CHAPTER V
UNITED STATES' PERCEPTIONS ON IRAN

United States and Iran: The Early Phase of an Encounter

Iran had never been a formal colony of any Western power. But its history is replete with various attempts at domination by external powers. In this century, Britain and Russia in the beginning and the United States later tried to dominate the Iranian political scene. For the United States, the initial contacts with Iran, started by the American missionaries in the 19th century, could not evolve as a major bond of relationship until World War II.

Colonial transformation of most of the countries of West Asia and North Africa had been set in motion by the influence or rule of one or the other European power by the turn of this century. The Gulf region already started showing signs of becoming an area of not only strategic but of economic significance as well as oil was being discovered in the region during the initial decades of this century. The United States’ involvement in Iran began to evolve, though in a subdued way to start with, in such a context.
It was around 1883 that the Americans opened their diplomatic mission in Iran. The discovery of oil in Masjid-e-Sulaiman in 1906 culminated in a more intense Anglo-Russian tug-of-war for control over Iran. The two powers signed the Anglo-Russian Treaty in 1907, virtually dividing Iran into their spheres of influence.\(^1\) John Stempel points out that the United States "started becoming more involved because the government of Nader Shah considered the United States a source of assistance untainted by great power politics".\(^2\) More or less a similar view is projected by Barry Rubin also. Rubin explains that in the early part of this century,

Both Americans and Persians came to believe that indeed the United States—with its growing power and yet with no national interest in Persia's resources—might come to play some special, beneficial role in rescuing Persia from its humiliating servitude and in restoring it to some semblance of past glory.\(^3\)

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2. Stempel, Ibid., p. 60; emphasis added.

One finds that most of the authors on US-Iran relations describe the nature of the emergence of this encounter as very positive and free of bondages or entanglement of power. "Few international relationships have had a more positive beginning than that which characterized Iranian-American contacts for more than a century", says James Bill.4

It is interesting to note Barry Rubin's above assertion that it is not the "national interest" of the growing power, the United States, that propelled its encounter with Iran in the initial years of this century, but the "civilising mission" of the US. One finds that such a mission forms part of all colonial endeavours in the orient, during, and earlier to, this period. On the one hand, material interests and the "civilising" project were integral to the colonial strategy. On the other hand, as Stempel notes, the US was becoming "more involved" in Iran. The point that strikes is the attempt by authors like Rubin, Stempel and Bill to separate the material from the moral. Such an attempt, in Rubin and Bill, for example, comes at the beginning of their respective books, without examining whether this "model", "civilising" encounter of the US actually had with it economic or political interests. The point that one

observes here is a preemptive salvaging of American involvement from any taint of economic or political interest. Edward Said points out that colonial rule was justified by orientalism in advance rather than after the event.\textsuperscript{5} If he is talking about the historical preemption of a knowledge tradition over the actual event, that is, colonialism; in this context, one is pointing towards an analytical preemption over the possible (or not) event, that is, an involvement as part of interests.

During the Constitutional Revolution, American individuals like Howard C. Baskerville supported the movement while the American consulate in Tabriz, where he worked, and the State Department asked him not to do so because the US wanted to be neutral in this crisis. Baskerville had no choice but to resign his job as a teacher in the American mission school in Tabriz to continue his support for the movement, for which he sacrificed his life.\textsuperscript{6} Another American, W. Morgan Shuster, came to Iran as financial adviser during the time of the constitutional movement. He, on the one hand, believed that the US could play a transformatory role in Iran and, on the other, sympathised with the constitutionalists.


\textsuperscript{6} See, for details on this episode. Rubin, n. 3, pp. 9-10.
He could not complete his mission in the context of increased Anglo-Russian rivalry.7

As Mohamed Heikal aptly described, "A new state, America, was joining the old power rivalries, and the world's most desirable commodity, oil, had become a stake in the struggle".8 Heikal points out two distinct pictures of the American connections with Iran by the time of World War II, pertaining to, one, individual Americans and two, the American government. "If the Americans had a fault it was perhaps that these gallant cowboys appeared to know too little about the outside world, including countries like Iran that they were too politically naive".9 Individuals like Baskerville seemed to be an exception. If this described scene one of the episode "Enter the Eagle", scene two provided a matter of fact view:

In fact, though individual Americans may have been ignorant and innocent, the American government and American businessmen knew exactly what they wanted in the Middle East, and were determined to get it. The two things they wanted

7. Ibid., pp. 10-11. For Shuster's own account on Iran, see Morgan W. Shuster, The Strangling of Persia (New York, 1912).


9. Ibid.
were air facilities, to begin with for the purpose of the war effort but with an eye to strategic and commercial considerations when the war was over, and oil concessions. On these two desiderata much was to be built.\textsuperscript{10}

Thus, the actual material facilities and resources like oil that Iran could provide, determined the nature of American interest in and policy on Iran, not only before and during World War II but, more so, after the war.

It was during World War II that the foundation for future linkage between American interests and the Iranian monarchist system was laid. This was especially after Reza Shah's abdication of the throne in 1941. As Amin Saikal observes, "Washington committed itself to the development of close political, economic, and military ties with Iran, so that America's position would remain strong in the country".\textsuperscript{11} US interests in Iran during the War centered around: one, the requirements of ensuring supplies to the Soviet Union as part of Allied war efforts; two, the need to maintain oil supplies and the security of such installations; and three, reducing the influence of the Soviet Union in Iran by neutralising it through diplomatic and other means.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., p. 38.

\textsuperscript{11} Saikal, n. 1, p. 30.
The American administration sent a financial mission headed by Arthur C. Millspaugh in order to reorganise Iran's financial set-up. He worked as Administrator General of Iranian Finance and remained in Iran till the end of the War.12 Within six months of American involvement during the War, there were 28,000 US servicemen in Iran apart from "the presence of numerous advisers in almost every branch of the Iranian government".13 With Millspaugh's mission itself, there were seventy more Americans working in ministries and departments like finance, treasury, food and price stabilisation, the national bank, customs, and the national police.14 The heads of various other missions included General Clarence S. Ridley (head of the military mission to the Iranian army), Colonel Norman Schwarzkopf (adviser and later director for the gendarmerie), General Donald H. Connolly (Commander of the Persian Gulf Command in Abadan) and General Patrick Hurley (President Roosevelt's personal representative in Iran).15


15. See, Heikal, n. 8, p. 41.
Thus, there was multifaceted American involvement in Iran during World War II and this involvement was to accelerate and diversify further, once the War was over. Once American imperialism was firmly established as a super power after the War, its involvement in West Asia in general and in Iran in particular was necessarily to be in accordance with the requirements of an ascending world power. The crucial interrelationship between the growth of American imperialism and the development of area studies and other orientalist scholarship has been discussed in Chapter II. It is enough to note below a few aspects of the linkage between American interests and the corresponding constitution of knowledge, which contributed to American perceptions, especially towards Islam and Iran.

American Perceptions on Iran: The Constitutive Realm of Ideas

Gary Sick, the principal White House aid for Iran on the National Security Council staff during Jimmy Carter's presidency, in his book on American-Iranian relations, observes: "Despite a century of sustained contact, Iran remained *terra incognita* for almost all Americans". In other words, "it is not an exaggeration to say that America approached Iran from a position of almost
unrelieved ignorance". Barry Rubin also says: "Especially remarkable is the extent to which years of American-Iranian relations were built on mutual ignorance and misperceptions". He points out that General Patrick Hurley, President Roosevelt's envoy to Iran and the Gulf during World War II, used to confuse Iran with Iraq.

The problem is not one of ignorance alone. It is not precisely a question arising out of a 'lack'. Perceptions emerge not out of nothing but out of certain representational practices. "Policy thinking is not unsituated", says Michael Shapiro. According to him, "it is expressed in various dominant forms of representation, those representational practices arise out of a society's more general practices (for example, the modes through which various social spaces are produced)". Therefore, it is important "to discern the representational practices that construct the 'world' of persons, places and modes of conduct and to inquire into the network of social practices that give particular modes of representation their standing". Shapiro also stresses on the need "to

situate the thinking or representational practices of a society within the other aspects of the social formation, which collaborate in producing their effects and consequences.\textsuperscript{19} This means that American perceptions and policy thinking have to be viewed in the context of the specific social formation, that is, the historical contingency of US imperialism. Following Shapiro, one can argue that the discursive practices of American perceptions on Iran are anchored on not merely the "cognitive orientations of individuals", who are actors in the field, but also on the "stock of signs" enabling interpretation, generated within such a field.\textsuperscript{20}

In accordance with US imperialist interests in West Asia, scholarly endeavours and policy requirements attained great degree of congruence. The American enterprise in Iran, and for that matter in West Asia, is both imperialist and orientalist. There is no point in equating the two or separating the two beyond a limit. Robert Pranger writes about US interests and scholarship and their linkages:

In order to gain "better understanding" of the movements and regimes operating there [in West Asia], American scholarship finds itself studying

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 76.
\textsuperscript{20} See, Ibid., p. 73.
problems of interest to policy in ways that will enable this understanding to become an important tool for protecting vital interests. This scholarship may or may not be explicitly directed toward this end, but the important point is that the research agenda itself has been conditioned by the undeniable fact that the Middle East is "vital" for American interests in certain important respects. 21

Chapter II provides some details on this aspect of scholarship being shaped by interests. In the United States, in accordance with this requirement, orientalism as a discipline in itself was transformed "from a fundamentally philological discipline and a vaguely general apprehension of the Orient into a social science specialty". 22

Understanding this change in the nature of scholarship is vital to comprehend US perceptions.

No longer does an Orientalist try first to master the esoteric languages of the Orient; he begins instead as a trained social scientist and


"applies" his science to the Orient, or anywhere else. This is the specifically American contribution to the history of Orientalism, and it can be dated roughly from the period immediately following World War II, when the United States found itself in the position recently vacated by Britain and France. The American experience of the Orient prior to that exceptional moment was limited.\textsuperscript{23}

The early American missionary families in countries like Iran and members of US foreign service and oil companies had a symbiotic relationship.\textsuperscript{24} That relationship was transformed and later replaced by considerations on imperialist interests. According to Said, "the American Oriental position since World War II has fit--I think, quite self-consciously--in the places excavated by two earlier European powers".\textsuperscript{25} It is in spite of this European legacy that one notes the conversion of European orientalism into a form of applied social science by the Americans. American experts in the field invariably were preoccupied with interpretations of the behaviour of societies and polities like that of Iran from the

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{25} Said, n. 5, p. 17.
inherited "stock of signs" rather than producing valid new knowledges.

