Introduction

Iran a Middle East Country of great political, economic and strategic importance, witnessed a sequence of popular political uprising in the year 1978-1979. The revolutionary upsurge was a multi-class phenomenon which included a broad range of social, political, economic and regional groups. They each reflected their own particular grievances with the Pahlavi system of governance and their own plans for change. However the real wielders of the revolutionary political power in Iran was the street mobs. They were mainly made up of small scale artisans, porters, members of the bazar and the urban service groups of the cities of Tehran, Shiraz, Tabriz and Isfahan. In the 1960s and 1970s they were overwhelmed and outnumbered by a new group who came into the cities as urban migrants as a result of the Shah’s industrialisation. In fact they were the spill over of the regime’s agrarian neglect and land reforms. They never felt at home in an urban setting and its western secular ways of life and class distinctions, because they had been raised in rural life style which placed a great stress on Shia religious belief system. The repressive and autocratic nature of the regime did not provide them any political outlet to express their grievances. But the Shia’s religious establishments such as mosques, schools, cells, holy shrines and clerics not only played a critical organisational role but also provided an overarching revolutionary ideology to mobilize the population under the leadership of Ayatullah Ruhollah Khomeini to overthrow the Pahlavi regime. For them the most serious development taking place in Iranian society was the erosion of its Islamic spiritual core to the world of materialism which they identified with the West, especially the US.
The more disturbing trend for American administration was the attitude of the revolutionary regime’s self assumed moral superiority and its anti-Americanism. They indicted the U.S. for the interference in Iranian internal affairs in favour of the Shah and the destruction of the Iranian culture and economy. It created an anti-American feeling during and after the revolution which resulted in the collapse and exile of the Shah, the seizure of the United States embassy in Tehran in 1979, and holding of American hostages until 1981. The political and ideological transformation of Iran as an Islamic Republic signalled the end of Iran’s role as the guardian of American interests in the Persian Gulf region. Simultaneously it claimed the leadership of the Islamic world under the guidance of the Shi’ite religious leader Ayatollah Ruhollaah Khomeini. Thus the events of 1978-1979 collectively constituted a major foreign policy crisis for the Carter administration. The US followed an inherently flawed foreign policy in Iran and was slow to recognize the extent of danger posed by such a policy. Flaws arising out of massive ignorance, conflict within the foreign policy making apparatus, excessive fears of Soviet threat to its interests in the Persian Gulf region, enormous economic stakes and the prevalence of informal and privatised decision making precipitated the Iranian revolution. Later attempts to defuse the crisis failed because of the contradictory policies followed by the Carter administration’s warring factions of foreign policy advisers. It created a situation in which the President or the administration had no real understanding or control over the policies followed in Iran. It was not an incident that happened over night in the Carter period. It was rather the logical culmination of the way the Shah and the different administrations (from Roosevelt to Carter) interacted in the advancement of their own interests. An analysis of the last four decades (1940-1980) of US-Iranian relations proves that the US attitudes towards the Shah of Iran was a major factor which resulted in the growth of social discontent and culminated in the Iranian revolution.
DEVELOPMENT OF THE US POLICY TOWARDS IRAN

Throughout the nineteenth century Iranian political history was overshadowed by the continued interplay of Anglo-Russian rivalry. Till the end of the Second World War the US had only limited involvement and very little influence on Iranian affairs.¹

During the Second World War, Iran was ruled by Reza Shah Pahlavi, a nationalist dictator (1925-1941). He was protecting Iran’s national integrity by balancing Anglo-Russian forces with the Nazi-German alliance. This alliance seriously threatened the Allied war effort. In 1941 the British and the Soviet forces invaded Iran, deposed the King Reza Shah and installed his son Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi with a view to forestall the German influence over the Persian Gulf. The US also supported the allied forces in this effort primarily because of its awareness of Iran’s geo-strategic importance as a land bridge to Soviet Union. Secondly it was a policy to gain access to the petroleum and economic wealth of the region. Later in 1942, 40,000 American troops landed in Iran to participate in the Tripartite Alliance between Iran, Britain and the Soviet Union. These powers signed the Tripartite Treaty in January 1942 which guaranteed the territorial sovereignty and political independence of Iran.² The US took the lead in promoting the December 1943 Tehran Declaration of support by all the three major powers “... for the maintenance of the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iran...”³ It is because American foreign policy officials like

2. Ibid., pp.18, 48
John D. Jernegan of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs and Wallace Murrey, the adviser on political relations to Assistant Secretary of State Dean Acheson realised America's growing role and interest in the Persian Gulf region. Therefore they advocated a more active US policy to thwart any attempt by Russian or British forces from converting Iran as their protectorate. As a result the Secretary of State Cordell Hull summarized the American interests in Iran in a communication to President Franklin D. Roosevelt stating thus: "... it is our interest that no great power be established on the Persian Gulf opposite the important American petroleum development in Saudi Arabia.” Thus by 1943, the US wartime involvement in Iran had a sense of direction and commitment unprecedented (till then) in the history of US-Iranian Relations.

During the occupation period, the US continuously increased its ties with Iran by upgrading its legation to a full-fledged Embassy and signing new bilateral trade agreements. The US also sent five separate advisory missions to Tehran to assist its financial administration, military reorganization, police training, and food supply. Even though these measures were taken in response to the various requests from the Iranian government it was an indication of the rapidly growing American interests in Iran. President Harry S. Truman has noted in his memoirs that the Soviet Union agreed to withdraw its forces along with US and Britain, within six months of the end of the war. Stalin told Truman, "We promise you that no action will be taken

4. Ibid., pp. 35-37
6. Irani, n.4, p. 41
by us against Iran”. 8 But contrary to his own assurance, when the Second World War ended, while the British and US forces withdrew in accordance with the Tripartite Treaty, the Soviet Union continued to stay there with the idea of establishing a puppet regime. The strong US support for Iran was a critical factor in persuading the Soviets to withdraw in mid 1946, and it refrained from direct intervention when the Communist regime in Azerbaijan was overthrown by the Iranian government. 9

In the 1940s the US moves were aimed at protecting America’s long range foreign policy objective of defeating the Axis forces. But the increased involvement and the later reassessment of American interests resulted in the explicit advocation and announcement of distinctive and long range US policy towards Iran by taking the lead role to ensure Iranian independence and integrity to prevent the Soviet Union from transforming Iran into a permanent base for its hegemony in the region. It marked a beginning of large scale American involvement in Iranian affairs. This direct clash of wills can be regarded as one of the opening salvo of cold war between the US and the Soviet Union on Iranian soil. 10

**Involvement to Intervention**

The first substantial US involvement in Iran followed the nationalization of British owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) by premier Muhammad Musaddiq in April 1951. Since 1909 the year after oil was first discovered in Iran, Britain had acquired a controlling interest and influence in economic and political affairs of Iran. 11 Anglo-Iranian oil dispute escalated to a stage of stalemate with an effective British initiated worldwide boycott of Iranian oil and Musaddiq’s relentless

