

A Cumulative Image Problem: Human Rights and US Foreign Policy towards Iran in the Seventies

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This article focuses on the impact of human rights on American-Iranian relations in the Seventies. By devoting specific attention to the role of the Iranian Students Association in the United States, Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists in shaping up a negative image of the Shah and influencing receptive congressmen, the primary goal of this study is to assess the US State Department's dual approach to improve the Shah's image in the United States and, therefore, preserve the alliance between Washington and Tehran. On the one hand, the State Department implemented obstructionist tactics to neutralize Congress' opposition to American security assistance to Iran; on the other, it engaged in confidential exchanges with Iranian officials to dampen public and congressional criticism against the alliance. If we want to understand how, notwithstanding US public and congressional opposition, American-Iranian relations remained mostly unchanged until the 1979 Iranian revolution, the State Department tactics to improve the Shah's image in the United States seem a good place to start.

Keywords:

Cold War; American-Iranian relations; human rights; Congress; shah; Kissinger

INTRODUCTION

When on January 16, 1968, the Prime Minister Harold Wilson announced the British withdrawal from the Persian Gulf by the end of 1971, American policymakers realized that this would create a political vacuum in a vital area for the security of the whole Western world. The British decision posed a serious strategic dilemma for Washington as it required immediate plans for both containing Soviet expansionism and maintaining access to the Gulf vast oil resources (Palmer 1992; Fain 2008; Macris 2010). During his last year as President, Lyndon B. Johnson embraced the British suggestion that the status quo should be maintained through a joint role of responsibility of the two principal players in the Persian Gulf, Iran and Saudi Arabia (Alvandi 2012; Castiglioni 2015). However, it was the newly-elected President Richard Nixon who laid the foundations for the new American Third World strategy in 1969. The Nixon Doctrine renounced American direct interventionism and promoted military assistance to local players that would guarantee regional security and safeguard Western interests (Gaddis 1982; Garthoff 1985; Westad 2005; Dallek 2007). Even though the President's *twin pillars policy* in the Gulf was theoretically directed towards Iran and Saudi Arabia, from the outset Nixon tilted towards the Iranian Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, thus making Iran the stronger pillar of the new US security structure in the Gulf (Rubin 1981; Sick 1985; Bill 1988; Cottam 1988; Alvandi 2014).

This turning point in American-Iranian relations came during a period of profound change in the United States, a period that would lead in the years to come to the political affirmation of human rights. This new phase positioned human rights as a valid alternative to how American foreign policy had been conducted, or, in the words of Samuel Moyn (2010), a "last utopia" designed to replace the failed Cold War ideals. Hence human rights activists began to challenge the boundaries between "communist enemies" and "anti-communist friends" as they drew public attention to repressive regimes and questioned American alliances with those countries that enjoyed privileged relations with Washington.¹ The Iranian ally, because of the brutal repression of internal opposition through mass arrests, use of physical and psychological torture, unfair trials, as well as the pervasive surveillance of Iranian citizen and the lack of freedom of expression, would therefore soon become a primary targets of human rights pressure groups (Shannon 2015, 681).

1 According to Moyn, the main targets of human rights activists and supporters' activities in the seventies became freedom of speech and movement, physical and psychological torture, and the pervasive nature of states' security organizations surveillance of civil society.

Scholars agree that the political battle for human rights in the United States began in the seventies, when widespread malaise against American interventionism in Vietnam and Kissinger's realpolitik generated the need for a foreign policy based on moral principles. Part of the existing literature on the topic (Forsythe 1988; Apodaca 2006; Schmidli 2011; Tulli 2012; Keys 2012; Snyder 2013) emphasizes the US Congress' centrality in the political affirmation of human rights. Barbara Keys, for example, focuses on the role of the US Congress in incorporating human formation rights into the State Department's bureaucratic machine, and therefore into US foreign policy, despite Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's firm opposition. William Michael Schmidli and Sarah Snyder offer further insights into the institutionalization of human rights into US foreign policy. Specifically, Snyder devotes particular attention to the importance of the congressional hearings on human rights, and argues that a careful examination of the hearings, which were initiated in 1973, is crucial if we want to "understand the influence of congressional activism in the formulation and implementation of US foreign policy." Schmidli, on the other hand, focuses on an effective case of US human rights policy towards a specific country, Argentina, by exploring how human rights legislation affected US-Argentine relations and eventually led to a congressional cutoff of US arms transfers to Argentina in 1978.²

Besides the general consensus over the role of Congress, other scholars investigate the emergence of transnational advocacy networks composed by the new players of the international system, primarily non-governmental organizations (NGO) and civil society organizations. Conceptually rooted in previous research by Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones (1991), this scholarship (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 1999; Cmiel 1999, 2004; Sikkink 2004) looks at the "dual strategy of venue shopping" and "third party influence," namely the ability of pressure groups to manufacture negative images and transmit them to receptive politicians with the purpose of influencing governmental decisions. Amongst these scholars, Cmiel (1999) emphasizes the pioneering role of Amnesty International (AI) in prioritizing image building and management for human rights promotion. In fact, Cmiel explains that AI was the first human rights non-governmental organization to

2 Interestingly, what also emerges from this scholarship on human rights is that congressional activism challenged the traditional boundaries of party political affiliation: in fact, while key Democrats, such as Donald Fraser (D-MN), played a leading role in the battle for the political affirmation of human rights, in mid-seventies there emerged a politically eclectic group including also Republicans. Just to give two examples, John Ashbrook (R-OH) and Clifford Case (R-NJ).

understand the great opportunities provided by the public broader access to information that emerged in the seventies: “We live with television, the sound bite, photo-ops, video culture, infotainment. Politics, we are told, is turning into a battle of images, increasingly remote from the ‘real world’” (Cmiel 1999, 1245). According to Cmiel, data collection on human rights’ abuses and its use to build a negative image of specific countries became the pillars of any effective human rights’ campaign strategy, the primary tools to draw politicians’ attention and the most effective ways to influence governmental policies.³

While human rights historians devote sizeable attention to the human rights’ revolution and how it affected American foreign policy towards certain countries (Shoultz 1981; Sikkink 2004; Schmidli 2011), little consideration is given to the impact of human rights on American-Iranian relations, most likely because the alliance between Washington and Tehran did not incur any substantial change until the 1979 Iranian revolution (Sick 1985, 27; Emery 2013, 11).⁴ However, two experts of US foreign policy, James Bill and Matthew Shannon, investigate the impact of human rights on American-Iranian relations in the Pahlavi era. Using different approaches, both authors oppose the conventional argument that the human rights’ revolution affected Iran because of President Jimmy Carter’s commitment in this regard, and show how the impact of human rights on American-Iranian relations should be primarily found in the period prior to Carter’s inauguration in January 1977.⁵ Despite their noteworthy contribution to the field, both authors offer limited sets of analysis. Bill (1988) looks primarily into the impact of human rights on the shah’s domestic politics, but does not investigate *how* the human rights’ revolution affected American-Iranian relations (219–223). Specifically, he does not examine in depth the State Department’s steps to preserve the alliance from public and congressional criticism and the complexity of the anti-shah opposition in the United States. Shannon’s more recent studies (Shannon 2011; 2015) on the Iranian Student Association in the United

States (ISAUS) focus on its attempts to construct a negative image of the Iranian regime with the purpose of “delegitimizing the shah in the eyes of the global public and persuade American policymakers to withdraw their support from and consider alternatives to the Pahlavi regime” (Shannon 2011, 2). Shannon’s valuable contributions notwithstanding, his studies present three major limitations. First, he devotes little attention to the seventies and focuses primarily on the fifties and sixties. Second, his main focus is on ISAUS, thus only touching upon the various actors of the anti-shah network in the United States. Third, his analysis generally overlooks the State Department’s initiatives to preserve the alliance against the growing tide of criticism.

