

Nixon, Kissinger and the Shah:
US-Iran Relations and the Cold War,
1969-1976

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the nature and dynamics of U.S.-Iran relations during the Cold War under the leadership of U.S. President Richard Nixon, his adviser Henry Kissinger, and Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi of Iran. This revisionist account critically examines the popular view of Mohammad Reza Shah as a mere instrument of American strategies of containment during the Cold War. Relying on recently declassified American documents, British government papers, and the diaries, memoirs and oral histories of Iranian actors, this thesis restores agency to the shah as an autonomous Cold War actor and suggests that Iran evolved from a client to a partner of the United States under the Nixon Doctrine. This partnership was forged during Nixon's first term in office between 1969 and 1972, as the United States embraced a policy of Iranian primacy in the Persian Gulf region. Thanks to a long-standing friendship with the president, the shah was able to exercise extraordinary influence in the Nixon White House. This partnership reached its peak during Nixon's second term as the United States supported Iran's regional primacy against the challenge from Iraq. The shah drew Nixon and Kissinger into Iran's secret war against Iraq in Kurdistan in 1972, by portraying Iran's long-standing regional conflict with Iraq as a Cold War confrontation with the Soviet-backed Ba'ath regime in Baghdad. When the shah unilaterally decided to abandon the Kurds in a deal with Iraq's Saddam Hussein in 1975, Kissinger had little choice but to acquiesce, despite the personal embarrassment and domestic recriminations that followed. The U.S.-Iran partnership declined following Watergate and Nixon's resignation in 1974. In spite of the best efforts of the shah and Kissinger, between 1974 and 1976 the United States and Iran were unable to reach an agreement on U.S. nuclear exports to Iran. President Gerald Ford tried to impose a discriminatory nuclear agreement on Iran that was rejected by the shah because it violated Iran's national sovereignty. Under Ford, the United States reverted to treating Iran as a client rather a partner of the United States.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACDA	U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency
AEOI	Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran
CENTO	Central Treaty Organisation
CIA	U.S. Central Intelligence Agency
ERDA	U.S. Energy Research and Development Administration
FMS	Foreign Military Sales
HEU	Highly-Enriched Uranium
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICP	Iraqi Communist Party
IDF	Israel Defence Forces
IIAF	Imperial Iranian Air Force
INR	Bureau of Intelligence and Research, U.S. Department of State
ISA	Office of International Security Affairs, U.S. Department of Defence
KDP	Kurdish Democratic Party
LEU	Low-Enriched Uranium
MAAG	U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
NAC	National Action Charter
NIE	National Intelligence Estimate
NSC	U.S. National Security Council
NSC/IG	NSC Interdepartmental Group for the Near East and South Asia
NSC/USC	NSC Under Secretaries Committee
NSDM	National Security Decision Memorandum
NSSM	National Security Study Memorandum
OPEC	Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PNE	Peaceful Nuclear Explosion
PPP	Pakistan People's Party
SAVAK	National Intelligence and Security Organisation of Iran
VPWG	NSC Verification Panel's Working Group on Non-Proliferation

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I dedicate this work to the memory of my grandfather, Mirza Ramazan Ali Asgarian Tafreshi, whose legacy to me was his love of Iran and its history.

INTRODUCTION

On 29 July 1980, in the sweltering heat of the Egyptian summer, the funeral cortege of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the last shah of Iran, slowly wound its way through the streets of Cairo.¹ Thousands of Egyptian soldiers escorted the shah's casket, draped with the Iranian flag, lying on a horse-drawn gun carriage. Behind the casket walked the exiled Iranian royal family, led by the widowed Empress Farah, solemnly veiled in black. The world's leaders had shunned the funeral of the deposed shah, who had fled Iran in 1979 following a popular revolution that had toppled the Pahlavi dynasty and established an Islamic Republic. The emperors and princes, presidents and prime ministers, who had enjoyed the shah's hospitality at the lavish 1971 Persepolis celebration were now conspicuous by their absence. Only Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and former U.S. President Richard Nixon were on hand to witness the burial of Mohammad Reza Shah, and with him, more than two-and-a-half millennia of Persian monarchy. No senior official had been sent from Washington to represent President Jimmy Carter at the funeral.² The Carter administration had tried to distance itself from the reviled Iranian monarch, refusing him permission to settle in the United States. They hoped to salvage some kind of relationship with the Islamic Republic from the ruins of the United States' longstanding friendship with the shah, which every president since Franklin Roosevelt had reaffirmed, including the incumbent. Carter had begrudgingly

¹ The shah was styled His Imperial Majesty, the *shah-an-shah* (king of kings) *aryamehr* (light of the Aryans). Throughout this thesis he is referred to interchangeably as Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Mohammad Reza Shah, and the shah.

² A. O. Sulzberger, 'U.S. Quietly Acknowledges Death of Shah', *The New York Times*, 28 July 1980.

allowed the ailing shah to visit the United States in October 1979 for medical treatment, but when American diplomats were taken hostage in Tehran in November, the shah was palmed off to Panama and then Egypt, where he died and was laid to rest in Cairo's El-Rifa'i Mosque.³

Richard Nixon, like many Republicans, was appalled at the way the Democratic Carter administration had treated the shah, a long-standing friend and ally of the United States. Despite being something of a pariah himself after resigning the presidency in disgrace in 1974, Nixon made a point of flying to Egypt for the funeral. Upon arriving at Cairo airport, he told reporters that Carter's actions had been "shameful" and described the decision to deny the shah asylum as "one of the black pages of America's foreign policy history."⁴ Henry Kissinger, who had served Nixon as both national security adviser and secretary of state, had been pressing the White House to admit the shah after he fled Iran in January 1979.⁵ Nixon and Kissinger's concern for the shah's fate reflected not only their desire to help an old friend, but also a sense of injustice that they were now being blamed for the shah's downfall and the subsequent Tehran hostage crisis, because of Nixon's embrace of the shah during his presidency. A typical Washington blame-game was now being waged between Democrats and Republicans over the question of 'who lost Iran?'⁶ While Republicans blamed the shah's downfall on Carter's refusal to

³ Farah Pahlavi, *An Enduring Love: My Life with the Shah, A Memoir* (New York: Hyperion, 2004), pp. 328-388. See also, William Shawcross, *The Shah's Last Ride: The Story of the Exile, Misadventures and Death of the Emperor* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1989).

⁴ Christopher S. Wren, 'Few Ex-Allies Will Attend Funeral of Shah Today', *The New York Times*, 29 July 1980.

⁵ Bernard Gwertzman, 'Carter Emissary Dissuaded Shah From U.S. Exile', *The New York Times*, 20 April 1979; 'Kissinger Interceded For Shah in Mexico, As Did the State Dept.', *The New York Times*, 12 June 1979.

⁶ 'Who Lost Iran?', *The Washington Post*, 26 February 1979.

sanction a bloody crackdown in Iran, Democrats attacked Nixon and Kissinger for encouraging the shah's megalomania through unrestricted arms sales to Iran.⁷ This political debate spawned a scholarly literature in the shadow of the Iranian revolution and the Tehran hostage crisis, most prominent among which are the works of James Bill and Barry Rubin, which portray the enmity in U.S.-Iran relations as the fateful outcome of a series of policy blunders by short-sighted American presidents who were willing to tolerate the shah's arbitrary rule at home and megalomania abroad because of a Cold War logic that saw the stability of Pahlavi Iran, and its vast oil reserves, as crucial to the U.S. strategy of containing the Soviet Union.⁸

'What Went Wrong?'

This 'what went wrong' literature tries to explain to an American audience the origins of the deep enmity between the United States and revolutionary Iran.⁹ This story begins with the Truman administration's support for Iran's independence and territorial integrity in the face of British and Soviet imperialism. In the first confrontation of the Cold War, President Harry Truman provided crucial diplomatic support for Iranian Prime Minister Ahmad Qavam's efforts to eject Soviet forces from northern Iran in 1946, following the wartime occupation of the country by the

⁷ 'Kissinger's critique (continued)', *The Economist*, 10 February 1979; 'Letter: Kissinger on Iran', *The Economist*, 17 February 1979.

⁸ James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Barry Rubin, *Paved With Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). See also, Richard W. Cottam, *Iran and the United States: A Cold War Case Study* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988).

⁹ Bernard Lewis uses this phrase in the broader context of relations between the Muslim world and the West. See, Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (London: Phoenix, 2002).

Allied powers.¹⁰ Similarly, when the popular government of Prime Minister Mohammad Musaddiq nationalised the British-owned Iranian oil industry in 1951, Truman tried to head-off instability in Iran by mediating the subsequent Anglo-Iranian crisis between Musaddiq and the Attlee and Churchill governments in London. However, when a compromise settlement could not be reached, President Dwight Eisenhower authorised an Anglo-American covert operation in 1953 to oust Musaddiq and restore Mohammad Reza Shah to power as an arbitrary ruler. A number of studies have identified this decision to topple the nationalist Musaddiq government as the original sin of the United States in Iran, which burned into the Iranian psyche an image of the shah as an American puppet and the United States as an imperial power no different to Britain or Russia.¹¹ Francis Gavin and Steve Marsh have questioned the degree of discontinuity between the Truman and Eisenhower administrations by showing that the logic of the Cold War motivated the United States to both support Iran against the Soviet Union in 1946 and cooperate with Britain to overthrow Musaddiq in 1953.¹²

After the 1953 coup, Iran is portrayed in this ‘what went wrong’ literature as being firmly in the Western camp, joining the Baghdad Pact in 1955 and signing a bilateral defence agreement with the United States in 1959. In a detailed study,

¹⁰ Louise L. Fawcett, *Iran and the Cold War: the Azerbaijan Crisis of 1946* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 108-140.

¹¹ James A. Bill and Wm. Roger Louis (eds.), *Musaddiq, Iranian Nationalism, and Oil* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1988); James F. Goode, *The United States and Iran: In the Shadow of Musaddiq* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997); Mark J. Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne (eds.), *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004); Mark Hamilton Lytle, *The Origins of the Iranian-American Alliance, 1941-1953* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1987).

¹² Francis J. Gavin, ‘Politics, Power, and U.S. Policy in Iran, 1950-1953’, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 1/1 (1999), pp. 56-89; Steve Marsh, ‘Continuity and Change: reinterpreting the policies of the Truman and Eisenhower administrations towards Iran, 1950-54’, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 7/3 (2005), pp. 79-123.

Mark Gasiorowski has shown how American military, economic, and security assistance, provided under the Eisenhower Doctrine, entrenched the shah in power and laid the foundations for an autocratic Pahlavi state that was increasingly alienated from Iranian society.¹³ However, President John Kennedy worried that without domestic reform and a reallocation of resources away from military spending and towards economic development, the shah's regime would succumb to Communist subversion. James Goode has suggested that although Kennedy encouraged the shah's appointment of the liberal Ali Amini as prime minister in 1961 and welcomed the shah's 'White Revolution' of social and economic reforms in 1963, he ultimately shied away from pressing the shah to make any meaningful political reform.¹⁴ Bristling at Kennedy's criticism, the shah sought to reduce his dependence on the United States by inaugurating an 'independent national policy,' whereby he normalised Iran's relations with the Soviet Union in the mid-1960s. As Iran's oil revenues increased, Iran's dependence on American assistance declined, to the point that in July 1964 U.S military assistance grants to Iran were replaced by credit sales. Consequently, as Andrew Johns has shown, President Lyndon Johnson found himself with less and less leverage with which to contain the shah's military spending in the late 1960s.¹⁵ Confronting the British withdrawal 'East of Suez' and

¹³ Mark J. Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Shah: Building a Client State in Iran* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 85-129.

¹⁴ James F. Goode, 'Reforming Iran During the Kennedy Years', *Diplomatic History* 15/1 (1991), pp. 13-29. See also, April R. Summitt, 'For A White Revolution: John F. Kennedy and the Shah of Iran', *The Middle East Journal*, 58/4 (2004), pp. 560-575; Victor V. Nemchenok, 'The Ford Foundation and the Failure of Rural Development in Iran, 1953-64', *Middle East Journal*, 63/2 (2009), pp. 261-284; Victor V. Nemchenok, 'In Search of Stability Amid Chaos: US policy toward Iran, 1961-63', *Cold War History*, 10/3 (2010), pp. 341-369.

¹⁵ Andrew L. Johns, "'Tired of Being Treated like a Schoolboy": The Johnson Administration, the Shah of Iran, and the Changing Pattern of U.S.-Iranian Relations, 1965-1967', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 9/2 (2007), pp. 64-94.

a continuing quagmire in Vietnam, President Richard Nixon embraced Iran's rising power and sought to enlist the shah as an instrument of the Nixon Doctrine in the Persian Gulf. As James Bill argues in a scathing critique of Nixon and Kissinger's policies, Washington's uncritical support for the shah overlooked the growing discontent with the shah's rule at home while encouraging his delusions of grandeur abroad, all in the name of containing Soviet influence in the oil-rich Persian Gulf.¹⁶ The harvest of this litany of American missteps was reaped by the Carter administration, with the seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in November 1979 following the victory of the Iranian revolution. Decades of American investment and diplomacy in Iran lay in ruins, as a seemingly powerless President Carter faced one humiliation after another at the hands of Ayatollah Khomeini.¹⁷

'We Now Know'

The 'what went wrong' literature places the decisions and actions of American actors at the centre of the history of U.S.-Iran relations. It constitutes an orthodoxy that reduces Iran to a stage, upon which a series of American triumphs and tragedies are played out, while the shah is relegated to the role of a mere instrument of American power. This thesis moves beyond this orthodox approach by broadening the focus of inquiry from a single actor – the United States – to a study of the relationship between both actors – the United States and Iran – in the context of the regional politics of the Middle East and the global politics of the Cold War. Here I ask, what were the nature and dynamics of U.S.-Iran relations under Nixon,

¹⁶ Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, pp. 183-215.

¹⁷ Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America's Fateful Encounter With Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1985); Patrick Tyler, *A World of Trouble: The White House and the Middle East – from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009), pp. 210-248.

Kissinger, and the shah? By posing this question I do not ignore or dismiss the view from Washington, which is at the heart of this thesis. Instead, I challenge the popular notion of the shah as a mere instrument of the Nixon Doctrine and incorporate the view from Tehran into the history of U.S.-Iran relations during the Cold War. This revisionist account restores agency to the shah by highlighting his role in shaping and implementing the Nixon Doctrine in the Persian Gulf and its environs. Relying on recently declassified American documents, British government papers, and the diaries, memoirs and oral histories of Iranian actors, this thesis suggests that in the 1970s Iran evolved from a client to a partner of the United States in the global Cold War. Mohammad Reza Shah was no longer “America’s proxy”, as he is often portrayed, but an autonomous Cold War actor who acted independently of his American partners.¹⁸ While the Iranian state archives remain closed, the gradual declassification of American documents produced by the Nixon and Ford administrations has opened a window onto the nature of dynamics of Iran’s relations with the United States in this period. A handful of works based on these new sources point to the constant bargaining and friction in the U.S.-Iran relationship in the 1970s, as the shah’s global ambitions expanded in parallel with Iran’s rising oil revenues.¹⁹ This thesis builds on this recent work by providing one of the first studies, based on extensive multi-archival

¹⁸ Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: the United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 144-145.