Many European orientalists like G. von Grunebaum, H.A. R. Gibb and Joseph Schacht were attracted to American universities to embark upon the project of studying Islam and such societies. The new area studies programmes, especially the Middle East studies branch, had to, in most cases, deal with those aspects of scholarship that were of immediate or short-term interest to US imperialism. The applied social science legacy of contemporary American area studies emanates from such a requirement. According to Donald Reid, "the United States came late both to orientalism and to political influence in the Middle East" while comparing with their European counterpart. But, what he says about the role of orientalists in imperialist expansion applies squarely with many American Middle East area studies experts:

Imperialism produced an immediate demand for linguistic and other skills of the orientalists. Some Western scholars kept to the ivory tower, but patriotism was the order of the day, and at one time or another most orientalists followed the natural course of putting their expertise at their countries' disposal.26

This is true of many US experts on Iran, who were investing their expertise in the service of imperialism. As Stuart Schaar notes, many American Middle East studies experts are rationalisers and justifiers of US government policies in the Middle East; others cater to the neo-colonial clients of the US in Middle Eastern and north African states; in both cases they reap material rewards, and compete to sell themselves to the highest bidders. 27

This point is well-stated by Said: "Expertise in foreign affairs . . . has usually meant legitimization of the conduct of foreign policy and, what is more to the point, a sustained investment in revalidating the role of experts in foreign affairs". 28

The result of this integral interconnectedness between scholarly expertise and state policies has been "the fact that almost every serious study of the modern Middle East produced in this country [the United States] since World War II cannot prepare anyone for what has been taking place in the region". 29 This is especially true of the developments in Iran.

The interpretive field functioning with individual cognitive orientations and culturally-rooted semiotic system produces an interesting dichotomy while considering the foreign policy and perceptions of the United States. On the one hand, "the poetical, subjective impulse" is very strong on the subject of the so-called Middle East, in studying which "a quasi-fictional, even mysterious, understanding of the region" operates. On the other hand, there is . . . a noticeably strong preference for empirical, positivistic knowledge in the modern social sciences and historical studies that concentrate on the Middle East. At the very least, therefore, a dichotomy exists between policy and understanding, or, perhaps more accurately, understanding itself is affected by tricks in a language that appears empirical but is more imaginative.³⁰

At the same time, the aspect of American policy which Christopher Hitchens points out, has to be noted: "Well, there isn't a soul today in Washington who doesn't pride himself on the purity of his realpolitik".³¹ If Hitchens


is talking about the obsession in American circles on realpolitik during the early 1990s, that is, the period of the second Gulf War, his statement holds true for US foreign policy making in most periods of this century. The empirical, applied social science, policy-oriented mould of knowledge production in line with realpolitik thinking and the orientalist bandwagon of signs and simulations contribute in delineating the conceptual world of policy formulation.

Stephen Rosow, in an interesting analytical article, writes about three characterisations or three types of narratives prevalent in the Western tradition for dealing with outsiders: the barbarian, the heretic and the primitive. He observes that in orientalism and US foreign policy towards the Soviet Union, which constitute two cases of Western tradition, all three narratives "intertwine, drawing on each other and blending into one another". The point is, that in the case of orientalism and US policy, there "is no single master narrative of 'the other'". The three together "form a wealth of stories that provide a meaningful framework for political

action toward those who do not share the dominant system of international legitimacy". Rosow writes:

The three narrative strategies represent different historical-conceptual moments in Western relations to others and seem to constitute an economy of difference in Western international system. The barbarian seems to represent the consciousness of ongoing relations with those whose difference cannot be absorbed into the dominant society; for to incorporate such others into one’s own society would threaten to alter its identity and constitution radically. The heretic represents the moment of threat from outside, the moment when the Western system perceives itself to be under siege from others. The primitive represents the moment in which the other is discovered as different, but not yet perceived as a threat or as irreconcilable to the dominant European [American included] way of life.  

These characterisations and narrative strategies, more or less, apply to US policy towards Iran, historically and conceptually.

33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., p. 299.
The congruence of US interests and scholarship has been noted earlier. But the universe of perceptions built on it is infested by incongruities of various kinds; which being connected with the variety of representational practices, and which explain the multiple, most often contradictory, voices from US policy-making circles on various West Asian issues, especially those concerning Iran. One finds in various reports, analyses and observations of American officials dealing with Iran, a claim to truth. Policy discourses emanating from various practitioners of US policy towards Iran are formulated within the grid of interests, power and a constituted orientalist tradition of knowledge. While there is a broad consensual validational process of discourses within such a "regime of truth", legitimate discourses themselves exhibit inconsistencies and varieties depending upon the strategies of representation. Within the regime itself there are contending discourses alluding to claims of truth. In short, the perceptual realm of US policy-making is replete with contending discourses within an overall apparatus of consensus in dealing with Iran.

Another important point is the question of "national interest" itself. While US national interest, with all its modalities of operation and pervasiveness, is a matter of reality, it has a representational character as well. This nature of national interest demands mention in this
section dealing with the realm of ideas constituting US perceptions on Iran. Noam Chomsky explains the point very vividly:

As a general rule, an imperial power is guided by the "national interest" as conceived and defined by dominant social groups. At the same time, its ideologists labor to mask this pursuit of self-interest with a system of delusion and mystification. To be effective, this belief system must, of course, bear some relationship to reality, and often it will appear convincing not only to the mass of the population but to policy makers and ideologists as well--a matter of some significance. Use of term "national interest" is one familiar technique of mystification. The ideologists of empire rarely ask who pays and who profits . . . . It must be emphasized again that, like the the delusional systems that individuals may construct in their personal lives, the propaganda images of the super-powers are not wholly divorced from reality. But even the manipulators and rulers court disaster when disregard for reality goes beyond certain bounds.\(^{35}\)

This delusional and mystificatory pursuit of self-interest did create problems and even disasters for US policymakers in Iran. The grip of such a system of beliefs did blind most practitioners of American policy from perceiving the realities of Iranian polity and society in spite of their avowed realpolitik orientation in the conduct of foreign policy.

The Post-War Scenario and US Perceptions on Iran

By the end of the World War II, the United States started viewing Iran as a theatre of confrontation with communism.

American policymakers gradually became convinced of Moscow's aggressive designs toward Iran. . . . [T]he United States had to ally itself with London and Tehran to force out Soviet occupation troops and to counter Russian attempts to carve up Iran. Thus, Iran became a testing ground for the containment policy and a key experience in persuading Americans of Soviet bad faith.36

This preoccupation with containment of communism along with oil and commercial interests determined the policy

orientations of the United States. Both these aspects were important as far as its nascent superpower status and its interests were concerned. US Secretary of State James Byrnes in his letter to Secretary of War stated that the "stabilization of Iran... will serve to lay a sound foundation for the development of American commercial, petroleum and aviation interests in the Middle East".37

By the 1950s, nationalist and national liberation movements began to be successful in most part of the third world in achieving political decolonisation to a considerable extent. Iran was also experiencing a nationalist upsurge by the early 1950s. Dr. Muhammad Musaddiq and his National Front was able to assert the power of the people and the majlis over the Shah and his monarchy. The nationalisation of oil industry, especially the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) by Prime Minister Musaddiq's government was viewed with great hostility by British and American circles. The United States, on its part, considered third world nationalisms in general as arenas of Soviet penetration. Iranian nationalism represented by Musaddiq was also considered to be a threat to US interests. The struggle between the Shah and Musaddiq's National Front government resulted in the

37. Quoted in Heikal, n. 8, p. 43.
monarch's virtual loosing of power. The AIOC and the Americans wanted the Musaddiq rule to be ended for their own different reasons. AIOC was seeking to regain its oil concessions. The Americans feared the Soviets taking control of Iran, which ultimately might lead to Soviet control of the Gulf, thus thwarting American interests in the region. This was the period when the Americans were nurturing the idea of evolving a defence alliance in the region for containing the Soviet Union.

A secret plan to overthrow Musaddiq was hatched by the Central Intelligence Agency. Kermit Roosevelt of the CIA coordinated the plan code-named Ajax. The Eisenhower administration approved the plan and Operation Ajax was carried out in 1953. The Shah was reinstated ousting Musaddiq through a stage-managed coup. As noted by Heikal, the "real seat of authority in Tehran in these days was the American Embassy rather than Niavaran Palace".

38. Ibid., p. 63.
39. For details on the Ajax Plan, see Roosevelt's own account: Kermit Roosevelt, Countercoup: The Struggle for the Control of Iran (New York, 1979). For descriptions on the Musaddiq era and the American role, see Rubin, n. 3, pp. 54-90; Heikal, n. 8, pp. 52-64.
40. Heikal, n. 8, p. 65.
In Gary Sick's assessment, Operation Ajax, abruptly and permanently ended America's political innocence with respect to Iran. Until 1953 the United States had played an essentially benevolent role in the great-power politics of Iran, restraining both British and Soviet appetites during World War II, firmly opposing Soviet encroachments immediately following the war, and playing the honest broker between Iran and the AIOC five years later. But the direct intervention in 1953 cast the United States in the role so common in Iranian history of the cynical external power prepared to manipulate Iranian political circumstances for its own benefit. Whether or not such a description is a fair characterization of U.S. policy, it is unfortunately true that after 1953 the United States would never again be able to enjoy the presumption of benign objectives and enlightened self-interest when engaging itself in the affairs of Iran.41

It is absolutely true that with the overthrow of the Iranian Prime Minister, who was elected by the people, and the reinstating of the monarch, for protecting British and

41. Sick, n. 16, p. 7.
American interests, that also in a clandestine manner, the Iranians understood the interventionist nature of US imperialism in their soil and their polity. However, look at the words Gary Sick uses to characterise U.S. involvement in Iran prior to 1953: "political innocence", "essentially benevolent role", "honest broker", "benign objectives" and "enlightened self-interest". What is completely missing is an explanation for how this essentially Good Samaritan changed overnight into an intriguing, cynical, manipulative, self-serving power. It is this kind of a narrative strategy, where the actual self-interests are camouflaged by orientalist epithets like enlightenment and benevolence, that one finds in various writings of subject experts and participant observers.