Situating the concept of public image as the unifying narrative thread, this article draws on a wide range of archival primary sources and an extensive literature to explore the impact of human rights on American-Iranian relations in the seventies.⁶ Specifically, I examine the alliance between the United States and Iran in a period of Cold War imperatives, giving specific attention to the degree of strategic and economic interdependency between the two allies (Alvandi 2014). It is this context that I understand the rise of anti-shah pressure groups in the United States, whose aim was to construct a negative image of the monarchy, stimulate Congress’ opposition to the American-Iranian alliance and withdraw US government support for the shah. By the mid-seventies, when human rights took center stage in the American public debate and information began to circulate widely about the repressive nature of the Iranian regime, the State Department attempted to mitigate congressional opposition to the American-Iranian alliance and improve Iran’s image in the United States. These efforts culminated in 1976, when Iran became a primary target of pressure groups for human rights and the new human rights legislation began to threaten the alliance. On the one hand, the State Department implemented obstructionist tactics to neutralize Congress’ opposition to American security assistance to Iran; on the other, it engaged in confidential exchanges with Iranian officials to dampen public and congressional criticism

3 Cmiel notes also that the importance of image management was grasped by the perpetrators of human rights violations: the creation of public relations agencies by certain governments showed how their image abroad became priority to preserve foreign policy objectives.

4 A valuable exception to the mainstream scholarship on human rights history is Bradley R. Simpson (2009).

5 The Thirty-Ninth American President Jimmy Carter campaigned for his presidency promising to make human rights a cornerstone of his foreign policy agenda. However, US strategic goals forced the new president to use a double standard with regard to human rights promotion in third countries. Thus US policy towards countries with strategic value, like Iran, remained mostly unchanged.

6 The article draws primarily on diplomatic records from US and UK archives, US congressional records, Amnesty International records and oral history sources. Archival research was conducted in the following archives: National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington DC; Library of Congress, Washington DC; National Security Archive, Washington DC; Carter Presidential Library, Atlanta; Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor; Columbia University’s Center for Human Rights Documentation and Research, New York; National Archives of the United Kingdom, London. This research draws also on the transcripts of the Foundation for Iranian Studies Oral History Archive.

against the alliance.

This research is significant for three main reasons. First, it refines the existing literature on the anti-shah network in the United States, giving specific attention to the role of congressmen, ISAUS and NGOs, as well as influential media, in building a negative image of the Iranian monarchy in the United States. Second, while most of the scholarship on the impact of human rights on US bilateral relations looks into “successful” cases of reduction or termination of US economic and military assistance (Shultz 1981; Sikkink 2004; Schmidli 2011), this article examines what is behind the failure of US human rights policy towards a strategic ally, Iran. In particular, it offers an in-depth investigation of the State Department’s efforts, both inter-institutional and diplomatic, to preserve the strategic alliance by neutralizing congressional legislation on human rights. Lastly, this article explores how the image of an enlightened monarch, consolidated by the State Department between 1975 and 1976, was adopted by the new President James Carter in the early months of his presidency and provided a solid motivation for his strategic decision to maintain the United States’ previous policy towards Iran.

ANTI-SHAH OPPOSITION IN THE EARLY SEVENTIES

The repressive traits of the Iranian regime were not new to the Iranian-born American citizens and students living in the United States in the early seventies, as well as human rights activists of the era. The authoritarian turn of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi’s regime had indeed taken place long time before, in the fifties, when the shah had realized that his dynasty’s survival would depend on his capacity to curb internal opposition (Gasiorowski and Byrne 2004).⁷ To this end, besides building a loyal and powerful army, in 1957 Pahlavi created a secret intelligence organization, SAVAK,⁸ with the technical assistance of experts from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Mossad.⁹ Since then SAVAK had become notorious for its suppression of the anti-shah opposition in Iran through its pervasive surveillance of Iranian citizens, its mass arrests and its use of torture against political prisoners (Keddie 1981, 134; Rubin 1981, 177–182; Bill 1988, 186–192; Gasiorowski 1991, 118–124; Abrahamian 1999, 106; Afkhami 2009, 386).

7 The author refers to the power struggle between the shah and Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq, which took place from 1951 to 1953. Only thanks to a coup orchestrated by the US Central Intelligence Agency, the shah could save his throne in 1953.

8 The acronym SAVAK stands for *Sazeman-e ettleaat va amniyat-e keshvar*, or Organization of Intelligence and National Security.

9 The CIA and Mossad are, in turn, the intelligence agencies of the United States of America and Israel.

In this regard, the globally publicized lavish celebrations for the 2500th anniversary of the Persian Empire in October 1971 provided a great opportunity for the shah’s critics in the United States to spread alarming information about the repressive methods of the Iranian regime. Whereas AI (1972) reported that “the celebrations of the 2 500 anniversary of the Persian Empire not only successfully avoided mention of Iran’s political prisoners and inadequate judicial system, but also resulted in many more people being imprisoned for their opposition, or suspected opposition, to the present government,” ISAUS took advantage of its liaisons with congressmen to influence US policy towards Iran. In early 1972, members of the Iranian Students Association informed senator George McGovern (D-SD) and House Representatives Shirley Chisholm (D-NY), Parren Mitchell (D-MD) and Ronald Dellums (D-CA) about the arrests and death sentences of Iranian students and intellectuals both during and after the celebrations (ISAUS 1972, 17–24).