10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p. 6
campaign against Western interests in Iran. The US failure to resolve the dispute and Musaddiq’s increasing dependence on the communist Tudeh party led the Americans to believe that the USSR was laying the ground for the pro-communist coup in Iran. Under these circumstances, obsessed with worldwide communist challenge in the 1950s and the massive national preoccupation with communism as a direct threat, the Eisenhower administration approved US participation in a covert military plan to oust Musaddiq in favour of the Shah who was known for his pro-American stand. The coup was proposed by Kermit Roosevelt of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1953.\textsuperscript{12} It was contrary to the earlier stand taken by the Secretary of State Dean Acheson that “we recognise the right of sovereign states to nationalize provided there is just compensation.”\textsuperscript{13} According to President Eisenhower and his Vice-President Richard Nixon, the reason for the changed US policy in Iran from one of diplomacy and conciliation to intervention and confrontation was the result of the changed US perception of communist challenge in the Gulf region and American apprehension about secure source of oil.\textsuperscript{14} Musaddiq’s attempt to play the US against Britain and the two Western powers against the Soviet Union and the Tudeh party disappeared as the American and British positions became nearly identical. As a result the Eisenhower administration rejected Musaddiq’s request for urgent US

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economic aid to meet the British challenge.15 Thus in the politics of oil, the US and British oil interests reached an entente on this issue. In exchange for American support in overthrowing the Musaddiq government, Britain grudgingly permitted US companies a 40 per cent interest in Iranian oil. Earlier US companies had made several attempts to penetrate the Iranian fields but had failed before the appearance of Musaddiq.16 As a result of the settlement of the oil nationalization dispute in 1954, for the first time, the US oil interest cut across the Persian Gulf encompassing the two great clusters of oil-fields on the Arab and Iranian sides of the strategic waterway. However the US oil interest was matched by the strategic importance of Iran. Therefore President Truman claimed that the US had no selfish interest in the oil dispute. George McGhee, Assistant Secretary of Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs pointed out that Iran was a “great and strategic prize”, the control of which would put the Soviet Union astride the communication routes connecting the free nations of Asia and Europe. The US, as a leader of the free nations did have strategic interests in Iran. The US became involved in Iran not just as a counterweight to Russia, but as the predominant super power and the partner of Britain in a global East-West conflict. The rigid bipolar international system left no real room for a third great power on which Iran could rely to counter balance the British and Soviet Powers.17 It signalled the replacement of Britain in the Middle East as the dominant foreign power by the US.18

16. Ibid., p. 326
17. Ibid.
Iran became a focal point of the US activity, which was reflected in various bilateral arrangements and agreements as well as in such concepts like the Truman Doctrine of 1947 and the Eisenhower Doctrine of 1957. These two major policies were pronounced in the context of developments that were taking place in the Middle East. Even though the Truman Doctrine aimed at safeguarding Greece and Turkey, it was based on many of the same principles that animated and motivated the US' bilateral arrangements with Iran. The Eisenhower Doctrine focused on the Arab world and pledged direct use of military power. During the Eisenhower years the philosophy of collective regional security as a bulwark against communism was promoted by the President and his secretary of state John Foster Dulles. The US first sponsored the Middle East Defense Treaty Organization (MEDO) but when the government in Baghdad was overthrown, it had to be content with the strategy of forming an alliance of three non-Arab states - Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. The MEDO following the agreement in Baghdad had Iran as an important member and US as an associate member. Iran joined the pact in 1956 and continued in the alliance when it assumed the name of Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), following the anti-monarchial revolution in Iraq in 1958. The Shah felt that it was an important gesture of massive financial assistance and territorial guarantees from the US.


This pattern of American influence by offering economic aid as a political reward for establishing military alliance to guard Western interest in the Gulf region in the 1950s, 60s and 70s was designed to strengthen the Shah's government. This policy of regime reinforcement by Americans (since the 1953 CIA coup) generated a deep discontent against the US in Iran.

During this period the Shah actively encouraged the deeper US involvement in Iran to protect his rule against domestic and foreign foes, such as the fundamentalists who demanded the restoration of the 1906 - 1907 Constitution, the communists who entertained the idea of establishing a People's Republic of Iran, the British and Soviet forces clamouring for their own interest zones in Iran. The Shah sought more and more American involvement in Iran as a way to strengthen his security forces. He regarded military strength as the sine qua non of royal survival. To American officials, he presented military strength as the essential pre-requisite for social and economic modernization as well as national independence.\(^{21}\)

However the Kennedy administration was critical about the Shah’s over emphasis on the military aspects of the Iranian development and lack of basic socio-economic reforms and heavy burden of the Iranian military establishment. Contrary to the Policies of his predecessors and much against the Shah's own will President Kennedy reviewed the US aid programme to Iran in 1962. A presidential task force was set up to formulate a long term programme for Iran.\(^{22}\) As a result of the reassessment of US-Iranian relations, Kennedy took a strong stand against the Shah’s wrong emphasis on military expansion at the cost of political liberalization. He sought a cut back on military aid programmes and replace them with economic


development funds, and argued that it was necessary to avoid the revolution in Iran. The Kennedy administration believed that the external threats to Iran was fully matched by the internal problems posed by the political unrepresentative nature of the regime and the country's unsound economic structure. In March 1962 the administration suggested a reduction in Iranian armed forces to 150,000 men, stressing the inter-relationship between military, economic and political factors. In return for accepting the cut in forces and the termination of defence support funds the Shah was offered a military assistance package that stressed the qualitative aspect of arms procurement. At the cost of some $330 million, the Military Assistance Programme (MAP) included two squadrons of advanced aircraft, a squadon of medium transport aircraft, the complete replacement of all the soft-skinned vehicles in the Iranian inventory and the completion of a military airfield. The Shah was unimpressed with these proposals but the Kennedy administration's resolution to implement them compelled the Shah to sign an agreement on these proposals in September 1962.

As a result of the American pressure, the Shah, on 26 January 1963, announced his six point selective and controlled reform programme called the White Revolution. Besides land reforms, which was the core of the campaign the programme included the nationalization of forests, the public sale of state owned factories, profit sharing in industry, electoral power to women and a literacy corps. It was greeted skeptically by the major Iranian opposition forces. The old aristocracy opposed the land reform along with the clerics and the lower middle-class resented the attack on their power.


bases. The middle-class professionals criticized the reforms for failing to deal with the central issue of political participation and social justice.

Many of the reforms adopted by the Shah were in fact identical to those recommended by State Department's Iran analyst John W. Bowling.25 Kennedy's programme of enforced reforms in Iran was intended to preserve rather than transform the Iranian political structure as an attempt to meet the Soviet communist challenge in Iran. The introduction of the reforms by the Shah, on US insistence led to heightened expectations and aspirations. By initiating and imposing reform on the Shah, Kennedy deeply involved the United States in the domestic affairs of Iran. An analyst observed that: "...was the only period in more than thirty years the United States ever attempted to modify the Shah's ambitions and priorities, this ensures that the Kennedy proposal is somewhat a milestone in US-Iranian relations."26 Even though all the US administrations from Truman to Johnson believed that the US had the right and obligation to intervene in the internal affairs of Iran in order to safeguard its own security only the Kennedy administration attempted to apply it on Iran.27

If the Kennedy administration represented the period of greatest presidential involvement in US-Iranian relations, the Johnson administration represented the period of least presidential interest in Iranian affairs because his administration was profoundly involved in the Vietnam war. It was not interested in expanding the sphere of American involvement. The major decisions in this period in respect of US-Iranian relations were made by the lower levels of bureaucracy in the State and Defence Departments. All the important tasks of coordinating US arms sales were