¹⁹ William Burr, ‘A Brief History of U.S.-Iranian Nuclear Negotiations’, *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, 65/1 (2009), pp. 21-34; Andrew Scott Cooper, ‘Showdown at Doha: The Secret Oil Deal That Helped Sink the Shah of Iran’, *The Middle East Journal*, 62/4 (2008), pp. 567-591.

research, of U.S.-Iran relations from Nixon's assumption of the presidency in 1969 to Kissinger's last year as secretary of state in 1976.

I begin with a broad discussion in *Chapter One* of the framework and methodology for this study of the international history of U.S.-Iran relations during the Cold War. Each of the three subsequent chapters examines in detail a major episode in the U.S.-Iran relationship under Nixon, Kissinger, and the shah. *Chapter Two* focuses on the origins of the partnership between the United States and Iran under the Nixon Doctrine. Here, I pay particular attention to the longstanding friendship between the shah and Nixon, which gave Mohammad Reza Shah tremendous access and influence in the Nixon White House, allowing him to outmanoeuvre his critics in Washington and to convince Nixon and Kissinger to embrace Iran's regional primacy. I suggest that between 1969 and 1972 Iran evolved from a client to a partner of the United States, as the Nixon administration acknowledged the preponderance of Iranian power in the Persian Gulf and agreed to provide whatever conventional arms the shah wanted to ensure Iran's regional primacy. Engrossed with the war in Vietnam, détente with Soviet Union, the opening to Communist China, and the trials of American politics, Nixon and Kissinger increasingly relied on the shah's judgement on regional matters. In *Chapter Three* I focus on the implementation of this partnership, as the shah exercised his influence to draw the United States into the Iranian-backed Kurdish rebellion in northern Iraq in 1972. He used the United States to keep the Iraqi Kurds fighting against Baghdad until 1975, when he abandoned the Kurds in a deal with Iraq's Saddam Hussein, much to embarrassment of Kissinger and the Ford

administration. Finally, in *Chapter Four*, I examine the decline of the partnership after Watergate and Nixon's resignation in 1974. While Iran maintained its autonomy, the caretaker Ford administration reverted to treating the shah as a client, rather than a partner, of the United States. President Gerald Ford proved to be far more responsive than his predecessor to the shah's critics in Washington, who saw Mohammad Reza Shah as a megalomaniac responsible for soaring oil prices. Because of the changing dynamics in the relationship, the United States and Iran ultimately failed to reach an agreement on U.S. nuclear exports to Iran during torturous negotiations between 1974 and 1976. The United States tried to impose a discriminatory nuclear agreement on Iran that was rejected by the shah because it violated Iran's sovereignty. Together, these three chapters provide an international history of the rise and fall of the Iranian-American Cold War partnership under Nixon, Kissinger and the shah. This study locates and examines the origins of this partnership during Nixon's first term; the heyday of the partnership during Nixon's second term; and the gradual decline of the partnership under Ford.

This thesis offers three original and substantive contributions to our understanding of U.S.-Iran relations during the Cold War. First, it restores agency to Mohammad Reza Shah as an autonomous Cold War actor and places him at the centre of the history of U.S.-Iran relations. This focus on the shah and Iranian diplomacy builds upon the earlier work of two Iranian scholars, Shahram Chubin and Rouhollah Ramazani, both of whom produced seminal studies of the history of Iran's foreign relations during the late Pahlavi period.²⁰ Working without access to

²⁰ The two seminal studies are Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabih, *The Foreign Relations of Iran: A Developing State in a Zone of Great-Power Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974)

documentary primary sources and writing what was then contemporary history, their landmark studies could go little further than outlining the broad contours of U.S.-Iran relations in the 1970s. Therefore, the second contribution of this thesis is to add empirical depth to our understanding of U.S.-Iran relations in this period, by providing a detailed history of three key episodes: the shah's role in the origins of Nixon's Persian Gulf policy between 1969 and 1972; the Iranian-American intervention in Iraqi Kurdistan between 1972 and 1975; and the negotiations for an agreement on U.S. nuclear exports to Iran between 1974 and 1976. In parallel with broader developments in the historiography of the Cold War, this thesis makes use of new documentary sources to move away from the debate on 'what went wrong' in U.S.-Iran relations towards a new discussion of what 'we now know' about the nature and dynamics of the relationship.²¹ Finally, as a study in the history of international relations, this thesis locates the Nixon-Kissinger-shah partnership in the broader history of the global Cold War. It seeks to show that the shah's emergence as an autonomous Cold War actor and a partner of the United States under the Nixon Doctrine had dramatic consequences throughout the region, as Iran intervened in a variety of regional Cold War conflicts from Kurdistan to

and Rouhollah K. Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran, 1941-1973: A Study of Foreign Policy in Modernizing Nations* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1975). For Rouhollah Ramazani's other works see, *The Northern Tier: Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey* (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1966); *The Persian Gulf: Iran's Role* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1972); 'Iran's Search for Regional Cooperation', *Middle East Journal*, 30/2 (1976), pp. 173-186; and 'Iran and the Arab-Israeli Conflict,' *Middle East Journal*, 32/4 (1978): 413-428. For Shahram Chubin's other work see, 'Iran: Between the Arab West and the Asian East', *Survival*, 16/4 (1974), pp. 172-182; *Iran and International Organization: The Use of the U.N. on Selected Issues, 1960-1971* (Tehran: Institute for International Political and Economics Studies, 1976); 'The International Politics of the Persian Gulf', *British Journal of International Studies*, 2 (1976), pp. 216-230; and 'Iran' in Yezid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim (eds.), *The Cold War in the Middle East* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

²¹ See, John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Bangladesh. This account of the shah's role in the Cold War suggests that we may need to re-examine the role of other Third World actors as we rethink the international history of the Cold War.

CHAPTER ONE: ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This thesis is a study of U.S.-Iran relations during the Cold War under the leadership of U.S. President Richard Nixon, his adviser Henry Kissinger, and Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi of Iran. It seeks to advance our understanding of the U.S.-Iran relationship between 1969 and 1976 and to locate the Nixon-Kissinger-shah relationship within an emerging scholarly literature on the global Cold War. This chapter begins by discussing the ambitions of this thesis as a work of international history within the discipline of International Relations. It then explores the scholarly literature on the Cold War and suggests how this thesis could contribute to a synthesis between new Cold War history and Middle East area-studies. After presenting a broad sketch of the Cold War in the Third World, this chapter identifies the questions we need to pose in order to judge the nature and dynamics of U.S.-Iran relations in the 1970s. By borrowing some concepts of superpower relations with Third World actors from international relations theorists, this chapter defines key terms that are used throughout the thesis such as ‘client’ and ‘partner,’ and suggests where Iran might fit in the bigger picture of the global Cold War. Finally, this chapter outlines the three historical episodes that make up the three empirical chapters of the thesis and provides an explanation of how these three episodes were selected and what primary sources will be employed to examine them.

History and Theory in International Relations

This thesis is a work of international history, more specifically, the history of international relations during the Cold War. Historians are sometimes uncomfortable locating their work within the discipline of International Relations, where their contribution is often underestimated by theorists. As Michael Hunt writes, many theorists consign historians “to the role of the hewers-of-wood and the drawers-of-water”, providing the raw empirical data for “real social scientists” to “raise grand explanatory structures that would account for the enduring patterns in international relations.”¹ This thesis, however, consciously rejects this division between history and theory within the discipline, by arguing that the two do not, in fact, exist apart from each other. Theory draws upon historical work, which itself has been interpreted through the heuristic device of theory. Therefore, our understanding of international relations cannot advance without the contribution of both historians and theorists. Kenneth Waltz, perhaps the most influential American theorist of international relations, writes that, “Reality emerges from our selection and organization of materials that are available in infinite quantity. How can we decide which materials to select and how to arrange them?” Waltz argues that theory guides our choice of which historical facts to gather and how to interpret them. Yet, Waltz also concedes that, “Knowledge, it seems, must precede theory, and yet knowledge can proceed only from theory.” How then can we arrive at a theory of international relations deductively? Waltz’s unsatisfying answer is that theory emerges “creatively,” which is to say that it is the product of “brilliant

¹ Michael Hunt, ‘The Long Crisis in US Diplomatic History: Coming to Closure’, *Diplomatic History*, 16/1 (1992), pp. 115-116.

intuition flashes.”² He leaves us searching for the font of this theoretical creativity, which must surely be an understanding of history. For example, the influence of Cold War history on the development of international relations theory is evident in Waltz’s own seminal work, *Theory of International Politics*, which warned of the instability of multi-polarity at a time when American power was declining and the rise of China was challenging U.S.-Soviet bi-polarity.³ Similarly, the great theoretical introspection that followed the failure of theorists to anticipate the end of the Cold War led two prominent scholars to describe that historical episode as the ‘Big Bang’ of International Relations.⁴

It is important, however, to avoid conflating a historical approach with inductive reasoning. History exists in infinite quantity and does not speak for itself. How are we to make sense of history? E. H. Carr wrote that the facts of history “are like fish swimming about in a vast and sometimes inaccessible ocean; and what the historian catches will depend, partly on chance, but mainly on what part of the ocean he chooses to fish in and what tackle he chooses to use – these two factors being, of course, determined by the kind of fish he wants to catch. By and large, the historian will get the kind of facts he wants. History means interpretation.”⁵ Borrowing from Carr, we can assume that in order to interpret international history we need some implicit or explicit theory of international relations, some notion of how it all hangs together. As Richard Ned Lebow points out, research questions

² Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), pp. 5-9.

³ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 194-210.

⁴ Richard Ned Lebow and Thomas Risse-Kappen (eds.), *International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. ix. See also, John Lewis Gaddis, ‘International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War’, *International Security*, 17/3 (1993), pp. 5-58.

⁵ E. H. Carr, *What is History?* Second Edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 18.

emerge “when we encounter behaviour at odds with our expectations. Expectations are always theory-driven; they are based on underlying beliefs about how the world works.”⁶ Similarly, Marc Trachtenberg argues that we inquire after historical phenomena that we find surprising, and “If surprise is important, then theory has to be important. The two go hand in hand.”⁷ Therefore, one way of looking at the discipline of International Relations is as a constant dialogue between theorists and historians.⁸ The former are interested in history as the raw material for building and testing theory, while the latter employ theory to generate research questions and interpret raw historical material. Both want to understand and explain international relations. Lebow, borrowing from Isaiah Berlin, uses the analogy of hedgehogs and foxes to describe theoretical and historical approaches to the study of international relations, respectively. Whereas hedgehog theorists “know one big thing, know it very well, and succeed by invoking it repeatedly”, the historian foxes “know many things, are inventive, and tailor their strategies to circumstances.”⁹

The subject of this thesis calls for a fox-like approach to study of international relations. My purpose here is not to build or test any theory of superpower relations with regional actors. Nor do I try to construct a model of the Cold War in the Third World from the single example of the U.S.-Iran relationship. Instead, I seek to provide a detailed historical study of the nature and dynamics of U.S.-Iran relations between 1969 and 1976 through an examination of three key

⁶ Richard Ned Lebow, ‘Social Science and History: Ranchers versus Farmers?’, in Colin Elman and Mirium Fendius Elman (eds.), *Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists, and The Study of International Relations* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), p. 117.

⁷ Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History: A Guide to Method* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 38.

⁸ For an exploration of this synthesis see, Zara Steiner, ‘On Writing International History: Chaps, Maps and Much More’, *International Affairs*, 73/3 (1997), pp. 531-546.

⁹ Lebow, ‘Social Science and History’, p. 123.

episodes from this period. I have chosen to study the U.S.-Iran relationship in the 1970s because recently available documentary evidence from this period seems to be at odds with the orthodox view of the shah as a mere instrument of American power. I draw upon this new evidence to argue that the shah emerged as an autonomous Cold War actor in the 1970s and that the nature and dynamics of U.S.-Iran relations were characterised by a partnership that rose and fell between 1969 and 1976. Although the primary contribution of this thesis is to broaden and deepen our understanding of the international history of U.S.-Iran relations during the Cold War, its findings also contribute to an ongoing re-evaluation of the global Cold War that is discussed below. The revisionist account of U.S.-Iran relations in this thesis suggests that Third World actors, particularly those that aspired to regional primacy like Iran, may well have enjoyed more autonomy from the superpowers and played a larger role in the Cold War than either theorists or historians of international relations have acknowledged.¹⁰

New Cold War History

The British novelist and essayist George Orwell coined the phrase ‘Cold War’ to describe a “peace that is no peace” between the United States and the Soviet Union in the nuclear age. He worried that these two great powers, unable to conquer each other because of the awesome destructive power of atomic weapons, would instead divide the world between them, heralding “an epoch as horribly stable as the slave

¹⁰ See, for example, Max Paul Friedman, ‘Retiring the Puppets, Bringing Latin America Back In: Recent Scholarship on United States – Latin American Relations’, *Diplomatic History*, 27/5 (2003), pp. 621-636.

empires of antiquity.”¹¹ His was a view of the Cold War from the periphery of power, beyond the capitals of the great powers. Orwell’s perspective was different from that of Walter Lippmann, the influential American journalist, who popularised the term ‘Cold War’ in his critique of George Kennan’s containment thesis.¹² Lippmann argued that American interests lay not in defending the “disorganized, disunited, feeble or disorderly nations, tribes and factions around the perimeter of the Soviet Union”, but in protecting its “natural allies” in the “Atlantic community”.¹³ Whereas Orwell feared a return to empire, Lippmann worried that an overextended United States would be defeated by the Soviet Union. Lippmann’s focus on the Atlantic community, not Orwell’s concern with the extra-European world, has shaped the kinds of questions we ask about the Cold War. The confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union casts its shadow over international relations between 1945 and 1991, which is why we characterise this period of international history as the ‘Cold War’. But, to take Orwell’s perspective, the history of the Cold War was not only the history of superpower competition for the mastery of Europe, but also of superpower intervention in many parts of the ‘Third World’ – those countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America that emerged from European colonial domination after the Second World War. As the French theorist and *homme de lettres* Raymond Aron wrote in 1966, “the Western bloc and the Soviet bloc confront each other on the Old Continent like two goats face to face on a narrow bridge, each as incapable of moving forward as the other, but the

¹¹ George Orwell, ‘You and the Atomic Bomb’, *Tribune*, 19 October 1945.

¹² Walter Lippmann, *The Cold War: A Study in U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947). George F. Kennan, ‘The Sources of Soviet Conduct’, *Foreign Affairs*, 25/4 (1947), pp. 566-582.