Official records show how the State Department tried to discourage initiatives of a number of congressmen that aimed to promote human rights in Iran. David Abshire, assistant state secretary for congressional relations, responded to McGovern, Chisholm, Mitchell and Dellums that Iran enjoyed full sovereignty on internal affairs and that the shah’s controversial practices were essential to fight domestic terrorist groups.¹⁰ While congressional initiatives had no positive impact on those arrested, Joseph Farland, American ambassador in Iran from 1972–1973, stated that the activities of the Iranian students were very effective in spreading a negative image of the monarchy.¹¹

With the events of 1972–1973 Iran was destined to become one of the prime targets for human rights pressure groups in the United States. While the shah’s degree of repression increased, the May 1972 secret agreement between the shah, Nixon and the National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger enabled the monarch to purchase whatever conventional arms available on the American market.¹² This exclusive “blank check” in arms sales became evident in 1973 when, after the increase in oil revenues following the 1973 Yom Kippur war, the shah began to spend huge sums of petroleum dollars on American military

10 NARA, RG 59, Subject Numeric Files (SNF), 1970–1973, Political & Defense, Box 2380, Pol 23–8 Iran, 2–26–70, Memo, Abshire to Chisholm, March 9, 1972.

11 Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), Vol. XXVII, Doc. 1, Airgram, Farland to Rogers, January 9, 1973.

12 Henry Kissinger was national security advisor from January 20, 1969, to November 3, 1975, and served as state secretary from September 22, 1973, to January 20, 1977.

technology.¹³

Because of the uncontrolled flow of arms, and Kissinger's protracted resistance against making the agreement public, AI and ISAUS capitalized the growing congressional discontent on American security assistance to Iran for further influencing Capitol Hill.¹⁴ On November 14, 1973, Representatives Parren Mitchell, Richard Dellums, Shirley Chisholm and Pete Stark (D-CA) expressed their firm opposition to the American-Iranian alliance after receiving information on the shah's widespread use of torture from AI. The four congressmen noted that terminating military assistance to Iran would not lead to democracy, but it would guarantee a foreign policy in line with American moral values.¹⁵ The initiative was taken up by the President of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations William Fulbright (D-AR) on November 29, when, on the basis of ISAUS information, he recommended that Kissinger investigate human rights violations in Iran "like those in Greece and the Soviet Union."¹⁶

The State Department's response to critics was that the preservation of American-Iranian relations was a matter of national interest. Marshall Wright, assistant state secretary for legislative affairs, pointed out how reduced the American influence on Iran was, not only because Washington had no right to interfere in the juridical procedures of a sovereign country, but also because any attempt to affect Iran's internal affairs would be perceived as an act of hostility by the shah.¹⁷ Yet Richard Helms, US ambassador in

Tehran from 1973 to 1977, argued that the shah's sensitivity precluded any sort of American pressure on the monarchy (Helms 1985): "(Iran) is far less amenable to pressure from foreign governments indeed: as a cash purchaser of both equipment and advisory services, Iran is not vulnerable to threats of denial, but shows readiness to deal with other suppliers if necessary."¹⁸

The shah's sensitivity to Western criticism had been of particular concern to the State Department since the sixties. In the words of Iran's Court Minister Asadollah Alam, "the Shah expected nothing but praise" from Western countries as "he knew himself to be an exceptional man" with a strong desire "to pursue the good for his people (Alam 1991, 18–19). The monarch's intolerance to criticism helps explain the cooperation between the State Department and Iranian officials to contain anti-shah criticism in the United States.¹⁹ The case of Nasser Afshar, an Iranian-born American citizen and director of *Iran Free Press*, is an outstanding example in this regard. Escaped to the United States in 1946 after being condemned in Iran, Afshar had been granted citizenship in 1962 and obtained his passport in 1970. The Iranian government had failed to extradite him due to the lack of a bilateral agreement between the two countries, and the shah had harshly complained with the US government for granting him a passport with no previous consultation.²⁰ Between the late sixties and the early seventies Afshar became known for his radical anti-shah stance. While he sent numerous letters raise awareness of the members of congress to the shah's brutal regime, the US government tried to delegitimize him before Congress. For example, in 1971, US Ambassador in Iran Douglas MacArthur II, invited Representative Graham Purcell (D-TX) to ignore Afshar's "scurrilous and defamatory" declarations by "denouncing the character and activities of the organization and its chairman, on the basis of FBI information."²¹ Yet, Purcell was advised to "reminisce about a number of other congressmen who had taken up the anti-shah banner in the 1960s, much to their subsequent embarrassment."²²

13 Gerald Rudolph Ford Library (GRFL), National Security Adviser's Files, Presidential Country Files for the Middle East and South Asia, Box 12, Iran (2), Memorandum, Kissinger to Rogers and Laird, June 15, 1972; GRFL, National Security Adviser's Files, Presidential Country Files for the Middle East and South Asia, Box 12, Iran (2), Memorandum, Kissinger to Rogers and Laird, July 25, 1972. The greatest increase in the Iranian defense budget was in fact registered in 1974 and between 1972 and 1976 American sales to Iran amounted to 10.4 billion dollars: US Congress. 1976. *US Arms Sales to Iran. A Staff Report to the Subcommittee on Foreign Assistance of the Committee on Foreign Relations*. 94th Congress, 2nd Session, Senate (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office): 1–13.

14 Jonathan Bingham, *Amendment Offered by Mr. Bingham*, Congressional Record, 93rd Congress, 1st Session, House of Representatives, July 26, 1973, 26208; William Proxmire, *Foreign sales for F-14's?*, Congressional Record, 93rd Congress, 1st Session, Senate, July 26, 1973, 26072.

15 NARA, RG 59, SNF, 1970–1973, Political & Defense, Box 2380, Pol 23-8 Iran, 2-26-70, Letter, Mitchell, Stark, Dellums and Chisholm to House of Representatives, November 14, 1973.

16 NARA, RG 59, SNF, 1970–1973, Political & Defense, Box 2380, Pol 23-8 Iran, 2-26-70, Letter, Fulbright to Kissinger, November 29, 1973.

17 NARA, RG 59, SNF, 1970–1973, Political & De-

fense, Box 2380, Pol 23-8 Iran, 2-26-70, Memo, Wright to Fulbright, December, 27 1973.

18 NARA, AAD, RG 59, Telegram 1976TEHRAN02770, Helms to Department of State, March 17, 1976.

19 GRFL, WHCF, Subject File, Box No. 4, FO 2/, CO 68, *Article in Iran Free Press*, Telegram No. 1974TEHERAN09159, Helms to Kissinger, October 30, 1974.

20 Ibid.

21 FBI is the acronym for Federal Bureau of Investigation.

22 NARA, RG 59, GRDS, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs (NEA)/Iran (IRN), Office of Iran Affairs, Lot File 75D351, Box 6, PS 7, Iran 1969–71, *Assistance to Americans: Nasser Afshar*, 1971.