In the post-War world order, the United States assigned, as Noam Chomsky puts it, "a service function" to the third world countries: "to provide resources, cheap labor, markets, and opportunities for investment and for the export of pollution". Quoting US official records, he notes:

The primary threat to U.S. interests has therefore always been "radical and nationalistic

"regimes" that are responsive to popular pressures for "immediate improvement in the low living standards of the masses" and for diversification of the economies, tendencies that conflict with the need to protect sources of raw materials and to encourage "a political and economic climate conducive to private investment" and to the repatriation of "a reasonable return" on foreign investment.43

If the threat from the third world was basically from nationalistic or radical regimes which were responding to the need of their population, the Musaddiq regime fit well into that category.

See two responses from The New York Times on the ouster of Musaddiq government and the reinstatement of the Shah:

(1) While he [the Shah] has been a weak monarch on the whole, he was always true to the parliamentary institutions of his country; he was a moderating influence in the wild fanaticism exhibited by the nationalists under Mossadegh, and he was socially progressive. The

43. Ibid.
Shah was almost alone in dividing up his vast estates and fostering agrarian reform. 44

(2) Underdeveloped countries with rich resources now have an object lesson in the heavy cost that must be paid by one of their number which goes berserk with fanatical nationalism. 45

These comments hailed the Shah for his role as a protector of parliamentary institutions, as a moderating influence, as a progressive ruler and as a reformer; while Musaddiq was discredited for his fanatical nationalistic orientations. This upside down perception is complimented by a clear warning to those third world countries which want to control their rich resources--a warning that in such an event they have to pay a heavy price as did Musaddiq in Iran. Such comments speak volumes about the dearly held power-fed orientalist visions and the imperialist arrogance of an important and influential section in the United States. Iran had been subjected to a great deal of imperialist machination and orientalist worldviews in a more intense manner after 1953 when the monarchist-imperialist coalition was fully established in the country.

44. The New York Times, 21 August 1953; see also Rubin, n. 3, p. 87.

There was an all-pervasive American influence on Iran. The Iranian government received considerable financial assistance from the US. "Americans advised Iranians on everything from rural development to central planning, from trade union organization to the organization of intelligence services".\textsuperscript{46} Iran developed a "dependence relationship"\textsuperscript{47} with the United States. This dependence implied a narrowing of the regime's policy options to a pro-Western, mainly pro-American, stance in both its domestic and foreign policy behaviour. The regime committed itself to a formal alliance with the West, and tied not only Iran's foreign policy but also the country's socio-economic development to the interests of the capitalist world.\textsuperscript{48}


\textsuperscript{47} Amin Saikal uses this term to denote "the pattern and substance of the Shah's early political, economic and military reliance on the United States, and his consequent alliance with the capitalist world against the background of strong feelings of domestic and regional security"; n. 1, pp. 5-6.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., p. 46. For a detailed analysis of Iran's economic, military and political linkage with the United States during 1953-63, see pp. 46-70.
The United States, on its part, was pursuing different plans for containment of communism. It wanted Iranian participation in such plans. President Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles were toying with the idea of a "Northern Tier Alliance" to check the perceived Soviet expansionism. It resulted in Iran, Pakistan, Iraq, Turkey and Britain signing the "Baghdad Pact" in 1955; which subsequently led to the formation of CENTO. Thus, Iran was fully incorporated into the mechanisms of American cold war confrontation with the Soviet Union.

Thus, the United States perceived Iran as a client state in the context of its global strategy of preventing Soviet influence. In general, the United States viewed all nationalist movements and regimes in the third world through the prism of this global confrontation. According to Charles Kupchan, American involvement in the third world was governed by a security policy, which "tends to misunderstand indigenous political change and often mistakes nationalism and neutralism of Soviet ideology and influence". Such a policy created a situation in which "America frequently finds itself fighting against the inevitable forces of political change that have accompanied decolonization and modernization in the Third
He observes that "the problem is deeply rooted in cognitive biases" and bureaucratic distortions of decision-making and calls for "recasting the conceptual framework and changing the mind-set in which decision makers operate". His conclusions regarding American security policy in West Asia are:

The United States has tended to react inappropriately to regional political change and has adopted security policies that exaggerate the Soviet threat and that are insensitive to the realities of local politics. U.S. initiatives have exacerbated intrastate conflicts in the Middle East, fueled anti-American currents, and ensured that regional disputes have taken on an East-West component. At least to some extent, the American search for the Soviet threat in the


50. Ibid., pp. 587, 610.
Middle East has become a self-fulfilling prophecy.51

While disagreeing with his prescriptive bias, one can agree to a great extent with his conclusions regarding cognitive and bureaucratic components of American preoccupation with the global containment policy in determining regional and country-wise security policies. Iran, in the post-War years, achieved its client status within such a milieu. Since US policy towards Iran operated within such a framework, the cognitive world of American perceptions was unable to incorporate components from a one to one interaction. The dependent status of Iran added up to the problem. Therefore, the orientalist imagery had a determining role in moulding American perceptions on Iran while its imperalist interests determined American policy. In such an order of perception, as Nikki Keddie remarks, "common sense and attempts at understanding are often abandoned when U.S. policy makers discuss Iran".52

51. Ibid., p. 609. Nikki Keddie also writes about "a crude anti-Sovietism that leads officials to view events in the Gulf through the prism of East-West conflict" resulting in American misperceptions towards Iran. See her article, "Iranian Imbroglios: Who's Irrational?", World Policy Journal, Vol. 5 (1987-88), p. 29. Her article is also prescriptive in character, unlike most of her other highly scholarly works.

52. Keddie, n. 51, p. 29.
The John Kennedy administration, after assuming office in January 1961, urged the Shah of Iran to undertake reform measures so as to ensure stability of this client state and thereby protect American strategic and commercial interests in Iran. President Kennedy asked the Shah to appoint Ali Amini, former Iranian ambassador to the United States and close friend of Kennedy, as his Prime Minister in order to steer domestic reforms. The Shah himself and many US officials felt that the US "forced the monarch to appoint Amini". Earlier if Prime Minister Musaddiq was ousted by an American plan, now another Prime Minister was being thrust upon, despite opposition from the Shah himself. Amini had to resign after one year in office as Prime Minister due to compulsion from the Shah. Anyhow, reform programmes were undertaken unleashing the White Revolution, as described in the previous chapter.

US Secretary of State Dean Rusk wrote in a secret memo to President Kennedy that "the U.S. is strongly identified with the [Shah's] regime and the reform programme". He warned that "the Shah's greatest liability may well be his vulnerability to charges of both

53. Stempel, n. 1, p. 66.
reactionary and radical opposition that he is a foreign puppet". Rusk sketched the American strategy regarding reforms in Iran:

Encouraging the Shah in his "White Revolution" on a course fast enough to maintain lower class support for regime but slow enough to avoid social and/or economic collapse - i.e., revolution; maintaining the armed forces’ morale and loyalty to the regime; improving the counter-insurgency capacity of the military and of rural and urban police forces; discouraging governmental impulses towards unduly harsh and repressive measures against non-communist opposition elements; and encouraging the detaching of moderate conservative and liberal opposition elements, and the enlistment of their loyalties and energies in the Shah’s programme of social reform and emancipation.

Immediately after the launching of the White Revolution, Iran witnessed an opposition movement in 1963 inspired and


55. Quoted in Ibid.
led by the Shi‘i ulama, particularly Khomeini. There were riots and state violence, which ultimately resulted in the crushing of the movement and the arrest and deportation of Khomeini. "In many respects", observes Gary Sick, "the 1963 incident was a rehearsal for the revolutionary uprising a decade and a half later".56 What followed was an era of political suppression and militarisation together with economic reforms.

By mid-1960s and early 1970s, the Shah, through his reforms and repressive policies, was able to come out of a stage of complete dependence on the United States. He was able "to become more of a partner, even if a junior one, in the relationship"57 with the US. He could assume the role of a policeman in protecting American interests in the Gulf region, while preferring some independence especially in deciding arms purchases and oil policies. In foreign policy, the Shah maintained, what Sepehr Zabih called, "de facto non-alignment within a pro-Western alliance"58 and he nurtured an ambition for making Iran a big power of the region. The attempt by the Shah to assert a degree of independence did create some tension in

56. Sick, n. 16, p. 10. For details on the 1963 episode, see Heikal, n. 8, pp. 85-91.

57. Bakhash, n. 46, p. 17.

US-Iranian relations, but both Iran and the United States were agreeing on fundamental issues of mutual interest. It is in such a context that Secretary of State Henry Kissinger stressed the mutuality of interests at the end of US-Iran Joint Commission meeting in Tehran:

I wanted our Iranian friends to understand that, not out of sentimentality, though we are always happy here, but out of a calculation of our own national and global interests--just as Iranian policy is based on its calculation of its national interests--there has developed a parallelism of views on many key problems that has made our co-operation a matter that is in the profound national interest of both countries. 59

Notwithstanding the problems of imperial affinity for using the "national interest" card, here is a rare occasion where there is no allusion to great civilisational aims, values and so on, but only a statement of bare facts determining the US-Iranian relations. Still, the fact of the matter remains: whose national interest--peoples' or rulers'?

Mainstream American political, economic and socio-
logical studies on third world societies from the 1950s
have been based on, or influenced by, the modernisation
theory. The modernisation theory set forth a model of
linear historical transformation from underdevelopment to
development through a process of diffusion. Western
industrial capitalist economic model, its technological
capabilities, its political system and its values of
entrepreneurship and so on have to be diffused to
so-called underdeveloped societies through aid, technology
transfer, emulation of 'democratic values' etc. in order
that development is achieved in the latter. Classes,
class antagonisms, specific historical realities of third
world societies, capitalism as a system of expropriation,
the dynamics of the process of underdevelopment through
colonialism and neo-colonialism etc., do not become major
issues of interest and study in the modernisation
tradition.

