

***A Fleeting, Forgotten, Modus Vivendi:***  
**U.S. Foreign Policy and its Perspectives on Revolutionary Iran**  
**Before the Hostage Crisis of 1979**

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## **Preface & Acknowledgments**

Four years ago I was in the Middle East wearing Marine Corps combat utilities. The men I trained beside, the seas and straits my ship traveled through, and the lands my platoon traversed illuminated the complexity and richness of the Middle East as a whole. I became fascinated with the region's history and the United States' involvement in it. It was also then that I decided to study the region whenever and wherever I went to school. Even then, due in part to its mysterious image and rogue-classification, I knew Iran must be the topic of my studies. So to begin, I must thank Columbia University and its History Department for providing me the opportunity to make my intellectual aspirations a reality. My years at this institution have challenged me on nearly every front and simultaneously given me the autonomy to find answers for myself. This, of course, is possible only because of the people that are the fabric of this great institution.

It is tempting to list every man and woman who helped me along this journey. For the most part, you will find those individuals footnoted. Others not cited will be personally thanked. If I could spend time explicitly thanking just one person for the work that follows it would be my wife, Emily. Thank you for enduring many nights alone while I wrote in the rooms across or below from you. Thank you for always valuing this work as much as – and when I was in the slumps, more than – I did myself. And thank you, for always giving me thoughtful, wholehearted, feedback even, and especially when, you could not comprehend how I found the details of this history so “fun.”

## Introduction

On April 9, 1979, Henry Kissinger had had enough. Since the beginning of the year Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the former Shah of Iran and a close ally of the United States for thirty eight years, was exiled and on the run. Dr. Kissinger, no longer Secretary of State but still involved in political affairs, commenced a campaign against the United States Government's abandonment of the exiled Shah. In a public speech he argued for the Shah's admission into America, questioning why a long-time friend to the United States was now wandering like the "Flying Dutchman looking for a port of call."<sup>1</sup>

As the legend goes, the Flying Dutchman's ship is doomed to never moor, and if he should set his foot ashore, his presence would haunt those he neared.<sup>2</sup> "Stricken with pestilence" the Dutchman was cursed to roam.<sup>3</sup> After the Shah abandoned the throne of the Pahlavi Dynasty in January 1979, he too was cast away, and in less than one year's time had resided in Egypt, Morocco, The Bahamas, and Mexico. Though Kissinger's campaign persisted, the Shah was still barred from entering the United States. That was until his cancer finally warranted his admission on humanitarian grounds. On October 20, 1979, President Carter admitted the Shah into the United States to provide him with access to lifesaving medical care with equipment only available in the U.S.<sup>4</sup> Soon after, the Shah stepped ashore in New York City, and the Dutchman was moored. His curse: "a new era in Iranian-American relations - an era dominated by extremism, distrust, hatred, and violence."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Babak Ganji, *Politics of Confrontation*, 135. Throughout this thesis the term "America" will be used as a variable and synonymous name for the United States. It is by no means an expression of this author's perception of what "America" entails. But since no mention of South America, a few mentions of central America, and one mention of Canada are made throughout the entire work, any semantic issues arising from the use of the words "America" or "American" have been disregarded.

<sup>2</sup> John Leyden, *Scenes of Infancy*, 168.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Barry Rubin, "American Relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran," 315.

<sup>5</sup> James Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 293.

Indeed, after Iranian students seized the American embassy in Tehran on November 4, 1979, U.S.-Iran relations entered a new, desolate era. The political and psychological damage the United States endured seemed irreparable, and in April 1980 President Carter officially severed U.S. diplomatic relations with Iran, setting in motion the first retreat of the United States' presence in Iran since the 1946 Azerbaijan Crisis. But why did this hostage crisis ever occur in the first place? Which events leading up to the hostage crisis encouraged both the students to raid the embassy and Ayatollah Khomeini to support their cause?

History reveals a complex tale. For example, Iran's Revolution had not begun as a definitively "Islamic" movement. Nor had the name Ayatollah Khomeini coincided with an image of a bedeviled leader who was part of an international 'axis-of-evil.' In fact, America's *modus vivendi* with revolutionary Iran, even after it became clear that Ayatollah Khomeini was its probable power center, recommitted itself to a working, non-interfering, diplomatic relationship with Iran.<sup>6</sup> Of course, the early months of the revolution did not pass without tribulation. Communist organizations had a strong influence over Iran's revolutionary media, amplifying the ramifications of Khomeini's harsh critiques of American society and influence. Americans in Iran were harassed, and on rare occasions assassinated, and a few days after Khomeini returned to Iran the U.S. embassy staff was held hostage for a few hours by the same group that killed Americans a few years prior.<sup>7</sup> Yet even those obstacles were not sufficient to deter the U.S. from pursuing normal diplomatic relations with revolutionary Iran.

These reasons were both generic to the region and specific to Iran. During the Cold War, in the greater Middle East every nation embracing Soviet control was a geostrategic, economic,

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<sup>6</sup> Ganji, 143.

<sup>7</sup> One of the earliest assassinations of an American in Iran was conducted by the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) against U.S. Army Lt. Col. Lewis Hawkins in 1973. For more information regarding the MEK's assassinations against Americans see RAND Corporation's "The Mujahedin-e Khalq in Iraq: A Policy Conundrum."

and political loss to the United States. Beginning with the Nixon Doctrine in 1969, Iran's defense mechanisms as well as its education and economic institutions became indivisible from U.S. private corporations and the American government. So, even though Iran's revolution threatened U.S. relations with it, America had plenty of motivations to pursue a *modus vivendi* with Iran.

Yet because of the overwhelming impact of the hostage crisis on American perceptions of Iran, these efforts have been long forgotten. The idea that an Iran ruled by an Islamic Republic is an Iran antithetical to U.S. interests is now the dominant view. But, historically this has not always been the case. This thesis recounts those early months of U.S. efforts to engage with revolutionary Iran leading up to November 3, 1979, the day before the hostage crisis. From this period, a complex series of interactions, alliances, and motivations emerge which counter any truism that states that Iran's revolutionary and religious fervor was the sole precipitant to the fallout of U.S.-Iran Relations. In place of that trope, which has for decades now made myth of the past, a reanimating narrative arises. In it, America's relationship with revolutionary Iran becomes characterized by its pursuit of a *modus vivendi*. How that attempt failed is the content of this thesis.

### *Literature-Review*

Many of the primary sources concerned with U.S.-Iran relations were written in the wake of the infamous hostage crisis that lasted 444 days. These sources are frequently apologetic, absolving "those who could have been blamed" for the outcome of the crisis.<sup>8</sup> But today primary sources are no longer restricted to personal interviews and memoirs the way they were throughout the 1980s and '90s. Over the past three years, thousands of State Department cables addressed to or from the U.S. embassy in Tehran have become public. These releases have

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<sup>8</sup> Bill, *Eagle*, 243.

enormous implications for any history written hereafter. The significant volume of information available to contemporary historians and political scientists alike will lead to more nuanced interpretations of Iran's Revolution, and in the case of this thesis, the diplomatic history the United States shared with Iran during this period.

Nonetheless, these declassifications do not represent the totality of official United States Government documents pertaining to these events. For example, Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) documents relating to both the hostage crisis and the Iranian Revolution are scheduled to remain classified until 2019, "or later."<sup>9</sup> Any history that is written before these documents are fully released, is done so without the aid of critical, but inaccessible, U.S. government sources.

The secondary literature comes with caveats as well. The Islamic Revolution is one of the great revolutions of the 20th century and undoubtedly the first televised revolution.<sup>10</sup> For this reason, intimacy with Iran's history was not a prerequisite to studying the Iranian Revolution. Many treated Iran as a case study to understand revolutions, "because of this there are a lot of social science interpretations of the Iranian Revolution."<sup>11</sup> Thus, the diplomatic history between the United States and Iran is often treated as a vehicle to understanding themes such as the Cold War or religiopolitical movements throughout the Middle East.

This tendency to understand the Islamic Revolution politically rather than historically has created isolated schools-of-thought on the subject, whereby scholars reach conclusions without speaking to one another's claims. For example, Gary Sick, a former member of the Iran Desk at

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<sup>9</sup> Foreign Relations of the United States, Iran: Revolution, volume X, web.

<sup>10</sup> What defines a revolution is a longstanding scholarly debate; and how revolutions differ from mutinies, coups, rebellions, uprisings, and other similar social movements is another dense subject. While both topics are interesting, neither is relevant to this thesis because there is no legitimate debate about how true of a revolution Iran's Islamic Revolution was.

<sup>11</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, personal correspondence.

the National Security Council, analyzed the fallout of U.S.-Iran relations in his book *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran*. In short, he argued the tragedy of the revolution was made worse because of mistakes made across every U.S. agency operating in partnership with Iran. This work remains fundamental to historical interpretations of both the revolution and hostage crisis today. Two years later, Richard Cottam, wrote *Iran & The United States: A Cold War Case Study*. Mr. Cottam was a leading scholar of Iran, and one of the few Americans who ever met with Ruhollah Khomeini during his reporting of the revolution. But despite his overlapping subject matter with Sick's previous work, Cottam cites *All Fall Down* only once – and in reference to the Iran-Iraq war alone.

This disjunction among scholars seems to exist because of the questions each of these works attempts to answer. Much like the early first-person interviews and autobiographies that congealed as an apologetic genre, the responding secondary literature looked for a system or person to blame for the revolution in Iran. And, since a revolution of any kind does not have a single reason for its origins, scholars seeking an explanatory approach have discovered intellectual solace in their discrete analytical paradigms.

But amidst the various exonerations and convictions, how is the U.S. perception of, and its evolving foreign policy toward revolutionary Iran remembered? Admittedly, this question, if present at all, remains a minor concern among questions about the larger sequence of events that emanated from the Islamic Revolution, including the hostage crisis, the Beirut Bombing of 1983, the Iran-Contra scandal, and the Iran-Iraq War. Despite this fact, the sum of historiographical and social science material pertaining to U.S.-Iran relations in the months leading up to the hostage crisis are plentiful.

James Bill's magnum opus *The Eagle and The Lion* remains one of, if not the, most exhaustive texts on U.S.-Iran Relations leading up to and through the 1979 revolution. In discussing U.S. foreign policy toward Iran in the early months of the revolution, Bill states the U.S. "committed a series of major political errors," errors which "ultimately ended in the catastrophic hostage crisis."<sup>12</sup> Among the major failures, Bill notes, was the American embrace of moderate opposition forces, and its inability to establish connections with any major religious leaders. Though the U.S. officially supported the revolution, the extent to which it did so was challenged by the fact that seemingly no attempt was made to contact its leader. This policy toward Khomeini, Bill argues, was "symptomatic of the overall attitude" the United States had toward Iran's Revolution: bitter, begrudging, and all together hostile.

The hostility toward the Iranian Revolution was exacerbated by domestic infighting. In *Debacle: The American Failure in Iran*, Michael Ledeen and William Lewis argue that from the onset of the revolution the American Foreign Policy apparatus was divided over its approach to Iran because of "classic problems in American diplomacy."<sup>13</sup> How much should the U.S. demand compliance to its own moral and civil code in return for a working alliance with revolutionary Iran? Contextualizing that question were the geopolitical aftershocks of the Vietnam War; the disapproval of continued U.S. support of any form of dictatorship – friendly to the U.S. or not; and the Carter Administration's dismissal of *Pax Americana*. In this landscape, Carter's human rights campaign thrived, and in the context of Iran's revolution, those "principles seemed to call for American efforts on behalf of Iranian 'reform.'"<sup>14</sup>

In *Politics of Confrontation*, Babak Ganji analyzes divisions among individual U.S. policymakers as the core issue fragmenting U.S. Foreign Policy in its approach to Iran.

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<sup>12</sup> Bill, *Eagle*, 278

<sup>13</sup> Michael Ledeen and William Lewis, *Debacle: The American Failure in Iran*, 77.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

Specifically, he notes the divisions between Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski. These “remarkably intractable” characters, by nature of their mutually authoritative positions, and often mutually exclusive approaches to U.S. foreign policy, characterized the U.S. approach to Iran through “policy currents.”<sup>15</sup> Ultimately, Ganji echoes Gary Sick and claims that U.S. perceptions were ill-informed because the intelligence agencies failed, time and again, to accurately report forthcoming events.<sup>16</sup>

Most recently, Abbas Amanat in his work *Iran: A Modern History* asks if the revolution was avoidable. His response is terse but argues that any answer to such a hypothetical begins with addressing the “dormant messianic traits in Iranian Shiism,” and the centuries long opposition between the state and the religious establishment within Iran.<sup>17</sup> A professor of early modern and modern Iran, Abbas Amanat’s perspective is unique among English language sources about the Iranian Revolution and the U.S. policy toward Iran during that time. Along with the works of Said Arjomand, author of *Turban for the Crown*, and Ervand Abrahamian, perhaps the most formidable historian of modern Iranian history today, these scholars introduce a consistently more detailed account of the Iranian perspective by way of their first-hand experience with the region.