26. Carr, n. 24, p. 70
27. Ibid.
conducted from the small office for International Logistics Negotiations (ILN) within the Department of Defense.\textsuperscript{28} Coming immediately after Kennedy’s programme of enforced reforms and involving a number of personalities responsible for that programmes, “The Johnson Administration shifted American policy into decidedly pro-Pahlavi directions.”\textsuperscript{29}

The Shah by extending unconditional support to America’s Vietnam war, anti-Nasser campaign in Egypt and support to US’ Israeli policies was trying to cement Iran’s relations with America. To ensure close relations with the United States he concluded two treaties much at the cost of Iranian pride. On 4 July 1964, US and Iran signed a Memorandum of Understanding which provided that with the oil revenues increasing, Iran could afford to purchase military equipments for cash or through credits provided by the US.\textsuperscript{30} Later in the same year Iran approved Status Force Agreement (SOFA) which provided diplomatic immunity for all American military personnel and their dependents stationed in Iran. Following the signing of the agreements, the government of the United States approved a loan of $200 million which, in turn, was used by Iran to acquire sophisticated arms from the United States. It outraged Iranian sensitivity as they believed that the American grant was the pay off for the acceptance of an agreement which compromised the independence and sovereignty of their nation. It was an abject surrender of the rights of Iranians. The outrage was voiced by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a Shi’ite Muslim religious leader. The Shah responded quickly by exiling Khomeini to Turkey on 4 November 1964.\textsuperscript{31}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{28} Ibid., pp. 70-71.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Bill, n.1, p. 176
\item \textsuperscript{30} Carr, n.24, p. 71
\item \textsuperscript{31} Bill, n.1 pp. 156-60.
\end{itemize}
Twin Pillar Policy

Over extension of American power and overdependence of Iran on the US within the context of a rigid bipolar international system began to change increasingly in the 1960s with significant implications for Iran-American relations. Until the assumption of the office of the President by Richard M. Nixon in 1969, the Shah had been unhappy with the US foreign policy philosophy which was basically at odds with his own ambitions for a grandiose role for Iran in the Gulf. If the US itself was to be the major player in the region, then this ambition could not be realised. That the US had such a role in mind was evident from its military assistance programme, that was supported by the American administration in the past. In the late 1960s, rapid and fundamental changes in the internal and external foreign policy environments of the Gulf region presented a three-fold opportunity to the Shah to strengthen the US-Iranian relations. First, with the expansion of war in Vietnam and its greater involvement, the US became increasingly reluctant to be involved militarily in other regions. Second, the historic withdrawal of British forces from the area of east of Suez including Persian Gulf region in 1971 created a power vacuum. Third, the dramatic transformation of the world oil market from buyers to sellers after the oil crisis in the early seventies thrust a new role on Iran.32

These developments drastically altered the Shah’s position as a dependent American satellite to a powerful regional partner in a new power dispersion in the Persian Gulf. Henceforth the Shah could exploit the geopolitical vulnerabilities of the region and concerns of the Nixon administration.33 The Shah’s own view that Iran should assume greater responsibility coincided with the Nixon administration’s

32. “Background for American Policy Toward Iran” AIE Foreign Policy and Defense Review (Washington, D.C.), vol. 1, no. 2 (1979), p.3. Also see Ramazani, n. 21, p. 11.

views as articulated in the Guam doctrine that the US should undertake fewer commitments in world affairs and should assist local states in assuming responsibility for their own defense and that of their region. This provided the foundation for a new relationship between Iran and the US. The immediate task of the Nixon administration was to fill the power vacuum created by the British withdrawal in the Persian Gulf region to safeguard American and Western economic and strategic interests. President Nixon and his National Security Adviser (later Secretary of State) Henry Kissinger found that the Shah could be a valuable ally with whom the US shared views on regional security matters. He was also willing to co-operate with the US in opposing Soviet ambitions in the Persian Gulf. The Nixon administration formulated a well defined policy towards Iran which became known as the “Twin Pillar Policy.” This policy recognized Iran as the guardian of America’s Middle East interests by building up the military capability of Iran as also that of Saudi Arabia. The idea was to enhance their political status so that they would serve as twin pillars of regional security. The US policy was based on the premise that close collaboration with Iran and Saudi Arabia was possible because of their fear of Soviet communism and their desire to contain the pro-Soviet drift in the Arab world especially led by Iraq. The high point of that policy was reached when President Nixon and Henry Kissinger made the decision to gratify the Shah’s desire for expeditious military buildup through massive US arms transfers to Iran.

Although, American rhetoric spoke of pursuing a “twin pillar” policy, the US primarily relied on Iran to perform the role of the “policeman” for the Gulf.

34. Reich, n. 23, p.7
35. Henry Kissinger, The White House Years (New Delhi, 1979), pp. 1261 - 2
According to Henry Kissinger, "America’s friendship with Iran reflected geo-political realities." Iran is a land bridge between USSR and Middle East sharing a 1,600 mile border with Soviet Union in the north. With fifty million people, a number almost twice that of all Persian Gulf countries put together America cannot ignore Iran. It is also a nation of special geo-strategic importance to the US, as eighty percent of oil exported from the Middle East must pass through the two mile wide strait of Hormuz, policed by Iran’s navy and airforce. Its being at the head of the Persian Gulf and stretching along its northern and eastern shores has always served a barrier against Russian ambitions toward the Indian Ocean. It also acted as a buffer between the Soviet Union and other oil rich Arab states, all of which having a fragile social and political structure. Thus the American interests were not confined to the Shah or even with the oil that Iran produces but were much more broader in its overall strategic importance in an era of cold war politics.

The fact that so much of the East-West global and regional competitions for power and influence has centred on the Middle East and South-Western Asia after World War II partly distinguishes Iran - which straddles both regions - from most other Third World states. Unlike most Third World states, Iran’s foreign policy during the Shah’s regime represented a close alignment and identification with the US interests.

**The US - Iranian Economic Ties**

Apart from its strategic interests, the US had substantial economic stakes in Iran. Shortly after the British withdrawal from the Gulf, the US started to consolidate its commercial relations with Gulf states through increased American diplomatic presence in Iran and lower Gulf states. Its interest was to maintain access to oil by building up friendly relations with Persian Gulf states to maintain moderate, pro-American regimes in the area and to discourage over-reliance on the Soviets. The US worked to provide

38. Kissinger, n. 36, p. 667
regional collective security against outside aggression and internal subversion. It was obviously aimed at opening the vast regional markets to American goods and to recycle petrodollars. By building intricate webs of interdependency that linked the US to the Gulf, the US aimed at a gradual integration of commercial and political relations. It helped the US to establish and monopolise a controlling economic and defence oriented interest with all the oil producing states in the Persian Gulf region, except Iraq and especially with Iran.39

On 4 November 1973, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Commerce for International Commerce Marinus Van Gessel called Iran a “special case”. Gessel viewed Iran as a significant financial power with ample human resources, wide variety of recoverable mineral deposits and a strong foreign exchange position. At the same time it regarded Iran to be its main trade partner in the Gulf. In 1971 the total volume of US exports to Iran and Saudi Arabia constituted 80 per cent of the total US exports to the Gulf states (see table 1 in appendix) and nearly six years later in 1977 the proportion was 79 per cent almost the same. During the period from 1971 to 1977 US exports and imports to Iran rose from $481.5 million in 1971 to $2730.8 million in 1977. Although there were fluctuations, on the whole, the figures for US exports to Iran were higher than those for Saudi Arabia.40 It is clear from Marinus Van Gessel’s statement that Saudi Arabia did not occupy as much of ‘special’ position in US foreign policy as Iran. The US preference of Iran over Saudi Arabia was consistent within the broader framework of ‘twin pillar’ policy. The policy itself primarily aimed more at consolidating US relations with Iran than with Saudi Arabia.