Joanna de Groot remarks that the innumerable books
produced in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s on
"political modernisation" and "economic development" put
into operation, "a variety of 'scientific' concepts and
pyrotechnics to 'understand' the 'progress' or lack of it
in Middle Eastern, African or Latin American societies. In fact such methods avoided or concealed the realities of class conflict within these societies and capitalist dominance over them".60

The modernisation paradigm functioned as an apology for imperialism and its varied forms of penetration into the third world. Precisely for this reason, it suited well with the post-War American official thinking. "Almost without exception, the Third World seemed to American policy-makers to be 'underdeveloped' in the grip of unnecessarily archaic and static 'traditional' modes of life, dangerously prone to communist subversion and internal stagnation"; notes Edward Said.61 James Peck opines that "modernization theory was the ideological answer to a world of increasing revolutionary upheaval and continued reaction among traditional political elites".62


62. Quoted in Said, n. 24, p. 27.
When the Iranian revolution unfolded in the late 1970s, many experts from the academic and diplomatic circles described it as a reaction to a hasty modernisation of Iranian society by the Shah. Nikki Keddie observes that "Iran is a very dramatic example of some of the shortcomings of modernization theory; for each step forward there is also a step backward, and almost any program of economic, social, and cultural modernization has a negative side." It seems useful to quote Keddie further:

The words "modern", "modernization" and "traditional" are in fast open to serious objections, especially if one considers the ideological way in which they have been used . . . . The notion disseminated in the Western press that in 1978-79 Iranians were revolting against modernization and for a return to the distant past is particularly unenlightening. Modernization, if it means anything, encompasses the adoption of modern technology and science, often with the assumption that Western political systems and ideas will accompany them. There are however, many different ways of adopting, adapting, or being influenced by, modern technology and science, and to think that Mohammad Reza Shah's program is explained by calling it "rapid modernization",
which then evoked a "traditionalist" response is highly simplistic. In fact, both "modernization" and "tradition" are constantly in flux, and ... it was the type of "modernization" launched by the ex-Shah, which favored the elite and new bourgeoisie and disfavored others, that contributed to his downfall.⁶³

The tendency to describe the Iranian revolution as a process of a pre-modern religious ideology being triumphant over modern, Western ways of thought and praxis, is just an attempt at reducing the event's significance to a struggle between a set of neat opposites--Islam and modernism. As one author points out, there exists "a remarkable affinity between the traditional approach to modernization, which perceived tradition as an undifferentiated entity having an almost total structuring effect upon society, and Orientalism, which pictured 'Muslim people as acting always as Muslims and nothing else'.⁶⁴ An important point to be underscored is that the revolutionary movement in Iran precisely is a


modern political movement operating well within the rules of contemporary political praxis, unlike the modernisation and orientalist assessment.

Edward Said notes that "the United States today is heavily invested in the Middle East, more heavily than anywhere else on earth", and the policy-makers dealing with this investment take advise from "Middle East experts", who are "imbued with Orientalism almost to a person". According to Said,

Most of this investment, appropriately enough, is built on foundations of sand, since the experts instruct policy on the basis of such marketable abstractions as political elites, modernization, and stability, most of which are the old Orientalist stereotypes dressed up in policy jargon, and most of which have been completely inadequate to describe . . . . what has been taking place in West Asia.  

In the field of political science, there has been a proliferation of studies on political elites along with those on political development, in the citadels of the discipline in the United States. The so-called Middle East studies with its policy-oriented, utilitarian and managerial ethos, has obviously been devoting a lot of

attention on the study of political elites in different countries, especially in Iran, where the United States has had a special interest. It is interesting to note that there exists a great deal of agreement in methodology and perception between such 'scholarly' works and secret studies prepared by, or for, the US policy-makers. One such secret study on political elites in Iran, available with the documents captured from the American embassy in Tehran during the "hostage crisis" in November 1979, is scrutinised below in a brief manner.

This study on elites and politics in Iran, prepared by Earnest Oney, in February 1976, for the Directorate of Intelligence of the Central Intelligence Agency, tries "to portray and to analyze the people who run Iran, dominate its politics, control its businesses, sets its cultural and moral standards and even try to change its ways".

66. See studies like, Marvin Zonis, The Political Elite of Iran (Princeton, 1971); Leonard Binder, Iran: Political Development in a Changing Society (Berkeley, 1962) and James A. Bill, The Politics of Iran: Groups, Classes and Modernization (Columbus, 1972). For a critical assessment of such works, see Schaar, n. 27 and de Groot, n. 60.

Oney is writing about the Iranian elite. One who is not aware of the American political science tradition would find it difficult to grasp at least the last two adjectives Oney uses to describe the elites. He says that it is the elite who sets cultural and moral standards for the whole Iranian society and that it is the elite who attempts to effect fundamental changes in the country. Problems start from the very definition itself. There are two different scales to denote an elite in the Western world and in Iran. Ted Gurr’s definition of an elite is applied in Oney’s study:

Individuals with the acquired or inherited personal characteristics that are culturally prescribed requisites for high value positions, whether or not they have actually attained those positions. In Western societies these characteristics usually include high degrees of intelligence, technical training, managerial ability, ambition and skill in interpersonal dealings. 68

See how value loaded is the very concept of an elite, so much so that Edward Said’s view of the concept of political elite as a "marketable abstraction" seems to be

68. Ibid., p. 17.
perfectly in order. Oney says: "In Iran the requisites have traditionally been family connections, influence in a patron-client relationship, education and wealth". One finds here two essentialist worlds with their own features to even describe the elite--the West and Iran. The orientalist notion is evident while comparing the qualities of the elites belonging to these two worlds. Oney observes that among the Iranian elites (more accurately, elites with "Iranian features"), there are "some pressures in the direction of the Western model". With this modernisation paradigm, the picture is complete.

Oney's CIA study asserts: "Iran is best understood by understanding the role and functioning of its traditional elites rather than by examining the formal bureaucratic structures which prevail".69 This simply means that Iran was until now understood by examining the bureaucratic system and that this has to give way to an understanding of the traditional elites. After all, what kind of an understanding of the Iranian nation and its peoples is produced either way?

Oney's research report discusses in a detailed manner, the structure of traditional Iranian society, the monarch, the royal family, the bureaucratic set-up, the

69. Ibid.
cabinet, the majlis and the religious community. There are biographical accounts, tables on the Iranian social structure etc., references and appendices. There is no point in going into such details of Oney’s study. It is sufficient to note two more points. On Musaddiq, Oney writes:

Mossadeq combined a unique inability to get things done with a tenacious resolve to reduce the Shah to the status of a figurehead. His supporters contributed mightily to both. A heterogeneous collection of parties, cliques and individuals called the National Front, they were united by only two things, a hatred for the British and an intense dislike of the Pahlavis . . . . This disunity was ultimately a key factor in Mossadeq’s downfall. 70

There is no mention about the nationalistic urge of the people and no word about CIA’s own determining role in overthrowing Musaddiq.

According to Oney, the Shah stood at the top of (pre-revolutionary) Iran’s elite structure. The Shah was the supreme leader by virtue of his position as a monarch and of his personal power. In Oney’s view, "Iran, without a

70. Ibid., p. 25.
monarch to rule and protect the nation against outside enemies, would be, for most of its people, a contradiction in terms".\textsuperscript{71} One wonders whether he is writing about modern Iran. Within three years of such a confident assertion, the monarchy fell due to "most of the Iranian peoples'" opposition to the Shah's rule. Their revolution was also "to protect the nation against outside enemies",\textsuperscript{72} which, according to them, could be achieved only by ousting the monarch.

The Americans undertook such studies in order to understand Iran better for cultivating their interests. The kind of understanding provided by such studies could well be imagined. Such studies have been analysed in order to underline the deployment by American policy thinkers of conceptual paradigms and theories in the orientalist tradition and to point out its consequences.

\textbf{American Perceptions on the Developments Leading to the Iranian Revolution}

After putting into effect the White Revolution and after unleashing a ruthless campaign for suppressing oppositional activities, the Shah's regime painted a picture of stability. In a document prepared in 1969 by the American embassy in Tehran addressed to the Department

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{71} Ibid., p. 9.
\item \textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
of State, it is observed: "The Shah, by successfully identifying himself with modernization through a progressive reform program, coupled with the effective use of police power, has over the years succeeded in destroying all organized internal political opposition to his rule". This "stability" of the Iranian monarchy, prompted the Shah to strive for relative independence on matters regarding arms purchase and oil policy creating constant uneasiness in American circles, and at the same time, the US was able to pursue its interests with the Shah without major problems.

Notwithstanding the irritants regarding the Shah's attempts at purchasing arms from the Soviet Union, Iran remained the largest single purchaser of US military equipment. Government-to-government military sales to Iran were valued at $3.91 billion in 1974. The US government recognised arms sales as "an important


75. "United States Military Sales to Iran", A Staff Report to the Subcommittee on Foreign Assistance of the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, July 1976; reproduced in Yonah Alexander and Allan Nanes, eds., The United States and Iran: A Documentary History (Frederick, Maryland, 1980), p. 406.
component of U.S.-Iranian foreign relations. The Senate Subcommittee Report of 1976 on arms sales to Iran maintained that "Iran’s military programs are having a profound effect upon the socio-economic development of the country". The Report meant a positive impact on Iranian economy. But, the Iranian people viewed the increased militarisation of the country as a threat to their interests. There again lies the incongruity of American perception and Iranian reality. The above Report further notes the current situation and projects the future scenario:

Barring dramatic change in Iran’s leadership, the future course of the U.S.-Iranian military relationship is already being determined by the level of U.S. activity in the country. Iran has invested so heavily in American weapons and technology that through the early 1980’s it will have to rely upon American maintenance and logistics support to the extent that most Iranian decisions regarding a major and sustained use of military power must inevitably take into account attitudes of the United States.