### *Conclusion*

Even today, U.S. foreign policy seems unconcerned with issues such as the latent messianism of Iranian Shiism or the religio-political contests for authority among secular and religious authorities. Perhaps it is this ignorance of such culturally significant nuances, that

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<sup>15</sup> Babak, *Politics of Confrontation*, 3. The term “policy currents” originated from Franz Schurmann in his book *The Logic of World Power* in order to explain policies driven by “organizational and ideological affiliations” of policy-makers.

<sup>16</sup> Babak, *Politics of Confrontation* 85.

<sup>17</sup> Abbas Amanat, *Iran*, 742.

produced the very “intelligence disaster of the first order” Gary Sick recognized during his tenure at the National Security Council.<sup>18</sup> But even Mr. Sick urges his readers to look beyond the question of whom to blame. Instead, he suggests “it is more interesting to ask whether there were missed opportunities that might have changed the course of events significantly.”<sup>19</sup>

It is in this spirit of reflection, that a granular-level analysis of the major events during the first few months of Iran’s Revolution will be pursued. This history reveals the many opportunities that U.S. foreign policy makers had to rewrite the events known as facts today. And in light of recently declassified documents, these events can undergo greater scrutiny and analysis than ever before. Ultimately, Iran and the United States encountered dozens of moments – opportunities – to rewrite the history they have today. By reexamining events such as the Shah’s initial decision to travel to Egypt instead of the U.S.; General Huyser’s visit to Iran; a message from Khomeini to President Carter that reversed a plan to arrest him; and the United States’ efforts - however hapless - to demonstrate support for the nascent Islamic Republic; all complicate the belief that the coming of the Iranian Revolution inevitably meant the collapse of U.S.-Iran relations as well.

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<sup>18</sup> Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America’s Tragic Encounter with Iran*, 105

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

## Chapter One: America, The Arbiter

When did the animosity begin? For many Iranians, their hatred for the United States began in 1953 when the CIA and MI6 led a *coup d'etat* that overthrew Prime Minister Mossadegh in order to prevent the nationalization of Iranian oil by strengthening the role of the monarchy. For Americans, it was likely the Islamic Revolution of 1979, a popular movement that overthrew the Shah, made Ayatollah Khomeini the leader of its new theocratic state, and eventually held 53 members of the American embassy hostage for 444 days, that spoiled the relationship the United States and Iran once shared.

Both perspectives deserve readdressing. If Iranians were already so averse to the United States before 1979, why at the cusp of the Islamic Revolution were there more Iranian expats studying in the United States than expats from any other country in the world?<sup>20</sup> For the American perspective to stand uncontested it must answer why the U.S. acted at times passively, and even positively, to Khomeini's homecoming to Iran as its revolutionary leader.

In readdressing these perspectives, the events influencing them must be reexamined as well. For, at the beginning of the Islamic Revolution, there was no single political party destined to replace the throne; nor did U.S. policy makers concerned with Iran feel Khomeini's proposed Islamic Government would coincide with an ousting of U.S. influence in Iran. So, if the United States' perception is false, and if Iran's Islamic Revolution of 1978-1979 did not separate these two nations from one another, what did?

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<sup>20</sup> The New York Times, "Shah Visit Was Marked by Oil and Tear Gas," 20 Nov 1977. Official statistics concerning Iranian students studying abroad are, at best, educated estimates. Officials from Iran's Ministry of Science and Higher Education tracked students sponsored by the government to study overseas, but no known sources have accurately tracked students who studied abroad apart from government assistance.

## *Harvesting a Revolution*

Public discontent in Iran accelerated into the early stages of the Islamic Revolution after a series of protests began in January 1978. *Ittila'at*, one of Iran's longest-running newspapers, published remarks about Ayatollah Khomeini calling him a colonial agent whose life was privately shrouded with sexual misconduct.<sup>21</sup> In the religious city of Qom, thousands of "theology students and their sympathizers" responded, clashing with police in street riots, shouting 'we want our constitution' and 'we demand the return of Ayatollah Khomeini.'<sup>22</sup> The clashes became fatal after Iranian police forces opened fire into the crowds. The Iranian government claimed two were killed, the opposition claimed seventy, and the United States embassy reported six.<sup>23</sup> From the beginning, facts about the Iranian Revolution were murky.

But why had libel against Khomeini provoked such a reaction? How is it thousands of students were inspired to march through the streets, causing some to face death, in order to protect the reputation of Ayatollah Khomeini?<sup>24</sup> These answers begin in 1963, when Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi launched a social reformation campaign coined the "White Revolution."

These earnest social, cultural, and economic reforms were initiated to "transform Iran from a semi feudal baron state into a modern industrial powerhouse."<sup>25</sup> The reforms nationalized critical infrastructure, freed farmers from their landowners, granted women a full-spectrum of civil rights, and, perhaps most influentially, modernized Iran's educational system. Yet with

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<sup>21</sup> *Ittila'at*, "Iran and the Black and Red Reactionaries," 7 January 1978.

<sup>22</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 505.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*; State Department Cable, "Serious Religious Dissidence in Qom," 11 January 1978, History Lab Digital Archives.

<sup>24</sup> The topic Ruhollah Khomeini's reputation is significant, for it marks a true historical phenomenon. As Said Arjomand writes in *Turban for the Crown* "the acclamation of Khomeini as 'Imam' . . . was an unprecedented event in Shi'ite history" (152). In *The Fall of Heaven*, Andrew Cooper recalls that Khomeini, at the start of his political activism, was not even the highest ranking mullah among the Shia clerics (108-110). For more on Khomeini's usurpations of Shia norms see Arjomand, 177-188.

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Scott Cooper, *The Fall of Heaven: The Pahlavis and the Final Days of Imperial Iran*, 21.

reform came consequences. Ultimately, changes in taxation, property ownership, and education attainment occurred too rapidly, dislodging Iranians from their traditional identities and usurping former avenues to power. Worst of all, the White Revolution appeared like an orchestration of the United States.

Throughout the 1960's, America invested heavily in the Iranian education system, its military capabilities and the Iranian government as a whole. This outpouring exponentially increased under the Nixon Doctrine, which essentially opened the entire US arsenal for purchase by the Shah's government. Within seven years of the Nixon Doctrine, the United States sold upwards of \$19.5 billion in military arms to Iran - 16 times more than the previous twenty years combined.<sup>26</sup> But even before Nixon, the Shah was fascinated with American defense materials. The increasing dependence the Shah demonstrated on the U.S. offered the U.S. a chance to enter a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with Iran, rendering *de facto* American service members in Iran and their families immunity from Iranian law. Aware Iran's Parliament - *majlis* – was reluctant to ratify such an agreement, President Johnson “offered a \$200 million loan to purchase additional military hardware.”<sup>27</sup> *A quid pro quo*: arms for amnesty.

Ruhollah Khomeini already had a reputation for political activism before this agreement, but his response to the October 1964 SOFA earned him even more notoriety, leading to exile by the Shah's government. In 1963, he gave a fiery speech against the Shah's White Revolution reforms. In response, his listeners took to the streets of Qom, declaring Khomeini's speech the ‘Second Ashura.’ The more riotous destroyed “symbols of the regime and modernity,” and all seemed to be chanting “death to the dictator!”<sup>28</sup> On October 27, 1964 outside his home in Qom, Khomeini again spoke out against the regime's policies proclaiming, “they have reduced the

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<sup>26</sup> The Washington Post, “Who Lost Iran?” 26 February 1979.

<sup>27</sup> Cooper, *The Fall of Heaven*, 120.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

Iranian people to a level lower than that of an American dog.” If any Iranian, including the Shah himself, Khomeini argued, runs over an American dog that person will be prosecuted; but if any American under SOFA runs over another Iranian, even the Shah himself, there is no one who could intervene.<sup>29</sup> He closed his speech with a pan-Islamic call to arms. Within a week he was exiled to Turkey for nearly a year, before the Iranian government authorized his move to a setting more befitting for a Shia Ayatollah - Najaf, Iraq.

Paralleling Khomeini’s objections to the Shah’s White Revolution and the Pahlavi Monarchy was his anti-American rhetoric. From his perspective “all the problems beetting (*sic*) Iran and other Islamic nations are the doings of the aliens of the United States.”<sup>30</sup> Laura Secor, in her work *Children of Paradise* aptly summarized this political binary, “what the shah called the White Revolution, Khomeini viewed as American reforms.”<sup>31</sup> The culture of modernity the Shah imported from the west, and specifically from the United States of America, brought with it a culture whose “lax public morality, heartless economics, and abandoned traditions” stood starkly in contrast to traditional Iranian culture.<sup>32</sup> Those disaffected by the White Revolution found solace in Khomeini’s words, which offered both a diagnosis and prescription to their chronic ailments.

Even those who temporarily benefitted from the Shah’s reforms - those belonging to the intelligentsia, the professional middle class, the rising Iranian elite - found themselves disaffected. Among them, there was no sense they were “a relatively homogenous, self-conscious class.”<sup>33</sup> Whatever power these rising classes of Iranians had attained was only as

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<sup>29</sup> Baqer Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*, pgs. 121-128.

<sup>30</sup> Jonathan C. R., “Khomeini: From Oblivion to the Brink of Power Long Exile From Iran Is Khomeini’s Badge and Handicap,” *The Washington Post*, 21 January 1979.

<sup>31</sup> Laura Secor, *Children of Paradise*, 28.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>33</sup> Earnest R. Orey, “Elites and the Distribution of Power in Iran,” 13.

strong as their base was unified, but the Shah took measures to ensure no organization could unify against him.

In March 1975, the Shah, responding to instability in the economy and attempting to remain relevant to his rapidly shifting society, made Iran a one-party system of government under the Resurgence Party (*Rastakhiz*). But the *Rastakhiz*, as Andrew Cooper notes, had missed its aim.

*In theory, the “King’s Party” [Rastakhiz] was supposed to inoculate the throne from the threat of future social unrest, bring the crown closer to the people, and prepare the Iranian nation for a more open, democratic political system. But the Shah utterly failed to communicate that vision to his people, who interpreted the formation of Rastakhiz as a final, brazen attempt to bury their cherished 1906 Constitution.<sup>34</sup>*

Any voice, be it political, religious, or business-oriented that countered the Shah’s increasingly isolated perception of Iran was silenced. This became even more true shortly after the Shah celebrated the 2,500th anniversary of the Pahlavi Dynasty, thereafter scrapping the Islamic *Hijri* calendar and reinstating the Ancient Imperial Persian calendar.<sup>35</sup> This isolated the court not only from secular politically-active cohorts of Iran’s population but also from the religious establishment and its members as well. Iran’s monarchy, in response to the rapid economic and societal changes done in the name of modernization, had become less democratic and essentially eroded into a dictatorship. With each aggressive response from the Shah, the court became further isolated from its people and in its embrace of foreign influence, the Iranian identity as well.

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<sup>34</sup> Cooper, *Fall of Heaven*, 217.

<sup>35</sup> Overnight, this change added 1,172 years to Iranian calendars. Moreover, such a gesture elevated pre-Islamic rulers and deities, setting the beginning of the calendar to the start of the Achaemenid Empire, founded by Cyrus the Great. Mentioning these figures situated Iranian culture within a pre-Islamic era and embraced the more proto-Zoroastrian worldviews ingrained to the early Persian empires.

Out of these oppressive circumstances rose dissent. As the Shah sat in isolation - pursuing policies that only further insulated him from the realities felt within communities across Iran - the intelligentsia, rooted in intellectual discovery, exposure to western ideologies, and a desire for personal freedoms, discovered collectivism through the boisterous journalistic scene born out of the constitutional revolution of the early 20th century.

The works of Jalal Ahl-e Ahmad, Ali Shari'ati, Mehdi Bazargan, Jamalzadeh, and Ayatollah Khomeini captured and expressed society's shared frustrations with despotism, thus offering the public a sphere to redefine the Iranian identity, a platform for collectivism, and a channel to incite action. While political activism predated the Shah's White Revolution, it was during this period, from 1963 onward, that political strife in Iran intensified to levels unforeseen - and exposed the royal court to a newly-unified body of dissenters. The monarchy's disregard for the rising intelligentsia and longstanding Iranian Shia clerics exposed the throne to a multi-front political-battle. Religious clerics witnessed "students' active participation in the vanguard of the revolutionary conflicts."<sup>36</sup> Their participation "attracted the attention and admiration of Islamic leaders," and in 1978, while in exile, "Khomeini called for an alliance between university people and the clergy."<sup>37</sup>

Through Islam, Khomeini argued in his treatise *Islamic Government*, the rights of Muslims could be protected, and their identity could be restored.<sup>38</sup> Khomeini's success in unifying fractured parties of dissenters was not just in what he said, but what he did not say. His message was rooted in an Islamic worldview, and while that did not resonate with a majority of the intelligentsia, his identity politics did.<sup>39</sup> So, when Ali Shari'ati, a man denounced by most

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<sup>36</sup> Misagh Parsa, *Democracy in Iran: Why it Failed and How it Might Succeed*, 181.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islamic Government*.

