never

knew when the Americans might decide to back the regime in an iron fisted repression, and military regime. Another option, if not a savory one, but one that might have bought time was that of backing the military government solution à la Vietnam, 1963 (the coup ousting Diem) without the necessity of violence to the shah. From this perspective it is possible to argue that the lack of a coherent U.S. position, one which watched events unfold in Iran in a rather detached fashion, closed off many different kinds of options for Washington (rather than holding them open) and lowered U.S. esteem in the eyes of its allies.

6. *Understimating the power of the Ayatollah Khomeini*- This problem was closely related to other problems of political intelligence, but the degree of error here was remarkable. Virtually no important intelligence assessment reflected awareness of the power Khomeini demonstrated from Paris during 1978. According to Goodman, the findings of the CIA's Iran post mortem (the findings of which "were so embarrassing that no more than a dozen persons were permitted to see the report") "not a single person in or out of government forecast the ascent of Khomeini." Sullivan's repeated attempts to establish some link to Khomeini were sidetracked by Brzezinski and others.

Perhaps the most puzzling question of all in our search for mistakes and alternative policies is how Khomeini could have been so consistently ignored as a remote controlling influence in Iranian politics. No other leader could have brought the revolution to the stage of white heat it had reached in the fall. There would have been riots or incidents, but these could have been isolated or repressed. With *Khomeini* the numbers of people disenchanted with the shah grew enormously as did their activism, and this made such isolation of insurrectionists impossible. Other opposition leaders did not make the revolution happen. Not Bahktiar; not Forouhar; not Sanjabi.

7. *Failure to be aware of the shah's physical decline and deterioration of will*- The lateness and sketchiness of the American picture of the shah's illness and his apparent almost clinical depression was highly preventable. Leadership health assessment is a well developed intelligence art and should have been easier in the case of the shah of Iran than for Soviet leaders like Brezhnev and Andropov. The ruler's health has been clearly highlighted in memoirs and recapitulations of the crisis as basic to his inability to cope with the situation. Closer monitoring of the shah's condition could have brought about a more realistic U. S. position which took into account the extraordinary needs of the situation, as should be the case in dealing with all leaders of "swing" countries in pressure environments. It is of course far from given that knowledge of such a state of affairs guarantees the right approach or a more decisive U. S. role, but it would at least have enhanced the chances of a clearer appraisal *at the time.*

Having considered the major apparent failings of the short term (1977-79) period, it will be helpful to catalogue United States policies during the preceding 25 years which may have contributed to the untenable situation in which American Iran strategists found themselves. Again, alternative policies will be proposed — not to display the facile wisdom of hindsight — but rather to show that each individual case of action or inaction had other options which might have been more productive or wise, *even if the short run setbacks of 1977-78 had not occurred.*

1. *The intervention against Mossadegh in 1953*- One of the earliest American interventions in Iranian affairs, which was to have fateful consequences in the late 1970's was the CIA-aided toppling of Mohammed Mossadegh's government in 1953 (described earlier in this chapter). It is not argued here that such consequences *could have* been foreseen, nor that the coup guaranteed the shah's

eventual downfall. Rather it may be said that the coup carried with it certain bad long-term implications and reinforced early a policy of limiting the options open to the Iranian body politic and a policy of underwriting the shah's position.

There are various interpretations of the degree to which the United States was responsible for making Mossadegh's removal possible — there would have been turmoil in any case. Given the containment and rollback mentality of 1953, in the face of the Korean and Chinese problems and the earlier "near loss" of Greece and Turkey, the CIA action may have been the only realistic *perceived* option. So rapid was the course of events and so hostile was Mossadegh to Western (particularly British) influences that not to have acted could arguably have taken Iran out of the U.S. camp and ended the shah's career in 1953, not 1979. But it is also possible that a policy of restraint and financial support might have moderated the Mossadegh government and produced a neutral Iran somewhat on the Indian model rather than the unremittingly angry Iran of a Khomeini. Certainly the Mossadegh intervention is cited as the archetypal U.S. imposition and the cause of bitterness among the Iranian masses.