76. Ibid., p. 407. See also Rubin, n. 3, pp. 158-89.
77. Ibid., p. 411.
78. Ibid., p. 415.
It is precisely this determining character of US policy on Iran, along with the Shah's use of his military might against his own people, that, to a great extent, created peoples' resentment against both the US and the Shah.

American security assistance objectives in Iran, in the context of the Nixon doctrine, were:

(1) Assist Iran in developing armed forces capable of defending Iran against all but a major external attack by the Soviet Union;
(2) Encourage Iran to play a leading role in providing for the security of the Persian Gulf;
(3) Maintain internal security;
(4) Insure continued availability of essential rights, authorizations and privileges [for the United States].

These security assistance objectives were redefined in 1976 in order to incorporate further US interests, keeping in view of future needs. The redefined objectives include:

(1) Help Iran maintain an adequate and responsive mobilization base;

(2) Encourage active participation [of Iran] in pro-Western collective security arrangements;

(3) Assist in obtaining necessary rights, authorizations, and facility arrangements for US and allies and deny them to [those] opposing US interests;

(4) Help Iran establish and maintain combat and logistic support forces capable of meeting anticipated defense tasks;

(5) Encourage closer regional cooperation and resist communist influence;

(6) Enhance US access to major sources of petroleum. 80

When President Nixon visited Iran in May 1972, the United States expressed its willingness to sell F-14 and F-15 aircrafts to Iran and offered to provide laser-guided bombs and uniformed military technicians to Iran.81. Thus, by mid-1970s, the US armed Iran with very sophisticated weapons and military technology.

American objectives in Iran in the 1970s were formulated in a secret Inspection Report of the


81. The White House Memorandum for Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense entitled "Follow-up on the President's Talk with the Shah of Iran", 25 July 1972, Asnaad, Vol. 8, pp. 42-44.
Department of State prepared in 1974. It listed the objectives as follows:

Contribute to and strengthen Iran’s ability and willingness to play a responsible stabilizing role in international affairs, particularly in the Persian Gulf.

Ensure close and cooperative bilateral relations with continuing friendly access to decision makers who can affect US interests.

Retain unimpeded access to the Turkish-Iranian air corridor and to Iranian ports.

Ensure maintenance and unimpeded use of our special military and intelligence facilities on Iranian territory.

Ensure access to the Iranian market for US goods and services and maintenance of a hospitable climate for US private investments.

Ensure reliable access to Iranian oil and minerals at tolerable prices for ourselves and other OECD members.

Encourage Iran to recycle its expanded oil revenues in such a way as to minimize the disrupting effect of higher oil prices on the balance of payments of consumer countries including the US.
Contribute to long-run domestic political stability in Iran and to the growth of a favorable attitude toward the US among the Iranian people. 82

It is important to note the extent of interests the United States wanted to pursue in Iran and in the region through Iran. The Inspection Report finds that "US-Iranian relations are excellent, and we enjoy a preeminent position in Iran". 83 This was in spite of irritants like the issue of differing perceptions on oil prices and supply. The following observation in the Report is noteworthy:

US interests in Iran have expanded and prospered in recent years in part because of the Shah's perception of the usefulness of the United States to his country. In the event of the Shah's death or removal, a successor regime may not necessarily see things in the same way.

Moreover, the closeness of US-Iranian relations


83. Ibid., p. 85.
could become an exploitable issue for radical, anti-regime elements. The US has, therefore, a fundamental interest in long-run political stability in Iran under governments reasonably friendly to the United States and not likely to act against us. For the same reasons the US also has an interest in the cultivation and perpetuation of a friendly attitude toward the US among the Iranian people. 84

This realistic assessment of the requirements of protecting US interests in Iran, could not be translated into practice basically because, "there were visible differences between Iranian feelings about their monarch and the official U.S. conception". 85 The Iranian people, for obvious reasons, were apprehensive of, and most often opposed to, the pursuance of American interests in their country; such feelings being surfaced in a big way during the opposition movement in the late 1970s.

Despite a few attempts by the Shah in showing independent policy postures, "Iran in the 1970s became more dependent on the United States, and thus more open to American political, economic, and social influence than

84. Ibid., pp. 83-84.

85. Stempel, n. 1, p. 78.
ever before, though the nature of dependence was different from that in the past". US economic interests, on the eve of the Iranian revolution, were "both significant and conspicuous".

By 1978 US investment approached $700 million, and 50,000 American expatriates were resident in the country. US military sales to Iran peaked in 1977 reaching nearly $6 billion, and US oil companies owned 40 per cent of the foreign consortium that controlled the purchase of Iranian oil. A bilateral agreement signed in 1976 projected that nonoil and nonmilitary trade between Iran and the United States would reach $15 billion by 1981.

It was estimated that during the twenty years ending in mid-1978, the United States sold arms worth $18 billion to Shah’s Iran. Further, "the income from his arms purchases and the U.S. technology Iran buys means that the

86. Saikal, n. 1, p. 207.


United States gets back almost $2 for every $1 it spends on Iranian oil. 89

The Iranian people were more or less aware of the extent of US involvement in, and exploitation of, Iran. Moreover, by 1977, the economic and social situation deteriorated.

The country was beset by numerous problems, including spiraling inflation, increasing corruption at all levels— involving some members of the royal family and top government officials—and mounting social and economic inequalities that were widening the gap not only between country and city people, but also between the privileged and wealthy minority and the unprivileged poor majority. 90

It was this conjecture of increasing US involvement and exploitation, deteriorating socio-economic situation and the surfacing of new levels of class antagonisms (explained in the previous chapter) that provided the context for the Iranian revolution.

The situation was ripe for a revolution. The dormant political wrath of the people towards a regime characterised by oppression, denial of democracy, unwillingness to address to the socio-economic maladies suffered by the people and their rising needs, corruption at all levels, torture and high-handedness of the security and police force, and staunch imperialist alliance, could find a vent when the Shah adopted a policy of liberalisation starting from mid-1976. Many authors point out that the Shah adopted the liberalisation measure in the political scene under pressure from the Jimmy Carter administration which assumed office in January 1977. In effect, the Shah "had preempted Carter... by announcing several political and judicial reforms that somewhat increased political freedom in Iran". According to an American embassy document, "The Shah's basic commitment to liberalisation made its appearance in mid-1976".

91. See, for example, Saikal, n.1, p.191; Mohsen M. Milani, The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic (Boulder, 1988), pp.179-80 and Mohammed Amjad, Iran: From Royal Dictatorship to Theocracy (Westport, Connecticut, 1989), pp.115-116


Shah intended to pursue liberalisation "as a safety valve to overcome the crisis of the state". 94

American embassy officials in Iran found that liberalisation and uncertainty were the key-notes of Iran's domestic political situation during 1977-78. In their assessment, Iran was "in a turbulent transition both economically and socially", and this situation was "producing a new political dynamic" in the country. On the one hand, there was affluence due to the quadrupling of petroleum prices during 1973-74. On the other hand, this affluence produced ills like double-digit inflation, large scale migration from rural to urban areas, dependency on foreign labour, breaking up of Islamic family and traditional cultural patterns, etc., and, "in general, raised popular expectations of economic and social improvement to levels which the leadership is unable to fulfill". 95

According to American embassy assessment,

Faced with this tumultous situation, the Shah has come to realize that its complexities are greater than he can continue to manage and direct exclusively. He feels a genuine need, therefore,

94. Amjad, n.92, p.115.
to decentralize some of his current authoritarian controls and devolve responsibility upon subordinates.\textsuperscript{96} American officials shared the Shah's thoughts on the reforms. The Shah later wrote: "I myself wanted a true democracy which would, above all, take care of the country's interests .... I did not want a caricature of a democracy such as has been seen elsewhere and which the multi-party system discredited".\textsuperscript{97} In reality, the political system in Iran was infested by suppression of dissent voices, mass arrest and torture of opposition activists and an over-all surveillance on the population in a militaristic manner. In such a milieu, the Shah wanted a top-down one-party regime to function under the label of true democracy.

The political liberalisation plan was launched with the Shah's directives to the Rastakhiz (Resurgence) Party to have consultation with party-members and the people on important issues. The Rastakhiz party was created in 1975 with a view "to function as the ideological apparatus of the state and to organize the whole nation under the Shah's banner".\textsuperscript{98} The Shah's view of democracy was

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., p.115.


\textsuperscript{98} Amjad, n.91, p.114.
centered around this one-party system. As part of the reform measures, under pressure from human rights activists and organisations and the Carter administration, the Shah introduced "some changes in the legal procedures affecting political detainees or prisoners so as to give them greater access to civilian attorneys" and to "reduce or abolish abuses such as torture".99 A bill to effect these changes was passed in November 1977. The Shah allowed some freedom of expression as part of his political liberalisation.

US Perceptions on the Iranian Revolution I

The atmosphere of limited political freedom, present in the context described earlier, proved conducive for the surfacing of oppositional political activity. Thus, by late 1977, anti-monarchist, anti-imperialist demonstrations and revolutionary activities by the student community, began to grow and spill over the university campuses. As Fred Halliday points out,

At the beginning of 1978, the active opposition to the Shah seemed to be confined to the urban middle class and to the students, yet by mid

99. Airgram from Sullivan, n.93, p.117.
January these forces had been joined by the religious officials, the mullahs. They in turn mobilized the mass of urban-poor in a series of street demonstrations from February onwards.¹⁰⁰

He analyses the underlying impulse for such a revolutionary upsurge:

The causes of this very deep-rooted and rapidly expanding popular movement are, essentially, three: first, a political revolt against... monarchical dictatorship; secondly, a social revolt against the increasing inequities and material problems associated with the pattern of capitalist development in Iran; and thirdly, a nationalist and Islamic revolt against the imposition of Western advisers and culture upon Iran, coupled with Iran's subservience to Washington in regional affairs.¹⁰¹

The United States was implicated in the developments in Iran in such a way that this foreign power was ever-present in both official and oppositional discourses either as a source of salvage or as a satanic force. As


¹⁰¹. Ibid.
already noted, the Americans had a big stake in Iran. They were fully involved in the crisis that was unfolding. "Virtually, all the soul-searching about US policy in Iran was about what 'we' should do, and who the US Embassy should work with—not about the more basic question of whether the United States should play a role at all", observes Halliday.¹⁰² Such a normal "detachment" expected of a foreign power in the context of domestic political developments in a sovereign country, could not be seen in the case of Iranian developments, precisely due to the history of decades of imperialist entanglement with the monarchical system. The policy discourses which emanated from the American circles, therefore, could not exhibit any "objectivity", rather, they showed a tendency towards operating within a self-serving "regime of truth". One may find it difficult to delineate a single all-encompassing American discourse narrating the happenings in Iran. Instead, one finds an array of discourses—some complementary, others contending—being circulated from the American establishment. Greater the intensity of the revolution, greater was the propensity for multiple policy discourses.