<sup>39</sup> Secor, *Children of Paradise*, 30.

clerics for his anticlericalism, began to rally Iran's youth, Khomeini said nothing and embraced Shariati's followers. "Political Islam gathered like a perfect storm," forming the contradictory, yet impassioned, body of Political Islam.<sup>40</sup>

In February 1976, three years before the Islamic Republic of Iran was established, the CIA wrote a report titled "Elites and Distribution of Power in Iran" which recognized the nascent intellectual class and working-professional/middle class as the emerging elites in Iran. Despite their claims to elitism coinciding with opportunities afforded to them by reforms set forth by the White Revolution, the intelligentsia's newfound power did not manifest into loyalty to the systems, nor to the executives of those systems who accommodated their rise. Before long, these modernization efforts supplanted the White Revolution's fortune with demise. The disruption that the reforms of the White Revolution resulted in Iran turning the products of its modernization efforts against the Shah. The precarious state of social institutions led the CIA to conclude Iran's monarchy "is a concept which is likely to be destroyed eventually by more widespread education and by exposure to other political concepts, systems, and customs."<sup>41</sup> Indeed, three years later, Iran's monarchy was destroyed.

Ultimately, the White Revolution became a fifteen-year failed project in modernity. Once Iranians mobilized, works like Jalal Ahl-e Ahmad's *Westruckness*, or Ali Shariati's *Man & Islam* bound a disparate class of disaffected Iranians into a uniform opposition against the Shah. So, when students took to the streets in January 1978 to protest the defiled image of Ayatollah Khomeini, their marching was about more than the integrity of one man but the legitimacy of their collective indictments against an unfair ruler and his apparent puppeteer, the United States of America.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Orey, "Elites and the Distribution of Power in Iran," 15.

## *Into The Great Abyss*

The White Revolution disrupted Iran, upended traditional power structures, loosened the reign of the Pahlavi monarchy, and empowered a new middle-class to command more political rights under the unifying voice of Ayatollah Khomeini. But before Khomeini would return to Iran from France as the leader of the revolution, he first needed to find his way back into Iran.

By October 1978, the revolution hung in a delicate balance. The Shah, conceding to public pressures, had already promised free elections by June 1980. Then in November, the Shah, attempting to restore order, replaced Prime Minister Sharif-Emami with Gholam-Reza Azhari and placed Iran under military rule.<sup>42</sup> It was not known what role the monarchy would play thereafter, nor in the meantime. The same was unknown of Khomeini. However powerful his voice was to this point in the revolution, he was still in exile, and whatever role he would play if he returned was unknown even to him.<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile in Iran, dozens of revolutionaries were constantly calculating when, if ever, they could sideline competing opposition-forces. Moreover, the Shah had warned Khomeini his return would result in his immediate arrest.<sup>44</sup> But Khomeini must have been aware that if he could not return to Iran one of the dozens of other opposition leaders would assumed leadership in his place. His first step home, however, meant going further away.

On October 4th 1978, Ayatollah Khomeini left his home in exile in Najaf, Iraq for the Paris suburb of Neauphle-le-Château on a visitor's visa. An official Iranian government website dedicated to remembering the works of Ayatollah Khomeini states his exile was because "the

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<sup>42</sup> Nicholas Gage, "Shah Puts Military in Control in Iran," *The New York Times*, 6 November 1978.

<sup>43</sup> State Department Cable, "Ayatollah Khomeini's Plans," 08 October 1978, History Lab Digital Archives.

<sup>44</sup> State Department Cable, "The Khomeini Dilemma," 04 October 1978, History Lab Digital Archives.

Iraqi government forced Imam Khomeini to leave Iraq for Kuwait.”<sup>45</sup> Three days prior, the United States communicated with Iranian embassy counselor, Shafei, who argued that the Iraqi “regime would not wish to expel him given his possible utility at some later time.”<sup>46</sup> Two days later, the “Government of Iran had learned, by telegram from Basra, that Ayatollah Khomeini had asked the Iraqi government to leave Iraq for Kuwait.”<sup>47</sup> In that meeting, Prime Minister Begin of Israel and Sharif-Emami of Iran, as well as the British and American ambassadors to Iran understood Khomeini’s desire to enter Kuwait was his first step to return to Iran. Doing so, they noted, placed the Shah in an impossible dilemma. If Khomeini returned, he must be arrested immediately, risking a “civil war *a la* Lebanon,” or let him become “the head of the anti-shah forces.”<sup>48</sup> Knowing this, all men agreed it was best Khomeini remained in Iraq. Since it was determined no other nation in the Islamic world would admit Khomeini, the British and American ambassadors in Kuwait approached Kuwaiti authorities in a demarche “to ensure against the return of Khomeini to Iran.”<sup>49</sup>

But Khomeini was not heading for Kuwait. Though it was rumored he was on the Kuwaiti border, others speculated he was scheming to “infiltrate” Iran amidst a planned nationwide general-strike over October 6th and 7th. Once it was known Khomeini was in France, French authorities would not disclose where.<sup>50</sup> It was even rumored his next stop would be the United States, where the opposition’s cause could be promoted even more than in Paris. Regardless, Khomeini was one step closer to entering Iran. The U.S. government began its contingency planning.

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<sup>45</sup> Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini’s Works, “Exile in Paris.”

<sup>46</sup> State Department Cable, “Khomeini Under Close Iraqi Surveillance,” 01 October 1978.

<sup>47</sup> State Department Cable, “The Khomeini Dilemma,” 03 October 1978, History Lab Digital Archives.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> State Department Cable, “The Khomeini Dilemma,” 04 October 1978, History Lab Digital Archives; Mohamed Heikal, *The Return of the Ayatollah*, 156-157.

<sup>50</sup> State Department Cable, “Ayatollah Khomeini’s Plans,” 08 October 1978, History Lab Digital Archives.

Violence impacted the American community in Iran since the beginning of the revolution. If Khomeini returned, the attacks were expected to multiply. With an estimated 50,000 citizens throughout the country, the United States had a sizeable interest in the overall safety of the country. But by the end of 1978, the American embassy, exhausted by hostile, sometimes deadly, attacks began considering the “agonizing decision on whether to encourage dependents to leave Iran.”<sup>51</sup>

In January 1978, Grumman Corporation offices in Iran began receiving threats with the letterhead of the Mujahedin-e Khalq claiming the F-14 and F-16 projects would be destroyed in the same manner the group carried out previous attacks against Grumman’s academic centers. Later in the year, during a street protest in August 1978, a pipe bomb was thrown onto a bus full of Bell Helicopter employees working in Isfahan.<sup>52</sup> Then in November, the Waldorf hotel in Isfahan was burned; days later, the Morrison-Knudsen camp in Shushtar was attacked. By the end of the year, the American consulate in Tabriz would be temporarily overthrown as well. Before the revolution’s end, no standing relic of western influence was insulated from the indiscriminate attacks that set dozens of cinemas and banks throughout Iran ablaze.

Such violence undercut the legitimacy of the Shah’s newly appointed Prime Minister, Sharif-Emami. By Mid-October 1978 a telegram from the U.S. embassy in Tehran showed the United States could not project the stability or longevity of the Sharif-Emami government. Though relatively stable, it was largely understood as a transitional body-politic whose goal was not to solidify its role but enact policies that appeased any disrupting bodies against the monarchy. What’s worse, Sharif-Emami had a reputation for being a corrupt politician in the age

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<sup>51</sup>State Department Cable, “The Khomeini Dilemma,” 04 December 1978, History Lab Digital Archives.

<sup>52</sup> Joseph Kraft, “Letter From Iran,” *The New Yorker*, 18 December 1978.

of Islamic revivalism. Attacks against him and his supporters mounted, and the very “crocodiles” he was supposed to be feeding looked at him as the one who was contaminated.<sup>53</sup>

Simultaneously, the Shah’s authority appeared to deteriorate by the day. The Iranian government, under the military rule of Gholam-Reza Azhari, forbade public religious ceremonies of mourning during the month of Muharram.<sup>54</sup> In response, more than two million protesters took to the streets on December 2, 1978 calling for the overthrow of the Shah and return of Ayatollah Khomeini. Then, nine days later an estimated 6 to 9 million people - or 10% of the entire Iranian population - marched in Tehran's Shahyad Square protesting the same.<sup>55</sup>

Preparing for a change in power, the U.S. began to “hypothetically assess the nature of any successor regime to the Shah’s.”<sup>56</sup> The list, visualized in Table 1, concretely demonstrates the complex political forces at work long before the conclusive victory of the Islamic Republic. Moreover, it dilutes the meaning and understanding of traditional political labels, as the military, arguably Iran’s most powerful organization was marked as having “little or no role.” This point is accentuated once more by the fact that the political forecast was made in terms of a Cold War contest, classifying even Khomeini’s takeover as a victory for the right. Curiously, this list does not seem to have been widely circulated among those in government at the time, as Gary Sick believed “there was almost a total absence of such studies and speculative analysis in the case of Iran.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Bill, *Eagle*, 241.

<sup>54</sup> R.W. Apple Jr., “Reading Iran’s Next Chapter,” *The New York Times*, 13 December 1978.

<sup>55</sup> Everett Rosenfeld, “Muharram Protests in Iran, 1978,” *TIME*, 28 June 2011.

<sup>56</sup> State Department Cable, “Iran’s Opposition and Foreign Policy,” 01 December 1978, History Lab Digital Archives.

<sup>57</sup> Sick, *All Fall Down*, 49.

Table 1. U.S. Political Analysis of Organizations with a Probable Chance of Succeeding the Pahlavi Monarchy<sup>58</sup>

Royalists	Nationalists	Islamists
The Resurgence Party (absorbed People's Party and New Iran Party)	Liberation Movement (AKA Freedom Movement of Iran)	The Islamic Republic Party (Later: The Islamic Republic of Iran)
Regency Council	The National Front	
	Pan-Iran Party	
Iranian Military	Constitutional Defenders Front	The Muslim People's Republic Party (Supporters of Conservative Ayatollah Shariatmadari, who opposed many of Khomeini's political philosophies)
The National Equality Party	National Democratic Front	
Communists	Radicals	Separatists and Others
Labor Party		Coalition Government
The Tudeh Party		Bazaris (Merchants)
Charks (AKA: The People's Sacrifice Guerillas)	Mujahideen-e Khalq	Tribal Minorities (including the Turkomen, Baluchis, Arabs, Qashqais and others)
Fedayeen		Komitehs
Azerbaijani Democratic Party		Middle Class
The Toilers Party	Oil Workers	Intelligentsia/Student Body
Unity for Freedom		Upper and Lower classes
		Unity for Liberty
		Kurds
Key		
divided loyalties	having little or no role	opposed leftist takeover
leftist takeover		separatists

Throughout December, American businessman George Nathanson approached U.S. State Department officials in D.C. multiple times to discuss the forming of an American backed Pro-Shah organization.<sup>59</sup> Nathanson was seen as a “big operator” in business and deeply connected in Iranian circles, frequently referring to both the Shah’s twin sister and wife, Princess Ashraf and Empress Farah. Ostensibly, Nathanson stated he did not want United States government assistance, yet throughout December alone he met with U.S. State Department officials in D.C. three times and would continue to meet with them frequently in the early months of 1979. In the

<sup>58</sup> Table is an original design by the author. Data taken from intelligence reports categorized as “Biographic Profiles” created by the CIA from November 1978 through March 1, 1979 (source: CREST collection). Data was also supplemented by a memo titled “An Inventory of Iranian Political Groups” also published by the CIA on 27 March 1979. This table does not represent the entirety of known political groups, nor is the representation of organization affiliation an exhaustive analysis. Rather, this table represents the parties U.S. intelligence and diplomatic organizations reported on during the months leading up to Ayatollah Khomeini's return to Iran. And, their classification in terms of leftist takeover was borrowed from the most exhaustive analysis of these organizations sent in March 1979, which highlights the U.S. continued concern that the Iranian Revolution may result in a Soviet takeover of the country.

<sup>59</sup> Babak, *Politics*, 115.

end, the State Department declared Nathanson's attempts amateur, his group unqualified, and his mission a risk to the U.S. image in Iran. To finalize their analysis, the State Department noted no other agencies found interest in his proposal. Be it the wrong man, or a lesson from history, the decision to determine Iran's political fate was rejected.