¹³ Lippmann, *The Cold War*, pp. 21, 24.

states...outside this direct confrontation may be seen as the true stakes in the debate or the historical conflict between Washington and Moscow, between the Western world and the Soviet world.”¹⁴

In this thesis I take the view of Orwell and Aaron that the Third World mattered in Cold War history. More specifically, I assume that Third World actors, like Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, were also Cold War actors. This is a relatively novel approach, given the traditional view of the Cold War as the history of great power rivalry in a largely, though not exclusively, European context. For example, John Lewis Gaddis characterised the Cold War as a ‘long peace’ because of the absence of great power conflict in Europe. He acknowledged that concurrent with the long peace in Europe, the Third World suffered from “a whole series of protracted and devastating limited wars, an abundance of revolutionary, ethnic, religious, and civil violence, as well as some of the deepest and most intractable ideological rivalries in human experience.”¹⁵ But ultimately, he argued, these ‘limited wars’ in the Third World were not as important as the long peace in Europe. In his seminal work, *We Now Know* (1997), he dedicated only one chapter to a discussion of the Third World and concluded that, “the ‘third world’ did not, in the end, determine the Cold War’s outcome. What took place in Europe and Japan largely did, and there the results were decisive.” Gaddis hoped that with the fall of the Soviet Union and the opening of the state archives of the former Communist countries, we could finally write a

¹⁴ Raymond Aron, *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations* (Malabar: Robert E. Krieger, 1981), p. 506.

¹⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, ‘The Long Peace: Elements of Stability in the Postwar International System’, *International Security*, 10/4 (1986), p. 100.

“new” Cold War history that would incorporate the view from the “other side”.¹⁶
But this new Cold War history continued to neglect the Third World.

The marginalisation of the Third World in Cold War historiography was a product not only of a Eurocentric view of international relations, but also of the practical difficulty for Western scholars of accessing state archives outside of Europe and the United States. However, as new archival sources in the Third World have slowly become available, the scope of new Cold War history has expanded dramatically. The Cold War is no longer studied as simply a confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union in Europe. Instead, historians now recognise that because of decolonization in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, the Cold War evolved into “a struggle over the direction of global history and the definition of modernity itself.”¹⁷ New Cold War history does not ignore the superpowers or the European theatre of the Cold War. Instead, it recognises that the course of what Odd Arne Westad has called the “global Cold War” was determined as much by rulers and revolutionaries in Cairo, Hanoi, and Havana, as statesman in London, Moscow, and Washington.¹⁸ Therefore, as Westad writes, “New Cold War history is in its essence multiarchival in research and multipolar in analysis, and, in the cases of some of its best practitioners, multicultural in its ability to understand

¹⁶ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, pp. 282-283, 286.

¹⁷ Michael E. Latham, ‘The Cold War in the Third World, 1963-1975’ in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume II: Crisis and Détente* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 259. See also, Jeremi Suri, ‘The Cold War, Decolonisation, and Global Social Awakenings: Historical Intersections’, *Cold War History*, 6/3 (2006), pp. 353-363; William Wohlforth, ‘Superpowers, Interventions, and the Third World’, *Cold War History*, 6/3 (2006), pp. 365-371.

¹⁸ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

different and sometimes opposing mindsets.”¹⁹ This literature ranges from broad works, such as Michael Latham’s study of American social science and the Third World, to more focused studies, like Chen Jian’s work on Mao Zedong and China or Salim Yaqub’s study of the American encounter with Gamal Abdel Nasser and Arab nationalism.²⁰ What these works have in common is a treatment of the regional and domestic politics of the Third World as part of the fabric of the global Cold War. They are not only interested in explaining why and how the superpowers intervened in the Third World, but go further by asking what impact these Third World actors, who emerged in the era of decolonization and revolutionary nationalism, had on the course of the Cold War itself.

The availability of documentary sources in the former Soviet Union, combined with the opening of the Israeli state archives, has resulted in a proliferation of new Cold War histories of the Middle East.²¹ Iran, however, remains on the margins of this literature, with studies of the region focusing overwhelmingly on the superpowers and the Arab-Israeli conflict. When Cold War scholars study Iran, they do so largely in the context of either the old debates about

¹⁹ Odd Arne Westad (ed.), *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), p. 5. See also, Odd Arne Westad, ‘Review: A “New,” “International” History of the Cold War?’, *Journal of Peace Research* 32/4 (1995), pp. 483-487; Odd Arne Westad, ‘The New International History of the Cold War: Three (Possible) Paradigms’, *Diplomatic History*, 24/4 (2000), pp. 551-565.

²⁰ Jian Chen, *Mao’s China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Michael E. Latham, *Modernization As Ideology: American Social Science and ‘Nation Building’ in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). These three books are all published in a series on ‘The New Cold War History’, edited by John Lewis Gaddis.

²¹ Nigel J. Ashton (ed.), *The Cold War in the Middle East: Regional Conflict and the Superpowers 1967-73* (London: Routledge, 2007); Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez, *Foxbats over Dimona: the Soviets’ Nuclear Gamble in the Six-Day War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Peter L. Hahn, ‘The View from Jerusalem: Revelations about U.S. Diplomacy from the Archives of Israel’, *Diplomatic History*, 22/4 (1998), pp. 509-532; Yaacov Ro’i and Boris Morozov (eds.), *The Soviet Union and the June 1967 Six Day War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

the origins of the Cold War, with reference to the 1946 Azerbaijan crisis and the 1953 coup against Musaddiq, or the Islamist challenge to the United States and the Soviet Union after the shah's overthrow in 1979.²² Little attention has been given to the foreign relations of Iran in the era of superpower détente, but the fleeting references in new Cold War history to U.S.-Iran relations in the 1970s hint at Iran's increasing autonomy vis-à-vis the United States as Iran's oil revenues and military

²² On the 1946 Azerbaijan crisis and the origins of the Cold War see, Justus D. Doenecke, 'Iran's Role in Cold War Revisionism', *Iranian Studies*, 5/2 (1972), pp. 96-111; Fawcett, *Iran and the Cold War*; James F. Goode, *The United States and Iran, 1946-51: The Diplomacy of Neglect* (London: Macmillan, 1989); Jamal Hasanov, *At the Dawn of the Cold War: The Soviet-American Crisis Over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946* (Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield, 2006); Gary R. Hess, 'The Iranian Crisis of 1945-46 and the Cold War', *Political Science Quarterly*, 89/1 (1974), pp. 117-146; Bruce R. Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East: Great Power Conflict and Diplomacy in Iran, Turkey and Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Steven L. McFarland, 'A Peripheral View of the Origins of the Cold War: The Crises in Iran, 1941-47', *Diplomatic History*, 4/4 (1980), pp. 333-352; F. S. Raine, 'Stalin and the Creation of the Azerbaijan Democratic Party in Iran, 1945', *Cold War History*, 2/1 (2001), pp. 1-38; Kuross A. Samii, 'Truman Against Stalin in Iran: A Tale of Three Messages', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 23/1 (1987), pp. 95-107; Natalia I. Yegorova, 'The "Iran Crisis" of 1945-46: A View from the Russian Archives', Working Paper No. 15, Cold War International History Project Working Paper Series (Washington: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1996), available at: <<http://wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/ACFB51.pdf>>.

On the 1953 coup as a Cold War crisis see, Fakhreddin Azimi, *Iran: the Crisis of Democracy* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1989); Darioush Bayandor, *Iran and the CIA: The Fall of Mosaddeq Revisited* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Bill and Louis, *Musaddiq, Iranian Nationalism*; Mostafa Elm, *Oil, Power, and Principle: Iran's Oil Nationalization and its Aftermath* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992); Gasiorowski and Byrne, *Mohammad Mosaddeq*; Gavin, 'Politics, Power'; Goode, *The United States and Iran: In the Shadow of Musaddiq*; Mary Ann Heiss, *Empire and Nationhood: The United States, Great Britain, and Iranian Oil, 1950-54* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Homa Katouzian, *Musaddiq and the Struggle for Power in Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1990); Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2003); Steve Marsh, *Anglo-American Relations and Cold War Oil: Crisis in Iran* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Fariborz Mokhtari, 'Iran's 1953 Coup Revisited: Internal Dynamics versus External Intrigue', *Middle East Journal*, 62/3 (2008), pp. 457-488; Moirara de Moraes Ruehsen, 'Operation "AJAX" revisited: Iran 1953', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 29/3 (1993), pp. 467-486.

On the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the Cold War see, Ayesha Jalal, 'An Uncertain Trajectory: Islam's Contemporary Globalization, 1971-1979' in Niall Ferguson et. al. (eds.), *Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 319-336; Amin Saikal, 'Islamism, the Iranian Revolution, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan' in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume III: Endings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 112-134; Westad, *The Global Cold War*, pp. 288-330.

capabilities were augmented.²³ For example, Westad refrains from using terms like ‘proxy’ or ‘client’ to describe the shah. Instead, he refers to the shah as Washington’s “closest and most powerful ally” who safeguarded the security of the Persian Gulf and the shipping lanes that connected it with the global oil market. He does not see the shah as a passive instrument of American power but as an autonomous actor who “was determined to recreate Iran as a modern state, capable of rational government, economic growth, and military preparedness.”²⁴ This thesis goes some way towards expanding on this view and filling this gap in new Cold War history by using an array of newly available documentary sources to extend the study of Iran and the Cold War into the 1970s.

The Cold War and the Middle East

While historians of the Cold War have only recently begun to seriously consider the global significance of regional actors, scholars of the Middle East have long been studying the impact of the global Cold War on their region. The primary question with which this area-studies literature is concerned is the extent to which the behaviour of these local actors can be understood with reference to the superpowers and the Cold War.²⁵ The consensus among these scholars is that the Cold War

²³ One notable exception is Shahram Chubin, ‘Iran’ in Yezid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim (eds.), *The Cold War in the Middle East* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 216-249.

²⁴ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, pp. 289-292. See also, Fred Halliday, ‘Forward’ in Richard Saul, *Rethinking Theory and History in the Cold War: The State, Military Power and Social Revolution* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), pp. xi-xii.

²⁵ See, Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, *Israel, the Superpowers and War in the Middle East* (New York: Praeger, 1987); Moshe Efrat and Jacob Bercovitch (eds.), *Superpowers and Client States in the Middle East* (London: Routledge, 1991); Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Superpowers and the Middle East: Regional and International Politics 1955-1967* (Boulder: Westview, 1994); Wm. Roger Louis and Roger Owen (eds.), *A Revolutionary Year: The Middle East in 1958* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002); Peter Sluglett, ‘The Cold War in the Middle East’ in Louise Fawcett (ed.), *International Relations of the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 41-58; Steven L. Spiegel (ed.),

explains very little about either the domestic politics or international relations of the Middle East, which are in fact deeply rooted in the cultural, political, and social structures of the region. While acknowledging the impact of American and Soviet intervention during the Cold War, they tend to conclude that local actors enjoyed a great deal of autonomy from their superpower patrons. Writing at the height of Cold War tensions between the superpowers, Leonard Binder argued that,

“it is erroneous to look upon the Middle East as being in the “middle” between the United States and the Soviet Union. It is clear that the great-power relationship has an important bearing on Middle East affairs, but the latter may not be understood wholly or even primarily in terms of the major international system. If power were likened to rays of light, we might say that extra-area power is “refracted” when projected into the Middle Eastern element.”²⁶

By ‘refraction’ Binder meant that the superpowers could not easily translate their military and economic strength into influence over local actors in the Middle East.²⁷

Like many students of the region, he questioned the view of the Middle East as the world’s “most penetrated international relations subsystem.”²⁸ For these scholars, the fate of the peoples of the Middle East was no longer determined in London and Paris, as it had been during the era of colonial domination; but in Cairo, Jerusalem and Tehran, in the era of decolonisation and revolutionary nationalism. Malcolm Kerr used the analogy of a “boiling pot” to describe the post-war order in the

Conflict Management in the Middle East (Boulder: Westview, 1992); Bassam Tibi, *Conflict and War in the Middle East, 1967-91: Regional Dynamic and the Superpowers* (London: Macmillan, 1993).

²⁶ Leonard Binder, ‘The Middle East as a Subordinate International System’, *World Politics* 10/3 (1958), p. 415.

²⁷ Binder, ‘The Middle East’, p. 419. See also, Michael Brecher, ‘International Relations and Asian Studies: The Subordinate State System of Southern Asia’, *World Politics* 15/2 (1963), pp. 213-235; George Modelski, ‘International Relations and Area Studies: The Case of South-East Asia’, *International Relations*, 2/3 (1961), pp. 143-155; William R. Thompson, ‘The Arab Sub-System and the Feudal Pattern of Interaction: 1965’, *Journal of Peace Research* 7/2 (1970), pp. 151-167.

²⁸ L. Carl Brown, *International Politics and the Middle East: Old Rules, Dangerous Game* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1984), p. 4.

Middle East, writing that, “It is not within the power of outsiders to adjust the flame under the pot to their liking, let alone turn it off, nor to determine the contents.”²⁹

A plethora of surveys and case-studies of superpower intervention in the Middle East seemed to confirm the limits of American influence over Israel, and that of the Soviet Union over the radical Arab states in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict.³⁰ Indeed, by the end of the Cold War the orthodox view of these relationships within this area-studies literature was one of ‘tails wagging dogs’.³¹ Looking back on the Cold War, these area-studies scholars concluded that the states of the Middle East had not been “driftwood in the sea of international affairs,” but rather, autonomous actors capable of manipulating their superpower patrons.³² A landmark volume edited by Avi Shlaim and Yezid Sayigh on *The Cold War and the Middle East* (1997) reinforced this area-studies consensus on the autonomy of regional actors. Shlaim concluded that the divergence between the agenda of the superpowers, which was focused on the global balance of power, and that of their

²⁹ Malcolm H. Kerr, ‘Persistence of Regional Quarrels’ in J. C. Hurewitz (ed.), *Soviet-American Rivalry in the Middle East* (New York: Praeger, 1971), p. 228. See also, Malcolm H. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal 'Abd Al-Nasir And His Rivals, 1958-1970*, Third Edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. vi.

³⁰ On the United States and Israel see, Abraham Ben-Zvi, *The United States and Israel: The Limits of the Special Relationship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Peter L. Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East: U.S. Policy Towards the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1945-1961* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Zach Levey, *Israel and the Western Powers, 1952-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); David Schoenbaum, *The United States and the State of Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli*; William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). On the Soviet Union and the radical Arab states see, Adeed Dawisha and Karen Dawisha (eds.), *The Soviet Union in the Middle East: Policies and Perspectives* (London: Heinemann, 1982); Galia Golan, *Soviet Politics in the Middle East: From World War II to Gorbachov* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Fred Halliday, *Threat from the East? Soviet Policy from Afghanistan and Iran to the Horn of Africa* (London: Pelican, 1982); Oles M. Smolansky and Bettie M. Smolansky, *The USSR and Iraq: The Soviet Quest for Influence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

³¹ See, Michael I. Handel, ‘Does the Dog Wag the Tail or Vice Versa? Patron-Client Relations’, *The Jerusalem Journal of International Relations*, 6/2 (1982), pp. 24-35.