The Iranian economy was something of a bonanza for American businessmen and


there were both defense contracts and civilian sales. It imported substantial amounts of goods and services from the US and the level of imports showed a rapid increase over the years (see tables 2 and 3 in appendix). Sales to Iran were an important factor in reducing the United States trade deficit. Non-defense related sales to Iran were also important, the extent of sales and range of products was extensive and past sales were complemented by contracts for future deliveries (see tables 4 and 5 in appendix). As late as 1977, the US Department of Commerce described business opportunities in Iran thus:

"Iran's rapid economic growth has established a business climate characterized by expansion and keen competition, which should continue for several years to come. United States supplies hold a leading position in the Iranian market... [and] excellent opportunities continue for sales of US capital goods and services to Iran." 

It shows that almost on the eve of the Islamic revolution, American strategic and economic interests were inextricably bound up with the Shah of Iran.

**Nixon, Shah and Arms Sales**

Numerous other mutual economic interests tied America to Iran. Particularly the Shah paid premium prices for American military equipments, with sales, at a time when increasing payments for foreign oil had contributed to a worsening balance of payments. This kind of recovery of funds was not an insignificant economic factor. The Shah had deep and ever increasing interest in military relations with the US as contrasted with any other type of relationship. He tended

41. Reich, n. 17, pp.10, 12.
to view the success of his arms acquisition as the acid test of US confidence in his regime and himself personally. The Shah, who had an insatiable appetite for sophisticated arms, was asking for $100 million worth new weapon systems in 1969. This had happened at a time when the US through the adoption of twin pillar policy was ready to meet Iranian demands for sophisticated weapons to protect American and Western interests in the Persian Gulf. According to an observer:

It was the convergence between the Shah's emphasis on the qualitative aspects of Iranian armaments, his enhanced financial position that enabled him to exert pressure on the US for the supply of weapons, and the US willingness to meet Iranian demands that led to the burgeoning of arms sales to Iran and the associated expansion in the size of the American military personnel there.

These developments were noticeable between 1972 and 1976 as a result of Nixon's visit to Iran from 30 to 31 May 1973. In his 1972 Iran visit President Nixon guaranteed the Shah an easy access to the most sophisticated non-nuclear weapon systems (see table 6 in appendix). The Shah in turn agreed to accept the principal role in protecting Western interests in the Persian Gulf region. Thus the Nixon administration seemed to encourage Iran's huge arms purchases.

The Nixon administration's decision to sell F-14, or F-15 and associated equipment to Iran had met with opposition from Defense and State Departments. The Defense Department was reluctant to handover the technologically advanced weapons systems to Iran and the State Department argued that the sale was provocative. But "Nixon overrode the objections and added proviso that in future Iranian requests should not be second guessed."

44. R.K. Ramazani, The United States and Iran: The Patterns of Influence (New York, 1982), p. 47
45. Sirriyeh, n.40, p. 91
46. Sick, n.9, .13
47. Kissinger, n. 35, p. 1264.
arms sales orders by Iran from careful review and scrutiny by the Departments of State and Defense had important consequences for US military assistance programmes in Iran. It generated an intensive American arms sales campaign in Iran, in which both government agencies; different services of the US armed forces and private contractors were involved. They made concrete efforts to stimulate Iran’s request for more at a time when the Shah of Iran was attempting to expand the Iranian armament programme and accelerated his demand for more sophisticated weapons (see table 7 in appendix). Convergence of Shah’s demands and President Nixon’s willingness to meet them were two major factors that led to the acceleration of arms build up in Iran.48 The massive arms sales to Iran (as indicated in Table 7) were justified on the grounds that Iran was working for its own economic enhancement and was prepared to make a significant contribution to its own defense. It was also argued that on major international issues the policies of Iran and the United States were parallel.49

The Shah reciprocated Nixon administration’s generous arms sales policies towards Iran by supporting every US move in the region. Henry Kissinger has testified Shah’s goodwill towards the United States in his memoirs. Kissinger wrote:

Iran’s influence was always on our own side, its resources reinforced ours even in some distant enterprises in aiding South Vietnam at the time of the 1973 Paris Agreement, helping Western Europe in its economic crisis in the 1970s, supporting moderates in Africa against Soviet-Cuban encroachment, supporting President Sadat in the later Middle East diplomacy. In the 1973 Middle East war, for example, Iran was the only country bordering the Soviet Union not to permit the Soviet’s use of its air space in contrast to several NATO allies. The Shah absorbed the energies of radical Arab neighbours to prevent them from threatening the moderate regimes in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the Persian Gulf. He refuelled our fleets without question. He never joined

49. Reich, n.19, p.8
any oil embargo against the West or Israel. Iran under the Shah in short was one of America’s best most important and most loyal friends in the world.50

Kissinger’s growing tribute underlines the truth that the Nixon administration was using the Shah to serve US policy objectives without any regard to their adverse impact on Iran’s internal socio-economic and political situation. This itself was slowly destroying the credibility of the Shah as he was increasingly viewed as a tool of the Americans. One of the two foreign policy pillars was thus gradually eroding. The same fact was discovered by the President Jimmy Carter’s Special Adviser on Iranian crisis, George Ball. According to him, it was one of the major reasons for American debacle in Iran in 1979. He stated that: “Meanwhile he [the Shah] made himself useful to a succession of United States governments performing such unpopular chores, at our request, as selling oil to Israel. It was no wonder that American officials believed—because they found convenient to believe—that his regime was in no danger.” 51

By serving the American interest with a view to get more and more arms from the United States the Shah alienated his own people. Public resentment in Iran against American involvement in Iran’s internal and external affairs was growing at a very fast pace. Meantime, the Ford administration also blindly followed Nixon administration’s Iranian policy by extending unquestionable military support to the Shah, without any policy review or analysis of the Iranian situation. An observer has rightly remarked that, such an:

... unquestioning support for the Shah did not constitute aberrant behaviour in regard to US-Iranian relations but merely the logical extension of the way that those relations had been developing since 1948. Worn down by decades of conflict with the Shah’s regime, the US bureaucracy had been forced to rationalise its acquiescence to Iranian diktat in the same inflated terms that the Shah himself had used to justify increased aid to Iran in the early stages of relationship. What had been unacceptable then had been made acceptable by the attrition of decades of applied leverage, assisted by what has been termed the inertia quality of the ‘curator mentality’ within the US Department of State and by the presidential seal of approval that was the Nixon Doctrine. What had been the ‘Iranian problem’ during the Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations had by 1969, been transformed into an ‘alliance and partnership’ which precluded even constructive criticism.\footnote{Carr, n. 24, p. 77}

The most remarkable feature of this development was that the US lost its control and initiative on its own policy and started to subscribe to Shah’s national security and defence policies as the basic concepts for the US policy towards Iran. The Shah exploited the American strategic concerns all these years to deepen the American support for his regime just as he had done in the first decade of his rule to establish that support. This was the background of US’ Iranian policy before 1977.