Instead of implementing policy, the United States engaged in equivocation. Even publically, President Carter stated "we personally prefer the Shah maintain a major role in government" but emphasized that decision was one only for "the Iranian people to make."<sup>60</sup> This tactic, Marvin Zonis argues, "effectively, if unwittingly, destroyed the psychological capacity of the Shah to act."<sup>61</sup> The Shah's paralysis and Prime Minister Azhari's inability to control massive social unrest made Gholam Hossein Sadiqi, the Shah's preferred successor to General Azhari, reluctant to bear the Prime Ministership - leaving Azhari's "lame duck administration" in charge until an unknown time.<sup>62</sup>

There was the question of whether the Shah's son, Reza Pahlavi, could have taken over the monarchy before its collapse. However, Iranian constitutional law stated no person under the age of twenty could perform the functions of the monarchy. In 1978, Reza was 18 years old. If the Shah abdicated, his son would act as a regent, while the monarchy was led by an intermediary coalition known as the Regency Council until Reza Pahlavi turned twenty. The problem, of course, is that this solution required two years to complete and would preserve the same throne so many abhorred through the revolution. The mounting failures, paralysis, and

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<sup>60</sup> Jim Hoagl "Carter Hints Shah Could Fall," *The Washington Post*, December 8, 1978.

<sup>61</sup> Babak, *Politics*, 257.

<sup>62</sup> State Department Cable, "Whether or Wither Sadiqi," 28 December 1978, History Lab Digital Archives.

lack of options for the Shah resulted in a reset of American policy, because “the Carter administration came to the conclusion that the Shah had no chance of surviving the upheaval.”<sup>63</sup>

If there was a definitive successor to the throne by the end of 1978, that is known through hindsight alone. And while there were political possibilities that would make continued relationships with Iran difficult, it seemed a path for continuing relations with Iran was workable no matter the Shah’s successor. In the last days of 1978 a memo titled “The U.S. Image in Iran” evaluated Iranian perceptions of Americans and their role in the revolution was sent from Tehran to all “those in U.S. policy articulation roles” between the two countries. The U.S. concluded that both its role and image were paradoxes. To most Iranians, the United States was largely to blame for the woes their nation faced, yet the U.S. - for all its opportunities in both education and career - was still the reigning emblem of hope for what it means to live the “good life.”<sup>64</sup> This left the United States Government to conclude it was both the source of Iran’s problems and “the ultimate arbiter of whatever solution lies ahead.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Seyed Houssein Mousavian, *Iran & The United States: An Insider’s View on the Failed Past and the Road to Peace*, 31.

<sup>64</sup> State Department Cable, “The U.S. Image in Iran,” 29 December 1978, Digital National Security Archives.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter Two: “The Islamic Movement Will Squander”

At the U.S. Embassy in Tehran on Valentine’s Day 1979, “a murderous barrage of automatic-weapon fire opened up on the embassy from all sides.”<sup>66</sup> Barry Rosen, Press Attaché to the embassy, recalled more than a “hundred” young men “all with automatic weapons” storming the embassy.<sup>67</sup> For the first time in 1979, the U.S. embassy in Tehran was overrun. But, unlike the final takeover in November, during this incursion the embassy staff was held hostage for only three hours until Iran’s Foreign Minister Ibrahim Yazdi and Khomeini’s lieutenant, Ayatollah Mohammed Beheshti, intervened.

After the final takeover, *America Held Hostage*, ABC’s news program dedicated to covering the Iranian Hostage Crisis, displayed the plight of 53 American captives held by Iranian students in support of Ayatollah Khomeini each night at 11:30 P.M. Their 444-day coverage of the crisis evolved into the creation of the still-popular *Nightline*. Most important, it altered the role that television played in broadcasting breaking news and shaped the relationship the American public had with revolutionary Iran.<sup>68</sup> As one study estimates, by the end of 1980, 20% of all evening news in the United States was dedicated to covering the Iran hostage crisis.<sup>69</sup> But the February 14<sup>th</sup> incident in Tehran had hardly entered the consciousness of Americans. This seemed like a minor skirmish in the scheme of Iran’s Revolution and of the day’s events itself. Because February 14<sup>th</sup> also marked the day when the United States’ ambassador to Afghanistan, Adolph Dubs, was assassinated, allegedly by members of a soviet-aligned local faction, Mujahedin-e Khalq.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> William Sullivan, *Mission to Iran*, 258.

<sup>67</sup> Barry Rosen, *The Destined Hour*, 71.

<sup>68</sup> For more on ABC’s role during the Iranian Hostage Crisis see chapter “Held Hostage” in *Nightline: History in the Making and the Making of Television* by Ted Koppel and Kyle Gibson

<sup>69</sup> Hamid Naficy, “Mediating the Other,” in *The U.S. Media and the Middle East*, 78.

<sup>70</sup> John Prados, *Safe for Democracy*, 468.

While the events in Tehran led to the death of one Marine guard, ultimately the skirmish demonstrated the willingness of Khomeini's entourage to continue to engage positively with the United States. After all, the militant takeover was not an act undertaken, nor supported, by any of the revolution's leading elements. Instead, it was an operation of the Fedayeen, a Marxist group founded in 1971 that routinely engaged in political assassinations in order to subvert the power of the Shah. Despite anti-American sentiments growing throughout Iran, how did the U.S. embassy see itself in this new political landscape where the safety of Americans was demonstrably dependent on the support and influence of Khomeini and his men? And how, if at all, did this interaction change the relationship the United States government (USG) had with Khomeini's Islamic movement? Perhaps most pressing, how could the United States continue to prioritize – if not actively impose - potential political outcomes without compromising its commitment to non-interference?

### *The Mirage of Non-Interference*

Jimmy Carter demonstrated his trust “in the Iranian people to make the ultimate judgements about their own government.”<sup>71</sup> This commitment to non-intervention offered the United States an opportunity to align with any authority that rose to power after the revolution. Moreover, this approach would save the United States from becoming “a possible scapegoat later on.”<sup>72</sup> While the practice of non-intervention was both strategically sound and philosophically aligned with President Carter's Human Rights initiatives, it certainly had a dire effect on policy operations.

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<sup>71</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*, 442.

<sup>72</sup> Javier Gil Guerrero, *The Carter Administration*, 126.

The political and economic imperatives of maintaining a working relationship with Iran were paramount at this moment in the revolution. Whether the United States wished to engage in forcing the hand of Iran's revolution through methods as extreme as a coup, or idly sit by as the revolutionaries determined their outcomes themselves, there still existed an enormous list of American economic and strategic interests within the country. Leading up to the revolution, Iran was the source of roughly 9% of the United States' oil imports (5.5 million barrels/day) and had a geostrategic hold over the Straits of Hormuz, through which 37% of the world's oil supply passed.<sup>73</sup> In the forthcoming years, the U.S. anticipated many billions from Iran, including the \$6.2 billion contract between Iran and various western countries for the building of two nuclear power plants; and an estimated \$12 billion to the U.S. alone from a five-year arms contract signed one year earlier.<sup>74</sup> Additionally, some 150 U.S. corporations operated in Iran, and an estimated 50,000 Americans lived throughout the country.<sup>75</sup>

To square the United States' commitment to non-interference with these interests appears contradictory, to say the least. The consequences of an unfriendly or hostile regime replacing the monarchy were not just unfavorable, but a threat to national security and billions in economic benefits. This contradiction between non-interference and invested interest in Iran's outcomes essentially forced the hands of U.S. policymakers into promoting clandestine operations, which allowed for both saving face and pursuing the United State Government's ambitions throughout Iran. Equally alluring was outsourcing these roles to private citizens and companies, a practice that raised significant problems for U.S.-Iran relations in the weeks leading up to the hostage

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<sup>73</sup> Abul Kasim Mansur, *Armed Forces Journal*, January 1979; Note: The *Armed Forces Journal* published this piece under the pseudonym Abul Kasim Mansur, the known name of Ferdowsi ((حكيم ابوالقاسم فردوسی), author of Iran's national epic the *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings) in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century. The author, however, was "a former State Department official with intimate experience in Iranian affairs."

<sup>74</sup> Gary Sick, *All Fall Down*, 57.

<sup>75</sup> Digital National Security Archives, Chronology, May 4, 1978.

crisis (Chapter Three). Nonetheless, America was actively engaged in Iran during the early stages of the revolution, even as Iran's official government appeared increasingly absent.

After Prime Minister Azhari resigned on January 2, Iran entered 1979 with no effective government and had two leading forces competing for authority, the Constitutional Government and the Islamic Movement. Two days later, Shapour Bakhtiar was appointed Prime Minister of Iran by the Shah. His appointment represented a continuation of the monarchy's evolving attempts to maintain political authority. By this time, it was clear both to the United States and the Shah himself that the monarchy's legitimacy was waning. If the pre-revolutionary power brokers wished to weather the revolutionary fervor, it appeared the only possibility of doing so would be at the expense of preserving any institution or individual that resembled the Pahlavi Monarchy.

At the start of 1979, Khomeini announced his intention to build "a republic as in France."<sup>76</sup> This included elements of an elected president and parliament. Because the government would also be Islamic, as interpreted by the Shia clerics, retaining Iran's 1906 Constitution would be impossible. The law of Islam was sufficient unto itself, clerics, like Ayatollah Nuri, argued.<sup>77</sup> Instead, what was needed was a clerical leadership: Shia leaders who possessed an intimate knowledge of the legal system of Shia Islam and could contextualize and adapt its provisions to contemporary issues. How this clerical leadership would operate within the Islamic Republic was vaguely articulated by Khomeini. For all the United States knew, Khomeini was completely disinterested in having Mullahs lead the new government.<sup>78</sup> Instead, he suggested that they may act as intellectual framers who would design the new political system but never fill its leadership roles.

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<sup>76</sup> State Department Cable, "French Meet Khomeini," 01 January 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

<sup>77</sup> CIA, "Iranian Constitution," 01 January 1979, CREST collection.

<sup>78</sup> State Department Cable, "Cottam on Khomeini," 02 January 1979, Digital National Security Archives.

There were other, less formidable contenders as well. Most were mentioned at the end of Chapter One and are represented in Table 1 (pg. 22). Yet the organization with the greatest capacity to turn the revolution in their favor was Iran's military – armed with some of America's most advanced military equipment including the only arsenal of F-14's outside of the United States, as well as "Spruance-class destroyers, Phoenix and Maverick missiles, and a \$500 million IBEX electronic surveillance system."<sup>79</sup> And, the military's unique posture in the revolution did not rely on their armament alone. More than any other organization in the revolution, the Iranian military had the potential to undermine both the constitutional government and Islamic movement and could even pave the way for Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's return as emperor.

Since 1950, the U.S. maintained a group of military advisors in Iran known as the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG).<sup>80</sup> This long standing relationship between the U.S and Iranian military, in conjunction with the decades of U.S. military training and arms deals, gave the prerogative of influencing Iran's military commanders to the U.S. alone. It is perhaps for these reasons that the United States made an attempt to use its influence by sending General Robert Huyser to Iran.

### *Mission Unknown*

On January 4, 1979, President Carter personally ordered EUCOM Deputy General, Robert Huyser, to Iran. To this day sources disagree about the role of his mission. Some press reports suggested General Huyser was visiting Iran to collect overdue Foreign Military Sales payments.<sup>81</sup> Other sources, including America's own *CounterSpy Magazine*, along with *Pravda*, a publication of the Soviet Union, insisted General Huyser's purpose was to orchestrate a coup

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<sup>79</sup> Digital National Security Archives, Chronology, Intro.

<sup>80</sup> T. M. Ricks, "U. S. Military Missions to Iran," *Iranian Studies* 12/3-4, Summer-Autumn 1979, pp. 163-94.

<sup>81</sup> State Department Cable, "Military Supplies to Iran," 11 January 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

d'état – a suspicion James Bill reiterates in the *Eagle and the Lion*.<sup>82</sup> In his memoir, *Answer to History*, the Shah summarized Huyser's mission by retelling a conviction held by one of his generals, claiming "General Huyser threw the emperor out of the country like a dead mouse."<sup>83</sup>

Whatever the official story was, the United States would wait until June 9, 1981 to reveal it when Congress finally held its first meeting regarding the details of Huyser's mission. In that subcommittee, his mission was most broadly defined as "to stabilize the Iranian military and to encourage the Iranian military to support their legal government."<sup>84</sup> Many of the details were reserved for the closed-door executive session whose contents remain inaccessible to the public today. Moreover, Huyser's daily reports which he sent to the Pentagon and White House remain 'restricted,' meaning some materials are accessible while others remain sanitized or closed to researchers.<sup>85</sup> But one senses from both the subcommittee and General Huyser's memoir, *Mission to Tehran*, that the mission had failed because ultimately the military capitulated to "other than what was an established legal government at the time," referring to the Iranian Military's capitulation to Khomeini's forces on February 11<sup>th</sup>.<sup>86</sup> Whatever Huyser's mission was may not be explicitly known for years to come, but what can be examined is why his presence coincided with two monumental events in early revolutionary Iran, the departure of the Shah and arrival of Ayatollah Khomeini.