³² Malcolm E. Yapp, *The Near East Since the First World War*, Vol. II (London: Longman, 1991), p. 3.

local clients, who were preoccupied with their immediate neighbours, accounted for the limits of superpower influence in the Middle East during the Cold War. The superpowers' neglect and misunderstanding of local issues, combined with a "zero-sum mentality" that made them acutely sensitive to even the smallest relative gain by their superpower adversary in the region, allowed local actors to embroil the superpowers in regional conflicts by 'painting local crises with Cold War colours.' For example, President Camille Chamoun of Lebanon and Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel were able to enlist the Eisenhower and Reagan administrations in their local squabbles by portraying their domestic and regional adversaries as Soviet agents.³³

In contrast with this Middle East area-studies consensus, historians of the Cold War remain sceptical about regional autonomy and the limits of superpower influence in the Third World. They tend to argue, like Westad, that the Cold War was "critically important" to the politics of the Third World and they see superpower intervention in the Third World as "a continuation of colonialism through slightly different means."³⁴ They see the Middle East as no exception to this broader pattern and often characterise U.S. policy in the region as a form of neo-imperialism or Orientalism.³⁵ Both perspectives, the regional and the global, offer potential insights into the nature and dynamics of U.S.-Iran relations during the Cold War. Like Fred Halliday, I seek to avoid both "facile globalization" and

³³ Avi Shlaim, 'Conclusion' in Yezid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim (eds.), *The Cold War in the Middle East* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 280-282.

³⁴ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, p. 396. See also, Roger E. Kanet, 'The Superpower Quest for Empire: The Cold War and Soviet Support for "Wars of National Liberation"', *Cold War History*, 6/3 (2006), pp. 331-352.

³⁵ See, Douglas Little, 'Gideon's Band: America and the Middle East since 1945', *Diplomatic History*, 18/4 (1994), pp. 513-540; Andrew J. Rotter, 'Saidism without Said: Orientalism and U.S. Diplomatic History', *The American Historical Review*, 105/4 (2000), pp. 1205-1217.

“regional narcissism” in my analysis of the U.S.-Iran relations during the Cold War.³⁶ Instead, I take a middle road that incorporates both the view from Tehran and Washington. While the ambitions of the United States and the Soviet Union to control and dominate the Third World certainly echoed that of the European imperial powers, the process of decolonization and the rise of revolutionary nationalism after the Second World War dramatically diminished the ability of outside powers to project their influence into the Middle East.³⁷ If there was a Cold War in the Middle East, then as Halliday argues, “this was as much because local states and social movements sought to take advantage of it for their own ends as because it was a passive object of external strategic rivalries.”³⁸ In this thesis I suggest that Nixon and Kissinger were not simply imposing American power on Iran, as Britain and Russia had done for centuries. Instead, I argue that the shah ‘invited’ the United States into a partnership, which often served Iranian, rather than American, interests.³⁹ By combining regional and global perspectives on the international relations of the Middle East, I make the case that the shah’s autonomy from the United States in the 1970s is crucial to understanding Iran’s place in the global Cold War. As such, this thesis contributes to an emerging synthesis between new Cold War history and area-studies research, which examines not only the

³⁶ Fred Halliday, ‘The Middle East, the Great Powers, and the Cold War’ in Yezid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim (eds.), *The Cold War and the Middle East* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 12.

³⁷ See, Wm. Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East 1945-1951: Arab Nationalism, the United States, and Postwar Imperialism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); Glen Balfour-Paul, *The Decline of Empire in the Middle East: Britain’s Relinquishment of Power in Her Last Three Dependencies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

³⁸ Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations: Powers, Politics and Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 98-99.

³⁹ Geir Lundestad, “‘Empire by Invitation’ in the American Century’, *Diplomatic History*, 23/2 (1999), pp. 189-217.

impact of the Cold War on the Middle East, but also the significance of the Middle East for the international history of the Cold War.⁴⁰

The Superpowers and the Third World: An Overview

The concern of this thesis with the nature and dynamics of U.S.-Iran relations between 1969 and 1976 has emerged, in part, from the debates in new Cold War history and Middle East area-studies that have been outlined in the preceding section of this chapter. In the following section I draw upon this same literature, as well as some broader theoretical studies of international relations during the Cold War, to guide my research into the U.S.-Iran relationship. Where can I look for evidence of the nature and dynamics of U.S.-Iran relations? What do I mean by terms such as ‘client’ and ‘partner’? How will I know whether Iran was an ‘autonomous’ Cold War actor? These are the questions with which I am concerned here.

At the most basic level, I borrow from Martin Wight to distinguish between ‘great powers’ and ‘minor powers’. For Wight, what distinguishes states in a hierarchy of power is not only the relative distribution of material power, but the breadth of the ambitions and interests that this power affords them. Therefore, great powers are those whose interests span the globe, while the interests of minor powers are limited to a particular region. Furthermore, among the great powers there are those ‘dominant powers’ which seek mastery of the international system. Wight concludes that after the Second World War there were five great powers: Britain, China, France, the Soviet Union, and the United States. Of these, only the

⁴⁰ See, for example, Nathan J. Citino, ‘The Ottoman Legacy in Cold War Modernization’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 40/4 (2008), pp. 579-597.

latter two qualify as dominant powers or superpowers.⁴¹ The term ‘superpower’ was first employed by W. T. R. Fox in 1944, in which category he included not only the Soviet Union and the United States but also Britain.⁴² As Hedley Bull writes, a superpower was “a new class of power, superior to the traditional European powers; and alone capable of undertaking the central managerial role in international politics they had played in the past.”⁴³ Throughout this thesis I use the term superpower to refer to the United States and the Soviet Union. Although my use of this term equates the two as superpowers, I do not wish to imply that the nature and dynamics of American and Soviet intervention in the Third World were the same; I assume only that they were comparable. Similarly, I use the terms Third World/regional/local actor/power interchangeably to refer to minor powers whose interests were limited to a particular region, in this case Pahlavi Iran in the Persian Gulf and its environs.

While we can make a very basic analytical distinction between superpowers and minor powers, our image of the Cold War becomes infinitely more complex when we try to make generalisations about the patterns of the relationships between these two kinds of actors. While there were only two superpowers – the United States and the Soviet Union – there was an immense variety of Third World actors in the Cold War, each enjoying varying degrees of autonomy from the superpowers

⁴¹ Martin Wight, *Power Politics*, Hedley Bull and Carsten Holbraad (eds.) (London: Royal Institute for International Affairs, 1978), pp. 30-65.

⁴² W. T. R. Fox, *The Super-Powers: the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union – Their Responsibility for Peace* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1944).

⁴³ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 203.

based on their local circumstances.⁴⁴ To make any sense of where Iran might fit on this broad canvass of the global Cold War, I need to “impose order on the past” by engaging in what Gaddis calls ‘lumping’.⁴⁵ I begin by outlining three questions that I can ask about the U.S.-Iran relationship, which will then help me group Iran with other Third World actors in one of three broad categories: ‘satellites’, ‘clients’, or ‘partners’. My purpose here is not to develop a theory of superpower relations with Third World actors, but rather to introduce some analytical language to simplify and make sense of the Cold War in the Third World and to determine where the U.S.-Iran relationship might fit in that bigger picture.

Borrowing from the work of Michael Handel and Christopher Shoemaker & John Spanier, the first question I pose is: what is the degree of bargaining and reciprocity in the U.S.-Iran relationship?⁴⁶ Here I need to make a judgement about the balance of benefits that the United States and Iran each derived from the relationship and what they gave up in return. The shah, like other Third World actors, jealously guarded his independence and autonomy from the United States.⁴⁷ Indeed, as Iran’s oil revenues steadily grew in the 1960s, Iran received less and less

⁴⁴ See, Iver B. Neumann (ed.), *Regional Great Powers in International Politics* (Basingstoke: St Martin’s Press, 1992).

⁴⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. vii.

⁴⁶ Michael I. Handel, *Weak States in the International System* (London: Frank Cass, 1981), pp. 132-137; Christopher C. Shoemaker and John Spanier, *Patron-Client State Relationships: Multilateral Crises in a Nuclear Age* (New York: Praeger, 1984), pp. 13-21. See also, Jeffrey L. Hughes, ‘On Bargaining’ in Jan F. Triska (ed.), *Dominant Powers and Subordinate States: the United States in Latin America and the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1986), pp. 168-199.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of the security dilemmas confronting Third World actors like the shah see, Mohammad Ayoob, ‘Review: The Security Problematic of the Third World’, *World Politics*, 43/2 (1991), pp. 257-283; Steven R. David, ‘Explaining Third World Alignment’, *World Politics*, 43/2 (1991), pp. 233-256.

American economic and military assistance.⁴⁸ Why, then, did Iran's alignment with the United States continue and intensify in the 1970s? What did the shah gain from his close identification with the Nixon Doctrine? What could he offer Nixon and Kissinger in return, at a time when the United States was pursuing détente with the Soviet Union and scaling back America's overseas military commitments in the context of Vietnam? How much bargaining took place in the relationship and who got their way? All of these questions will need to be addressed in order to form a judgement about the nature of dynamics of the U.S.-Iran relationship. However, the presence of bargaining and reciprocity in the relationship would not, in and of itself, mean that Iran was an autonomous Cold War actor. For example, historians have suggested that bargaining and reciprocity were a constant feature of the relationship between London and the colonised local elites of Britain's 'informal' empire.⁴⁹ Similarly, the shah's critics accused him of being a collaborator with American imperialism, bargaining away Iran's independence for the sake of preserving himself in power. Therefore, two additional issues – American respect for Iran's national sovereignty and the degree of mutual penetration and influence – must also be factored into the analysis.

I borrow from Hedley Bull to pose my second question: to what extent did the United States resort to force or coercion in its relationship with Iran? Bull argued that great powers unilaterally exercise their preponderance of power by employing varying degrees of force and showing varying degrees of disregard for

⁴⁸ Gasirowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy*, pp. 102-103.

⁴⁹ See, Wm. Roger Louis, 'Robinson and Gallagher and Their Critics' in his *Ends of British Imperialism: The Scramble for Empire, Suez and Decolonization: Collected Essays* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), pp. 907-954.

the universal norm of sovereignty in their relations with minor powers. He distinguished between relationships of “dominance” where such behaviour is “habitual”; “hegemony” where this behaviour is “occasional and reluctant”; and “primacy” where “leadership” is attained without the resort to force. Bull argued that dominance, by which I take him to mean empire, “has ceased to represent a viable form of great power preponderance” after the Second World War. He gives Soviet intervention in Eastern Europe and American intervention in Central America and the Caribbean as examples of hegemony, while he points to the U.S. position in the Atlantic community as an example of primacy.⁵⁰ We might argue that the United States’ relationship with Iran bore the hallmarks of both hegemony and primacy at different points during the Cold War. American disregard for Iran’s sovereignty was hardly habitual, so the notion of American empire or dominance in Iran would be an exaggeration. But the United States did occasionally violate Iran’s sovereignty in the 1950s and 1960s. The most obvious example is the Eisenhower administration’s covert support for the military coup against Musaddiq in 1953. But there were also other examples, such as the controversial status of forces agreement that was negotiated by the Kennedy administration and agreed to by President Johnson in 1964, which granted immunity to American military personnel and their dependents in Iran from all Iranian laws and courts.⁵¹ The challenge for this thesis is to determine whether this pattern of occasional American disregard for Iran’s sovereignty persisted into the 1970s, or whether Nixon and Kissinger sought to

⁵⁰ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, pp. 214-216.

⁵¹ See, Richard Pfau, ‘The Legal Status of American Forces in Iran’, *Middle East Journal*, 28/2 (1974), pp. 141-153.

persuade rather than coerce the shah.⁵² Crucially, was the shah both able and willing to resist Nixon and Kissinger's demands, particularly when these demands trampled on Iran's sovereignty?

The third and final question that I pose looks below the surface of the state to ask: to what extent did the United States and Iran penetrate and influence each others' decision-making processes? This question relates back to the earlier discussion of the disagreement between Cold War historians and area-studies experts on the relationship between the global Cold War and the politics of the Middle East. There is general agreement that both the Soviet Union and the United States sought to penetrate and remake state and society in the Third World.⁵³ There is, however, no consensus as to whether this penetration translated into influence over the local actors' decision-making. A number of scholars have highlighted cases where Third World actors were able to influence and manipulate the decision-making of the superpowers by shaping American and Soviet perceptions of local conditions in the Third World or by manipulating the domestic politics of the superpower.⁵⁴ The most commonly cited example is the U.S.-Israel relationship and the influence of the pro-Israel lobby in Washington.⁵⁵ However, Robert Keohane, writing at the time of Nixon's presidency, also identified Iran's relationship with the

⁵² On the distinction between persuasion and coercion under hegemony see, G. John Ikenberry and Charles A. Kupchan, 'Socialization and Hegemonic Power', *International Organization*, 44/3 (1990), pp. 283-315.

⁵³ See, George W. Breslauer, 'Ideology and Learning in Soviet Third World Policy', *World Politics*, 39/3 (1987), pp. 429-448; Nick Cullather, 'Modernization Theory' in Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Patterson (eds.), *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 212-220; Westad, *The Global Cold War*.

⁵⁴ Zachary Karabell, *Architects of Intervention: The United States, the Third World, and the Cold War, 1946-1962* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997).

⁵⁵ See, Tony Smith, *Foreign Attachments: The Power of Ethnic Groups in the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007).

United States as a prime example of what he called “the big influence of small allies.” He characterised the shah’s strategy vis-à-vis the United States as one of “loyalty with independence”.⁵⁶ The extent of American penetration of Iranian state and society has been well documented by Mark Gasiorowski, whose research shows that the number of American military advisers in Iran fluctuated between roughly 300 and 500 personnel between 1961 and 1972, but then jumped to more than 1,000 in 1976. These Americans were in Iran to help the Iranian armed forces absorb the huge volumes of American arms that the shah was ordering in the 1970s, financed by Iran’s rapidly rising oil revenues. Outside of the military, the number of American consultants in Iran proliferated in areas such as agriculture, civil administration, higher education, industry and engineering, and public health.⁵⁷ Did this growing American presence in Iran translate into American influence over the shah’s decision-making? To what extent did Mohammad Reza Shah take Washington’s interests into account in the conduct of Iran’s foreign relations? Conversely, what role did the shah play in Nixon and Kissinger’s decision-making? Was he able to influence their perceptions of local conditions in the Middle East?

Taken together these three dimensions of the U.S.-Iran relationship – bargaining & reciprocity, sovereignty, and penetration & influence – will help me locate Pahlavi Iran in the broader picture of the Cold War in the Third World. Here I borrow three terms from the vast theoretical literature on minor or subordinate powers – satellite, client, and partner – as a short-hand for three possible roles that

⁵⁶ Robert Keohane, ‘The Big Influence of Small Allies’, *Foreign Policy*, 2 (1971), pp. 162-170.