As one commentator puts it, the "search for consistency in American foreign policy is elusive, and, in

¹⁰². Ibid., p.110
the end, probably pointless. One should not underestimate the broad consistency concerning American imperialist interests at the level of policy. It is at the level of policy discourses that one finds abundant inconsistencies. The gap between policy and perception, noted earlier in this chapter, explains this dichotomy. At the realm of perception, within the broad "regime" of orientalism, one is able to decipher contending discourses claiming legitimacy. Concerning American policy, Williams and Croft remark that

United States policy towards the Middle East often seems to suffer from a lack of consistency and coherence. Yet this is not the result of ineptness or incompetence. Nor does it involve a failure to formulate clear and precise objectives. Although they are worsened by the nature of the American political system, the problems are inherent in the multiplicity of American objectives and roles in the Middle East. 104

As against this notion of inherent inconsistency, one can hold a view of a dynamic inconsistency within the


logic of imperialism. According to Halliday, "there are significant divisions within the overall policy of US imperialism towards Iran". In other words,

It is... a simplification to talk about 'US policy in Iran' as if this represented a single approach. There is of course an overall coherence in US policy towards Iran, but the variety within it needs to be kept in mind in order to explain some of the conflicts and shifts that are observable.¹⁰⁵

As the oppositional movement in Iran accelerated, the schism in American circles started widening and multiplying. President Carter, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and others in Washington and Ambassador William Sullivan, Political Officer John Stempel and others in Tehran led the polyphonic orchestra of US policy towards Iran, which very often generated discordant notes and voices.

President Carter's policy towards Iran was guided by his overall policy concerns of nuclear non-proliferation, improved human rights and limiting of conventional arms. To his chagrin, Carter found that on all these counts, he

was put in a dilemma by the Shah's regime in Iran. The Shah's quest for acquiring nuclear capability in tune with his ambition to become the great power of the Gulf; the dismal human rights record of his regime, especially the notorious ways of surveillance, arrest and torture of oppositional activists by the SAVAK; and the Shah's unquenchable appetite for more and more armament—all put each one of the Carter guidelines in a fix. American interests in Iran got predominance over its principles; thereby its entanglement with the Shah continued in spite of the dilemmas created by such a relationship. As John Stempel points out, "By midsummer 1977 it was clear to most Iranians, but not to Washington (suffering more than usual from fragmentation of policy coordination), that the US had become chained to the Shah in negative ways."¹⁰⁶

Once protest demonstrations started growing in number and size, the Shah used his police and paramilitary to suppress such political activities. An American embassy document acknowledged the fact that the police was "assisted on one or two occasions by disciplined groups of so-called 'workers' in civilian clothes who obviously acted as extra-legal arms to the government".¹⁰⁷ The forceful intervention of paramilitary forces and SAVAK in

¹⁰⁶. Stempel, n.1, p.80.
¹⁰⁷. Airgram from Ambassador Sullivan, n.93, p.118.
people's political activities and the suppression of their
demonstrations and freedom of expression, proved that the
Shah's tall claims of "true democracy", etc. under the
liberalisation policy, were just a facade. Such continued
high-handedness of the security apparatus also showed the
hollowness of US assertions on human rights. At the same
time, it is true that once the opposition rage against the
Shah's regime and the United States was let loose, taking
advantage of certain measures of liberalisation, it
started engulfing the population at large, resulting in a
situation where the very logic of liberalisation was
thwarted.

American embassy's assessment of the political
situation in Iran during late 1977 and early 1978 contains
the following points:

There is little reason for us to doubt the Shah's
commitment to liberalization.... It is obvious, however, that he is having trouble keeping
Pandora's box only partly open.... It is extremely doubtful that the Shah wishes or would
ever accept any serious diminution of his policy-making power. It is equally obvious that he will
not permit events to escalate to the point where national security, as he sees it, would be
threatened. Yet events have escalated, partly because moderation seems foreign to the Persian
soul, partly through his own doing or through the mistakes and vacillation of his assistants (SAVAK, police, administrators, Party officials). He has therefore improvised a patchwork of ad hoc measures which have not always been well contracted and are unlikely to remain for long. 108

It is interesting to note two aspects of this American assessment. First, there is an absence of any mention about the contributory role of the United States on the events in Iran. Second, there is the assertion that events escalate due to, among other things, an essentialist feature of the Persian soul: the lack of moderation. Such baseless essentialisms are common to the orientalist vision. One finds that US policy discourses of this sort function within the broad framework of such a vision.

Apart from the points noted above, one observes two general features of American policy discourses on the unfolding revolution in Iran: one, the absence of any acknowledgement of the Iranian peoples' own contribution to their movement and the authenticity of their revolution; two, the absence of a political economy analysis on the revolution. Such lacunae evolve out of an

108. Ibid., p.121.
orientalist and managerial tradition of knowledge and analysis, that continued to reign the mainstream of academic and diplomatic establishment in the United States.

The revolutionary movement in Iran gained momentum with the Qom incident of 8 January 1978. On the previous day, the Iranian newspaper Ettela’it published an article intended to damage the reputation of Khomeini. The tone of the article was outrageous and offensive. It was written by the Shah’s Information Minister, Daryush Homayun. Later, it was clear that the Shah himself wanted such an article attacking Khomeini to be published in the newspaper at that juncture. This court-sponsored incident provoked the religious leaders and believers. On January 8, the clergy and students of religion undertook protest demonstrations on a massive scale in the holy city of Qom. The Shah’s police fired at the demonstrators and many people were killed.109 The Qom incident had a domino effect on the movement, so much so that, demonstrations by opposition forces spread to various other cities like Abadan, Mashad, Tabriz, Isfahan and Tehran, especially after six days of mourning for the martyrs of the Qom incident. Thus, by mid-January, clergy-led demonstrations

became a nation-wide phenomenon. People from various walks of Iranian life joined the movement. The whole of 1978 witnessed oppositional political movement and clashes between the demonstrators and the Shah's troops.

The unprecedented nature of religious upsurge and the display of abundant religious symbolism and rituals in the revolutionary political praxis necessitated an understanding of the political role of religion in Iran. It was with the developments starting from the Qom incident that the Americans felt the need for understanding Islam, especially Shi'ism practiced by the Iranians.

US Perceptions on the Iranian Revolution II: The Role of Islam

In a telegram addressed to the Secretary of State, in the context of the unfolding of the chain of events following the Qom incident, Ambassador Sullivan reported that "in the coming months Embassy will be attempting to work at inherently difficult task of learning more about religious elements of opposition movement[sic.]." The task of understanding Islam was "inherently" difficult for

the United States for a variety of factors, at the centre of which lies the orientalist tradition of perceiving Islam.

A US document, prepared a few months after the Iranian revolution, admitted that "The US State Department has never understood Iran, culturally, religiously, or economically." This has been especially true of US understanding of the role of religion in the socio-political life of the Iranians and this applied not only to the State Department, but to the whole gamut of US establishment as well. This failure to understand Islam has been stressed not only in official communications, but also in the writings of influential US policy-makers after the advent of the Iranian revolution.

Ambassador William Sullivan later wrote in his book on his mission to Iran that the American "embassy and Islam had remained aloof from each other". Sullivan confesses that he could not make much headway in tackling the "inherently difficult task" of knowing about Islam in Iran, which he promised to report to his counterparts in Washington, while in office. He says that neither he nor the embassy "was ever able to make much progress in

comprehending the mind set of the Shia hierarchy or in obtaining sympathetic consideration from them for the United States".113

John Stempel, who was Political Officer in the American embassy in Tehran during the Iranian revolution, later wrote in his book on the revolution, that "Until March 1978 there were no direct encounters between embassy officials and religious leaders".114 According to him, this was due to the fact that "both religious and secular radicals were extremely reluctant to have even a minimal connection with any western mission, especially the U.S. embassy."115

Sullivan also notes this point and its reason: "My efforts to penetrate further into the mysteries of Shi'ism were constantly frustrated. It was clear that, in the minds of the Shi'i authorities, Americans not only were directly associated with the Shah's policies but were their inspiration". Therefore, Ambassador Sullivan "could not produce any useful contacts for embassy reporting". He admits that the whole diplomatic apparatus could not achieve anything substantial in this regard. "Neither our political officers nor our intelligence officers were able

113. Ibid.
114. Stempel, n.1, p.287.
115. Ibid.
to satisfy my interest in obtaining further insights into the working of the Shia mind".116

The impression of Islam and the clergy, Ambassador Sullivan got from the Shah of Iran, was a very negative one. The Shah was contemptuous of the Shia ulama and, often in private talks, he described them as "ragheads" and corrupt. He was of the opinion that the ulama "stood in the way of his country's progress".117 It is easy to decipher the similarities between the Shah's views on the clergy and the contents of the Ettela't article which his Information Minister wrote and which provoked religious rage against the Shah's own regime. Ambassador Sullivan wanted wider contacts with, and a greater understanding of, the clergy to grow in the face of the increased role of religious elements in the Iranian opposition movement. In a book on his foreign service career, Sullivan writes:

These ayatollahs, mullahs, and other members of Islam's only hierarchic ulama, had been largely discredited over the years. Many of them were personally corrupt, their lives were anything but exemplary, and their political ideas seemed


117. Ibid., pp.89-90. For the Shah's views on the clergy's role in the Iranian revolution, see Pahlavi, n.97, pp.166-68.
archaic. Moreover, the Shah had for many years successfully manipulated them one against the other through a complex system of bribes, blackmail, and intrigue. Although they clamored for the Shah’s overthrow and had organized terrorist groups that used assassination as a political technique, no observers gave them very much chance for success.118

He further states that it was the unique nature of urban proletariat that enabled the ulama to lead the revolution. It is true that the ulama could appeal to, and mobilise the urban proletariat to a great extent for the revolutionary movement.