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<sup>82</sup> Bill, *Eagle*, 254; CIA, "Press Release/Report: Counterspy," 01 February 1979; Robert Huyser, *Mission to Tehran*, 3; CounterSpy was an arm of the radical left notorious for publishing information concerning American covert operations across the globe. Some of its most famous sources include disaffected case officers in the CIA, like Philip Agee.

<sup>83</sup> Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *Answer to History*, 173.

<sup>84</sup> U.S. Congress, Committee on Foreign Affairs, "General Huyser's Mission to Iran, January 1979," 97<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1981.

<sup>85</sup> Nearly all of the documents open to research were made available in the last decade, with many being released in April 2017. All materials in this collection are crucial to future research pertaining to U.S.-Iran relations in early 1979 and researchers should be encouraged to see past the public "restricted" label to attain available documents.

<sup>86</sup> U.S. Congress, Committee on Foreign Affairs, "General Huyser's Mission to Iran, January 1979," 97<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1981.

Shortly after Huyser's arrival, the Shah departed Iran on January 16, 1979 never to return again. Records indicate the Shah's decision to depart Iran was made unilaterally, without the pressures or concessions of any outside entities. It had become obvious that the Shah's power rapidly faded by January of '79, to the point where his very safety was a matter of great concern. But unlike moments in the past when the Shah depended on the intervention of the United States or members of his cabinet to relieve him of making heavy-handed decisions, this time the United States acted as a sort of magic-eight-ball, tersely responding to situations when shaken. So, when the Shah suggested he turn an iron-fist against the revolutionary forces in December 1978, Ambassador Sullivan informed him that "he was the Shah and he had to take the decision, as well as the responsibility."<sup>87</sup> By January, Sullivan reaffirmed the U.S. conception of a post-Shah Iran after the ambassador informed the Shah that he believed the monarchy's survival was not a matter of days but hours, and that he should prepare to transition his authority to another entity.<sup>88</sup> Once the Shah departed Iran, he did so ignoring the invitation from Washington to enter the United States and instead entered Egypt. The Shah's departure then, does not appear to be inextricably linked to General Robert Huyser's arrival or mission. What seems less coincidental, however, is Khomeini's arrival two weeks after the Shah's departure.

On January 24<sup>th</sup> 1979, Prime Minister Shapour Bakhtiar reportedly received a memo from Washington indicating that the United States supported his plan to arrest Ayatollah Khomeini once the Ayatollah arrived in Iran as scheduled on January twenty-fifth.<sup>89</sup> But the plan to arrest Khomeini was aborted after airports across Iran closed on the night before his planned arrival following a communique issued by the Military Governate of Tehran at 11:30 P.M. Because of unsafe conditions stemming from strikes within Iran's Civil Air Aviation ground control

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<sup>87</sup> State Department Cable, "Meeting With Shah," 26 December 1978, History Lab Digital Archives.

<sup>88</sup> Pahlavi, *Answer to History*, 172.

<sup>89</sup> Betty Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 172.

operations, they stated, and due to a “failure of certain companies such as Lufthansa and Air France to operate flights,” the closures were not given an expiration date.<sup>90</sup> The situation caused mass confusion. There were reports that private planes were free to land at a municipal airport in Isfahan with no ground control. Two commercial flights were allowed to land the morning following the shutdown after Civil Air authorities admitted they had not done a good job at announcing the closures.<sup>91</sup> It was not even known who had called for the complete closure of airports nationwide, though the obvious answer was Bakhtiar. But why would Prime Minister Bakhtiar, after receiving confirmation that his plan to arrest Ayatollah Khomeini was supported by the United States, prevent Khomeini from returning? That may be explained by another message President Carter received on the same day he gave the okay for Khomeini’s arrest.

While the White House was prepping for the repercussions of Khomeini’s arrest, a message was received at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran from Khomeini addressed to President Carter. The message was delivered by two businessmen, Leonard Freeman and Nourbakhsh.<sup>92</sup> Khomeini began the message by reminding President Carter that no matter how events turned out in Iran, it would be the U.S. and its policies that the Iranian people will blame for their situation. He then acknowledged President Carter’s influence over the Iranian military, and on that fact, proposed a deal. If the Iranian military allowed Khomeini to return to Iran safely, he promised to “personally negotiate with the Iranian Generals and will solve the differences to the best interest of Iran and the United States.” Assuring President Carter his arrival would be worth bargaining

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<sup>90</sup> State Department Cable, “Political Security,” 25 January 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> State Department Cable, “Message to President Carter,” 24 January 1979, History Lab Digital Archives. The cable does not indicate the first name of Nourbakhsh, however the cable does state that his identification connected him with Amtron Industries of Jericho, New York. Based on evidence provided in previous cables it’s believed Mr. Nourbakhsh was Mohsen Nourbakhsh, the future head of Iran’s Central Bank (1994-2003).

for, Khomeini noted the new Iranian government would be non-communist and would be “composed of members the U.S. will approve of.”<sup>93</sup>

But was Khomeini in any position to negotiate? In January of '79 it became evident that Khomeini's followers gathered more as anti-monarchist than in support of the Islamic Government he laid forth. *Komitehs* – the U.S. embassy in Tehran would go on to call them – were groups and organizations publicly aligned with Khomeini but that frequently expressed ideas that contradicted those of the proposed Islamic Republic. These “constantly changing, unpredictable, and capricious group” of revolutionaries became a liability for Khomeini as much as the United States.<sup>94</sup> If Khomeini was to receive their undying support, it seemed he thought fanaticism was the vehicle that would separate his true supporters from the more lackluster.

By mid-January, Khosrow Iqbal, a known confidant of Khomeini's while he was in France, reported back to the U.S. embassy that Khomeini was an “arrogant monster.” While Iqbal's report expresses his personal dissatisfaction with the Ayatollah, he made a much bolder and eerily precise prediction of Iran's fate if and when Khomeini came to power. Iqbal's analysis: Iran would move “from life under a dictatorship of the boot to life under a dictatorship of the sandal.”<sup>95</sup> Iqbal affirmed his distrust of Khomeini by returning to France and remaining there in exile indefinitely.

It is hard to imagine the USG would have been paralyzed by this report. The Shah's monarchy, in many ways, resembled a dictatorship, and his rule was favorable to the United States. And while Khomeini had a history of speaking against American hegemony, he also had expressed that there was no nation to which he stands in opposition. Rather, there were just

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Sullivan, *Mission to Iran*, 270.

<sup>95</sup> State Department Cable, “Failure of a Mission to Khomeini,” 17 January 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

policies he despised.<sup>96</sup> In fact, the most fraught attribute of Khomeini and his entourage according to U.S. analyses was that they had been “predisposed” to communism. The fear for U.S. Foreign Policy was not that a Shia cleric was coming to power. Though such a change came with risks, the establishment of a religiously driven political body promised to be the ultimate fortress against Soviet influence.<sup>97</sup>

If the United States wished to secure their own bargaining position with Iran’s leading revolutionary figure, it could not have been accomplished by ignoring his request for assistance. However, tracing the United States’ response to Khomeini’s request is difficult. There are only two declassified responses to his message. The last was written by Ambassador Sullivan for Washington stating, “we will hold off further action on this pending your advice.”<sup>98</sup> Further action on what? According to Washington’s first response, the U.S. had both compliments and concerns.

The U.S. shared its concern about the strife in Iran and the bloodshed it brought about. However, they were pleased that the Ayatollah sought a peaceful end to the conflicts. But there was a caveat. Washington continued “to feel that the establishment of a government outside the Constitutional framework present[ed] dangers to the reestablishment of a peaceful, stable, and independent Iran.”<sup>99</sup> The message concluded by reiterating the United States’ belief that no peaceful resolution exists outside dialogue with the constitutional government and military. That same day, Khomeini’s Lieutenant, Seyyed Beheshti, began meeting intensively with Prime Minister Bakhtiar.

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<sup>96</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini, “Ayatollah Khomeini Faces the Nation,” CBS News Audio Resource Library, 1979.

<sup>97</sup> Richard Cottam, *Iran & The United States*, 184-188.

<sup>98</sup> State Department Cable, “Message from USG to Khomeini,” 28 January 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

<sup>99</sup> State Department Cable, “Message from USG to Khomeini,” 27 January 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

According to State Department cables, after two days of meetings between Khomeini elements and the constitutional government, Prime Minister Bakhtiar scheduled a flight to Paris to personally visit Khomeini. Notably, that same day Bakhtiar cancelled the ongoing \$6.2 billion nuclear plants project with French, German, and American companies.<sup>100</sup> But the purpose of Bakhtiar's visit, Sullivan believed, was to conclude "my deal" - he called it - which would lead to a mutually satisfactory means to finally solidify a single political authority. The assumption was that any deal struck between Khomeini and Bakhtiar would be embraced by the military and save the few diehard troops who still supported the monarchy. But this, Sullivan suggested, would not be fully known until Huyser consulted with senior generals the next day.<sup>101</sup> And if successful, would usher in choice 'D' on Huyser's list of preferable political outcomes: ranked after (A) the successful establishment of the Bakhtiar government, (B) a temporal Bakhtiar government, and (C) a military coup.<sup>102</sup>

There is perhaps no month more determinative to the outcome of Iran, its revolution, and America's relationship with both than January 1979. The year began with the still-secret mission of General Robert Huyser. And at first, the U.S. seemed to position itself in opposition to Khomeini, supporting Prime Minister Bakhtiar's plan to arrest him upon his return to Iran. But a request sent from Khomeini to President Carter appeared to flip the U.S. position, setting in motion a series of contemporaneously timed events that entangle explanations rooted in both coincidence and conspiracy.

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<sup>100</sup> The New York Times, "Iran Cancels Nuclear Plants", 30 January 1979.

<sup>101</sup> State Department Cable, "Message from USG to Khomeini," 27 January 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

<sup>102</sup> Department of Defense Memo to General Brown from General Huyser, [Title Sanitized], Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Series: Geographical File, Folder: Iran - Reports from General Huyser (01/19/79 - 01/31/70); Container 12, 12 January 1979, pg 2.

### *Khomeini Comes to Power*

Coincidentally or not, on February 11, 1979, after two days of convulsive fighting between opposition and security forces in Tehran, the military “issued a communique declaring the Army’s neutrality in the ongoing crisis.”<sup>103</sup> Hours later, Bakhtiar and his ministers announced their resignations, thrusting Khomeini’s provisional regime into total control. The military withdrawal marked the fall “of the most powerful and most symbolic institution of Pahlavi rule.”<sup>104</sup> Back in the states, the American media broadcast this victory as definitive, declaring that the Ayatollah Khomeini had finally come to “full power in Iran.”<sup>105</sup>

But how certain was the United States’ Government that Khomeini’s victory would endure? Under Khomeini’s banner, a fractious bunch of revolutionary militias had appeared to raise him to the position of revolutionary leader, de facto. To further legitimize his control, Khomeini appointed Mehdi Bazargan as his Prime Minister on February 4<sup>th</sup>, and, by the 11<sup>th</sup>, the administrative cabinet was nearly filled.<sup>106</sup> But this victory had not come without costs. Although Khomeini rose to prominence unscathed, his supporters faced death to ensure it.

That evening’s newscast subtly exposed a rift still present among Iranians. Scores of revolutionaries took to the streets in celebration. Some burned military equipment while others occupied old British tanks and strapped themselves with military arms. Among the fighters, men and women were clad in balaclavas or looted military apparel. Most were dressed in business casual attire. But between these celebratory scenes, images of the dead – killed by their fellow Iranians – showed that not every Iranian welcomed Khomeini’s victory as their own. Indeed,

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<sup>103</sup> Amanat, *Iran*, 739.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> ABC News, “Khomeini Seizes Power in Iran,” Archive footage, Vanderbilt Television News Archive: February 11, 1979.

<sup>106</sup> Cottam, *Iran & The United States*, 189.

from October 1977 to Khomeini's return in February 1979, an estimated 2,781 Iranians lost their lives fighting on some side of the revolution.<sup>107</sup>

Within three days, the United States offered their congratulations to the new Islamic Republic. In a cable sent to Tehran early on February 14<sup>th</sup>, the same day members of the Fedayeen would storm the embassy in Tehran, Washington asked Sullivan to express the following.