⁵⁷ Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy*, pp. 85-129, 112. See also, Thomas M. Ricks, ‘U.S. Military Missions to Iran, 1943-1978: The Political Economy of Military Assistance’, *Iranian Studies*, 12/3-4 (1979), pp. 163-193.

Iran might have played in the global Cold War.⁵⁸ I define these terms in this chapter and try to use them consistently throughout the thesis. The term ‘satellite’ refers to those minor powers that enjoyed little reciprocity in their relationship with a superpower. The satellite’s leadership had little choice but to submit to being part of the superpower’s ‘sphere of influence,’ as the superpower was readily willing to use force to enforce compliance if the satellite attempted to defect.⁵⁹ The superpower deeply penetrated the satellite’s state and society, to the extent that the superpower’s agents were actually present in the satellite’s decision-making processes. The term is most often used to describe the Soviet satellite states in Central and Eastern Europe that were members of the Warsaw Pact, but it is extremely difficult to classify any Third World actor in this category. Even states that were deeply penetrated by the Soviet Union, such as Ethiopia after the coup by Mengistu Haile Marian in February 1977 or Afghanistan after the Soviet military intervention in December 1979, managed to defy and confound Moscow.⁶⁰ Similarly, Washington found it difficult to control even those Third World regimes that relied on the United States for their very survival, such as South Vietnam under Presidents Ngo Dinh Diem or Nguyen Van Thieu.⁶¹

⁵⁸ These terms are taken from, Klaus Knorr, *The Power of Nations: The Political Economy of International Relations* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 24-26; and Handel, *Weak States*, 132-137. For surveys of the vast theoretical literature on minor powers see, Annette Baker Fox, ‘The Small States in the International System, 1919-1969’, *International Journal*, 24/4 (1969), pp. 751-764; Robert O. Keohane, ‘Lilliputians’ Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics’, *International Organization* 23/2 (1969), pp. 291-310.

⁵⁹ On ‘spheres of influence’ see, Paul Keal, *Unspoken Rules and Superpower Dominance* (London: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 5-15.

⁶⁰ See, Westad, *The Global Cold War*, pp. 250-287, 299-326.

⁶¹ See, Kathryn C. Statler, ‘Building a Colony: South Vietnam and the Eisenhower Administration, 1953-1961’ in Kathryn C. Statler and Andrew L. Johns (eds.), *The Eisenhower Administration, the Third World, and the Globalization of the Cold War* (Lanham: Rowen & Littlefield, 2006), pp. 101-123; Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, ‘Waging War on All Fronts: Nixon, Kissinger, and the Vietnam War,

The vast geographic distances between the superpowers and Third World actors in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, combined with the popularity of the idea of non-alignment throughout the Third World, meant that the vast majority of Third World actors enjoyed significant degrees of autonomy as either ‘clients’ or ‘partners’ of the superpowers.⁶² A ‘client’ was a minor power that enjoyed some reciprocity in its relationship with its superpower patron. Client states voluntarily aligned themselves with a superpower, in exchange for security guarantees or military and economic assistance. They were able to bargain with their patrons by threatening to defect from one superpower patron to another. Coercion by the superpower was rare, though not absent in such relationships. Transfers of economic and military assistance meant that clients were penetrated by their superpower patron, often to point of dependency.⁶³ Although the superpower’s agents were rarely physically present in the client’s policy deliberations, this penetration meant that clients had to take their patron’s interests into consideration in their decisions. The term ‘client’ is most often used to describe the pro-American military dictatorships of Latin America.⁶⁴ However, it can also be extended to the vast majority of Third World actors, including those in the Middle East. Examples include the Soviet Union’s relationship with Iraq after the 1958 revolution, which

1969-1972’ in Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston (eds.), *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 185-203.

⁶² See, Roy Allison, *The Soviet Union and the Strategy of Non-Alignment in the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); H. W. Brands, *The Specter of Neutralism: The United States and the Emergence of the Third World, 1947-1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Edward A. Kolodziej and Roger E. Kanet (eds.), *The Limits of Soviet Power in the Developing World* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

⁶³ On ‘dependency’ in the Cold War context see, Louis A. Pérez, Jr., ‘Dependency’ in Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Patterson (eds.), *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 162-175.

⁶⁴ See, for example, John H. Coatsworth, *Central America and the United States: the Clients and the Colossus* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994).

will be discussed later in this thesis, as well as the United States' relationship with King Hussein of Jordan, particularly after the 'Black September' of 1970.⁶⁵

An even greater degree of autonomy was enjoyed by a Third World 'partner' of a superpower. Despite the asymmetry in power in such partnerships, the Third World partner enjoyed a significant degree of bargaining power because of the important benefits that it provided the superpower. In return, the superpower acknowledged the leadership of its Third World partner in a particular region or on a particular international issue and respected its national sovereignty and local interests. These regional partners could act in defiance of the superpower and paid little attention to the superpower's interests in their decision-making. In fact, some Third World partners were even able to influence the decisions of the superpower, either directly, by manipulating American or Soviet leaders, or indirectly, by intervening in the bureaucratic and domestic politics of the United States. As mentioned earlier, the prime example of a regional partner during the Cold War was Israel's relationship with the United States after the 1967 Six-Day War, thanks partly to the influence of the pro-Israel lobby in Washington. However, as I will discuss in the following the chapter, the United States established an array of such relationships with regional actors under the Nixon Doctrine.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the Soviet Union had similar relationships with highly autonomous regional partners that often defied Moscow, such as Cuba and Egypt.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ See, Smolansky and Smolansky, *The USSR and Iraq*; Avi Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan: The Life of King Hussein in War and Peace* (London: Penguin, 2007).

⁶⁶ See, Robert S. Litwak, *Détente and the Nixon Doctrine: American Foreign Policy and the Pursuit of Stability, 1969-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 135-150.

⁶⁷ See, Karen Dawisha, *Soviet Foreign Policy Towards Egypt* (London: Macmillan, 1979); Piero Gleijeses, 'Cuba and the Cold War, 1959-1980' in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds.),

As discussed in the *Introduction* to this thesis, the orthodox view of Mohammad Reza Shah in the historiography of U.S.-Iran relations is one of a mere instrument of American power following the 1953 coup against Musaddiq. However, even the shah's harshest critics would not go so far as to characterise Pahlavi Iran as a 'satellite' of the United States. As James Goode argues, even in the period immediately following the Anglo-American-backed coup, the Eisenhower administration quickly discovered that the shah had gained "a new found confidence" thanks to the defeat of Musaddiq, which "made the task of American diplomats more challenging than before."⁶⁸ For example, the shah briefly entered into negotiations with the Soviet Union for a non-aggression treaty in January 1959, in order to gain leverage over Washington in the negotiations for the U.S.-Iran defence agreement that was signed in March 1959.⁶⁹ The consensus view within the literature on U.S.-Iran relations is that Pahlavi Iran was transformed into a client of the United States after the 1953 coup. The United States provided economic and military assistance to Iran with the aim of stabilizing the Pahlavi monarchy as a bulwark against Communist subversion in Iran and Soviet penetration into the Persian Gulf.⁷⁰ This thesis does not challenge this view of the U.S.-Iran relationship in the 1950s and 1960s. However, the argument made here is

The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume II: Crisis and Détente (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 327-348.

⁶⁸ Goode, *The United States and Iran: In the Shadow of Musaddiq*, p. 161.

⁶⁹ See, Kristen Blake, *The U.S.-Soviet Confrontation in Iran, 1945-1962* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2009), pp. 120-124.

⁷⁰ For the most rigorous exponent of this view see, Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy*. Gasiorowski's notion of 'patrons' and 'clients' is drawn from his earlier work on U.S. relations with Latin America. See, Mark J. Gasiorowski, 'Dependency and Cliency in Latin America', *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 28/3 (1986), pp. 47-65.

that in the 1970s Iran evolved from a client to a partner of the United States.⁷¹ Under Nixon, the United States acknowledged and embraced Iran's regional primacy and deferred to the shah's judgement on regional issues in a way that no previous American administration had done. This U.S.-Iran partnership was crafted during Nixon's first term and ratified during Nixon and Kissinger's visit to Tehran in May 1972. The partnership reached its peak during Nixon's second term as the United States supported Iran's regional primacy against the challenge from Iraq. However, despite Kissinger's best efforts, the partnership wavered and then declined following Nixon's resignation in 1974 as President Gerald Ford reverted to treating Iran as a client rather than a partner of the United States.

Three Historical Episodes

The history of U.S.-Iran relations during Nixon and Kissinger's years in office from 1969 to 1976 encompasses a vast array of bi-lateral and international issues and historical episodes. For the purposes of this thesis I have selected three episodes that might illustrate the dynamics of the relationship. Three criteria were used for selecting these episodes: first, each episode must have been perceived by both the American and Iranian decision-makers as having major consequences for their national interests and must feature the participation of both American and Iranian leaders; second, each episode must have global implications in the context of the Cold War; and third, the episodes collectively must span the entire period under review (1969-1976). Episodes that fit these criteria will involve decision-making at

⁷¹ Robert Litwak uses similar language to argue that in the early 1970s, the United States was transformed "from a restraining patron to acquiescent partner" of Iran. See, Litwak, *Détente and the Nixon Doctrine*, p. 142.

the highest levels of both governments and will provide us an opportunity to view the dynamics of U.S.-Iran relations not simply in the context of a single issue or crisis, but on a much larger scale within the context of the global Cold War. By selecting three episodes across the period 1969-1976, rather than providing a detailed narrative of the entire eight-year period, I undoubtedly sacrifice some detail for the sake of parsimony. However, each episode will serve to illustrate one or more of the dimensions of the US-Iran relationship.

I have been careful to use the term *episode*, rather than *case-study*, as the latter has a particular meaning for theorists.⁷² To use cases to develop theory, the causal chain between independent and dependent variables must be consistently established across a number of comparable cases.⁷³ To use cases to write history, we examine episodes that might illustrate an element of the pattern we suspect is present. Each episode may reveal a different facet of that pattern. For example, one episode may illustrate the degree of reciprocity in the bargaining relationship between the United States and Iran, while another might highlight the extent to which American decision-makers respected Iranian sovereignty, while yet another could shed light on the degree of mutual penetration and influence. Taken together, these detailed historical episodes allow me to make some broad observations about the evolving nature of U.S.-Iran relations between 1969 and 1976.

⁷² Robert Jervis, 'International History and International Politics: Why Are They Studied Differently?' in Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman (eds.), *Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists, and the Study of International Relations* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 392.

⁷³ For a discussion of how social scientists try to avoid bias in case selection see, Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 115-149.

The first episode examines the shah's role in the origins of Nixon's Persian Gulf policy and the establishment of the U.S.-Iran partnership during Nixon's first term in office from 1969 to 1972. Following the announcement of the British withdrawal from the Gulf in January 1968, the United States was confronted with the task of formulating a Gulf policy that would prevent the Soviet Union from taking advantage of the political vacuum created by the British withdrawal. President Lyndon Johnson sought to ensure regional security in the Gulf by maintaining a balance of power between Iran and Saudi Arabia, a policy he inherited from the departing British. However, between 1969 and 1972, Nixon and Kissinger gradually abandoned this balancing policy and acquiesced to the shah's demands for Iranian primacy in the Gulf. Here I examine the bargaining process through which Nixon, Kissinger and the shah gradually shifted U.S. policy in the Gulf from balancing to Iranian primacy. This new policy was adopted by the Nixon Administration in National Security Decision Memorandum 92 of November 1970, and culminated in the historic summit meeting between the shah, Nixon, and Kissinger in Tehran in May 1972, where a new U.S.-Iran partnership was ratified.

The second episode examines the covert U.S. support for the Iranian-backed Kurdish rebellion in Iraq between 1972 and 1975, which marked the zenith of the U.S.-Iran partnership during Nixon's second term. Although the United States had long refused to become involved in Iraq's civil war, Nixon and Kissinger agreed to the shah's request in 1972 for covert U.S. support for Mulla Mustapha Barzani's Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) against the Soviet-backed Ba'thi regime in Baghdad. This episode reveals the extent to which Nixon and Kissinger deferred to

the shah's judgement on regional matters. I focus on Nixon and Kissinger's decision to join the shah's secret war in Kurdistan, against the advice of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the National Security Council (NSC) staff, and the State Department, and despite the risk that this might upset détente with Iraq's Soviet patrons. At the shah's behest, Nixon and Kissinger augmented and maintained U.S. support for the Iraqi Kurds in 1973 and 1974, despite the rising cost of the operation and the diminishing prospects for success. Finally, Kissinger was forced to acquiesce to the shah's unilateral decision to abandon the Kurds in a deal with Iraq's Saddam Hussein in 1975, despite the personal embarrassment and domestic recriminations that followed.

The third episode examines the failure of the negotiations between the shah and the Ford administration for an agreement on American nuclear exports to Iran between 1974 and 1976, which corresponded with a period of decline in the U.S.-Iran partnership after Watergate and Nixon's resignation. Despite the best efforts of Henry Kissinger, who retained his position as both secretary of state and national security adviser under President Gerald Ford, the United States was unable to reach a nuclear accord with the shah by the time Ford and Kissinger were preparing to leave office in December 1976. The Ford administration was deeply reluctant to allow Iran to reprocess spent nuclear fuel, a sensitive nuclear technology that would also allow Iran to stockpile plutonium for a nuclear weapons program. The fear of nuclear proliferation that gripped Washington following the 1974 Indian nuclear test, combined with a popular view of the shah as megalomaniac who was driving up oil prices, compelled the Ford administration to try to impose stringent nuclear

safeguards on Iran, which went beyond Iran's commitments as a party to the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The shah vigorously rejected these American demands as a violation of Iran's sovereignty and instead turned to suppliers in Europe for Iran's nuclear energy program. Ultimately, the U.S.-Iran nuclear talks failed because the Ford administration's reverted to treating Iran as a client, rather than a partner, of the United States.

Taken together these three episodes provide ample historical material on which to base a judgement about the nature and dynamics of U.S.-Iran relations between 1969 and 1976. The Persian Gulf, Iraq, and nuclear proliferation were all areas of major concern for both Iran and the United States, with significant consequences for the global Cold War. All three episodes involved the active participation of the most senior Iranian and American decision-makers and span the entire eight-year period under review, encompassing the formation, implementation, and decline of the U.S.-Iran partnership under Nixon, Kissinger and the shah. Nonetheless, some significant aspects of U.S.-Iran relations in this period have inevitably been neglected due to the limitations of this approach. For example, despite the undeniable importance of oil as a strategically important commodity in the global Cold War, this thesis does not pay any particular attention to Iran's role as a major oil producer in the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).⁷⁴ Historians disagree over the impact of oil price rises on the U.S.-Iran bilateral relationship in the 1970s. For example, Tore Petersen argues that, "In the grand scheme of things, and President Nixon persistently thought grand thoughts,

⁷⁴ See, David S. Painter, 'Oil, Resources, and the Cold War, 1945-1962' in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume I: Origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 486-507.

increased oil prices were a minor nuisance on the road to the global structure of peace.”⁷⁵ While this thesis does not ignore the oil issue, the impact of rising oil prices is treated as a backdrop or context for the three episodes outlined above.