It is interesting to note that Iranian officials were regularly informed about such initiatives. In November 1971, for example, MacArthur notified Alam of Afshar's letters and Purcell's initiative.²³ Two years later, in response to the shah's requests, the idea of suppressing *Iran Free Press* began to materialize amongst US embassy and State Department officials, and Harold Saunders from the National Security Council (NSC) recommended that the White House officials ignore Afshar's letters to President Nixon.²⁴ The stated reason to ignore Afshar's letters was well explained by Douglas Heck, chief of mission at the US Embassy in Iran: the shah considered Afshar as the key organizer of anti-monarchic activities in the United States and had complained several times about US government inability to curb them.²⁵ Any reply to the letters would therefore irritate the monarch as it would be perceived as an explicit recognition of Afshar's activities.²⁶

KISSINGER, CONGRESS, AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS LEGISLATION

When Congress began actions to reduce American aid to authoritarian regimes, the State Department realized that the American-Iranian alliance would be challenged by growing congressional opposition. In 1973, Representative Donald Fraser (D-MN), chair of house foreign affairs subcommittee on international organizations and social movements, began to hold congressional hearings on human rights in US foreign policy, thus preparing the ground for human rights incorporation into the State Department's bureaucratic machine.²⁷ On

23 Ibid.

24 NARA, Electronic Documents, 1/1/1973–12/31/1973, RG 59, GRDS, Central Foreign Policy Files, *Nasser Afshar Ghotli*, Telegram No. 1973TEHERAN02363, Helms to Rogers, May 11, 1973. After consultation with the State Department legal advisors, Helms reported that suppression of *Iran Free Press* was not feasible as it would violate freedom of expression.

25 Afshar's "offensive" letters criticized the President's participation in the 1971 Persepolis celebrations, described the Iranian regime as corrupted and barbarian and blamed the shah for human rights abuses. See FRUS, 1969–1976, Vol. E–4, Documents on Iran and Iraq, 1969–1972, Doc. 179, Memorandum from Harold Saunders of the National Security Council Staff for the Files, Washington, April 26, 1972; FRUS, 1969–1976, Vol. E–4, Documents on Iran and Iraq, 1969–1972, Doc. 225, Memorandum From Harold Saunders of the National Security Council Staff for the Files, Washington, October 20, 1972.

26 NARA, RG 59, GRDS, NEA/IRN, Office of Iran Affairs, Lot File 75D365, Box 7, POL 23, Internal Security, Counter-Insurgency, Heck to Miklos, 1972.

27 US Congress, 1973. *International Protection of Hu-*

December 13, 1973, for the first time in US history, Congress enacted legislation tying military assistance to human rights.²⁸ Although not binding, section 32 of the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA) reflected Congress' growing desire to reconsider military assistance to human rights perpetrators.²⁹

Unsurprisingly, the new legislation received scarce consideration from the State Department and, in particular, from the Secretary of State Henry Kissinger (Keys 2012). A strenuous opponent to the integration of human rights into foreign policy, he argued that meddling in third countries' internal affairs was to be perceived as a violation of national sovereignty.³⁰ Kissinger's views were elaborated in a State Department assessment of October 1974. Human rights had turned public attention from Communist countries to repressive regimes, and public criticism varied according to the degree of US identification with the country under examination. The range of options for human rights promotion was wide, but any action had to be taken in full consideration of the following aspects:

- a. US interests in the country;
- b. US leverage in the country;
- c. the political context in which violations occur;
- d. the evolution of human rights in the country;
- e. the short-term and long-term consequences of US action or inaction;
- f. regional stakes.

The study, which regarded "quiet diplomacy" as the best option to bridge the gap between foreign policy and American public opinion's views, described the degree of American influence in Iran as nil.³¹ The alliance was an integral part of American

man Rights, the Work of International Organizations and the Role of US Foreign Policy. Hearing before the Subcommittee on International Organizations and Movements of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. 93rd Congress, 1st Session, House of Representatives (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office)

28 Foreign Assistance Act of 1973. PL 93-189. <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-87/pdf/STATUTE-87-Pg714.pdf>

29 Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division, *Human Rights and US Foreign Assistance: Experiences and Issues in Policy Implementation (1977–1978)*. Report prepared for the Committee on Foreign Relations, 96th Congress, 1st Session, Senate (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1979), 84–85.

30 FRUS, Vol. E–3, Doc. 244, Minutes of the Secretary's Staff Meeting, October 22, 1974.

31 FRUS, Vol. E–3, Doc. 243, Summary of Paper on Policies on Human Rights and Authoritarian Regimes, October 1974. Quiet diplomacy refers to representations of concern communicated within the confines of private discussions between government and/or diplomatic offi-

national security, and Iran's financial, military and energy resources made the shah "immune" from Washington's influence (Helms 1985, 79).

The Watergate scandal and Nixon's resignation on August 8, 1974, modified the balance between Congress and the State Department; assistance to authoritarian regimes became a battleground for congressional affirmation in foreign policy (Fraser 1979, 174–185; Schmitz 2006, 143). On December 20, 1974, Congress ratified section 502B of the 1961 FAA: "It is the sense of Congress that, except in extraordinary circumstances, the President shall substantially reduce or terminate security assistance to any government which engages in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights."³² Section 502B was not binding, but it was stricter than section 32. Firstly, while it recognized executive flexibility by providing "extraordinary circumstances" exceptions, it required the president to report Congress when those exceptions were made. Secondly, NGOs took central stage in the new legislation as their reports, as well as the recipient countries' willingness to welcome their investigations, should be assessed when deciding security assistance.

Most importantly, the new legislation prepared the ground for important changes, amongst which that all US embassies should produce and send to the State Department detailed human rights reports.³³ However, Kissinger did his best to oppose the effective implementation of section 502B, as shown by the report's preparation and transmission to Congress. In January 1975, the US embassies sent the 502B reports to the State Department for review.³⁴ The final report, containing various country studies, confirmed violations of human rights in some countries, amongst which Iran. According to the new legislation, the report was to be transmitted to Congress alongside the presentation of the 1976

foreign assistance program.³⁵ However, Kissinger opposed it firmly, exclaiming with great irritation that transmission of reports would not occur "while I am here."³⁶ Only after Deputy Secretary of State Robert Ingersoll and State Undersecretary Carlyle Maw's insistence, along with Senator Jacob K. Javits' (D-NY) and Senator Alan Cranston's (D-NY) pushy demands, Kissinger decided to send a new version of the report in November 1975. Ten months later the original one was produced. In the end, the new report had the only effect to irritate Congress as it was not only briefer than the original, but it lacked any country study and focused primarily on the State Department's "difficulties" in assessing human rights abuses.³⁷

THE STATE DEPARTMENT AND THE SHAH'S IMAGE IN THE UNITED STATES

According to AI, by 1975, Iran became the country with the worst record of human rights worldwide, with a number of political prisoners comprised between 25 000 and 200 000.³⁸ Although it is presumable to think that AI data were exaggerated, they attracted media and public attention to the shah's repressive tactics and increased the number of congressmen opposing the alliance.³⁹ On March 4, 1975, Stark brought to the House's attention articles from the *San Francisco Examiner*, *Harper's Magazine* and the *London Sunday Times* about the Iranian repressive regime. He forwarded to the House AI data on torture in Iran, as well as transcripts of testimonies from four Iranian intellectuals – Reza Baraheni, Ali Shariatti, Gholam

cial, for the purpose of bringing about a change in human rights practices. Its use is primarily aimed at avoiding public humiliation of specific governments in order to maintain good relations.