In the eyes of Sullivan, the urban proletariat of Iran were people who had grown up in the rustic vernacular of Islam. Their daily lives were described in the versus of Koran. Even if Tehran might teem with jet-set sophisticates in tight blue jeans, the proletarian terms of reference were much closer to those known by the Prophet Mohammed, or by Ali and Hossein.119


119. Ibid., pp.266-67.
They found Ayatollah Khomeini's words "most appealing". They formed the bulk of the demonstrators against the Shah. As remarked by Sullivan, "There was nothing charismatic or attractive to the western eye in their demeanor as they marched along, shouting their slogans, clenching their fists, followed by their quiet, black-shrouded women, shuffling along in a sullen phalanx". Further, according to Sullivan, "it is very difficult for a foreigner who was present in Iran during the revolution to get caught up in its spirit".120

And finally, comes Sullivan's frank confession: "My acquaintance with those who made the revolution was less extensive than it was with those who lost it".121 Going through all the available documents and Sullivan's own writings, one wonders whether there is any fundamental difference between his lot and the Shah on the attitudes towards Islam in Iran. If at all there was a difference, it was Sullivan's own allusion to the "Western eye" in looking into the role of Shi'ism in the revolution. With all the revolutionary drama on the streets of Tehran and elsewhere, as Foucault noted, with people "demonstrating" their collective will and with all their ritualistic "act of deposing the sovereign" as in Greek tragedy, Sullivan's

120. Ibid., p.267.
121. Ibid.
"Western eye" could only capture the picture of the "sullen phalanx". For Sullivan, there was no drama at all, no revolutionary "spirit". The mingling together of monarchist and imperialist visions and their blindness to the unfolding of a movement of such a great intensity could only be explained by asking one pertinent question: how can the rulers understand a revolution?

American popular and diplomatic perceptions of Islam have many things in common. In the words of Fred Von Der Mehden, "There can be little doubt that the public's perceptions of Islam have tended to be characterized by ignorance, confusion, and misinformation". According to him,

The fundamental ignorance and, at times, antipathy of Americans regarding Islam needs to be judged in the light of our history. It can be argued that past cultural and racial biases against Third World societies in general has clouded our views of Islam as well as other "foreign" belief systems.

In his assessment, "the Islamic Revolution has been a two-edged sword in the battle to increase American


123. Ibid.
understanding of Islam". On the one hand, it increased the American awareness of Islam and, on the other, contributed to further stereotypical notions.124

It is important to note that in the contemporary era, as Edward Said points out, Islam entered the consciousness of most Americans—even of academic and general intellectuals who know a great deal about Europe and Latin America—principally if not exclusively because it has been connected to newsworthy issues like oil, Iran and Afghanistan, or terrorism.125

For the American media, Islam in itself is news. Islam came to represent all that is primitive, pre-modern, traditional, fanatic, violent and extremist in a world of modernisation and Western civilisation. For the "ragbag body of instant media expert, journalist and novelist... Islam is the media villain, a monstrosity to be reviled and beaten".126 While Edward Said stresses on similarities between the views of mainstream academic experts and the media, Akbar S. Ahmed points out the need

124. Ibid., pp.24, 29.
to separate scholarship from voices of the media, while both agree on the orientalist nature of perceptions of the media at large.  

127 There are, of course, a number of scholars who do not fall into the orientalist bandwagon and a very few number in the media. One is dealing with the generality of perceptions in this context.  

Barry Rubin states that "as usual, the American media did a good job in covering the events of the Iranian crisis".  

129 For him, the coverage of the Iranian crisis by the US media was unproblematic as did previous coverages of events of this sort. Intellectuals like Said, on the other hand, had to write a whole book (Covering Islam) about the problematic of media coverage--about what American media did usually and in the


129. Rubin, n.3., p.363; emphasis added.
particular case of the Iranian revolution. He finds that the media, in covering Islam and the revolution in Iran, were covering them up as well. Many authors showed the failures of American media. According to Dorman and Farhang, To the extent that mainstream journalism failed in Iran, it did so for ideological and ethnocentric reasons rather than because of the economics of the industry or because the press was victimized by a manipulative U.S. government, as is more commonly argued. The point is that the orientalist vision is shared by popular media and diplomatic circles. It is because of this orientalist outlook, that one finds in the analyses of Sullivan, ideas like "mysteries" of Shi'ism, the "rustic vernacular of Islam", daily lives of the urban proletariat being "described by the verses of the Koran" and so on. Such abstractions cannot explain the lives and the movement of a people. One may find it difficult to

130. See, for example, William A. Dorman and Mansour Farhang, U.S. Press and Iran: Foreign Policy and the Journalism of Deference (Berkeley, 1987) and J.V. Vilanilam, Reporting a Revolution: The Iranian Revolution and the NIICO Debate (New Delhi, 1989). Interestingly, both the works do not mention Edward Said's Covering Islam published in 1981 in the United States, where both the above works were fully or partially undertaken.

131. Dorman and Farhang, n.130, p.204.
grasp the idea that the urban proletariat of Tehran live in a world which is completely determined by religious factors alone. To understand the revolution of the Iranian people, factors considered in the preceding two chapters are very important.

A telegram from American embassy addressed to the Secretary of State says that "political violence has been tradition in Iran". It notes:

Religious opposition retains the violent element that has marked Shiite attitudes toward government since the eighth century.... Those religious elements presently dominating the Iranian scene, both organizationally and ideologically, are committed to violence and obstruction as tools for obtaining power.\textsuperscript{132}

This document, drafted at a time when the Shah declared martial law in the city of Isfahan in order to quell the oppositional activities, observes that "it is a surprisingly restrained reaction so far\textsuperscript{133} in Isfahan on the imposition of martial law. Once violence is understood as an inherent quality of Shi‘i attitude, this surprise was bound to occur. Sullivan, on his part,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{132} Telegram from American Embassy, Tehran, addressed to Secretary of State, Washington DC, entitled "Where are We Now and Where are We Going?", 17 August 1978, Asnaad, Vol.12B, pp.9, 12-13.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., p.14.
\end{flushright}
mentions that the urban proletariat felt that "there was something violently wrong with the system in which they had come to live, and they were prepared to resort to violence to make it right". He says further: "They were surely, brutal, and persistent." Another document, which is a note prepared after the revolution by Marvin Zonis of the University of Chicago, observes:

During the entire period of intense revolutionary activities, say from the first riots in Qom on January 8, 1978, to the departure of the Shah on January 16, 1979, the Iranian revolutionaries used almost no violence to accomplish their ends. The last two hundred years of Iranian history manifest a similar pattern. Organized violence, widespread manifestations of violence, are shunned.

The first document and Sullivan's observation treat violence as something either inherent or manifest in Shi'ism and its practitioners, while Zonis's note says the opposite. What is important to note here is this obsession with the idea of violence in analysing matters concerning Islam and Iran in all the three observations--a typical orientalist passion.


The assertions of Sullivan, Stempel and others, that the American embassy and other policy-making circles did not have any contact with the religious establishment in Iran and that they did not get information about the clergy, seems to be only partially true. The embassy in Tehran did have contacts with senior and moderate clerics like Ayatollah Syed Kazem Shariatmadari, probably from the 1960s itself. The American embassy documents contain a few material on the Shi‘i ulama’s role in Iranian politics in the pre-revolutionary period. A Department of State Biographical Data Form prepared on 9 September 1964, a copy of which was in the Tehran Biofiles, provides a profile of Shariatmadari. It notes the differences between Shariatmadari and Khomeini, a difference which continued even after the revolution. It says that Shariatmadari, "is not too happy about the relative prominence of Mr. Khomeini. However, because of the present [in the aftermath of the 1963 movement] political importance and following which Khomeini possesses, Shariat-Madari must demonstrate a certain minimum of support to him [sic.]." 136 Another document of 1966 talks about the rivalry among religious circles, especially that between Khomeini and Shariatmadari, in Qom, the centre of Shi‘i theology and politics. The main source of

136. Department of State, Biographic Data Form, 9 September 1964, Asnaad, vol.25, p.5.
information on Qom politics was a senior mullah, who had been providing the US embassy with such information on religious activity. These things are pointed out here to bring home the fact that, not only did the American embassy have information about religious circles, but also that, as shown below, it had been aware of the implications of their thinking and activity on the United States. According to the document cited above, pro-Khomeini elements in Qom felt that Shariatmadari was not supporting "Khomeini's candidacy for leader of the Moslem Shia sect because he himself wants the title". They also have been active in stating rumors that Shariat-Madari is supported by the U.S. and by the Shah's regime, which, they believe, is completely subservient to U.S. interests.

Another information contained in this document is that the Learned Society of Qom, formed by representatives of all major religious leaders in Qom, published and distributed in March 1966 a pamphlet entitled, "The Menace of America and Israel to Islam", which stated that "the people of Iran increasingly hate American diplomacy and that the American government through its control of the


138. Ibid.
Shah's government, is trying to crush Islam and Iran's national independence.¹³⁹

Thus, the problem with the American officials was not one of lack of information, but that of a perception which fails to place the historical role of the religious opposition in its proper significance. If on the one hand, one finds a reluctance to acknowledge and to understand the import of Khomeinian leadership, and on the other, one notices an analysis which totally writes off the clergy's political clout.