2. *Failure to emphasize reform until Kennedy / Johnson* - Even given the removal of Mossadegh at the beginning of the Eisenhower period, and the delivering of modern weapons to undergird the shah's power, some of the ill effects of the Pahlavi pattern of rule could have been offset by an early U.S. carrot and stick policy to encourage controlled internal reform in the country in return for U.S. military aid and technical assistance. No such inducements for reform were to be found in the Dulles approach, perhaps for 2 reasons: 1. it was assumed that Iran's loyalty to the United States was ample reward for the American military infusions, 2. the U.S. was still insecure about losses of any terriotry to communism and had to have a period of consolidation

before much concern with internal reforms could begin. That the encouragement of the second might have reinforced the first seems not to have been a popular theory. Yet precisely this *alternative*, the avoidance of the maintenance of the flow of military supplies and trainers without some serious demonstration of enlightened domestic statesmanship on the shah's part, would have avoided one bad pattern and introduced one good one instead of what happened.

3. *Failure to keep arms aid and development aid in proportion.*

Between 1973 and 1976 the Shah purchased $8.3 billion in weapons from the United States. With a gross domestic product of under $70 billion per annum,[16] this outlay ($2.1 billion per year) represented an enormous cost necessrily diverted from sorely needed domestic welfare programs. Outside arms transfers to Iran in 1975 were greater those to Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Saudia Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and other Persian Gulf states combined.[17]

It is difficult to prove that greater U.S. emphasis on economic aid and Iranian development programs by the shah would have cirumvented the problems of 1978. But certainly the attribution to the United States of a callous disregard for real Iranian needs — as opposed to geopolitical ones — damaged America's reputation and linked the country to the shah as an oppressor. Waste and corruption were widely felt to be endemic, in spite of the shah's not inconsiderable modernization programs. It may be that given the American identification with the Shah and his country's critical location, it would have been better (if not ideal) to have strongly push for an upgraded program for domestic welfare and far less visible and extravagant arms outlays, per-

16 Leslie M. Pryor, "Arms and the Shah," *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1978, p. 57.

17 *Ibid.*

mitting some general economic imporvement to be felt throughout society without giving openings to political opponents.

4. *Failure to understand Shiite disentent (as opposed to controlling it and its explosive potential)*- The factors of massive U.S. arms sales to Iran, the influx or foreign personnel, corruption, and a state security agency ruthless in its pursuit of opponents of the Pahlavis, can be linked, but not used alone, to explain the fundamentalist rise in power and the hostile nature of that power. Khomeini both influenced this development and benefitted enormously from it. As Sullivan and Rubin have pointed out the Shiite awakening was far from the whole story of mounting opposition to the shah, but a vital element. U.S. reporting should have taken it into account. Basic societal problems were seriously overlooked and so called anachronistic determinants like religlon treated lightly. The meagerness of or failure to take seriously such intelligence was reminiscent of the low level of U.S. awareness of the popularity of the Viet Cong and the British underestimation of the grassroots power of religion in India at the time of Gandhi and Jinnah.

5. *Failure to recognize the breadth of hostility toward and fear of the shah*- This was a cardinal failing, which led to several later errors, including the inability to get information about opposition groups and full awareness of their power. Sullivan has emphasized that the NSC and Brzezinski saw the uprising far too much as a fundamentalist Muslim movement rather than a broad-based, deeply felt, wide-ranging anti-Pahlavi coalition.[18] Goodman's analysis of selective contacts provided for American intelligence and diplomatic personnel in Iran may explain the systematic and chronic underestimation of those who desired the extermination of the

18 William H. Sullivan, "Dateline Iran : The Road Not Taken," in *Foreign Policy*, Fall 1980, p. 176.

regime.[19]

A network of informants is needed in every such country to seek out opposition strengths and look through glasses untinted by rosy glasses at the status quo.

6. *Acceptance of and dependence on SAVAK*- In spite of the Carter administrations criticism of SAVAK and human rights violations in Iran, the U.S. history of tacit support for or at least acceptance of the security agency could not be erased. Although its scope of activities was far larger, SAVAK was modelled on the CIA and its agents were trained by Americans in some cases. Through the shah, the American government was inextricably linked to SAVAK and Carter's distancing from policies like those of the Iranian regime were too little too late. Accepting an organization as hated and feared as SAVAK was (evidenced in the retributions by Khomeini in 1979), may have been a necessary if unpleasant corollary to backing the shah's regime, but it meant that if the revolution came, Washington/SAVAK complicity would be seen as a fact to be considered carefully in plotting future American strategy by the leaders of the new order.