CARTER AND IRAN

In January 1977, President Jimmy Carter, an ardent advocate of human rights and arms control - the two most controversial issues in US-Iranian relations - entered the White House. Like his predecessors he was also committed to protect America’s special strategic relationship with Iran at all costs. His administration also considered Iran as a major military power for stability in the Persian Gulf and a moderating force in the pricing of petroleum. In his memoirs he has stated this fact
thus: “I continued as other presidents had before me, to consider the Shah a strong ally. I appreciated his ability to maintain good relations with Egypt, and Saudi Arabia and his willingness to provide Israel with oil inspite of Arab boycott.”

Thus the factors which determined the direction of Carter Administration’s policy towards Iran were the legacy of his predecessors, especially Nixon and Ford administrations. Like other presidents, Carter and his advisers were reluctant to commit the US forces in the foreign lands in pursuit of foreign goals especially after America’s disastrous Vietnam war. Therefore, it supported Iran as the keeper of peace in the Gulf region and continued the policy of supporting the Shah to maintain stability and security in the Gulf region by endorsing arms sales to Iran. In his policy briefing the President categorically told the US Ambassador to Iran, William H. Sullivan, that he would not even link US-Iranian relations either to his declared arms control or human rights policies, as the Shah was providing the important intelligence facilities to the US through its listening posts to monitor Soviet Union. He was also extending intelligence collaborations between both the countries.

President Carter’s foreign policy team consisting of Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Defense Secretary Harold Brown recognised the Shah because his policies directly benefited the US. Vance has listed five important reasons for the support to the Shah: (i) he provided substantial economic assistance to the countries in the area, (ii) helped reduce tensions in Southwest Asia, (iii) was a reliable supplier of oil to the West, (iv) refused to join the 1973 Arab oil embargo; and also (v) was Israel’s primary source of oil. Therefore, “We decided early on that it was in our

national interest to support the Shah so he could continue to play a constructive role in regional affairs.”

In fact, Carter’s policy towards Iran had been dominated by the same economic, strategic, oil and intelligence considerations adopted by the Nixon administration in the wake of British disengagement from the Persian Gulf. The high point of that policy was the decision to gratify the Shah’s desire for a rapid military build up through massive US arms transfers to Iran. According to Sullivan it was “Because the new administration had not really shaken out of its policy options on various critical matters of interest to us in Iran.”

A few career service officials in the Carter administration questioned the blind adoption of the policy towards Iran on tactical grounds. However, most of the top officials like NSC Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, US Ambassador to Iran William H. Sullivan, Assistant Secretary of State for Middle East and South Asian Affairs Alfred Atherton, and the Director of the Office of Iranian Affairs Henry Precht had for long approved and implemented the approaches inherent in the Nixon doctrine. It would be unrealistic to expect that they would have advocated a change simply because of a change in the administration. This was more so because Carter did not come to the office with fresh ideas on policy towards Iran. The administration’s view was that the Shah was in full control of Iranian affairs to face any external or internal

57. Sullivan, n. 54, p. 20.
58. Rubin, n. 23, pp. 190, 197. No information is available as to who these officers were and on what grounds they disagreed and further more what policy options they advocated to overcome the crisis.
challenges. No change appeared to them on the horizon and a review was not even considered necessary. The subsequent policy debates focused on the international aspects of the US-Iranian relations and not on Iran’s domestic problem. In this policy debate the advocates of large scale arms sales to Iran won. Their trump card was the argument that denial of weapons would be a risky vote of non-confidence in the Shah’s leadership at a time when America needed Iran’s help. For them the strengthening of Shah’s regime also implied predominant position of American interest in the Persian Gulf. According to President Carter “We look upon Iran’s strength as an extension of our own strength and Iran looks upon our strength as an extension of theirs.” In May 1977 Secretary of State Vance visited Tehran to appraise US’ fullfledged support to the Shah. He reassured the Shah that Carter administration would honour all existing prior arms sales commitments to Iran and was even prepared to offer AWACS weapon system to Iran.

President Carter informed the newly nominated US Ambassador to Iran William H. Sullivan that the administration had no objections to sell nuclear power plants to Iran, provided Iran agreed to appropriate safeguards, particularly on the disposition of spent fuel. He also indicated a willingness to reprocess spent fuel in the generation of power. Carter confirmed the continued importance to the United States’ access to intelligence on the USSR acquired in Iran, and he reiterated the continued importance of a secure and stable Iran for US strategic interests in the Persian Gulf. Later, these essential elements of US policy were relayed to the Shah by Sullivan when he arrived in Iran in June 1977. By offering nuclear power plants to Iran, Carter added a new

59. Ibid., pp. 191-2
60. Ramazani n. 44, p. 25
61. Vance n. 55, pp. 317-18
dimension to arms sales programmes. It can be thus seen that the Carter administration not only followed the preceding administration’s arms sales policies but also encouraged and expanded it for the same reasons for which the Nixon administration had approved the first increment.

During President Carter’s two day Tehran visit on 31 December 1977 and 1 January 1978, Shah demanded more than $10 billion worth of arms for Iran. Secretary of State Vance wrote:

It soon became clear that most of the military and foreign policy professionals, both in the State Department and the NSC, staff were strongly opposed to questioning the Shah’s military equipment requests. Despite this resistance, an excellent analysis of Iran’s security situation and defense needs was completed under the direction of Lesile Gelb and his staff in the State Departments’ Politico-Military Bureau (PM). I had hoped this study could become the basis for an objective American evaluation of the Shah’s requests, and the future arms sales decisions could be made in the light of our own assessment of Iran’s defence needs. As it was entirely dependent on the Shah’s unilateral judgement about his force requirements. There was little agreement, though even within State Department, on how to proceed. Everyone accepted the need to manage sales more rationally, but there was no consensus on how to respond to the Shah’s December requests or how to structure the mechanism for US-Iranian consultations....Yet most believed it would be very difficult for us to tell the Shah what his own military needs were.63

The statement of Vance points out that within the American foreign policy establishment the Shah had built up a strong pro-Pahlavite lobby. The US had positioned itself in such a way that it had become completely dependent on Shah’s national security judgements. By repeating the same past mistakes the Carter administration lost control over its own Iranian policy initiatives.

63. Vance, n. 55, p. 323. Emphasis added
Social Discontent

Since 1953 when it brought back the Shah through its clandestine operation code named Ajax the US continuously increased its influence in Iran to levels highly reminiscent of the colonial era. Meanwhile public resentment against American interference in Iran’s internal and external matters was growing rapidly, and neither the Shah nor America could contain it. The excessive military sales became a target of religious and political opposition to the Shah’s regime. It symbolised the military and political commitments to the Americans for the Shah’s survival. Disastrous US encouragement to the Shah to overload his country with inappropriate military burden ended in financial pressures that caused unemployment, disaffection and political repression which manifested through social, political economic and historical forces.\(^64\) Privileges granted to Americans residing in Iran, dramatised the poverty of Iranians.