32 Foreign assistance Act of 1974. PL 93-559. <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-88/pdf/STATUTE-88-Pg1795.pdf>. Considered as a congressional attempt to legislate on human rights and military relationships, section 502B of the International Security Assistance and Arms Export Control Act, like section 32 of the 1973 International Security Assistance and Arms Export Control Act, was merely advisory rather than binding. It became a binding directive with the International Security Assistance and Arms Export Control Act of June 1976.

33 FRUS, Vol. E-3, Doc. 246, Memorandum, Ingersoll to Kissinger, January, 16, 1975.

34 FRUS, Vol. E-3, Doc. 252252, Action Memorandum, Wilson to Maw, July 7, 1975.

35 FRUS, Vol. E-3, Doc. 254254, Briefing Memorandum, Maw to Kissinger, September 8, 1975.

36 DNSA, Kissinger Transcripts Item KT01825, Minutes, The Secretary's 8:00 a.m. Staff Meeting, Thursday, November 13, 1975.

37 FRUS, Vol. E-3, Doc. 254254, Briefing Memorandum, Maw to Kissinger, September 8, 1975.

38 GRFL, William E. Simon Microfiche of Papers, Folder 15: Amnesty International – Printed Material: 1976, *Political prisoners in Iran*, July 3, 1975, 1. The year 1975 was also crucial for the affirmation of human rights at a global level. As a result of the institutionalization of human rights in the Helsinki process of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the third basket of the Helsinki Final Act triggered political actions highlighting the contradiction between the Helsinki document and repressive regimes worldwide.

39 National Archives of the United Kingdom (NA), Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) 8/2727: Iran. Internal political affairs, *Ministry of Justice*, Memo, Westmacott to Jones, November 15, 1976, 2. According to data transmitted by Iranian authorities to the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in 1976 the number of political prisoners in Iran amounted to nearly 3 000.

Hosayn Sae'di and Hadjebi Tabrizi – previously tortured by SAVAK.⁴⁰ Together with Representatives Richard Dellums (D-CA), William Donlon “Don” Edwards (D-CA) and Michael Harrington (D-MA), Stark harshly criticized Georgetown University for granting a *laurea ad honorem* to Empress Farah, and opposed the sale of three diesel powered submarines to Iran.⁴¹

The growing role of AI in shaping up a negative image of the shah and influencing congressmen did not go unnoticed in Washington. Hence the State Department came up with the idea of establishing some form of cooperation between the shah and NGOs to improve the monarchy's image before Congress.⁴² In the fall of 1975 the State Department encouraged William Butler, president of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), and Georges Levasseur, professor of international and comparative law from University of Paris II, to carry out a study mission in Iran.⁴³ This initiative, backed by two champions of the human rights battle, senators Edward Kennedy (D-MA) and Hubert Humphrey (D-MN), was seen by the State Department as a unique opportunity to show Congress the shah's improvements in the field of human rights.⁴⁴

Aware of the shah's dislike for NGOs and of the reduced American leverage, Undersecretary Joseph Sisco invited Helms to contact Iranian officials in-

40 Fortney Pete Stark, *Other Voices*, Congressional Record, 94th Congress, 1st Session, House of Representatives, March 4, 1975, 5183–5184.

41 Amnesty International in the United States (AIUSA), Folder 17, Box 73, Congressmen Don Edwards, Ron Dellums, Michael Harrington, and Pete Stark, Press release, May 16, 1975; Fortney Pete Stark, *House Joint Resolution 512*, Congressional Record, 94th Congress, 1st Session, House of Representatives, June 18, 1975, 19618.

42 NARA, AAD, RG 59, Telegram 1976TEHRAN02770, Helms to Department of State, March 17, 1976.

43 NARA, AAD, RG 59, Telegram 1976TEHRAN10618, Helms to Department of State, October 21, 1976. The International Commission of Jurists is a non-governmental organization created in 1952. It promotes the application of international law to violations of a civil, political, social or economic nature. The decision to establish cooperation between the shah and William Butler came as a result of ICJ reputation as it was considered more credible and objective than AI.

44 NARA, AAD, RG 59, Telegram 1975STATE220650, Sisco to Helms, September 16, 1975. The White Revolution was a far-reaching series of reforms in Iran launched in 1963 by Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and lasted until 1978. Although the White Revolution saw some improvements of human rights in Iran, its main goal was to legitimize the Pahlavi dynasty. It brought new social tensions that triggered, more or less directly, the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

formally with the purpose of reaching out to the shah and inform him of the beneficial effects of Iran's cooperation with the ICJ.⁴⁵ The shah eventually approved the mission, that was conducted between September and October 1975. The ICJ final report, Human Rights and the legal System in Iran, was finally published in March 1976. While Levasseur's study focused on the need to reform the judicial system, Butler pointed out some positive changes occurred between 1963 and 1975. However, Butler reported also the widespread use of physical and psychological torture, the government's control over domestic media and the unfair trials before military tribunals (Butler and Levasseur 1976).

The shah's decision to cooperate with the ICJ was the first of three initiatives expressing his growing concern over Iran's image abroad. The second was taken in January 1976, when the shah received a delegation of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss Iran's public relations and media campaign in the United States. This meeting resulted in the shah hiring American-Jewish public opinion analyst and President of *Yankelovich, Skelly and White* Daniel Yanckelovich. Yankelovich's study was carried out at the Aspen Institute conference in Persepolis and drawn on interviews with American businessmen, politicians, government officials, congressmen, foreign relations experts and journalists who had professional contacts with Iran. The study, submitted to the shah on November 1976, revealed that only businessmen had a positive image of the country, which irritated the monarch, who blamed the US government, public and press of ignoring the positive effects of monarchic reforms (Alam 1991, 463–524; Parsi 1997, 297).

The last of the shah's initiative was undertaken in mid-seventies when the monarch, most likely both for his concern over Iran's image abroad and his need for a broader domestic consensus, launched a liberalization program.⁴⁶ Although these well-publicized reforms hardly contributed to gaining of popular support, they were highly appreciated by the US State Department as they were perceived as signs of good faith towards the Iranian people. In fact, the shah conceded several amnesties, reduced the use of torture and political arrests, limited the authority of military tribunals, and began cooperation with ICJ President William Butler to reform the Iranian judicial system.⁴⁷

45 NARA, AAD, RG 59, Telegram 1975STATE220650, Sisco to Helms, September 16, 1975

46 For an assessment of the shah's domestic reasons to liberalize, see amongst others: Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 215.