Even the shah recognized the excesses of SAVAK and in June of 1978 belatedly moved to reform the organization through the appointment of Nasir Moghadem, a moderate. Rubin reports that the paranoia about SAVAK was such that the agency was even blamed for a fire in a movie theatre set by fundamentalist extremists in an act of *agent provocateurism.*

7. *Lateness of human rights or some comparable emphasis*- The United States had for most of the period following the Pahlavi reinstatement of 1953 treated the rough authoritarian nature of that regime as a necessary evil to be overlooked or tolerated.

19 Goodman, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

The new human rights emphasis of the Carter administration, implemented by Patricia Derian's State Department Bureau of Human Rights, was well intended but ill-timed if sustaining the shah's power was a real administration goal. Even an uncompromising human rights advocate such as Richard Falk was impressed by the degree to which the Carter policies seemed to be giving encouragement to the opposition groups chafing under the Pahlavi yoke. Such a criticism as this implies two alternatives: 1. an earlier and more gradual emphasis on human rights or rule of law or some appropriate phrase, or 2. avoidance of application of human rights reforms as a policy to push on the shah once it became clear that whatever the merits of such a policy, an unintended side effect might be to send out unintended signals that would eventuate in his dethronement.

I favor the first alternative, recognizing that it, as sensible as it seems now, was never really regarded as a priority or feasible alternative. It was, in fact, believed that the Shah's economic reforms and westernization policies implied more political reform than could ever be the case. By consistently opposing harsh measures, or at least not favoring them in the stormy days of 1978, the administration further sealed the fate of a regime that was already endangered by other forces and reluctant itself to take cruel countermeasures.[20]

8. *Demonstrations of excessive affection and esteem for shah-*

Because the shah was a quietly charming man with impressive verbal abililities in one-on-one situations — he also entertained very well — several American presidents who in any case would have displayed friendship for him because of Iran's location, went beyond mere diplomatic pleasantries and seemed to embrace the leader. Nixon (and Kissinger) seemed especially fond of the mon-

20 Reza Pahlavi, "How America Overthrew," *Now* December 7-13, 1979, p. 33.

arch, but it was expected that when Carter announced his early policies, there would be some cooling of these demonstrations of closeness that so galled the opposition, including all shadesof moderates. Any anticipation of such a clear-headed and hard headed approach to a repressive ally, was disappointed by Carter's hyperbolic references to his personal friendship with the shah, and the ruler's being "beloved" of his people. This kind of praise may seem the stuff of reliable patron powers, but it has worked unnecessary and untold *preventable* harm in country after country in the strategic client-state belts.

9. *Seriousness of U. S. underestimation of the power of Khomeini*-

This was not simply an intelligence oversight of the Carter administration but a serious long-term error. It is true that Khomeini became a world media figure only after he moved to Paris in 1977 and appeared in a few American newspaper articles beginning about the same time. But Khomeini's writings and power over Iranian followers dated back to before his exile in the early 1960s. That his 1973 book *Islamic Government* was not even available in Washington by the time of his 1979 accession to power is appalling and inexcusable.

CONCLUSION

What may strike the astute observer in comparing the Iranian revolution and the American response to events there with other crises, is the apparent gradualness of the deterioration and the repeated obliviousness of those with stake in supporting the shah and bolstering the alliance to the wery factors which undid the ruler *and* the alliance. From the perspective developed in this article it might be said that the United States almost systematically rejected opportunities to reduce its own dependence on the shah's survival and prosperity. By bolstering the shah at every

crucial juncture, including the first crucial one which re-established his power in 1953, successive administrations in Washington, supported generally by the Congress and the national news media, effectively identified the ruler as Iran itself, for practical purposes.

When it was belatedly discovered that there were latent but potent alternative sources of power (and opposition) in the country and that these were capable of taking advantage of the shah's weaknesses and responding to growing perceived inequities there, there was not enough decisive action to aid the shah in a firm and decisive response *or* nudge him toward a reduced role. Indeed the pattern of American support, especially after the Johnson administration, magnified the ruler's role, his sense or his own indispensibility, without addressing these dormant but growiog stress points.