The most powerful opposition group comprised of Shi’ite religious leaders under exiled Muslim cleric Ayatollah Rouhalloh Khomeini who resented the erosion of their authority as a result of modernization and secularization movement known as White Revolution. Allied with them were bazar leaders, merchants and entrepreneurs of a more traditional type who were bypassed in the modern economic development in the 1970s by the new breed of businessmen and technocrats. These two groups consisted of discontented intelligentsia who cultivated liberal democratic ideas and clamoured for political participation and return to constitutionalism. They were secular in orientation and carried with

it the legacy of nationalism. The fourth group was composed of various ideological left parties and radical groups, committed to the class struggle principles. The coalition of all these forces created a very explosive force in Iranian body politic, and also generated an anti-American sentiment among Iranians by identifying America with the Shah.

They saw the Shah’s policy as intensifying American influence over Iran and the invasion of Western mass culture which disrupted their traditional social structures. For them, the contributing factor to the Iranian economic problems was the Shah’s modernization which meant the conversion of Iran into US and Western market. While the Westernized middle class and upper class profited from the Shah’s modernization, the ‘bazaar classes’ and traditional merchants, artisans and large urban sub-proletariat, made up largely of rural migrants, suffered in many ways. The discontent was consequent on the massive import of agricultural goods especially from the US, coupled with the absence of protective tariffs that contributed to the ruin of countless small farmers, aggravated rural unemployment and swelled the migration to the cities. At the same time American firms pumped the petrodollars out of Iran in exchange for needless armaments, industrial products and consumer goods. In the eyes of many Iranians these sales were just another means of looting their country’s resources and the cause of mounting economic problems, high inflation, decline in agricultural growth rate,


an embryonic industrial infrastructure, etc. Hence the revolutionaries gave the Shah the epithet of “American King”  

The American policy interacted and identified with the Shah’s own domestic and foreign policy issues which facilitated the exercise of American influence over the Shah’s regime. The basic reason for this importance was that the Shah’s domestic politics formed the reason d’etre of his American policy. Therefore, the downfall of the Shah’s regime was considered as the downfall of the American influence in Iran.

When the ever growing popular discontent began to build up Iranians had no outlet to express their grievances in body politic. Lacking any political channels, people turned to the only popular institutions not totally dominated by the Shah’s system - the mosque. Since the religious network provided a ready made informal organization for opposition to the Shah’s government, the religious leaders had been the natural rallying points for the masses who opposed the system for whatever reason. The resurgence of Islam in Iran had been propelled by the return of the middle class to religion. Irrespective of their ideological differences, the radical left and moderate nationalists adopted an attitude that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” They believed that, being better educated and more politically sophisticated in Western sense, they could utilise the religious opposition to weaken and overturn the despotic regime, afterwhich a basically liberal democracy would ensure. Thus they held together the mounting opposition to the Shah. They found a leader in Ayatollah Khomeini. The popular discontent found both a leader and context.


69. Keddie, n. 66, pp. 534-5
The revolution was born.

Meanwhile the President or the administration did not have any understanding of the developments taking place in Iran. This was reflected in the 1977 CIA study which concluded with the statement that “the Shah will be an active participant in Iranian life well in 1980s”, and “there will be no radical change in Iranian political behaviour in the near future.” In August 1978 a twenty three page intelligence Assessment - “Iran After the Shah” – the CIA asserted that the “Iran is not in a revolutionary or even a pre-revolutionary situation.” In fact it was not an assessment of what would happen but rather an examination of persons, institutions and other factors that would play a role. It turned out to be a highly misleading report.\(^7^0\) Later on various occasions the President gave statements which encapsulated the CIA’s assessment of the Shah and Iran. These sentiments were reaffirmed during a visit to Iran by Carter at the end of December 1977 and the beginning of January 1978. On departing, Iran on 1st January 1978 Carter said: “Iran under the great leadership of the Shah, is an island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world. This is a great tribute to you, Your Majesty, and to your leadership, and to the respect, admiration and love which your people give you.”\(^7^1\)

Later on 16th June 1979 when Shah fled from Iran, Carter noted ruefully


"I think that rapid change of affairs in Iran has not been predicted by anyone so far as I know." The confession only showed that the President and the US officials were extremely ignorant of Iranian domestic politics. The reason for the profound misunderstanding of the CIA was its preoccupation with the Soviet threat. The Soviet-centric mindset that pervaded the American official approach to Iran, relied heavily on the information obtained from SAVAK, the Shah’s intelligence apparatus. Like the Department of State, the SAVAK lacked contacts with the religious leaders, other social and informal groups. This American intelligence failure cut across the agencies, offices, ambassadors and missions.

**AMERICAN INTELLIGENCE FAILURE IN IRAN**

The US’ close working relationship with Iranian intelligence for information on Iranian politics, made them agree not to spy on the Shah. In return Iran permitted US to position two major military listening posts on Iranian soil overlooking the rocket and missile launching facilities that the Soviets maintained in their Central Asian Republics.

Hence, there was absolutely no reporting on the internal situation based on sources within the opposition during the first quarter of 1978. In doing so, the US political agents committed the cardinal error of focusing on the thinking of the ruling Iranian elites and ignoring social changes. The changes had been identified with the opposition groups in Iran’s intellectual and religious circles, and with consequent erosion of what had appeared to be a stable monarchy. As the US policy in the Persian Gulf became more and more dependent on the Shah, the risk of offending him by speaking with the opposition was less acceptable.


Even though some analysts in CIA made passionate plea for the greater collection of information on social groups, they were ignored by CIA and the embassy. This sort of contact could not be possible effectively by the US officials as long as US policy towards the Shah prevented direct contact with the opposition elements. The US' close identification with the Shah limited the opportunities for US officials to hear from Iranians who opposed him, thereby causing Iran to resemble a closed society from the US perspective. It discouraged them for a clandestine collection on Iranian politics. An important factor was the concern that the Shah suspecting a CIA conspiracy against him could deny US access to its technical collection sites or restrict other forms of intelligence cooperation. Another critical factor discouraging collection of such information, lay in the implicit priorities of policy makers, who for years had shown little interest in questioning the Shah’s performance. 75 In fact the mutual reinforcing policy attitudes of the US and the Shah prevented the US from understating the vulnerabilities of the Iranian regime.

At the same time policy makers were not asking whether the Shah’s autocracy would survive indefinitely. Lack of imagination concerning alternative US policies limited both the search for an accurate understanding of Iran’s internal situation, and the receptiveness of intelligence users to such analysis. 76 Even though there was visible evidence of the revolutionary symptoms on Iranian body politic such as the demonstrations and political violence in the streets and university campus and fast growing discontent in the bazzar and mosques, none of the Washington foreign policy makers including US ambassador in Iran were able to get these messages right and find out the seriousness of the situation until it was far too late. 77

75. Iran: Evaluation of US Intelligence Performance Prior to November 1978, n. 70. p. 3
76. Ibid., p. 2
77. See, Sullivan, n. 54, pp.100, 101-2, 109, 110
of deficiencies at the bureaucratic level. Most of the people who had previously worked in Iran and who had real doubts about the Shah's capacity were not there anymore. It also included the intelligence staff. In the 1950s and 1960s American intelligence and embassy officials in Iran were experts in internal Iranian politics, but by the late 1970's they were moved away from Iran, probably because in the policy context of total support for the Shah, their presence was not required. The officials who were posted in Tehran were relatively ignorant about the intricacies of the Iranian politics. Carter's ambassador to Iran, Sullivan himself has admitted that we went to Iran with "supreme ignorance of the area." 