*The embassy of the United States of America presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and has the honor to state that the government of the United States of America intends to continue its diplomatic relations with Iran and looks forward to cooperative and friendly relations with the provisional government of Iran.*<sup>108</sup>

But while the United States extended its recognition of the new Islamic Republic, privately it started to doubt its potential to succeed. By January 19<sup>th</sup>, Ambassador Sullivan delivered a lengthy analysis of possible outcomes in Iran succinctly titled "Situation in Iran." From Khomeini's victory, Sullivan notes, emerged total chaos. Authority was beholden to heavily armed groups that were dividing territory and centralizing their authority throughout the country by staging in mosques. In theory, these organizations were supposed to act as a shadow central government – an extension of Khomeini's revolutionary vision throughout the various provinces in Iran. In practice, these groups had differing "organizational and ideological loyalties."<sup>109</sup> Among the leading factions was the Mujahedin-e Khalq, which Sullivan reminded Washington, was the same group that assassinated six Americans a few years earlier. The government of Mehdi Bazargan was simply "buried" among the provincial pandemonium. All these things considered led Ambassador Sullivan to a grim forecast for Iran: "until the strength

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<sup>107</sup> Abrahamain, *A History of Modern Iran*, 161.

<sup>108</sup> State Department Cable, "Diplomatic Relations," 14 February 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

<sup>109</sup> State Department Cable, "Situation in Iran," 19 February 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

of the street gangs is tested and resolved, it is not – rpt [repeat]– not certain who is going to rule this country in the name of the Khomeini revolution.”<sup>110</sup>

It seemed that the fate of Iran was still in anyone’s hands. Despite much change since late 1978, much remained the same. Iran’s future was still beholden to a fate neither Ambassador Sullivan, nor any member of the U.S. State Department or intelligence agencies, could fully comprehend.

Meanwhile, the Shah resided in Egypt. Though Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was initially invited to enter the United States he instead traveled to Egypt for reasons he does not disclose in his memoir. Unseen to most, his initial invitation to the United States was about to expire.

The ever-deteriorating situation in Iran placed the U.S. in a political dilemma over what – if anything – they could publically do for the Shah while still maintaining some hope of continuing diplomatic relations with the newly formed Islamic Republic of Iran. Since the embassy attack on February 14<sup>th</sup>, the U.S. consulate in Shiraz was voluntarily closed. In Isfahan, the U.S. consul had been attacked after attempting “to save a drunken American from a surly mob.”<sup>111</sup> In Tabriz, the consulate was set ablaze and the consul had been threatened with lynching - while a rope was strung around his neck. The conditions called for a massive repatriation of both U.S. citizens and corporations. Grumman Corporation had already closed its offices throughout Iran and evacuated their employees. By the end of the day on February 14<sup>th</sup>, Bell Helicopter International’s President, Robert Williams, asked for USG assistance to evacuate all 1,500 employees in the country.<sup>112</sup> Additionally, the U.S. State Department planned to

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> William Sullivan, *Mission to Iran*, 271.

<sup>112</sup> State Department Cable, “Message From President of Bell Helicopters, 14 February 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

evacuate 6,000 more Americans by the end of the month.<sup>113</sup> Essential personnel were the only ones expected to weather this storm.

It is under these conditions that in late February the U.S. embassy in Tehran strongly discouraged the admission of the Shah into the United States. Back in Washington, “State Department professionals agreed that it would not be in America’s national interest to admit the shah into the United States.”<sup>114</sup>

But the Shah’s liability was not solely a matter of unstable political conditions within Iran. Though the Shah had exiled himself, he still had not yet abdicated. This was a fact of which Iranians seemed keenly aware, as rumors throughout Iran spread that the Shah was plotting – waiting - for a military coup to pave the way for his return.<sup>115</sup> How the paranoia endured after the military capitulated to Khomeini exposes just how palpable fears of a second 1953 were among the local populace. All the while, Henry Kissinger had actively made his agenda public: the United States must do something to save the Shah. With pressures compounding domestically and internationally to both deal with yet distance itself from the Shah, the United States devised a third option and asked the Shah’s longtime friend David Rockefeller to tend to the Shah’s needs.

The American position in Iran was precarious as Khomeini’s authority increasingly exposed itself as authoritarian. In a move to publically secure his authority, he called for a nationwide referendum to decide whether or not Iran should be an Islamic Republic. After two days of voting, a staggering 97% of the population voted in favor of establishing the Islamic

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<sup>113</sup> John Stempel, *Inside the Revolution*, 188-189.

<sup>114</sup> Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 323

<sup>115</sup> When Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was placed originally placed into power via the coup orchestrated by U.S. and British clandestine forces, the Shah first exited the country. Interpretations of his exile have ranged from proving his cowardice, to ensuring his safety during Operation AJAX. Regardless, it remained a well-known fact to Iranians that the Shah needed to first leave the country before he could return to it more powerful.

Republic. To Ayatollah Khomeini, April 1, 1979 was unprecedented, “the first day of a Government of God.”<sup>116</sup>

Less than a week later William Sullivan quietly exited Iran and resigned from his role as ambassador. The details of his departure illuminate the bewildering reality of life as an American in Iran during this time. Iran’s Foreign Minister, Ibrahim Yazdi, had assigned a security convoy to Sullivan to safely escort him out of the country. But ambassador Sullivan turned to his good friend and former security advisor in Manila, Mike Coughlin, to lead his personal security detail. Coughlin suspected the convoy Yazdi sent consisted of members from the Fedayeen. The possibility of them attempting to subvert Ambassador Sullivan’s departure through an attack, like launching a SAM-7 hand-held anti-aircraft rocket at his plane, challenged his operational ingenuity. Ultimately, Mike Coughlin hired members of Iran’s Olympic wrestling team and the Mujahedin-e Khalq to ensure the ambassador’s safe departure. Though the mission had a few close encounters, it was an operational success by every metric. Once the convoy escorted ambassador Sullivan to his plane “this bearded, greasy, ragtag, gallant bunch” of wrestlers, Mujahedin, and Fedayeen lined up one-by-one to wish him farewell. As each man said their goodbyes, Sullivan writes, they “grasped me around the shoulders, kissed me on both cheeks with their stubbly beards, and then meekly departed down the ramp.”<sup>117</sup> Kisses, not missiles, bid Ambassador Sullivan farewell.

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By the end of April, the U.S. embassy in Tehran, now under control of *Charge D’affaires* Bruce Laingen, evaluated the new American position and potential Iranian outcomes in the weeks and months to follow. Such analysis, however, was seen as “building a skyscraper on

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<sup>116</sup> The New York Times, “Khomeini Declares Victory,” 2 April 1979.

<sup>117</sup> Sullivan, *Mission to Iran*, 278-283.

quicksand.”<sup>118</sup> The continued political instability in Iran eviscerated intelligence forecasting of any accuracy. Nonetheless, the embassy projected potential outcomes and addressed the most prominent “bedrock of problems.”

On April 25, 1979, the U.S. Embassy in Tehran predicted Khomeini and the Islamic movements had “less than a 50/50” chance of securing the revolution.<sup>119</sup> Their organizational disarray, inability to consolidate power, and disjunctions among clerics exposed the Islamic movements to organized contests for power. Public showdowns between Ayatollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani ended in Taleghani’s deliberate public disappearance, in order to “protest the lack of coordination between various revolutionary committees.”<sup>120</sup> As one of the three highest ranking Ayatollahs in Iran, alongside Khomeini and Ayatollah Mohammad Kazem Shariatmadari, his protest had significant implications for the future of the Islamic Movement in Iran. The pending divisions became all the more evident by the end of April, when one hundred thousand plus protesters marched with anti-Khomeini cleric, Ayatollah Mohammad Taher.<sup>121</sup> By the end of April 1979, the U.S. had summarized Khomeini as an amateur politician with a “mishmash” strategy; and all of the embassy’s religious contacts claimed he was “incredibly naïve” about how to manage politics.”<sup>122</sup> Unless the Provisional Government of Iran under Khomeini’s control could consolidate its power, the U.S. embassy analyzed, “the Islamic Movement [would] squander the political head start it achieved as the vanguard of the revolution.”<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> State Department Cable, “Bedrock of Problems,” 24 April 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

<sup>119</sup> State Department Cable, “Looking Ahead Part II: Current Situation,” 25 April 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

<sup>120</sup> The New York Times, “A Religious Leader,” 15 April 1979.

<sup>121</sup> The New York Times, “Rally Hails Anti-Khomeini Cleric,” 28 April 1979.

<sup>122</sup> State Department Cable, “Looking ahead PT II,” 25 April 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

### Chapter Three: Dawn in Qom, Dusk in Tehran

By early May 1979, the relationship between the United States government and Iran had reached a stalemate. The United States was skeptical of Khomeini's longevity and yet acted in a way that recognized his tutelage on the Iranian psyche and its revolution. The United States now hedged its support for Khomeini. These veneer efforts were exemplified by the fact that no official from the United States government had yet – or would ever - meet with Ayatollah Khomeini. Instead, messages continued to be passed through American journalists and professors, as well as Iranian delegates and business contacts. This paradigm of communication placed layers of bureaucracy between the two powers, and created an environment in which degrees of separation developed into degrees of ignorance – further stalling progress in stabilizing the relationship between the two governments. This stagnation contributed to friction between the U.S. and Khomeini, which in the following months would result in the complete deterioration of the relationship with little hope of its repair.

#### *Death and Dishonor*

Khomeini appeared cognizant of his perilous position as the revolution's leader. One of the first maneuvers he made to fortify his position and incentivize loyalty to the newfound Islamic Republic was through the ultimate binary of life or death. Starting in mid-February, a string of kangaroo courts began trying, and executing, former loyalists to the Pahlavi Monarchy. By April 7th the courts had executed 77 people “under the edicts of Islamic committees” which found defendants guilty for “crimes” such as “being a minister in the former government” or “assigning the underground resources of oil, copper, and uranium, to foreigners”.<sup>124</sup> By the end

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<sup>124</sup> Amnesty International, *Law and Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 70.

of April, over 100 people had been executed under such convictions by summary trial.<sup>125</sup> Despite Khomeini's later announcement that executions should be restricted for the purpose of economic revival, he granted no amnesty to the "traitors, counterrevolutionaries and remnants of the accursed Pahl[a]vi regime."<sup>126</sup>

Although these courts were used to consolidate Khomeini's power, they also provoked negative responses from Khomeini's less-vigorous supporters. In March of 1979, Prime Minister Bazargan threatened to resign over the looming trial of the Shah's former Prime Minister of 13 years, Amir Hoveyda. Despite Bazargan's disapproval and renewed public rejections of the summary trials in early April, Bazargan acquiesced "to the fact that these procedures would continue for at least four months."<sup>127</sup>

On April 8<sup>th</sup>, Amir Hoveyda was found guilty of being a "corruptor on the earth," and shortly after was killed in a botched execution that required three shots to his neck and head.<sup>128</sup>

Others within government were not as patient with their objections. Iran's Foreign Minister, Karim Sanjabi quit his post in response to these executions.<sup>129</sup> To Khomeini and his followers, these courts were not aberrations but extensions of an unpopular practice employed by the Shah himself and which the United States apparently disregarded. It was believed that "under the Shah, two thousand Iranians were executed and half a million [were] jailed for their

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<sup>125</sup> Amnesty International, Annual Report 1979, 156. By the end of the 1989 the total estimated number of executions carried out by Khomeini's regime is thirty thousand, including the deaths of five thousand in the summer of 1988 alone after a fatwa was issued against the opponents the Iranian Regime.

<sup>126</sup> The New York Times, "Khomeini Sees a Need to Restrict Executions," 17 May 1979.

<sup>127</sup> The New York Times, "Hoveida Believed Doomed in Iran," 07 April 1979.

<sup>128</sup> Abbas Milani, *The Persian Sphynx*, 338-339.

<sup>129</sup> Barry Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions*, 287.

opposition.”<sup>130</sup> Those numbers are contested to this day, as other scholars report the sum of the Shah’s executions from 1971-1979 were at, or near, 100.<sup>131</sup>

From afar, the United States government calculated its response to these courts. Already, the State Department believed with certainty that another formidable armed opposition to Khomeini would erupt within the next two months. Since high-ranking cabinet members of the Provisional Government of Iran had already expressed their disdain for these practices, this timeline appeared increasingly plausible. If there was a domestic issue in Iran of which politicians in Washington could capitalize to advance conditions within the new Islamic Republic to their liking, the controversial summary trials seemed an excellent opportunity.

On May 17, 1979, the U.S. senate passed Resolution 164 condemning the executions in Iran, promising to “act to prevent and to punish any attempts to carry out criminal or terrorist actions against persons in the United States whatever their alleged offenses in other countries.”<sup>132</sup>

The response from Iran was vitriol. Iran informed Senator Jacob Javits, lead sponsor of the resolution, and his wife that they had been summoned before a revolutionary court and if they ever set foot in Iran, they would be arrested and tried for, among other charges, “raising funds for Israel.”<sup>133</sup> In a move “unusual” for Khomeini at the time, he too responded publicly, questioning the necessity of a relationship with the United States. “Our relationship with them is that of a tyrant with an innocent; that of a ravaged victim with a plunderer.” The Ayatollah continued, declaring, “we don't need America; it is they who need us. They want our oil.”<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Mansour Farhang, “Eye Witness Report: The Revolution in Iran,” 2, Library of Congress, Maxine Jaubert Collection.