A 1972 document asserts that the "Iranian clergy no longer have major political influence--though they retain a sufficient following to apply an occasional 'brake' to government programs".¹⁴⁰ There is a categorical assertion that it is unlikely that they will ever return to a historic role such as that of 1892, when they led the attack against the Belgian Tobacco Concession, or of 1907, when they played a key role in the Constitutional Revolution, or of 1952, when they rallied behind the government in the break with the British.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹. Ibid., p.8.
¹⁴¹. Ibid., p.31.
While significant milestones of political activities of the religious elements are narrated, as noted above, the failure is to place them in proper perspective. This document again has a thoroughly misplaced judgement on Khomeini:

Ayatollah Khomeini, arrested and exiled to Iraq in 1964 as a result of his anti-government activities, aspires to lead Iranian Muslims, but his close cooperation with the Government of Iraq in anti-Shah propaganda and activity has ruled out any chance of reconciliation with the present Shah and has reduced his appeal to many Iranian Muslims who might otherwise share some of his basically liberal ideas.142

These lines are self-explanatory. If a "liberal" Khomeini's political future is written off, there existed a distant fear of conservative and nationalist ulama affecting the US image and interests.

Conservative religious leaders lay much of the blame for Iran's secularization, for its liberalization of social mores, and for its close relations with Israel, to American influence. Moreover the nationalistic clergy has traditionally opposed foreign influence in Iran.

142. Ibid., p.30.
Thus, in the unlikely event the clergy were to return to a position of significant political influence in the next few years, we could expect to come under attack.\footnote{143}{Ibid., p.32.}

Such a distant fear came true with the Iranian revolution. From the very beginning of the movement, the United States was targeted as the most important enemy along with the Shah's monarchy.

Following the Qom incident and the subsequent political turmoil, Ambassador Sullivan, in a document prepared on 3 February 1978, provided an insightful analysis of the realities and potentialities of the Islamic elements:

Our best assessment to date is that the Shi'a Islamic Movement dominated by Ayatollah Khomeini is far better organized.... The Islamic establishment is neither as weak nor as ignorant as the Shah's government and some western observers would portray it. It has a far better grip on the emotions of the people and on the money of the bazaar than any other group.... We suspect the Moslem establishment would probably not be able to avoid making some accommodations...
with westernized ideas of government held by many in the opposition movement. This would be likely to appear over a period of time rather than immediately. Meanwhile, we can expect that the role of a post-revolutionary Shi’a Islamic movement would have broad popular support. It would probably resist communism as an alien import to the best of its ability, as well as resisting many other aspects of Westernization. 144

Interestingly enough, the precedent set by such an analysis for seeing Iranian reality as it is and projecting a picture on the basis of it, even if it creates unsettling effects on the US calculations and assessment patterns, has not been followed up. Most of the succeeding analyses and reports exhibit the old pattern. Ambassador Sullivan, who prepared a report of the above kind, sent an airgram to the Department of State, in the aftermath of increased political demonstrations and government crackdown on such oppositional activities, noting that

The Embassy’s soundings among religious leaders suggest an underlying basis of loyalty to the

Monarchy and to the independence of Iran as the Shah envisions it, but increasing unhappiness at the breakdown of communications between the religious leadership and the Shah.\textsuperscript{145}

This assessment did not apply, in reality, to the mainstream religious circles, who have had sound following from the people and who did not wish to see the monarchy survive.

US Perceptions on the Iranian Revolution III

The indiscriminate use of violence by the Shah's forces on demonstrators during the major oppositional activity in May 1978, according to the above document, "is the first of a possible series of steps backing away from liberalization."\textsuperscript{146} The Shah described the situation like this: "The more I advanced along the path of liberalization, the worse the situation inside the country became. Every initiative I took was interpreted as a proof of my weakness or the weakness of my government."\textsuperscript{147}

The political situation in Iran became worse by September 1978 and the actions of the Shah's government

\textsuperscript{145} Airgram from Sullivan, n.93, p.122.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{147} Pahlavi, n.97, p.170.
showed its real weakness. The Shah declared martial law on 8 September 1978 and on that day, the army opened fire against demonstrators who assembled at the Jaleh Square in central Tehran, killing 700 to 2000 people.148 This major event accelerated the momentum of the revolutionary movement.

During late October and early November, the revolution gathered even further momentum. Oil workers started their significant strike paralysing this vital industry. Demonstrations continued. In the midst of such developments, Prime Minister Sharif-Emami resigned on 6 November 1978. In his place, a military government headed by General Ghulam Reza Azhari was appointed by the Shah. Such a step by the Shah showed his last minute attempt to salvage the monarchy by force. The State Department announced the American government's support to the military government on 6 November itself. The revolutionary movement continued unabated. Prime Minister General Azhari resigned on 31 December 1978, as he could not control the people's movement to any considerable extent. Shapour Bakhtiar, leader of the opposition National Front, accepted the Shah's offer of Prime Ministership, the offer being approved by the majlis on 3

148. See Rubin, n.3, p.214. American embassy in Tehran reported that only 122 lost their lives; see Asnaad, Vol.25, p.81.
January 1978. In a revolutionary situation that was thoroughly out of control for the Shah’s regime, the Shah himself left the country on 16 January 1979, thus ending a long history of monarchical rule in Iran.

The revolution of 1978-79 was as anti-imperialist as it was anti-monarchist. The success of the revolution was an unprecedented set back for the United States. When events described above unfolded one by one, it was not only the citadels of power of the monarch that was shaken very badly, but also the interests and influence of the superpower—the United States. The anti-imperialist thrust of the revolution was never fully digested by the US circles. A cable from the American embassy in Tehran addressed to the Secretary of State noted the resultant frustration: "the revolutionary trauma, discretly and ably abetted by hostile propaganda has effectively and substantially diminished our historic influence here for some time to come".149

US attitudes and policies during the revolution were strikingly vascillatory. "The American foreign policy establishment was badly divided over the Iranian situation, and the major actors were involved in a tangled

web of personal and policy rivalry".\textsuperscript{150} As noted earlier, people in the policy-making circles in Washington and in Tehran, spoke different, and most often, contradictory things. According to Sepehr Zabih, three factors combined to produce a debacle for the United States in Iran:

First, the incoherence and confusion of Carter Administration; secondly, a State Department seemingly hypnotized by an abstract model of human rights; thirdly, a weakened and undermined intelligence community which was incapable of predicting the crisis, or, when it began to unfold, of making a correct assessment of what it portended.\textsuperscript{151}

For Henry Kissinger,

The failure was less of intelligence agencies than that of a conceptual apparatus. The fashionable "progressive" view for decades has been that economic development would more or less automatically produce political stability.... [This] enlightened view... has turned out to be clearly wrong. It would probably have been wiser for the Shah to concentrate explicitly on a

\textsuperscript{150} Bill, n.4, p.243.

political evolution to be more commensurate with Iran's economic evolution. And perhaps we should have urged the Shah to do that, though I am not sure that we would have known what to say.... What turned the inchoate unrest into a revolution was the conjunction of modernization, lack of political imagination by the Shah, American policies, demonstrations of American weakness, and assaults on American institutions perceived by those countries as essential for their survival. And clumsy tactical handling of the situation. 152

Ambassador William Sullivan and Political Officer John Stempel in the American embassy in Tehran, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance in the Department of State, National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and his adviser Gary Sick in the National Security Council, Harold Brown of the Department of Defense, James Schlesinger of the Department of Energy, Stansfield Turner of the CIA, and above all the major actor, President Jimmy Carter, were involved in various ways in the Iranian "crisis" contributing to the American "downfall" in Iran. There were inter-

departmental and inter-personal rivalries and disagreements.\textsuperscript{153}

The result of such differing voices was a range of policies adopted by the United States during the Iranian crisis, from the policy of "inaction" to that of an attempt at a "military solution". General Robert Huyser was sent to Iran, as part of this latter strategy "of instigating a military coup, which had worked successfully in 1953".\textsuperscript{154} He didn't succeed in this final US mission to salvage the Shah.

For Ledeen and Lewis, "The failure in Iran was basically the result of the absence of clear goals" on the part of the United States.\textsuperscript{155} "The overriding requirement for American foreign policy... is national security", they


\textsuperscript{155.} Ledeen and Lewis, n.109, p.233.
observe. In order to overcome the kind of crises like the one the United States encountered in Iran, they point towards the need for sufficient military power, stable alliances and clarity and coherence in the pursuit of objectives.\textsuperscript{156} If in actual practice, the US military line failed in Iran as exemplified by the Huyser mission, here was an expert suggestion for such a line at the analytical level. This, again, points towards the problem of US perceptions.

In Said Arjomand's analysis, "an intelligence failure and disagreements among the U.S. policy makers certainly existed, but they did not matter."\textsuperscript{157} The revolutionary movement was beyond the reach and manipulative abilities of the United States and the situation was very different from that of 1953. William Sullivan, alluding to the happenings in Iran, remarks:

\begin{quote}
Aftermaths are rife with ironies. We often reap something quite different from what we have sown. Nowhere is this more true than in the practice of public policy. Large social enterprises, especially on an international scale, have a fascinating habit of turning into paths never intended nor foreseen. Geopolitical
\end{quote}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{156} Ibid., pp.242-43.
\item \textsuperscript{157} Arjomand, n.12, p.133.
\end{itemize}
undertakings, often on a tragic scale, sometimes produce rather surprising results.\footnote{158}

The problem in Iran really was the conflict between "geopolitical undertakings on an international scale" or US imperialism and Shah's oppressive monarchy on the one side, and the Iranian people on the other. The "collective will" of the people triumphed.

At the realm of perception,

The gap between the American view of the United States as a benefactor and the Iranian revolutionary view of the Great Satan is not easily bridged without a careful look at both the Iranian economy and America's role in it, and the basic structure of Iranian religious beliefs.\footnote{159}

Thus, the conflicting nature of these two views can be understood only by analysing the political economy and religious and ideological aspects of the Iranian reality. These two important ingredients of the Iranian revolution are analysed in the two previous chapters so as to get a picture of the origins and function of antagonistic

\footnote{158. William Sullivan, "Foreword" in Montgomery, n.103, p.vii.}

perceptions of the US and the revolutionaries. As pointed out earlier, it is precisely these two constituent elements of the Iranian life that one is unable to find in the analysis of the US policy-making circles and a wide spectrum of mainstream American academic and media experts.