According to Sullivan the rationale for his appointment was that "... It had been decided to send a professional who had considerable experience in dealing with the leaders who were forceful personalities. The issues of the area, knowledge and specific acquaintance with the culture of the region were considered secondary qualifications for this post." 

Thus the administration itself was imposing a super Shah myth on its officials in Iran. Therefore instead of foreseeing the changes in Iranian political system, American officials virtually used Iran as the location for looking at outside threats and no attention was paid to Iran's internal problems. The Shah used this opportunity to build up an image that every revolutionary upsurge in Iran was a communist motivated threat to America's interest.

In November 1978 President Carter expressed dissatisfaction on political intelligence and demanded more accurate information immediately. The intelligence

80. Sullivan, n. 54, p. 16
community fell into procedural wrangles rather than providing accurate information. During most of 1978, intelligence community analysts struggled to produce a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iran. As the events in Iran sharpened the need for short term estimation, the NIE became an increasingly inappropriate vehicle. The NIE process required extensive collaboration and coordination by all the intelligence agencies which was cumbersome and time consuming. As the NIE was not useful in a fast moving political situation like Iran; analysts and senior intelligence officials increasingly regarded the NIE as a distraction from more pressing business under the pressure of deadlines.

Furthermore in its primary review of the NIE production process, the subcommittee staff found indications that senior intelligence officials might have resisted having the NIE assessment for the likelihood that the Shah might be ousted before the mid-1980’s. The possibility existed that such resistance was pressing a policy decision, than being formulated, to have the President express firm support for the Shah. In the absence of attractive alternative policies, senior US policy makers and advisers may not have wished to receive bad news, and may have communicated this attitude to managers of the NIE. 81

There was the tendency to avoid taking substantive differences. Although the Department of State perceived significant difference between their concern about the Shah’s political prospects and the complacency of other intelligence community participants, they were neither consistent nor forceful in putting their judgements forward. They devoted greater effort to convincing others to adopt a change in format, than in arguing the basis for their pessimism about Iranian stability. More aggressive reporting to the Department of State and CIA by the Embassy and the

intelligence analysts in Washington, about the increasing pace of events in Iran occurred after mid 1977. But these significant insights derived from the contacts between the Embassy, political and opposition elements did not appear in the State Department's Morning Summary until September 1978.82

Weak field reporting left serious analytical flaws unchallenged. Therefore, CIA and DIA studies in 1978 expressed the hope that the Shah could effectively control the dissident activities and opposition movements by using military and police force. Furthermore they believed that the Shah could successfully split the moderate opposition by exploiting inner contradictions within the movement and inducing them with the policy of liberalisation. In fact these moves only helped to create a deep distrust and dissatisfaction among the middle class Iranians. This misperception and misjudgment was the result of the inadequate and prejudiced collection of intelligence by the agencies.83 Thus even at the latter stage sophisticated collection intelligence had actually impeded the sharing of information. They (CIA, DIA, NSA, Pentagon, State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research, FBI) presented divergent analysis and failed to provide enough, accurate, timely or complete information to policy makers. These factors also contributed greatly to the US failure to anticipate and understand the real political situation in Iran.

US officials in Iran were slow to recognise the hidden crisis. By November 1979, the US Ambassador Sullivan was trying to communicate the grave Iranian situation to Washington. Not only the NSC Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and his NSC staff, but also Secretary of State Vance refused to believe that the Shah was in serious trouble. Sullivan's early confidence in the Shah's ability to control the Iranian situation and the late conviction about the inability of the Shah, eroded the credibility of embassy reporting. It was symptomatic of the misunderstanding and lack of

82. Ibid., pp. 2, 5.

83. Ibid., n. 1, p. 6.
communication that henceforth marked Carter’s Iranian policy. 84

BUREAUCRATIC INFIGHTING AND DUAL POLICY APPROACHES

When the hidden crisis was about to explode the entire fabric of Iranian society, the various segments of US foreign policy institution were engaged in their puerile game of one-upmanship. Particularly acrimonious was the tussle between Vance and Brzezinski for control over foreign policy.

The Secretary of State and his department were preoccupied with promoting democracy in Iran. They presumed that the Shah’s regime was stable and helped in the attainment of US foreign policy objective. The time, as Vance said, was ripe for making the regime more democratic. However, once the revolution erupted, the State Department became concerned with the problem of the safe evacuation of the Americans who were trapped in the fire of the revolution. 85

The State Department policy faction consisted of the US ambassador to Iran William H. Sullivan, Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher, the Country Director of Iranian Affairs in the Department of State Henry Precht, the State Department Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs Patricia Derian and Carter’s special adviser on Iranian affairs George W. Ball. They advocated the policy of abandoning the Shah and the creation of a coalition government consisting of Secular National Front leaders, moderate pro-Khomeini elements backed by the pro-US sections of the Iranian army. 86 Secretary of State Cyrus Vance was the logical spokesman in Washington for such a policy since many of his associates in the State Department were its leading proponents. At the same time Vance was so unwilling to

84. Bill, n., pp. 248-9
85. Brzeninki, n. 56, p. 355
86. Arshad, n. 73, pp.93-94
associate himself with a decision that would have been perceived as backing away from the support of the Shah that a centrist solution was not carried vigorously into high level policy discussion in Washington. As a result the issue was never pursued vigorously until it was very late. Vance was more preoccupied with Camp David Agreement between Egypt and Israel. He seldom attended policy meetings on Iran and generally delegated authority to his deputy, Warren Christopher. Vance's absence from day to day policy making left the field by default to Brzezinski. 87

Apart from Brzezinski, those who advocated a policy of 'iron-fist' or 'military-solution' to the Iranian crisis in the White House were represented at the highest level by the Defence Secretary Harold Brown and his Deputy Charles Duncan, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, General David Jones, the NSC country representative on Iran Commander Gary Sick. 88 Brzezinski consistently argued that only effective military actions could restore peace and order in Iran. 89 He believed that tough action by the Shah's military forces would scatter the opposition which he believed consisted of communists on left and few reactionary religious leaders on the right. To compete with the State Department and implement his own version of Iranian policy, he had set up his own channel of communication through Iranian ambassador to US Ardesher Zahedi, NSC officials Gary Sick and General Robert E. Huyser from whom he based his major understanding on Iran. Huyser arrived in Iran on 4 January 1979 to prepare the Iranian military to carry out a coup d'etat. According to Huyser his mission was that "... if that government [Bakhtiar] collapsed, then at exactly the right moment, I was to see that military took action." 90

87. Ibid., pp. 106-7
88. Ibid., p. 93
89. Brzezinski, n. 56, p. 394
As a result, policy conflict between the National Security Adviser and his staff on the one hand and the Department of State on the other hand was inevitable. According to Secretary Vance, Brzezinski opened this channel of communication without the knowledge of anyone in the State Department which "... contributed to the Shah's confusion ... and to his inability to decide what to do." 91 Furthermore, Carter's special adviser on Iranian affairs George Ball has severely criticised Brzezinski's one-upmanship by stating that: "He was operating in a free wheeling manner, calling in foreign ambassadors, telephoning or seconding telegrams to foreign dignitaries outside State Department channels, and even hiring a press adviser so he could compete with the Secretary of State as the enunciator of United States policy." 92