47 The shah's liberalization program was reinforced in early 1977. See: National Security Archive (NSA), *Spies' nest: documents from the US espionage*, Vol. 12A:114–124, Airgram A80, Sullivan to Vance, June 1, 1978; NARA, US Central Intelligence Agency Freedom of Information

The shah's initiatives did not achieve the desired effect of improving Iran's image abroad. On the contrary, the second half of 1976 marked the apex of anti-shah activities in the United States.⁴⁸ Whereas Butler's report and, later on, *AI Briefing on Iran* produced fresh information on human rights abuses in Iran, American media played a leading role in circulating them amongst the American public and Congress.⁴⁹ Influential newspapers and magazines such as the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times* and *Time* began investigating the controversial aspects of ICJ and AI reports, in particular the violent practices of the shah's secret police (Baraheni 1976; Anderson and Whitten 1976c). In August 1976, for example, Senator McGovern announced to oppose security assistance to Iran after bringing to Senate's attention *Torture as Policy: The Network of Evil*, an article published on *Time* (1976) investigating repression of Iranian intellectuals and SAVAK institutionalization of torture.⁵⁰ Yet, two investigative journalists and columnists for the *Washington Post*, Jack Anderson and Les Whitten, began inquiring SAVAK's espionage activities in the United States and its cooperation with the CIA (Anderson and Whitten 1976a).⁵¹

The issue of SAVAK activities in the United States and its suspected cooperation with the CIA in a period of public and Congressional attention hit the headlines during the months following the publication of the *Time* article and contributed to forge a bad image of the shah before and after the 48th US presidential election, held on November 2, 1976. In September, the shah, irritated by what he considered gratuitous allegations and worried by the growing anti-shah opposition in the United States, instructed SAVAK Deputy Director Parviz Sabeti to release an interview to the *Washington Post* and deny illegal SAVAK activities (Greenway 1976). This point was reiterated by the monarch in an interview with CBS journalist Mike Wallace on October 22. However, while his objective was to dampen the ongoing tide of criticism, his phrasing had the opposite effect of exacerbating it. Asked whether SAVAK was engaged in illegal activities, the shah replied that "SAVAK

agents' job in the United States was to check up on anybody who becomes affiliated with circles, organizations hostile to my country, which is the role of any intelligence organization." He eventually added that the US government was aware of SAVAK intelligence activities on American soil.⁵²

The shah's words dealt a severe blow to the Ford Administration prior to the presidential election. Immediately after the interview, several American universities complained to President Gerald Ford about SAVAK monitoring of Iranian students in their campuses.⁵³ Yet, between October and December 1976, Anderson and Whitten found evidence of SAVAK espionage in the United States and CIA's past cooperation with the Iranian secret police. At the end of October, for example, they publicized State Department's records proving the presence of SAVAK "death squads" in Europe and United States, CIA's past role in training SAVAK agents and the similarities between CIA and SAVAK's "dirty tricks" (Anderson and Whitten 1976b). In early November, they published information of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reporting that Mansur Rafizadeh, Iranian representative at the United Nations (UN) in New York, was the head of SAVAK in the United States, and that SAVAK agents were known both for recruiting informants and infiltrating in the Confederation of Iranian Students-National Union (CISNU) (Anderson and Whitten 1976e). In December, they received and published State Department records revealing American-Iranian cooperation to suppress *Iran Free Press* (Anderson and Whitten 1976d).⁵⁴

Pressed by electoral needs, Kissinger was urged to speak publicly on the matter. On November 1, he stated that "it is not correct that the US is aware that Iranian intelligence personnel are checking on individuals living in the US. We are making inquiries and if it is correct we are asking that it be stopped."⁵⁵ The Iranian response came immediately after from the foreign ministry spokesperson: "We are very friendly with the US. Our relations are good and we have beneficial common interests. But any action that they might take towards representatives we would reciprocate toward their representatives."⁵⁶ Whereas public

Act Electronic Reading Room (CIA-FOIA), *Iran, roots of discontent. Main features of the shah's Liberalization Program 1976-1978*, NFA Notes, October 25, 1978.

48 NA, FCO 8/2761, Memo, Lucas to Lipsey, October 5, 1976.

49 Amnesty International Briefing-Iran, November 1976. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/001/1976/en/>.

50 Larry P. McDonald, *Human Rights and the Policy of Torture*, Congressional Record, 94th Congress, 2nd Session, House of Representatives, August 23, 1976, 27071-27073.

51 Civil society's attention to the suspected CIA cooperation with SAVAK reflected widespread public interest in the suspected CIA's role in the Watergate scandal.

52 The shah's interview was carried out by Mike Wallace on October 22 and broadcast on October 24 by *60 Minutes*, a CBS television program.

53 See for example Professor Daniel Partan from Boston University: GRFL, WHCF, Subject File, Box No. 25, CO 68, Iran, Letter, Partan to Ford, October 22, 1976.

54 Nasser Afshar obtained these documents thanks to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), that allows declassification of official records under specific request.

55 AAD, *Foreign Ministry Statement on Secretary Kissinger's Remarks about Iranian Intelligence Personnel in the US*, Telegram No. 1976TEHERAN10874, Helms to Kissinger, November 1, 1976.

56 Ibid.

tensions between Washington and Tehran seemed to escalate, archival records show the ambiguity of the State Department's reaction: on the one hand, it responded to public and congressional pressures by ordering an FBI investigation into SAVAK activities in the United States; on the other, it engaged in a behind-the-scenes confidential dialogue with Iranian officials to dampen criticism and safeguard Iran's image. In effect, while the FBI began to look into the matter, Secretary of State Assistant for the Near East Alfred Atherton called Iranian Ambassador in the United States Ardeshir Zahedi on November 5 and agreed on the official responses to give if queried on SAVAK activities. Where the State Department would highlight the lack of evidence confirming the allegations and reiterate its commitment to halt any foreign agents' activities on American soil, Zahedi would deny any illegal activity and point out the Iranian right to legally monitor any individual posing a threat to the Iranian regime. The call ended with Atherton promising to share with the ambassador a "legal study of what would constitute illegal activities under US law".⁵⁷

This confidential dialogue proved to be useful in December, when the State Department received an FBI report revealing that Mansur Rafizadeh might have carried out illegal activities against Iranian students. The FBI reported Rafizadeh's ownership of a shop, "Persian Bazaar and Bookstore" in New York, and suspected that it had been used to collect information on Iranian students. It should not come as a surprise that the State Department did not follow up on FBI investigations. On the contrary, it regarded such report as "inconclusive" and "ambiguous," and noted that "in view of the particularly close and mutually beneficial relationship" between the two countries, a close cooperation on this matter would help dampen criticism. To this end, Atherton and Helms invited Zahedi and Alam to avoid any operation of foreign security organizations in the United States in "a period where media and Congressional interest was high," and guaranteed that Rafizadeh's expulsion as *persona non grata* would never be considered by the US government.⁵⁸ When Helms met Alam personally on December 31, the Court Minister was glad to learn that Rafizadeh would not be expelled and appreciated the spirit of cooperation between American and Iranian officials.⁵⁹

57 NARA, AAD, *Savak Officials Assigned to US*, Telegram No. 1976STATE273410, Kissinger to Helms, November 5, 1976.

58 FRUS, 1969–1976, Vol. XXVII, IRAN; IRAQ, 1973–1976, Doc. 199, Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Iran,, December 30, 1976. Both Atherton and Helms were instructed to contact Zahedi and Alam by Secretary of State Kissinger.