<sup>131</sup> Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions*, 135.

<sup>132</sup> S. 164, “An Original Resolution Relating to Human Rights in Iran,” 96<sup>th</sup> Congress.

<sup>133</sup> The New York Times, “Iran in a Protest Tells U.S. to Delay Sending New Envoy,” 21 May 1979.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

Iran responded by rejecting America's Ambassador-select Walter L. Cutler. Iran's reasons for rejecting Ambassador Cutler were two-fold. On one hand, Iran claimed that accepting the appointment of Ambassador Cutler was contingent on the stability of U.S.-Iran relations, which had been undermined by the recent U.S. Senate Resolution. On the other hand, Iran claimed that Ambassador Cutler was unfit for duty in Tehran and a threat to their sovereignty, because of his past experiences in both Vietnam and Zaire. Iranians believed he was primed to enact imperialist policies and interfere with Iran's domestic politics. While it is this second concern that holds the most credibility, it is the first reason that reveals Khomeini's oft-mysterious motivations: through missteps – or the perception of them – he too would capitalize on political incidents to accentuate the widening chasm between the U.S. and Iran.

### *Degrees of Separation*

The U.S. entered June “disturbed” by the recent diplomatic events. Rather quickly, attempts to recalibrate U.S. and Iran diplomatic relations were staged. In a conversation with Foreign Minister Ibrahim Yazdi, officials at the U.S. embassy in Tehran were told that the provisional government of Iran wanted to “break the cycle of mutual recrimination” and, for the sake of both nations, reestablish normal diplomatic relations. How this may happen, Yazdi suggested, was to recognize the foremost issues between the two nations were not diplomatic but political. While experiences with U.S. embassy staff were amicable, Yazdi believed the American press produced a constant barrage of negative coverage of the revolution.<sup>135</sup> And with the recent Senate Resolution, the propaganda did not seem too far fetched. The embassy reported that Yazdi claimed it was “difficult for the Iranian people to distinguish between the various

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<sup>135</sup> For a more complete analysis of American press coverage of Iran's revolution see Chapter Seven of William A. Dorman and Mansour Farhang's *The U.S. Press and Iran: Foreign Policy and the Journalism of Deference*.

branches of the American government,” to understand that actions from one group are not necessarily representative of the official policy of the United States government.<sup>136</sup> Of course, this was the exact same complaint the U.S. had against Iran. It was difficult to separate Khomeini’s – and his followers’ – anti-American rhetoric and actions from the official policy of the Provisional Government of Iran (PGOI) led by Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan. While Khomeini had led the revolution, it was now the PGOI that was supposed to lead the government – at least in theory.

It is this disconnect, between the voices and actions of revolutionary leaders, governmental officials, the populous of Iran, and the PGOI’s official foreign policy that would challenge U.S. foreign policy makers for the next five months. At the forefront of issues facing USG personnel in Iran was safety. Incidents at the embassy and with Americans in Iran were regular, but the severity of confrontations varied. Already, Americans across the country had been repatriated en masse. The U.S. consulates in Iran were either officially closed or burned and inoperable, and the embassy staff in Tehran was reduced to approximately 60 persons. The diminishing presence of U.S. citizens, however, did not hamper public anti-American demonstrations. Before the hostage crisis began on November 4<sup>th</sup>, the Tehran Embassy alone had 12 noteworthy incidents, ranging from protests where no one was injured, to drive by shootings, and a series of bombings, where, astonishingly, no one was killed.<sup>137</sup>

While the demonstrations indicated the revolutionary fervor against U.S. policies and presence, they offered no insight to the perceptions or strategies of the PGOI. However, Iran’s provisional government’s response to freedom of the press, business relationships, and to western institutions illuminated just how embedded the anti-American sentiments were in the

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<sup>136</sup> State Department Cable, “USG-PGOI Relations,” 04 June 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

<sup>137</sup> State Department Cable(s), “Embassy Incident,” 20 May, 28 June, 18 August, and 09 October 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

new Iranian government, and how powerless those who countered anti-American sentiments had become.

On July 1, David Lamb of the Los Angeles Times, was told by Iranian officials that he was no longer welcome in Iran after his “erroneous” reporting of military morale and the National Front’s resistance to Khomeini.<sup>138</sup> Another reporter, Yusef Ibrahim, of the New York Times would also be expelled from the country by the end of the month for his “bias” against the Republic.<sup>139</sup> Iran’s willingness to impose a controlled press over a free one was a grim indication of troubles to come. By August, the issue with the press turned inward, after approximately twenty-two Iranian publications were closed by order of a new press law which stated that “individuals affiliated with the former regime are barred from publishing.”<sup>140</sup>

While the battle for information raged through the summer of 1979, the U.S. and Iran found consistently similar views in regard to both business and military affairs. Fostering a landscape friendly to the return of U.S. businesses was an expressed interest of the PGOI. Yet the personal security of any returning businesses and their staff could not be guaranteed. Companies who had remained in Iran, like Morris and Knudsen and Lockheed Martin, both encountered attacks to their facilities or fought to receive payments from the National Iranian Oil Company.<sup>141</sup>

On the military front, differences were surmountable. Iran expressed its dislike of General Rogers’ and Brown’s public announcements stating that the U.S. contingency-plans to

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<sup>138</sup> State Department Cable, “Expulsion of American Journalist,” 01 July 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

<sup>139</sup> State Department Cable, “Expulsion of NYT Correspondent and U.S.-Iran Relations,” 27 July 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

<sup>140</sup> State Department Cable, “Khomeini’s Moves Against the Press,” 21 August 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

<sup>141</sup> State Department Cable, “PGOI Approval of Military Assistance Organization,” 07 August 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

secure any interest in the Persian Gulf region with a 110,000 man strike-force .<sup>142</sup> But it seems concerns over a possible U.S. invasion were not severe enough to stop the Iranian Government from trying to sell back the Grumman F-14 Tomcats – as its high costs and the large number of “expatriate technical personnel in Iran” required to service them were too burdensome for the new government to justify.<sup>143</sup> Moreover, the Military Advisory Assistance Group, the board of American military advisors who - controversially - had legal amnesty under the Shah, continued to maintain those same privileges under the revolutionary government.<sup>144</sup> Despite tepid relations between the U.S. Department of Defense and the Iranian Defense Ministry, it would be the newly formed Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps that would become the revolution’s defense-arm of choice, essentially nullifying the long-standing relationship between the U.S. Department of Defense and the Iranian Defense Ministry.

While divisions in economics, military affairs, and political attitudes placed the U.S. and Iran at odds with another, it was the recurring and reactionary motif of human rights that fashioned the permanent separation of these two nations. The previous senate resolution was taken as clear interference with Iran’s domestic affairs. Yet these public executions represented mere portions of the oppressive measures Khomeini exercised against minorities throughout Iran. At risk were the lives and livelihoods of Armenians, Iranian Jews, Mormons, Christians, Baha’is, and the Kurds across Iran. Stories of churches being raided and their records being stolen and the decapitation of a lone Jewish woman living in Shiraz crystallized the danger these minorities

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<sup>142</sup>State Department Cable, “Attack on Lockheed Offices in Tehran, 02 September 1979; “Morrison Knudsen Projects,” 08 July 1979, History Lab Digital Archives. This statement was made in September of 1979, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was December 25, 1979.

<sup>143</sup> State Department Cable, “Iranian Desire to Sell Back F14’s,” 17 July 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

<sup>144</sup> The Status Law had technically been repealed by the newfound Islamic Republic. However, according to international law, the immunities and privileges set forth in the Vienna Convention required Iran to honor the exchanges of notes made in 1963, 1964, and again in 1973. Pertinent to this thesis is the fact that members of the MAAG continued their advisory roles even after the formation of the Islamic Republic. For more on capitulations of U.S. service members and diplomats in Iran see *The Privileged American* by Guive Mirfendereski.

faced under a regime with a history of executing its opponents. The fate of U.S.-Iran relations would soon rest on the fate of the one individual the U.S. never allowed Iran to execute, the former Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

### *Calculating Positions*

Since May of 1979, Khomeini became increasingly aloof from the provisional government, treating them like the various other representatives that sought his attention. The fault, Deputy Prime Minister Amir Entezam believed, lay with Khomeini's entourage in Qom: these hundreds of "nobodies who have extremely radical and crazy ideas," and have attained positions of authority because of their personal loyalty to Khomeini.<sup>145</sup> Whereas those who constructively opposed positions of the Islamic Republic, like members of the Muslim People's Republic Party, were – one by one – subject to execution or placed on house arrest, until Khomeini's dogma stood so isolated that few voices dared to challenge it.<sup>146</sup>

How the Provisional Government of Iran essentially evolved into a titular governing body could be explained by Khomeini's increasingly aggressive posture, whereby resistance from all fronts was silenced. As executions, the censorship of the press, and control of PGOI siphoned power and authority to Khomeini, and his arch conservative allies, the Islamic Republic increasingly resembled the totalitarian regime so many had just fought to overthrow.

Despite Khomeini's apparent command of the governmental elements throughout Iran, the U.S. was still skeptical of Khomeini's longevity. Underground movements against Khomeini

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<sup>145</sup> State Department Cable, "Government Duality," 24 May 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

<sup>146</sup> Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History*, 808.

began to appear. On August 13, a failed coup attempt was made. Near the end of August, the U.S. analyzed, power in Iran was “diffused at best.”<sup>147</sup>

### *One Final Act*

In this volatile environment, the U.S. made a series of myopic political maneuvers. Iran still rejected the nomination of Ambassador Cutler to Tehran and the United States’ failure to name a new ambassador was seen as a lack of confidence in the new Iranian Government.<sup>148</sup> However, diplomatic relations were not entirely doomed. Despite uncertainties about staff safety, the U.S. still wished to reopen consular officer across Iran.<sup>149</sup> For U.S.-Iran relations to completely recover, the State Department in Washington believed a “cleanup-the-past campaign” was paramount. Curiously, this campaign suggested all the work remaining was Iran’s alone.<sup>150</sup>

Then, in late-August of 1979, a lower U.S. court froze \$16 million of assets belonging to the Iranian Naval and Air Forces’ Funds. The PGOI asked the USG to intervene. Washington directed Tehran to delay an official response for as long as possible.<sup>151</sup>

In less than a month ,the U.S. embassy in Tehran was forced to ask itself if it had “yet to act in ways that demonstrate convincingly that we have accepted the revolution,” after Foreign Minister Yazdi publicly berated U.S. policy in a speech at the U.N.<sup>152</sup> The answer, Iranians

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<sup>147</sup> State Department Cable, “Building Conceptual Bridges to Shi’a Islam,” 19 August 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

<sup>148</sup> State Department Cable, “U.S. Contingency Planning,” 02 August 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

<sup>149</sup> State Department Cable, “Options Re Opening New Consular Section,” 29 August 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

<sup>150</sup> State Department Cable, “Bilateral Problems,” 26 September 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

<sup>151</sup> Digital National Security Archives Chronology, August 28, 1979.

<sup>152</sup> John Limbert, *Negotiating with Iran*, 96.

believed, was already answered by Senator Henry Jackson after he publicly stated the “Iranian revolution was doomed to failure” in an interview with “Meet the Press.”<sup>153</sup>

The Soviet-controlled media inflamed long-standing fears that Iranians were covertly subject to U.S. ambitions.<sup>154</sup> The U.S. Senate Resolution denouncing the regimes executions demonstrated an unwelcome intervention that capitalized on domestic controversies. In the U.S., the press appeared to speak of the revolution in no other manner but reproach. Rumors of the “Bernard Lewis Plan,” a strategy designed to destabilize all Muslim countries bordering the Soviet Union, confirmed to some Iranians their own revolution was the product of American intelligence actions, as in 1953.<sup>155</sup> Despite these continuing issues, by late October *Charge D'affaires* Laingen was “frankly. . . surprised by the extent to which our motives in Iran and our posture towards the revolution seem to be constantly suspect.”<sup>156</sup>

Backgrounding all these issues was one that would dominate headlines and the contents of books for years to come. While the Shah was in exile, moving from country to country every few weeks or months, his health gradually worsened. Finally, President Carter, believing the Shah was close to death, permitted him to enter the United States for a severe case of gallstones deemed untreatable anywhere else.<sup>157</sup> The Shah was escorted to Cornell-Weill Medical Center in New York City and admitted under the name of the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, David D. Newsom. Henry Kissinger’s campaign finally succeeded. The Shah was admitted into the United States.