Sources

To examine each of these three historical episodes, I draw extensively on American, British and Iranian primacy sources. This thesis aspires to being a multiarchival study that avoids over-reliance on sources from any one country or on any one source within that country. Unfortunately Iranian state archives on the period under review remain closed to researchers. Nonetheless, I make use of three important Iranian primary sources. The first is the six volumes of diaries kept by Asadollah Alam, the shah’s closest advisor and some-time premier and court minister, spanning the period 1969 to 1977.⁷⁶ The diaries contain Alam’s day-by-day account of the politics of the shah’s court in Tehran and were periodically deposited by him in a bank vault in Switzerland with instructions that they were not to be made public as long as the Pahlavi Dynasty ruled Iran.⁷⁷ These diaries are the only available documentary source on the highly secretive politics of the shah’s inner circle of advisors. Though extremely valuable, they do contain significant biases. They were

⁷⁵ Tore T. Petersen, *Richard Nixon, Great Britain and the Anglo-American Alignment in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula: Making Allies Out of Clients* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2009), p. 30.

⁷⁶ See, Abbas Milani, ‘Asadollah Alam’ in his *Eminent Persians: the Men and Women Who Made Modern Iran, 1941-1979*, Vol. I (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press and New York: Persian World Press, 2008), pp. 44-55.

⁷⁷ Asadollah Alam, *Yad’dashtha-yi ‘Alam: virayish va muqaddamah-i mashruhi dar barah-i Shah va Alam az Ali Naqi Alikhani* [The Alam Diaries: Edited by Alinaghi Alikhani], Vol. I: 1347-1348 [1969-1970] (Bethesda: Iranbooks, 1992), p. 13. An abridged English edition of Alam’s diaries has also been published, though all references in this thesis are to the complete Persian edition unless stated otherwise. See, Asadollah Alam, *The Shah and I: The Confidential Diary of Iran’s Royal Court, 1969-1977*, Alinaghi Alikhani (trans. ed.) (London: I.B. Tauris, 1991).

intended to preserve Alam's view of Iranian politics for posterity, in which he was not only an observer but a protagonist and loyal servant of Mohammad Reza Shah.⁷⁸ Furthermore, they were edited by Alinaghi Alikhani, a friend of Alam's who served as economy minister in his cabinet.⁷⁹ Therefore, the opinions that Alam expresses about the Shah, his rivals at court, and his own role in the affairs of state must be treated with caution. In addition to the Alam diaries, I make extensive use of two expansive oral history collections, one assembled by the Foundation for Iranian Studies in Washington, D.C., and the other by the Iranian Oral History Project at Harvard University. Both contain numerous Persian and English-language interviews with Pahlavi-era civil and military elites, and foreign diplomats and officials who either dealt with, or lived in, Iran. I have also carried out an interview with Ardeshir Zahedi, who served as foreign minister from 1966 to 1973.⁸⁰ As these oral histories are not contemporary accounts, but recollections subject to all the biases and vagaries of memory and the politics of exile, I have used them only to corroborate or substantiate documentary sources.

For the first episode in this thesis, which examines the shah's role in U.S. Persian Gulf policy following the British withdrawal, I have made extensive use of

⁷⁸ It seems likely that Alam planned to use the diaries to write a biography of Mohammad Reza Shah, though he succumbed to cancer in 1978 before he could embark on this project. See, Letter from Richard Helms to Asadollah Alam, 15 August 1977, Document 1/3/3, Papers of Richard Helms, Georgetown University Library, Washington, D.C.

⁷⁹ See, Abbas Milani, 'Alinaghi Alikhani' in his *Eminent Persians*, Vol. I, pp. 56-62; Vali Nasr, 'Politics Within the Late-Pahlavi State: The Ministry of Economy and Industrial Policy, 1963-69', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 32/1 (2000), pp. 97-122.

⁸⁰ Ardeshir Zahedi also served as Iran's ambassador in London (1962-1966) and twice as ambassador in Washington (1959-1962, 1973-1979). He was particularly close to the shah as he was the son of Gen. Fazlollah Zahedi, who played a major role in the 1953 coup that overthrew Musaddiq and succeeded him as prime minister from 1953 to 1955. Ardeshir Zahedi was married to the shah's daughter, Princess Shahnaz Pahlavi, from 1957 to 1964, and remained a lifelong friend of the shah. See, Abbas Milani, 'Ardeshir Zahedi' in his *Eminent Persians: the Men and Women Who Made Modern Iran, 1941-1979*, Vol. I (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press and New York: Persian World Press, 2008), pp. 327-340.

British documents held at the UK National Archives in Kew, Surrey. These include the records of Prime Minister Harold Wilson and his Cabinet, as well as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. These documents reveal the origins of the Gulf ‘balancing’ policy that the Johnson Administration inherited from the departing British and chronicle the transmission of these ideas from Wilson’s Labour Government to the Johnson Administration in 1968. For my examination of American decision-making from 1969 to 1976 I have made use of recently declassified American documents from the Nixon and Ford administrations. These include the records of the Department of State, the Department of Defence, and the CIA, held at the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland (NARAI); the records of President Nixon, Henry Kissinger and the National Security Council (NSC) staff held by the Nixon Presidential Material Project at NARAI; and the records of President Ford, Kissinger, Lt. Gen. Brent Scowcroft and the NSC staff held by the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library in Ann Arbor, Michigan. I have also made extensive use of the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series published by the Department of State, including a recent e-volume on the Nixon Administration and Iran, as well as documents obtained by the National Security Archive at George Washington University.⁸¹ The culture of paranoia and secrecy that pervaded the Nixon White House, including the use of secret taping devices, means that his presidency is perhaps the best recorded in American history. This thesis makes use of the Nixon tapes, which record the President’s oval office conversations, as well as transcripts of both Nixon and

⁸¹ *The Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976*, Volume E-4: Documents on Iran and Iraq, 1969-1972, accessible at <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/nixon/e4/index.htm>>.

Kissinger's telephone conversations, all of which are kept at NARAII. Furthermore, thanks to a number of successful mandatory review requests at the Ford President Library, this study will be among the first to make use of recently declassified American documents detailing both American assistance to the Kurdish insurgency in Iraq between 1972 and 1975 and American nuclear cooperation with Iran between 1974 and 1976.

CHAPTER TWO:
THE ORIGINS OF IRANIAN PRIMACY IN THE PERSIAN GULF,
1969-1972

On the morning of 31 May 1972, the shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, received U.S. President Richard Nixon and his national security advisor, Henry Kissinger, at Tehran's Saadabad Palace in the foothills of the Alborz Mountains. That spring day, these three men were in high spirits. Nixon had arrived in Tehran the previous day from his summit meeting in Moscow with General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, where he had signed a series of arms control agreements with the Soviet Union. This was the era of *détente*, and Nixon and Kissinger were lauded as its architects. While the horrors of the Vietnam War were still unfolding, Nixon the statesman had made his momentous trip to Communist China in February and his soaring popularity would deliver him a landslide electoral victory in November over his Democratic challenger for the presidency, Senator George McGovern. Meanwhile, Henry Kissinger had established a position of unprecedented power in the machinery of American foreign policy, conducting the administration's secret diplomacy in Beijing, Paris, and Moscow, and sidelining the nation's chief diplomat, Secretary of State William Rogers. The shah too was at the apogee of his reign. Under his leadership, Iran had enjoyed more than a decade of nearly double-digit GDP growth, commensurate with manifold increases in both oil income and

military expenditure.¹ Pursuing what he called his ‘Independent National Policy’, he had normalized Iran’s relations with the Soviet Union and now sought Iranian primacy in the Persian Gulf in the wake of Britain’s withdrawal from the region in 1971. Mohammad Reza Shah had seen five American presidents pass through the White House; each in turn had frustrated and disappointed him in his ambition to make Iran the region’s leading power. But now, under the Nixon Doctrine, the United States would rely on the shah to maintain stability in the Persian Gulf. On that May morning in Tehran, Nixon looked to the shah and uttered the words the Iranian monarch had long waited to hear: “protect me.”²

The Nixon Doctrine marked a turning point in American strategies of containment in the Persian Gulf.³ Nixon’s predecessor, President Lyndon Johnson, had been wary of the shah’s ambition for Iranian primacy in the Gulf and instead saw regional stability as resting on a balance of power between Iran and Saudi Arabia, a policy he inherited from the British during their withdrawal from the Gulf. Contrary to popular perceptions of Nixon’s Gulf policy as one of balancing Iran and Saudi Arabia as the ‘twin pillars’ of the Gulf, between 1969 and 1972 Nixon

¹ United Nations, *Statistical Yearbook 1973* (New York: United Nations, 1974), p. 582, Table 179; Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy*, p. 143, Table 12; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook 1973: World Armaments and Disarmament* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1973), pp. 238-239, Table 7A.8.

² Memorandum of Conversation, Tehran, 31 May 1972. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1969-1976*, Volume E-4: Documents on Iran and Iraq, 1969-1972, Document 201. All documents from the U.S. Department of State’s *FRUS* series are henceforth cited in the format *Title*, Volume, Document Number. All are accessible at <<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/>>.

³ The most comprehensive studies of the Nixon Doctrine in the Gulf are Richard Haass, ‘Filling the Vacuum: United States Foreign Policy towards Southwest Asia, 1969-1976’, DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1982; Faisal bin Salman al-Saud, *Iran, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf: Power Politics in Transition 1968-1971* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003); and Hussein Sirriyeh, *US Policy in the Gulf, 1968-1988: Aftermath of British Withdrawal* (London: Ithaca Press, 1984).

gradually abandoned balancing and tilted in favour of Iran.⁴ This chapter is concerned with the question of why Nixon embraced Iranian primacy in the Gulf, whereas Johnson had rejected it. Declining Anglo-American power in the context of the British withdrawal from the Gulf between 1968 and 1971, and America's quagmire in Vietnam, do not provide an adequate explanation. These important material constraints confronted both Johnson and Nixon, yet each president adopted quite distinct Gulf policies. In this chapter I make the case that the shift in U.S. Gulf policy from balancing under Johnson to Iranian primacy under Nixon reflected a change in American thinking about Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Because of his long-standing friendship Mohammad Reza Shah, Nixon brought new ideas to the White House about the shah and his ambitions for Iran, which stood in stark contrast with the views of both the Johnson administration and the British. This change in American thinking provided fertile ground for the shah's relentless efforts to secure Washington's backing for Iranian regional primacy under the Nixon Doctrine. By lifting virtually all restrictions on U.S. arms sales to Iran, Nixon allowed the shah to assume the regional leadership role that he had always sought for Iran. Nixon's first term as president from 1969 to 1972 witnessed Iran's evolution from a client to a partner of the United States in the global Cold War.

⁴ The term 'twin pillars' does not appear in the documentary record. Following the fall of the shah, it was commonly used by journalists as a short-hand for pre-1979 U.S. policy towards the Persian Gulf. The term is often employed retroactively by historians to characterize U.S. policy towards the Gulf during the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon presidencies. See for example, Haass, 'Filling the Vacuum', p. 78; al-Saud, *Iran, Saudi Arabia*, p.66; Sirriyeh, *US Policy*, p. 62.

The Shah and Pax Britannica

The idea that security in the Persian Gulf rests on a 'balance of power' between Iran and Saudi Arabia finds its origins in London. For more than a century, Her Majesty's Government ruled the Gulf as a British lake on the periphery of India, protecting significant political and economic interests along the southern shore where Arab rulers governed a series of British protected states.⁵ Britain's balance of power policy in the Gulf consisted of preventing either of the two largest littoral powers, Iran and Saudi Arabia, from dominating their smaller and weaker Arab neighbours, while also deterring any other great power from entering the Gulf. However, by the 1960s the decline of the British Empire had dramatically accelerated and on 16 January 1968 the Labour Government, led by Prime Minister Harold Wilson, announced that Britain would withdraw all its military forces from the Gulf by 1971 as part of a larger withdrawal 'East of Suez'. The decision was motivated by the Cabinet's desire to cut defence spending and achieve fiscal austerity in the face of a severe economic crisis, while avoiding painful cuts in social spending. In order to avoid a power vacuum following the British withdrawal, which could result in regional instability and Soviet encroachment, a new balance of power would need to emerge to protect British interests.⁶

The solution developed by the mandarins of the British Foreign Office was to strengthen the British protected states by persuading them to join together in a single Arab federation, and to encourage Saudi Arabia to play a more active role in

⁵ In 1968 these British protected states consisted of the emirates of Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Bahrain, Dubai, Fujaira, Qatar, Ras al-Khaimah, and Umm al-Quwain.

⁶ Wm. Roger Louis, 'British Withdrawal from the Gulf, 1967-1971', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 31/1 (2003), pp. 83-86. See also, Balfour-Paul, *The End of Empire*; J. B. Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980).

the Persian Gulf, thereby providing an Arab counterweight to the shah's ambitions for Iranian regional primacy. In 1967 the Foreign Office had prepared a report on Britain's long-term policy in the Gulf, the conclusions of which were approved by the Cabinet's Defence and Overseas Policy Committee on 7 June 1968. According to this report Britain would "encourage an indigenous balance of power which does not require our military presence." This balance of power would depend above all on Saudi Arabia and Iran, as "they are also the two best placed to bring force to bear in the area, the Saudis by virtue of their commanding geographical position and the Iranians through their growing naval supremacy in the Gulf. If they were at loggerheads with each other, local stability would be unlikely to survive our departure. Conversely if they were to act in concert, or at least with mutual understanding, they could do much to ensure a peaceful transition to whatever new system follows our withdrawal."⁷ Pax Britannica had been maintained in the Gulf by a preponderance of British naval power. After the British military withdrawal, stability would be maintained by "preventing any element from gaining ascendancy over the others."⁸ Equilibrium, rather than imperial hegemony, would prevent Iran or Saudi Arabia from dominating the Gulf, thereby protecting the independence of the proposed Arab federation without a substantial British military presence. But such a balance of power would not emerge automatically. Rather, it would have to be constructed and maintained. As Inis Claude writes, in such 'manually operating'

⁷ 'Defence Expenditure Study No. 6: Long-Term Policy in the Persian Gulf. Report by the Defence Review Working Party', 7 June 1967, Records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and predecessors (FCO) 49/10. All British government documents cited are held at the National Archives, Kew, Surrey, United Kingdom.