59 FRUS, 1969–1976, Vol. XXVII, IRAN; IRAQ, 1973–1976, Doc. 201, Telegram From the Embassy in

THE 1976 HUMAN RIGHTS LEGISLATION AND BEYOND

Besides informal cooperation with Iranian officials to mitigate American criticism, the State Department's efforts to improve the shah's image in the United States emerged with vigor in the application of the new human rights legislation. On June 30, 1976, Kissinger's protracted resistance to an effective incorporation of human rights into foreign policy led Congress to produce a more stringent legislation. The International Security Assistance and Arms Export Control Act strengthened section 502B and it gave Congress a major role in foreign assistance decisions. Firstly, reduction or termination of military assistance to countries "which engage in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights" was no longer "the sense of Congress" but "the policy of the United States," thus reinforcing American commitment to human rights worldwide. Secondly, 502B (c)(1) required the State Department to transmit, upon congressional request, reports on specific countries containing:

- a. detailed information about human rights;
- b. US government efforts for human rights promotion;
- c. if any, those "extraordinary circumstances" that justified security assistance despite evidence of human rights abuses.

Lastly, Congress was empowered to reduce or terminate military assistance on the basis of the 502B reports through a joint resolution.⁶⁰ In the end, the new legislation did not deprive the US government from its role as ultimate decision maker with regard to security assistance programs as production of 502B reports was still up to the State Department. However, it strengthened Congress' role in assessing human rights as transmission to Congress of detailed reports was now mandatory.

In view of the 1977 foreign assistance program presentation, the Subcommittee on International Organizations of the House Committee on International Relations, also known as Fraser Committee, began hearings on human rights in Iran. Between August 4 and September 8, 1976, William Butler, Reza Baraheni, State Department Director for Iranian Affairs Charles Naas and Assistant Secretary of State Atherton were requested to testify before the Fraser Committee.⁶¹ Atherton's testimony represents

Iran to the Department of State, June 3, 1977.

60 International Security Assistance and Arms Export Control Act. PL 94-329. Accessed from: <http://uscode.house.gov/statutes/1976/1976-094-0329.pdf>

61 US Congress. 1976. *Human Rights in Iran*. Hearings before the Subcommittee on International Organizations of the Committee on International Relations. 94th Congress, 2nd Session, House of Representatives (Washington

an outstanding example of the State Department's obstructive practices of data manipulation and distortion. Ambassador Helms, instructed by Kissinger to prepare Atherton's speech, reported no evidence of violations, praised the Iranian constitution for guaranteeing individual rights and the monarchy for progress in the field of human rights.⁶² The ambassador's blatantly too "optimistic" analysis was in contradiction with State Department's classified data on torture, executions and lack of freedom of expression, so that State Department's analyst Frank Huddle, in charge of revising Helms' draft, recommended a high degree of caution as declassification of controversial information would embarrass the State Department before the Fraser Committee. Contrary to Helms' draft, Huddle suggested switching Atherton's speech on the shah's real accomplishments rather than overemphasizing Iran's good records on human rights. In Huddle's words, Atherton had to point out "that the regime provides stable rule, has reduced many of the land-tenure inequities, and is popular with the common man whose economic lot has measurably improved under the current Shah."⁶³

Atherton's testimony followed Huddle's recommendations: it portrayed Iran as a model country in the Middle East while minimizing the repressive aspects of the regime and exaggerating the positive ones. He praised American "quiet diplomacy" for human rights promotion and remarked Iran's central role for US national interest.⁶⁴ Iran, he said, posed no "extraordinary circumstance[s]" as two aspects legitimized the US government decision to maintain past security assistance levels. Firstly, the shah had promoted individual rights thanks to the White Revolution and was now promoting human rights thanks to more recent initiatives, such as amnesties and reduction of torture (Bill 1988, 221). Secondly, even if controversial practices to fight the "cancer" of terrorism had occurred, NGOs data on human rights violations were clearly exaggerated.⁶⁵

When few weeks later Assistant Secretary of State Philip Habib was called to testify before the Subcommittee on Foreign Assistance of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the sale of F-16 fighter aircrafts to Iran, human rights were only briefly mentioned and the Senate seemed to accept the State

Department's arguments.⁶⁶ As for the House, while Iran's strategic value was generally recognized, the Fraser Committee was not happy with the limited number of information reported by Atherton and took it as a further example of State Department's obstructionism and data manipulation. Moreover, the House was further irritated by Kissinger's "inability" to transmit, apparently for procedural delays, the 502B report drafts, as requested by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee President Hubert Humphrey (D-MN) in view of the 1977 foreign assistance program presentation (Keys 2012, 849).

Frustrated by the State Department's attitude, in October the Fraser Committee requested specific reports for six countries, including Iran, under section 502B (c)(1). Helms, again in charge of producing the report, was invited by Kissinger to strictly follow Atherton's arguments.⁶⁷ The final report, delivered to Morgan on December 29, lacked specific data on human rights violations and promoted a positive image of the monarchy by focusing on the ongoing collaboration between the shah and the ICJ, as well as the effectiveness of American "quiet diplomacy."⁶⁸

While the new legislation had no impact on the flow of arms to Iran, in the weeks prior to Carter's inauguration, the shah began to fear the future effects of section 502B on American-Iranian relations.⁶⁹ The imminent departure of Henry Kissinger, who had been able to establish a close friendship with the shah, along with Carter's commitment to human rights (Brinkley 1996; Strong 2000; Trenta 2013) and his campaign statement to reconsider arms sales to Iran, were perceived as serious threats for the future of the alliance (US Government 1979, 100). This would explain why Iran's State Undersecretary Nassir Assar instructed Mohammed Hatef, a high ranking official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to discuss section 502B with US Embassy officials John Lambrakis and Paul Stempel.

The meeting, held in an informal and cooperative manner on December 23, served the purpose

66 NA, FCO 8/2730, Memo, Muir to James, December 10, 1976.

67 NARA, AAD, RG 59, Telegram 1976STATE257996, Kissinger to Helms, October 18, 1976. The six countries were: Argentina, Peru, Haiti, Philippines, Indonesia and Iran.

68 US Department of State, *Human Rights and US Policy: Argentina, Haiti, Indonesia, Iran, Peru and the Philippines*. Report submitted to the Committee on International Relations, US House of Representatives, by the Department of State, pursuant to section 502B (c) of the International Security Assistance and Arms Export Control Act of 1976, 94rd Congress, 2nd Session, House of Representatives (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1977).