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<sup>153</sup> Bill, *Eagle and the Lion*, 285.

<sup>154</sup> Since February of 1979 the U.S. State Department had been tracking far-left media organizations in Iran. Among the most sophisticated organizations was an element known as the Chariks. They’re credited with “dominating” radio and television stations, and broadcasting a steady stream of anti-american propaganda during the revolution. For a short summary of their efforts see a State Department Cable titled “Situation in Iran,” sent on 19 February 1979.

<sup>155</sup> Joseph Brewda, “New Bernard Lewis Plan Will Carve Up the Middle East,” 1. Bernard Lewis, age 101, is the Cleveland E. Dodge Professor Emeritus of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University.

<sup>156</sup> State Department Cable, “Meeting with Yazdi,” 24 October 1979, History Lab Digital Archives.

<sup>157</sup> *Science*, “The Pahlavi Problem,” 282, Weill Cornell Library.

The initial response in Iran was underwhelming.<sup>158</sup> While the Shah was desired back in Iran more than when he was emperor, his homecoming to Iran would certainly mean his death. Some, realizing the Shah's return was a slim possibility, went further than calling for him to stand before a court. For example, one wealthy private citizen in Iran, offered an "expense-paid pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca" to anyone who murdered the Shah, no matter his location.<sup>159</sup>

Ostensibly, the United States admitted the Shah on humanitarian grounds claiming that his medical treatment was unavailable anywhere else. The public, however, soon learned the Shah's cancer had existed for at least five years and was discreetly treated by French doctors. In addition, critics pointed out that the Shah's lead doctor, Dr. Benjamin Kean, was a tropical disease physician sent to Mexico by David Rockefeller to diagnose the Shah's suspected cancer. The argument that the Shah's treatment was available only in the U.S. was debunked after the Shah's first operation, when a specialist from Canada was flown in to complete a surgical operation U.S. physicians could not.<sup>160</sup>

Finally, despite David Rockefeller's claims that his efforts to admit the Shah to the United States were performed as a humanitarian act for a sick friend, records indicate that as early as April of 1979 - months before the Shah's illness was made public - David Rockefeller assigned his former assistant Joseph Reed as the lead agent of "Project Eagle," the private mission undertaken by David Rockefeller and Henry Kissinger to arrange a new estate for the Shah in the United States. It is possible Mr. Rockefeller was aware of the Shah's sickness, but seeing that the

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<sup>158</sup> State Department Cable, "Media React on Shah's Trip to U.S.," 25 October 1979, Digital National Security Archives.

<sup>159</sup> *The New York Times*, "Iran Paper Offers Prize for Slaying of Shah," 18 May 1979.

<sup>160</sup> The medical circumstances coinciding with the Shah's last days became an international spectacle that fettered the Shah's access to streamlined, impartial care. William Shawcross' *The Shah's Last Ride* details these events marvelously.

Shah and David Rockefeller had less than half a dozen interactions in the past half a decade, the Shah exposing such a personal issue to him seems unlikely.<sup>161</sup> The more likely explanation for preserving good relations with the Shah lies in the financial ties between both men, a relationship that deepened after Chase Manhattan Bank helped form the International Bank of Iran in June 1975, which Chase also owned 35% of.<sup>162</sup>

In the end, the Shah would never receive the life-saving care he was admitted to receive. Instead, what ensued was a high-stakes political game where some half a dozen doctors competed against themselves ultimately leading to the Shah's death less than a year later in Egypt. The dire repercussions on U.S.-Iran relations for admitting the Shah into the United States, on any grounds, was one of the few items in U.S. foreign policy that was universally understood. Yet, those who fought to admit the Shah still have not answered President Carter when he asked, "what are you guys going to advise me to do if they overrun our embassy and take our people hostages?"<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Joseph Verner Reed Papers, "DR/Shah Visits," Series III, topical files, box 31, folder 5, Yale Sterling Library.

<sup>162</sup> Joseph Verner Reed Papers, "Recent History of Chase and Iran," Series III, topical files, box 31, folder 5, Yale Sterling Library. The most definitive work explaining the Rockefeller-Kissinger-Pahlavi financial network is Mark Hulbert's *Interlock: The Untold Story of American Banks, Oil Interests, the Shah's Money, Debts, and the Astounding Connections Between Them*.

<sup>163</sup> Hamilton Jordan, *Crisis: The Last Year of the Carter Presidency*, 32.

## Conclusion

At the U.N. General Assembly this past September 2017, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson sat with representatives from all five countries that adopted the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (colloquially known as ‘the Iran deal’) two years prior. It marked the first time Secretary Tillerson, then ten months into his tenure, met Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iran’s Minister of Foreign Affairs. But pleasantries would be reserved for another time. Minister Zarif spoke first, listing Iran’s many complaints it held against the Trump administration. Tillerson responded. Each cited their nation’s grievances against the other. Then, Secretary Tillerson addressed *the real problem*. “Since the hostage crisis of 1979,” he said, Iran has been attacking Americans.” He elaborated, stating, “the modern-day U.S.-Iran relationship is now almost forty years old . . . born out of a revolution, with our Embassy under siege.”<sup>164</sup>

The genesis of modern U.S.-Iran relations is largely understood as a relationship recast by the hostage crisis of 1979. While this model of U.S.-Iran relations is not entirely wrong, the overall lack of interest in the history preceding the crisis leads to a complete misreading of the United States’ foreign policy toward revolutionary Iran before that moment. This particular prism conflates the idea that the Iranian revolution – chiefly meaning the abolition of the monarchy and establishment of the Islamic Republic - led to the fallout of U.S.-Iran relations. Such a perspective omits the United States’ efforts to develop a *modus vivendi* with whatever political structures emerged in a post-Shah Iran. Perhaps most fatally, this lens implies that U.S.-Iran relations may never improve until the Islamic Republic collapses.

As this thesis demonstrated in Chapter One, the Iranian Revolution sprung from a series of domestic issues, which citizens across nearly every segment of Iranian society were against

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<sup>164</sup> Filkins, “Rex Tillerson at the Breaking Point,” *The New Yorker*, 16 October 2017.

and its widely diverging political persuasions protested. That Ayatollah Khomeini came to lead the revolutionary movement appears to hinge on the fact that he was one of the first of many leading figures whom the monarchy attempted to publically delegitimize in January of 1978. Such an attempt was interpreted as a total rejection of the public's protests against the Shah and his stifling policies. In turn, Khomeini navigated his way from exiled Ayatollah to revolutionary leader through an implementation of populist practices, which allowed him to welcome the broadest base of supporters across many classes, demographics, and political leanings, thus undercutting the many opposition forces competing for control.

In Chapter Two, the initial U.S. reaction to Khomeini's rise was reviewed. While much of the evidence is circumstantial, exactly how General Huyser's mission approached the idea of Khomeini returning to Iran remains central. During General Huyser's one-month mission to Iran, the Shah departed and a plan to arrest Khomeini was approved of by the United States. Then approval was apparently rejected after a letter from Khomeini was sent to President Carter asking for a deal. Coincidentally or not, the details of that deal played out almost exactly as Khomeini requested. But the United States refused to believe Khomeini's return was the revolution's end. Not wanting to show its hands against any power that may have overthrown Khomeini, the U.S. remained lukewarm to nearly every political possibility – save a Soviet takeover.

Finally, Chapter Three highlighted the slow decay of U.S.-Iran relations from May to November 1979. In early May, the U.S. policy toward Iran – publicly dominated by the engine of human rights - regressed after kangaroo courts began executing dozens and soon hundreds of Iranians for charges such as “corruptor on the earth.” The U.S. opposition to these summary executions became a source of friction. Members of the Islamic Republic interpreted Senate Resolution 164 as a form of foreign intervention. Moreover, it displayed to Iranians America's

hypocrisy, as such measures were never instituted against the Pahlavi Monarchy or SAVAK, both of which were responsible for the imprisonment and deaths of thousands of Iranian dissenters. This friction was never overcome. The U.S. continued to anticipate a heavily armed challenge to the newly established Islamic Republic. Believing the regime had but a 50% chance of survival, U.S. diplomatic members remained surprisingly aloof to this new Iran - a point exemplified by the fact that no U.S. official ever personally met with Khomeini before the hostage crisis.

In sum, these three chapters analyze the highly complex and multifaceted deterioration of relations between the U.S. and Iran. This detailed review of American policies and perceptions toward Iran during its revolution reveals the quandary in which U.S. officials were operating in and illuminates some of the myriad contingencies policy makers encountered throughout the revolution, thus highlighting the unpredictable manner which U.S.-Iran relations from this period evolved. What if the Shah immediately flew to the United States after leaving Iran? What if the U.S. chose to formally support any number of the dozens of opposition groups to the Pahlavi Monarchy? What if Khomeini never sent a message to President Carter and was arrested upon his return to Iran? What if following his return to Iran, direct channels of communication were made between Khomeini and U.S. officials? While these hypotheticals may seem pointless – after all, you cannot change the past – they raise doubts about the oversimplified conclusion which argues that the U.S.-Iran relationship was destined to fallout at the onset of the Iranian revolution.

However, this work is not without limitations. Despite this thesis' brief timeline, the recollection of events and their analyses included herein are not unabridged. For example, the perspective of many government agencies, such as the United States Information Agency, the

Defense Intelligence Agency, and the Peace Corps, remain entirely absent from this thesis, though their activities leading up to and during the revolution were substantial. The same can be said about the 50,000 plus Americans living in Iran at the onset of the revolution, whose collective voices and experiences influenced both policies at home and perceptions of America abroad. Such shortcomings bookmark the beginning of future historical research, both for this author, and others focusing on the history of U.S.-Iran relations..

Yet, more salient than its shortcomings is this thesis' case for a renewed historiography of the Iranian Revolution's impact on U.S.-Iran relations. For decades, the reductionist argument has conflated the fallout of U.S.-Iran relations to the revolution itself and in turn to the religious ideology that ultimately led it. Yet the underpinning themes of Iran's revolution were neither distinctively religious nor Shia. And any explicitly religious themes or figures that did transpire during the revolution did so in a manner unprecedented. Moreover, the religious establishment, even late into 1979, remained just one among dozens of competing forces in the Iranian revolution. That is to say, if Khomeini and his loyal clerics did not follow the Pahlavi throne, a powerful Bazaar, Communist, or Nationalist most certainly would have.

Tracing America's attempts of a *modus vivendi* with revolutionary Iran illustrates the quagmire U.S. officials operated within. Determined to protect its longstanding interests, the U.S. positioned itself to continue relations with whatever authority followed the Pahlavi monarchy. Analyzing America's surreptitious role in Khomeini's return suggests that even once the Iranian revolution transformed into the Islamic Revolution, the U.S. still stood ready to pursue a *modus vivendi* with the newly formed Islamic Republic. After Khomeini's entourage protected U.S. officials following the Mujahedin's February 14<sup>th</sup> takeover of the U.S. embassy, it seemed members of the nascent Islamic Republic felt the same. It was not long before the U.S.

mission became too unscrupulous for public representatives to condone; Senate Resolution 164 drew a line that U.S. lawmakers would not cross with this new Iran.

Why the U.S. never attempted warm relations with the Islamic Republic thereafter is a point the chaotic political landscape helps explain. If not for the legion of competing authorities that convinced the U.S. that Khomeini and his entourage had a 50/50 chance of survival, more serious measures may have been pursued with the Islamic Republic. Instead, the United States prepared itself for another change in power, waiting, perhaps naively so, for a renewed chance at U.S.-Iran relations. Fearing its interference would antagonize anti-Americanism all the more or because it truly believed opposition groups would deploy themselves, the U.S. never capitalized on the *komitehs* titular allegiance to Khomeini nor mobilized any of the forces that stood against him. Instead, the U.S.-Iran relationship devolved into a sort of international Mexican standoff and assumed that any party, but itself, would fire the first shot. In short, paralysis, stemming from Iran's steadfast and complex prospects, came to define U.S. policy.

During the first subcommittee hearing pertaining to his mission in Iran, General Huyser was asked what lessons the United States can learn from Iran's revolution. "I think," he responded, "that we should not live under false illusions." He continued, saying, "by that I mean we should not try to judge what other people do by mirror-imaging what we would do. In all parts of this globe there are different senses of values and we must try to understand those values."

To understand the values of Iran today, as in understanding the pulse of its revolution in the late seventies, is to understand the people who hold those values dearly, and the history that placed those ideologies and worldviews as paramount in their minds. As Americans continue to understand Iran by its membership in the 'axis-of-evil,' renewing relations between both

countries may seem almost impossible. But in light of the series of unfortunate contingencies this thesis analyzed, a path to rapprochement between the United States and Iran becomes plausible. To those who believe rapprochement may be a task too complicated, take delight in knowing the history of U.S.-Iran relations has, since even before the revolution, been a highly complicated affair.

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