Huyser's presence in Iran added more fuel to the policy confusion and centralization and it seemed evident to all that the White House now had its own representative in Tehran. It was a dramatic indication of Washington's two-track, collision-course, and contradictory policy towards Iran. Huyser never understood Iran and even never heard Khomeini's name before April 1978 and he estimated that only ten to fifteen per cent of the Iranian population supported Khomeini. Like the myopic Iranian military officers, he believed that if Iran became an Islamic Republic it would eventually end up in the communist camp. 93

It resulted in a sharp disagreement between Huyser and Sullivan. They disagreed sharply in their assessment of the Iranian situation. In Sullivan's own words the nature of disagreement was that:

91. Vance, n. 55, p. 328
92. Ball, n. 51, pp. 457-8
93. Huyser, n. 90, pp.12, 71, 267
On one line I would speak to Under Secretary of State Newsom, Assistant of Saunders. On the other Huyser would speak with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, David Jones, or with Secretary of Defense Harold Brown. He would then compare notes after our conversations to try to sort out what Washington was attempting to convey to us. There were times when we felt we must have been talking to two different cities.\footnote{Sullivan, n. 54, p. 230}

Sullivan felt that the Iranian military was deeply split, quite demoralized, and would fall apart in the face of the crisis that loomed ahead. Huyser overestimated the strength of the Shah's armed forces despite their leader's personal rivalry, appalling lack of planning, and their refusal to take responsibility. But in the end Sullivan was proven right.\footnote{See Huyser, n. 90, pp. 69, 79, 93, 105, 132, 156}

According to Huyser, "While Sullivan was the best informed American official concerning the Iranian situation, his views were ignored in Washington because they were bad news therefore unacceptable. On the other hand everyone eagerly awaited Huyser's report."\footnote{Bill, n. 1, p. 256} The Huyser mission had profound negative effects in the Iranian political context. It further divided the policy-making establishment in Washington. The Iranian opposition forces viewed Huyser's presence as an obvious US attempt to intervene directly and militarily in a last ditch effort to save the Pahlavi regime. The fact was that the Shah himself saw this as a hostile act designed to hasten his exit.

Adding fuel to the confusion was that Sullivan's attempt to walk a perilous line between declaratory support of the Shah in his reporting cables, while conducting private negotiations with the opposition for plans that were to be implemented only after the Shah decided to leave. For such a plan to have any realistic chance of success, it had to be carefully prepared in advance with the knowledge and support of the White House.

\begin{thebibliography}{96}
\footnotetext{94}{Sullivan, n. 54, p. 230}
\footnotetext{95}{See Huyser, n. 90, pp. 69, 79, 93, 105, 132, 156}
\footnotetext{96}{Bill, n. 1, p. 256}
\end{thebibliography}
It appears that Sullivan thought that Khomeini’s accession to power coupled with a change in government would be the most suitable course for the US to pursue at this juncture. With this in mind, it seems that he favoured removing the military leaders who were most likely to block Khomeini’s plans, and he consistently questioned the capability of Bakhtiar, the man whom Washington wanted to support, in a way which often became public. President Carter’s objective was some sort of coalition between Bakhtiar and the military. According to Huyser “But what was the use of my delivering my half of the objective a coherent military leadership with a workable plan of action, if the Ambassador was making no attempt to deliver his half, a political leadership confident of American support.” Sullivan was not only operating entirely on his own without instructions from Washington, but also he was acting in direct contradiction to the policy guidelines delivered to him. The basic elements of the policy adopted in 2 November 1978 Special Coordination Committee (SCC) meeting of the NSC, which met in the absence of the President Carter and Secretary of State Vance, was that: (1) US support for the Shah ‘without reservation’ (2) the need for ‘decisive action to restore order and the Shah’s authority. This indicated that the US would support the Shah’s decision fully, whether he chose a coalition or a military government. (3) Once order and authority had been restored it was hoped that the Shah would resume efforts to promote liberalization and eradicate corruption. It reflected the dual approach of the policy.

97. Arshad, n. 73, p. 108
98. Carter, n. 53, p. 445. Vance wanted the US to stay away from both the military and the Shah, in favour of Bakhtiar. But his own belief was that the Shah, the military leaders, and Bakhtiar were all acting in concert and he thought that ultimately the Shah and the military would prevail. In a large extent this was in confirmity with Brzezinski - Huyser line of thinking.
99. Huyser, n. 90, p. 290
100. Brzezinkski, n. 56, p. 364
As a result neither ‘decisive action was taken at the right time, nor were sincere efforts made to form a coalition government. The Shah also became a victim of this policy and rightly claimed, “... the message I received from the United States ... continued to be confusing and contradictory. Secretary of State Vance issued a statement endorsing my efforts to restore calm and encouraging the liberalization program. Such herculean fantasies left me stunned.”

The junior players in the State Department such as Henry Precht, while attempting to change US policy towards the Shah, found themselves constantly frustrated. Without the support of the Secretary of State, they were unable to argue their views at the highest level. On 19 December 1978, the country director for Iran in the State Department finally submitted a formal statement of his views on the Iranian policy in a memorandum entitled ‘Post Shah Iran.’

Like George Ball, he was arguing the case for a coalition government in Iran, consisting of moderate elements from Khomeini’s camp, backed by the military, though he was unaware that George Ball’s ideas of a ‘Council of Notables’ had already been floated to Sullivan and that he had rejected it. Gary Sick, the Iranian analyst in the White House, quite independently, and almost simultaneously with Henry Precht chose to argue for a substantial change in US policy. Sick in his memoirs states, “Ironically, I learned of Precht’s intervention only years later, after President Carter had left the White House. Precht, I am sure, was equally unaware of my actions. Communications between the White House and State Department on such ‘internal’ matters had long

102. Sick, n.9, p. 121
since ceased". 103 This fact more than any other in the history of the crisis demonstrates the overwhelming reluctance of officials at all levels to be perceived as backing away from the support of the Shah. The US relationship with the Shah was so deeply ingrained in the minds and policies of everyone responsible that even a carefully reasoned expression of doubt was regarded dangerous enough to destroy one’s career.

The attempts to open a disavowable channel of communication to Ayatollah Khomeini, including the earlier attempts of the State Department emissary, Theodore Eliot, to contact radical religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini was blocked by the President. 104 According to George Ball “Any approach to Khomeini was vetoed [by the President] presumably on Brzezinski’s advice.” 105

The worst side of this bureaucratic battle was the flow of insufficient information about Iranian political situation and mutual distrust. As a result every office developed a network of private sources that it was reluctant to share with others, thereby breeding distrust and suspicion. It is clear from Henry Precht’s revealing letter to Sullivan. “I presume you are aware of the top secret list of questions that was sent out over the weekend for the Shah. I have not been shown the list, such is the level of distrust that exists in the White House towards the State Department.” 106

This lopsided functioning of the American foreign policy set up provided the President with a deeply flawed and inaccurate picture of Iran. He constantly received

103. Ibid., p. 122
104. Carter, n. 53, p. 446
106. Quoted in Bill, n.1, p. 252.
conflicting advice and therefore wavered back and forth in his policy decision and contributed to the disastrous American foreign policy loss in Iran. As different and inconsistent policy options were being pursued, by the end of December 1978 US policy towards Iran was in a complete muddle. In the midst of Iranian uprising against monarchy and US’ Iranian foreign policy chaos, on 16 January 1979 Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi left Iran as a crumbled pillar of American policy in the Persian Gulf region. It was the beginning of the end of four decades of US-Iranian relationship.