69 Carter's inauguration at the White House took place on January 21, 1977.

DC: US Government Printing Office).

62 FRUS, Vol. XXVII, Doc. 184, Telegram, Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, August 18, 1976.

63 FRUS, Vol. XXVII, Doc. 185, Memorandum, Huddle to Naas, August 20, 1976.

64 DNSA, Kissinger Transcripts KT02053, Minutes, Secretary's Staff Meeting, September 8, 1976.

65 US Congress. 1976. *Human Rights in Iran*. Hearings before the Subcommittee on International Organizations of the Committee on International Relations. 94th Congress, 2nd Session, House of Representatives (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office).

of reassuring the shah for the time being but raised serious concerns for the future. According to Lambrakis and Stempel, American-Iranian relations would not change until the State Department was in charge of producing the 502B reports, but added that Carter's unpredictable use of section 502B made it imperative to improve Iran's image in the United States. What concerned both American and Iranian officials was the idea that Congress would play a major role in foreign assistance decisions. This explains why Lambrakis and Stempel found it necessary to think of ways to influence Congress' perception of Iran. In their views, two steps were crucial in this regard. Firstly, the Iranian government should meet Congress' desire for more detailed and unbiased information. To this end, Iranian non-governmental figures should produce a greater amount of data on the shah's accomplishments. Secondly, Iran's bad image in the United States had been shaped up by organizations like AI on the basis of exaggerated data. Thus the Iranian government should handle this "cumulative image problem" on a case-by-case basis, rather than harshly denying any allegation of human rights abuses. Moreover, while the occasional use of controversial practices should be justified by the danger of terrorism in the country, Iran should break the secrecy over trials, prison conditions and treatment, and even consider opening Iran's prison doors for inspections.⁷⁰

This informal cooperation was highly appreciated by Iranian officials and, presumably, by the shah, who ordered his men to call for a second meeting. Held on January 10, 1977, the second meeting prioritized again the shah's image in the United States. It opened with American officials stressing how dramatic changes occurred in American-Iranian relations had contributed to shape up a negative image of the shah. According to Lambrakis and Stempel, security assistance, trade and other exchanges in the seventies had created "a multiplicity of American-Iranian contacts going well beyond government-to-government relations." Because of the limited US government ability to influence this "multiplicity of contacts," it was essential for the Iranian government to "think harder about the ways to present its own image in the many contacts Iran has begun to have with Americans directly." To this end, Lambrakis and Stempel recommended Iran's embassy in Washington to expand its network of "friends" and "affect the perceptions of Iran" amongst junior members of Congress, US government middle-level staff and the American press. To reach out a larger audience, distinguished Iranian academics living in the United States should lecture on Iran's progresses under the shah. Lastly, following a model adopted

by other authoritarian regimes, they proposed the creation of an independent public relations agency "to coordinate human rights and related questions."⁷¹

CONCLUSION

This article provides new insights into the ineffectiveness of US human rights policy towards one strategic ally, Iran, and it shows the State Department's initiatives to neutralize US human rights legislation and preserve the American-Iranian alliance. In the seventies, pressure groups realized that human rights politics would become a battle over images. Amongst them, AI and ISAUS were particularly effective in building and circulating amongst receptive congressmen a negative image of the Iranian regime, thus posing a serious challenge to the alliance. The State Department fought this war on the same battlefield, image management. On the one hand, it put into practice obstructionist tactics aimed at enhancing the shah's image before Congress. On the other, it proposed high-ranking officials of Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs solutions for a better management of their country's image. This strategy resulted in the production of an enlightened image of the monarchy, whose advances in the human rights field were regarded as impressive and whose ambitions were in line with US foreign policy goals. It therefore justified the continuation of US military assistance and political support to Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

Contrary to Jimmy Carter's electoral proclaims, by the end of 1977 no substantial reduction of the flow of arms sales to Iran occurred (Shannon 2015, 686), and Carter's commitment to human rights was only directed towards nations with less strategic value (Cohen 1982, 254–256). The anti-shah opposition in Iran and the United States, as well as some sections of the new bureaucracy, expected Carter to promote human rights in Iran. The new President, however, decided from the beginning to continue past American policies towards his ally. As such he prioritized US geopolitical and strategic interests in the area and neglected human rights abuses (Bill 1988, 228; Emery 2013, 482; Shannon 2015, 685). His determination to preserve the alliance emerged in May 1977, when the new Secretary of State Cyrus Vance visited Iran. It was then confirmed in November 1977, in occasion of the first shah's official visit to Washington. In both cases, the issue of human rights was briefly mentioned and the shah realized that the alliance would not be subject to significant changes (Bill 1988, 227; Emery 2013, 39).

Although Carter exerted no pressure for human rights promotion in Iran, the shah decided to continue his liberalization program, initiated earlier in 1976. In the early months of 1977 he began to

70 NARA, AAD, RG 59, Telegram 1976TEHE-RAN12714, Helms to Department of State, December 23, 1976.

71 FRUS, Vol. XXVII, Doc. 202, Telegram, Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, January 10, 1977.

publicize previous reforms, release several prisoners, reshuffle his government, loosen the tight of censorship and strengthen cooperation with ICJ President William Butler.⁷² It is unknown whether, and to what extent, the shah's liberalization measures resulted from previous State Department's efforts to raise the shah's awareness about the importance of his image abroad, or from the impetus of Carter's human rights discourse during his electoral campaign. What is certainly known is that the Carter administration welcomed these initiatives as they further contributed to forge the image of an enlightened monarch and provided the new president with solid motives to publicly justify the preservation of American past policy towards Iran (Cohen 1982, 259–260; Sick

1985, 27). This tactic, that shows strong continuity with the previous' administration, emerged unmistakably in Tehran on December 31, 1977, in what might be regarded as the most unfortunate speech of Jimmy Carter's presidency: "Iran, because of the great leadership of the Shah, is an island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world" (Carter 1977).⁷³ Paradoxically, a few days later the shah's violent repression of anti-regime protests prepared the ground for the eruption of the Iranian revolution (Abrahamian 1982, 496–525; Parsa, 1989). In the end, future research should explain whether, and to what extent, the long consolidated image of an enlightened monarchy contributed to the Carter administration's failure to predict the imminent loss of the Iranian ally.

72 National Security Archive (NSA), *Spies' nest: documents from the US espionage*, Vol. 12A:114–124, Airgram A80, Sullivan to Vance, June 1, 1978; NARA, US Central Intelligence Agency Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room (CIA-FOIA), *Iran, roots of discontent. Main features of the shah's Liberalization Program 1976–1978*, NFA Notes, October 25, 1978; Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 222–226.

73 The author refers to Carter's famous New Year's Eve toast with the shah. At the end of his speech, Carter briefly expressed his concerns about human rights abuses in the world. However, this brief digression ended up with Carter emphasizing that the "the cause of human rights is one that also is shared deeply by our people and by the leaders of our two nations."

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