⁸ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, Third Edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), p. 169.

balance of power systems, “the maintenance of equilibrium is contingent upon the motivations and skills of human agents.”⁹ This conception of a Gulf ‘balance of power’ was the legacy that both Johnson and Nixon inherited from the British.

From Britain’s perspective, the shah’s ambitions for Iranian primacy in the Persian Gulf posed a threat to the successful construction and operation of a balance of power, particularly as the shah continued to press Iranian territorial claims against the British protected states of Bahrain, Sharjah and Ras al Khaimah. At the time of the shah’s March 1965 visit to London, British Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart advised Wilson to “disabuse the Shah of the idea that, if and when we ever leave the Persian Gulf, Iran can take our place: given the Arab character of the southern shores of the Persian Gulf, and the pretensions of Saudi Arabia and Iraq (to say nothing of the United Arab Republic) this hope is quite illusory.”¹⁰ Given their longstanding political and economic relationships with the Arab rulers of the Gulf, British policy was to contain Iran’s ambitions and reassure their Arab clients. Sir Stewart Crawford, the British resident in the Gulf, advised Foreign Secretary George Brown that Britain should avoid any appearance of endorsing Iran’s ambitions, thereby giving the impression that “we shall disregard the interests of the [Arab] Gulf States and sell them down the river.”¹¹ In March 1968, Sir Denis Wright, Britain’s ambassador to Iran, warned his colleagues in the Foreign Office that, “The Shah remains suspicious of our intentions and of our alleged favouritism

⁹ Inis L. Claude, Jr., *Power and International Relations* (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 50.

¹⁰ Note from Stewart to Wilson, PM/65/29, 23 February 1965, Records of the Prime Minister’s Office (PREM) 13/409.

¹¹ Crawford (Bahrain) to the Foreign Office, 31 January 1968, FCO 8/33.

of the Arabs against Iran.”¹² A few days later Wright travelled to London to participate in a discussion of Gulf policy convened by Goronwy Roberts, a junior minister in the Foreign Office. When Wright asked his colleagues “whether the balance of British interests in Iran had been considered against those in the Arab world”, he was assured that “on an arithmetical calculation the balance was overwhelmingly in favour of the Arabs.”¹³

Mohammad Reza Shah shared the ubiquitous Iranian mistrust of perfidious Albion, stemming from more than a century of British intervention in Iran’s political and economic life. He was convinced that London was now conspiring with the Arabs against Iran in anticipation of Britain’s withdrawal from the Persian Gulf.¹⁴ Although the shah’s Anglophobia was acute, given that Britain had deposed and exiled his father in 1941, his suspicion that British interests favoured the Arabs over Iran was not unfounded. In June 1968, Sir Denis Allen, under-secretary at the Foreign Office, advised Wright that any attempt to accommodate the shah’s ambitions would not only disrupt the stability of the Gulf and “earn us major ill-will from the Arabs”, but would in any event fail to “earn us any permanent dividends from the Shah”.¹⁵ Although the British privately recognized that Iran would be the single most powerful littoral power following their departure, they feared that the shah’s ambitions would spark Arab-Iranian hostility, threatening Britain’s economic

¹² Wright (Tehran) to the Foreign Office, 536, 20 March 1968, FCO 8/33.

¹³ ‘Minutes of discussions on the Persian Gulf held at the Foreign Office by the Minister of State on 25 and 26 March 1968’, FCO 8/33.

¹⁴ Denis Wright, *The Memoirs of Sir Denis Wright 1911-1971*, 2 vols., unpublished manuscript, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, pp. 385-388. See also, Ahmad Ashraf, ‘Conspiracy Theories’ in Ehsan Yarshater (ed.), *Encyclopedia Iranica*, Vol. VI (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 1993), pp. 139-142.

¹⁵ Allen (London) to Wright (Tehran), 14 June 1968, Records created and inherited by the Foreign Office (FO) 1016/755.

interests on the Arab shore of the Gulf and generating instability that could be exploited by the Soviet Union.

British disdain for Pahlavi Iran as a revisionist power, and support for Saudi Arabia as a status-quo power, is apparent in a report written in December 1968 by William Morris, Britain's ambassador to Saudi Arabia, following a visit by the shah to the court of King Faisal. Whereas Morris describes Faisal as "a true conservative, by nature cautious and pessimistic", he calls the shah "our Middle East de Gaulle", "restless, bold, innovative, radical." He denigrates the shah as "the son of the illiterate Persian sergeant, self-consciously masquerading as heir to the 3,000 years old Achaemenid monarchy", in contrast with Faisal, a man who "dislikes pomp, ceremony and luxury, and in a quiet rather snobbish way is certain and therefore undemonstrative about his lineage."¹⁶ The shah would have welcomed the comparison to French President Charles de Gaulle. In his memoirs he wrote that when de Gaulle "spoke of France, he seemed to echo the ambitions which I nurtured for my own country: he wanted an independent France. His quiet eloquence inspired faith in his country's future...This great patriot was an example to me."¹⁷ But Morris did not intend the comparison as a compliment. He saw the shah as an upstart with ambitions above his station, echoing the Foreign Office's anxiety that Iranian primacy would threaten Britain's long-term interests in the Gulf. These pejorative ideas about the shah and the concept of a balance of power

¹⁶ 'Relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran: the State visit by the Shah to Saudi Arabia (9-14 November, 1968) and its background', 3 December 1968, FO 1016/870.

¹⁷ Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *The Shah's Story*, Teresa Waugh (trans.) (London: M. Joseph, 1980), p. 140.

between Iran and Saudi Arabia were the legacy that the departing British bequeathed to the United States in the Gulf.

Continuity: Johnson's Balancing Policy

In the year between the announcement of the British withdrawal from the Persian Gulf in January 1968 and the inauguration of the Nixon administration in January 1969, President Johnson had little time to formulate America's Gulf policy. The Gulf had been a British sphere of influence and the United States had considered it Britain's responsibility to contain Soviet influence there. Johnson had agreed to subsidize Britain's global military presence, while concentrating his own attention on the Vietnam War.¹⁸ Although Britain had informed the United States in April 1967 that it would be withdrawing its forces 'East of Suez', the announcement in January 1968 that the Gulf would be included in this withdrawal disappointed the Americans and their reaction was markedly bitter. When British Foreign Secretary George Brown travelled to Washington on 11 January 1968 to deliver the bad news, he reported to London that he had suffered through a "bloody unpleasant" meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk, who was furious at what he saw as Britain's shirking of its global responsibilities at a time when the United States was bogged down in Vietnam. Rusk resented what he called the "acrid aroma of the fait accompli" and contemptuously demanded, "for God's sake, be Britain!"¹⁹ That same day Johnson wrote to Wilson expressing his "deep dismay" at the "British withdrawal from world affairs", which would leave the United States "to man the

¹⁸ See, Kevin Boyle, 'The Price of Peace: Vietnam, the Pound, and the Crisis of the American Empire', *Diplomatic History*, 27/1 (2003), pp. 37-72; Jeremy Fielding, 'Coping with Decline: US Policy toward the British Defense Reviews of 1966', *Diplomatic History*, 23/4 (1999), pp. 633-656.

¹⁹ Brown (New York) to the Foreign Office, 54, 11 January 1968, PREM 13/1999.

ramparts all alone.’²⁰ Nonetheless, within a week of these exchanges the U.S. State Department began what would be a year-long process of formulating a Gulf policy, in close consultation with the Foreign Office.²¹

The Persian Gulf was rather low on Johnson’s list of priorities in 1968, as he grappled with the Tet Offensive that was launched by the North Vietnamese in January, followed by his announcement in March that he would not seek re-election that year.²² Gulf policy was largely left to the State Department and rarely reached the Oval Office. The Johnson administration quickly dismissed any idea of taking over Britain’s role and instead opted for a policy of relying on the littoral states to maintain stability in the Gulf. In a careless statement made during an interview with the Voice of America on 19 January, U.S. Under Secretary of State Eugene Rostow said:

“In the Persian Gulf you have some very strong, and quite active and stable countries, which are interested in taking responsibility for regional security – Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia would certainly be a nucleus, and Kuwait – would certainly be a nucleus, around which such security arrangements could hopefully be built, and we can hope that in the long run the policy of Iraq would orient itself in a cooperative direction so that it could join in such efforts.”²³

The statement was careless for two reasons. First, it tarred any regional security arrangement with the imprimatur of the United States, making it more difficult for the Arab rulers of the Gulf to support such an arrangement, lest they be accused by Arab nationalists of collusion with ‘American imperialism’. Furthermore, the clumsy reference to Turkey and Pakistan – neither of which border the Gulf –

²⁰ President Johnson to Prime Minister Wilson, 11 January 1968, PREM 13/1999.

²¹ Urwick (Washington) to Stirling (London), 18 January 1968, FCO 8/36.

²² Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972), pp. 385, 425-437.

²³ ‘Interview with Under Secretary of State Eugene Rostow, 19 January 1968, as broadcast on Voice of America at 6.00 p.m.’, FCO 8/36.

angered both of these governments, as they had not been consulted, and also violated the principle that only the riparian powers would be responsible for Gulf security. In short, Rostow's poorly chosen words had the potential to upset Britain's plans for a regional balance of power arrangement following their withdrawal.²⁴ The British Embassy in Washington assured the Foreign Office that Rostow's comments were made "off the cuff" and without clearance from Rusk, and shortly afterwards the State Department informed all American diplomatic posts in the region that Washington has "no plan, general or specific, as to future [of the Gulf]."²⁵

Following the embarrassment of the Rostow episode, the Johnson administration sought to closely coordinate its Persian Gulf policy with London. Wilson's February 1968 trip to Washington smoothed over any residual hard feelings from the withdrawal announcement and in March American officials travelled to London for the first of a series of Anglo-American talks on the Gulf. What emerged from these consultations was a division of labour between Britain and the United States, whereby London would manage the negotiations to resolve the outstanding territorial disputes in the Gulf and construct a regional balance of power to replace British hegemony, while Washington would continue to pressure the shah to cooperate with Britain and Saudi Arabia in this endeavour. Theodore Eliot, the country director for Iran at the State Department, assured the British that Washington "could take a hand [with the shah] since the United States military

²⁴ Balfour-Paul (Bahrain) to Stirling (London), 26 January 1968, FCO 8/36.

²⁵ Killick (Washington) to Sykes (London), 25 January 1968, FCO 8/36; Telegram 103449 from the Department of State to the Embassy in Saudi Arabia, 24 January 1968, *FRUS 1964-1968*, XXI, 124.

relationship was vital to the Iranians.”²⁶ President Johnson had written to the shah in February, after a Saudi-Iranian spat over Bahrain, to remind him that regional stability would require the shah to exercise “patience, understanding and a high degree of statesmanship” in his relations with the Saudis.²⁷ In his stern reply to Johnson’s patronizing letter, the shah said that in dealing with the Saudis, he had gone “as far as any one can go, but our efforts so far have, unfortunately, been answered by precisely the opposite reaction to that expected.”²⁸ Nonetheless, the U.S. ambassador to Iran, Armin Meyer, was convinced that Johnson’s intervention had exercised a “restraining effect” on the shah.²⁹ Similarly, the president’s national security advisor, Walt Rostow, felt that Johnson had “injected a sobering perspective at a heated moment.”³⁰

Throughout 1968 the State Department deferred to the Foreign Office to such an extent on Persian Gulf matters that American and British Gulf policy became virtually indistinguishable. In talks held in London in May, Lucius Battle, U.S. assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern and South Asian affairs, assured Goronwy Roberts that the United States “recognised the special British role in the Region and would be heavily influenced by the British view of what it might prove possible to negotiate.”³¹ In September, Battle reiterated to Sir Denis Allen that the

²⁶ ‘Minutes of discussions with United States officials at the Foreign Office on 27 March 1968’, FCO 8/37.

²⁷ Telegram 108214 from the Department of State to the Embassy in Iran, 1 February 1968, *FRUS 1964-1968*, XXI, 129.

²⁸ Message from the Shah of Iran to President Johnson, 1 February 1968, *FRUS 1964-1968*, XXI, 130.

²⁹ Telegram 3869 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 23 March 1968, *FRUS 1964-1968*, XXII, 273.

³⁰ Memorandum from Rostow to President Johnson, 6 February 1968, *FRUS 1964-1968*, XXI, 135.

³¹ ‘Record of Conversation between the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and members of the State Department in Washington at 4.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 15 May 1968’, FCO 8/37.

United States was “in complete agreement” with Britain’s Gulf policy. He readily admitted that Washington “had no solution to offer, nor indeed any particular suggestions” for managing the various territorial disputes in the Gulf and that “the U.S. and everyone else concerned would look to the British” to manage Gulf problems.³² Theodore Eliot later recalled that “British interests in Iran were very similar to ours, and their record of experience was much longer” and that in this period “there was a real question as to whether we’d be choosing sides between the Saudis and Iranians, obviously none of us wanted to choose sides.”³³ Rather than choose between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the United States had opted for Britain’s balancing policy in the Gulf, which sought to temper the shah’s ambitions for Iranian primacy and encourage Saudi-Iranian cooperation.

The United States’ wholesale adoption of Britain’s balancing policy quickly led to tensions with the shah, who feared his American allies were toeing a pro-Arab British line. The National Security Council (NSC) staff warned of the “basic conflict...between the Iranian assumption that Iran has the mission of controlling the Gulf, and the Saudi assumption that Saudi Arabia is responsible for everything on the Arabian Peninsula.” Although the Americans wanted “to stay out of the middle” of this rivalry, the shah worried that Johnson had conspired with the British against Iran.³⁴ Hushang Ansary, the Iranian ambassador to the United States, had conveyed these concerns to Eugene Rostow in February and a few weeks later,

³² ‘Anglo-American talks on the Middle East in the State Department, 13 September 1968’, FCO 8/37; Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 13 September 1968, *FRUS 1964-1968*, XXI, 156.

³³ Theodore Eliot in an interview with William Burr, San Francisco, 29 July 1986, Tape 2A, in the Foundation for Iranian Studies Oral History Collection (FISOHC), accessible at: <<http://www.fis-iran.org/en/oralhistory>>.

³⁴ Memorandum from Foster to Rostow, 21 May 1968, *FRUS 1964-1968*, XXII, 285.

during a visit to Washington by Iranian Foreign Minister Ardeshir Zahedi, Dean Rusk informed his Iranian counterpart that he was aware of Tehran's suspicions and assured him that they were unfounded.³⁵ All Washington wanted, Rusk argued, was to promote Irano-Saudi cooperation as a "prerequisite to peace in [the] Gulf" in the interests of "preventing [the] expansion [of] Soviet influence in area."³⁶ Despite his protests, however, Rusk shared Britain's concern about the shah's ambitions. In language reminiscent of that used by the British, he would later recall that that shah "was influenced by the dreams of the Persian Empire, he had a very lofty view of what Persia had been and perhaps could be again some day. The sense of glory in the Shah was at least equal to that of President de Gaulle's views about the glory of France."³⁷

The shah had tried repeatedly to convince Johnson to tilt towards Iran in the Persian Gulf, using the Soviet threat as his argument for a policy of Iranian primacy. Conscious of the American public's aversion to overseas commitments in the context of Vietnam, the shah had written to Johnson in August 1966 arguing that, "A strong Iran can...avert the spreading of conflicts in the region, guarantee the smooth and orderly flow of oil to the west and, what is of vital importance and worthy of serious consideration, forestall the repetition of current tragic and costly involvements."³⁸ The shah firmly believed that radical Arab states like Egypt and Iraq, supported by Moscow, endangered both stability in the Gulf and Iranian

³⁵ Telegram 121476 from the Department of State to the Embassy in Iran, 28 February 1968, *FRUS 1964-1968*, XXII, 259; Ardeshir Zahedi in an interview with the author, Montreux, 11 June 2009.

³⁶ Telegram 131326 from the Department of State to the Embassy in Iran, 16 March 1968, *FRUS 1964-1968*, XXII, 269.

³⁷ Dean Rusk in an interview with William Burr, Athens, Georgia, 23 May 1986, Tape 1A, FISOHC.

³⁸ Letter from the Shah of Iran to President Johnson, 15 August 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, XXII, 173.

national security. He was particularly alarmed by Egypt's military intervention in North Yemen as well as the Soviet- and Chinese-backed rebellion against the sultan of Oman in Dhofar.³⁹ He feared that Moscow would use radical Arab forces to subvert the conservative Arab monarchies of the Gulf, from where they could disrupt Iran's oil exports through the Strait of Hormuz and press Arab territorial claims against the Iranian province of Khuzistan, where much of Iran's oil reserves are located.⁴⁰ But these arguments failed to convince Johnson and his advisors. A succession of American presidents had sought to temper Iranian military spending, fearing that Iran's burgeoning defence expenditure would divert precious resources from economic development, thereby fulfilling the shah's military ambitions at the cost of Iran's domestic stability.⁴¹

Andrew Johns convincingly makes the case that towards the end of Johnson's presidency, Iran's relations with the United States "matured from a patron-client relationship to a true partnership."⁴² Undoubtedly, by 1968 the shah was able to exert a great deal more leverage over Washington on bi-lateral issues such as arms sales and oil prices than ever before. But a shift in Johnson's *Iran* policy did not translate into a shift in *Persian Gulf* policy: the shah was unable to convince the Johnson administration to abandon balancing and tilt towards Iran. In

³⁹ Mohammad Ja'far Chamankar, *Buhran-i Zufar va rizhim-i Pahlavi* [The Dhofar Crisis and the Pahlavi Regime] (Tehran: Institute for Iranian Contemporary Historical Studies, 2004), pp. 323-331; Chubin and Zabih, *The Foreign Relations of Iran*, pp. 140-162; J. E. Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies: The Sultanate's Struggle for Supremacy* (London: Saqi Books, 2007), pp. 320-327.

⁴⁰ Intelligence Memorandum 1355/66 prepared by the CIA, 21 May 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, XXII, 139.

⁴¹ Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, pp. 131-153; Goode, 'Reforming Iran', pp. 13-29; Rubin, *Paved With Good Intentions*, pp. 91-123; Summit, 'For a White Revolution', pp. 560-575. See also, Theodore L. Eliot, Jr. in an interview with Robert Martens, 24 April 1992, The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, available at: <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/diplomacy/index.html>>.

⁴² Johns, 'Tired of Being Treated like a Schoolboy', p. 88.

February 1968 the NSC's inter-agency review group concluded that the United States should continue to pursue a balance of power in the Gulf by "avoiding an undue military build-up by the Gulf littoral states."⁴³ Despite the shah's constant requests for ever larger quantities of American arms, in June 1968 Johnson would only agree to continue providing Iran with \$100 million in annual military sales credits, as the U.S. had done since 1966.⁴⁴ In the waning months of Johnson's presidency, Washington continued "to discourage large military expenditures that would adversely affect Iran's economic development" and still held that "Iran's armaments should not be so augmented as to frighten other riparian states and thus endanger prospects for Arab-Iranian cooperation."⁴⁵ A shift away from balancing would have to await the election of Richard Nixon to the White House.

Nixon and the Third World

By the first summer of his presidency, Nixon had already decided on the contours of the grand strategy that would come to bear his name. During a tour of East Asia, over which the shadow of Vietnam loomed large, the presidential party stopped on the island of Guam on the night of 25 July 1969. Speaking on background to reporters, and much to Kissinger's surprise, Nixon outlined his views on a post-Vietnam foreign policy for the United States. He declared that while America would always keep its treaty commitments to its allies, it "must avoid the kind of policy that will make countries in Asia so dependent upon us that we are dragged into conflicts such as the one we have in Vietnam." When it comes to defending its

⁴³ Record of Meeting, Washington, 1 February 1968, *FRUS 1964-1968*, XXI, 131.

⁴⁴ Memorandum from Rostow to President Johnson, 11 June 1968, *FRUS 1964-1968*, XXII, 292.

⁴⁵ Memorandum from McClelland to Handley, 28 August 1968, *FRUS 1964-1968*, XXI, 155.

Cold War allies in Asia, “except for the threat of a major power involving nuclear weapons ... the United States is going to encourage and has a right to expect that this problem will be handled by, and responsibility for it taken by, the Asian nations themselves.”⁴⁶ Nixon’s statement was intended to signal to America’s nervous allies in Southeast Asia that the United States would not abandon them following a withdrawal from Vietnam, while also assuring a profoundly angry American public that they would never again find themselves fighting someone else’s civil war.⁴⁷ This ‘Nixon Doctrine’ was quickly extended to the rest of the Third World, where the United States would provide material assistance to regional allies like Brazil, Indonesia, Iran, and Zaire to manage local conflicts and contain Soviet influence without direct American military intervention.⁴⁸ As John Lewis Gaddis argues, the Nixon Doctrine represented a return to a more limited or “asymmetrical” American strategy of containment, reflecting “a determination to apply strengths against weakness while leaving to allies forms of military activity uncongenial to the United States.”⁴⁹

If the Nixon administration was going to rebuild public support for American leadership in the Cold War at a time when the Soviet Union had achieved military parity with the United States, then as Odd Arne Westad argues, Nixon

⁴⁶ Editorial Note, *FRUS 1969-1976*, I, 29. These ideas had been foreshadowed in Richard Nixon, ‘Asia after Vietnam’, *Foreign Affairs*, 46/1 (1967), pp. 113-125.

⁴⁷ Jeffrey Kimball, ‘The Nixon Doctrine: A Saga of Misunderstanding’, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 36/1 (2006), pp. 68-69.

⁴⁸ Litwak, *Détente and the Nixon Doctrine*, pp. 135-150. See also, Mark Atwood Lawrence, ‘History from Below: The United States and Latin America in the Nixon Years’ in Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston (eds.), *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 269-288; David F. Schmitz, *The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1965-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 72-111; Matias Spektor, ‘Equivocal Engagement: Kissinger, Silveira and the Politics of U.S.-Brazil Relations (1969-1983)’, DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2006.

⁴⁹ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, p. 304.

would have to recast America's global role as "an overseer, not an intervener".⁵⁰ Third World conflicts, like the war in Vietnam, were a costly distraction from Nixon's agenda of seeking détente with the Soviet Union and building Washington's leverage over Moscow through the opening to China. Therefore, the Nixon Doctrine and superpower détente were inextricably linked, as the former would redirect American attention and resources to the latter.⁵¹ Nixon and Kissinger were interested in the politics of the Third World only to the extent that it affected relations among the great powers. Nixon famously instructed Kissinger early in his first term not to waste his time on the Third World, "as what happens in those parts of the world is not, in the final analysis, going to have any significant effect on the success of our foreign policy in the foreseeable future."⁵² The Middle East was of interest to Nixon and Kissinger mainly because the Arab-Israeli conflict impinged on superpower relations and Persian Gulf oil fuelled the economies of America's allies in Asia and Europe. Kissinger readily admitted that in 1969 he had no understanding of Gulf politics: "I did not know how Saudi-Iranian relations worked, my priority was to get the Soviets out of the Middle East."⁵³ As Jussi Hanhimäki argues, "The overall emphasis on the 'great powers' blinded Nixon and Kissinger to the specific local circumstances that determined the course of the numerous

⁵⁰ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, p. 197.

⁵¹ Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, Revised Edition (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1994), pp. 25-39. Litwak, *Détente and the Nixon Doctrine*, p. 54.

⁵² Memorandum from President Nixon to Haldeman, Ehrlichmann, and Kissinger, 2 March 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, I, 61.

⁵³ Henry Kissinger in an interview with Faisal bin Salman al-Saud, New York, 3 June 1997, cited in al-Saud, *Iran, Saudi Arabia*, p. 65.

regional conflicts the administration encountered.”⁵⁴ The Nixon Doctrine was a way of limiting and simplifying American intervention in the Third World, and the Gulf was no exception. Preoccupied with superpower détente, engagement with China, and the war in Vietnam, Nixon and Kissinger reduced the complexities of regional politics to a simple question of whether Iran was capable of keeping the peace in the Gulf after the British withdrawal.

Throughout the period of 1969 to 1972 the shah aggressively lobbied Nixon to convince him that Iran could indeed fill the vacuum left by the British in the Persian Gulf. He employed the language of the Nixon Doctrine to argue that the United States should provide Iran with the necessary arms to maintain the security and stability of the Gulf without direct American military intervention. Relations with Iran were higher on the Nixon administration’s agenda than formulating a broad Gulf policy, thanks in large measure to the warm personal relationship between Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and Richard Nixon. Then vice president in the Eisenhower administration, Nixon first met the shah in Tehran in December 1953 after the United States had backed the coup against Musaddiq, whom Nixon saw as dangerously “procommunist”. Nixon wrote of his first encounter with the shah: “I sensed an inner strength in him, and I felt that in the years ahead he would become a strong leader.”⁵⁵ Both men were staunchly anti-Communist and both thought of themselves as practitioners of *realpolitik*. They had maintained their friendship throughout Nixon’s years in the political wilderness and met in Tehran in April

⁵⁴ Jussi Hanhimäki, ‘An Elusive Grand Design’ in Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston (eds.), *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 40-41.

⁵⁵ Richard M. Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), p. 133.

1967 during Nixon's tour of Asia, which was intended to burnish the former vice president's already impressive foreign policy credentials ahead of the 1968 presidential election.⁵⁶

Over lunch at Niavaran Palace on 22 April, the two old friends lamented the loss of American confidence in the age of Vietnam. After surveying the Cold War in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, the shah told Nixon that it was "better for [the] U.S. to have Iran able to defend [it]self than to have...another Vietnam." In his handwritten notes of their conversation, Nixon recorded that the shah's views echoed the "RN Doctrine." Planting the seed of what would become Nixon's Persian Gulf policy, the shah boasted that by 1971 "Iran will be able to help [the] Saudis if required", though at the time, Nixon thought this claim to be "over optimistic". The shah complained to Nixon that the "Harvard boys" in the incumbent Democratic administration – liberal intellectuals who wanted to curtail Iran's military spending – enjoyed far too much influence over U.S. foreign policy. Addressing accusations of corruption and autocracy in his regime, the shah portrayed himself to Nixon as a reformer who "attacks problems – not classes." Unlike the socialists, he was "not imprisoned by any 'ism' ". Nixon found the shah to be "decisive, confident, strong, kind, thoughtful."⁵⁷ As president, he would never forget the respect and courtesy the shah had shown him while he was out of office. Returning to the United States, he hailed Iran's "strong monarchy" as a "dramatic

⁵⁶ Steven P. Ambrose, *Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician, 1962-1972* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), p. 106; 'Program for the Informal Visit to Iran of The Honorable Richard M. Nixon', undated, Wilderness Years, Series II, Trip File, Iran, Richard M. Nixon Library (RMNL), Yorba Linda, California.

⁵⁷ Handwritten Notes by Richard M. Nixon, Wilderness Years, Series 2, Far East and Middle East Trips 1967, RMNL. See also, Gholam Reza Afkhami, *The Life and Times of the Shah* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), pp. 302-303.

economic success” which, although not “a representative democracy by Western standards”, “worked” for the Iranian people.⁵⁸ The April 1967 meeting profoundly strengthened the bond between the two men and laid the foundation for Nixon’s policy of Iranian primacy. Writing from exile many years later, the shah recalled that during that conversation, “we found that we agreed over several very simple geo-political principles.”⁵⁹

In the first year of Nixon’s presidency the shah’s relentless lobbying quickly overtook the administration’s slow and cumbersome consideration of Persian Gulf policy. When the shah visited Washington in April 1969 for President Eisenhower’s funeral, the White House was expecting him to press Nixon to abandon balancing in the Gulf and acknowledge Iran as the paramount power of the region.⁶⁰ The U.S. intelligence community had warned the new administration in a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) in January that, “with the impending British withdrawal from the Persian Gulf, Iran is vigorously asserting its own claim to a leading position there, thus running afoul of the aspirations of Saudi Arabia.” Nixon and Kissinger would confront an Iranian ruler who was certain that “he is master in his own house”, confidently “seeking for Iran the position in regional affairs that he deems to be rightfully his.”⁶¹ At his first ever meeting with Kissinger, the shah reiterated the same warnings about the Soviet and radical Arab threat to the Gulf that he had expressed to Johnson.⁶² Asadollah Alam, the shah’s court minister and

⁵⁸ Address by Richard M. Nixon to the Bohemian Club, San Francisco, 29 July 1967, *FRUS 1969-1976*, I, 2.

⁵⁹ Pahlavi, *The Shah's Story*, 143.

⁶⁰ Memorandum from Saunders to Kissinger, 1 April 1969, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 7.

⁶¹ National Intelligence Estimate 34-69, 10 January 1969, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 1.

⁶² Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 1 April 1969, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 8.

closest advisor, accompanied the shah to Washington and recorded in his diary that his boss,

“asked the Americans to consider the advantages they receive from their friendship with us. He stressed that Iran is not an American stooge but that we nevertheless prefer to remain independent of Soviet influence. Iran is a friend of the West sufficiently powerful to maintain her own sovereignty, able to defend her own interests and by implication capable of defending the interests of her western friends.”⁶³

Crisis in the Shatt

Despite this pressure from the shah, the shift in U.S. Persian Gulf policy from balancing to Iranian primacy was a slow evolutionary process. In 1969 many of the same American officials who had implemented Johnson's balancing policy remained in place, such as Ambassador Armin Meyer in Tehran and Iran Country Director Theodore Eliot at the State Department. Echoes of Johnson's policy were apparent in the American response to the border crisis between Iran and Iraq over the Shatt al-Arab waterway in the spring of 1969, which threatened to escalate into war. The two countries had long disagreed on where their common border lay, with the Iraqis claiming sovereignty over the entire Shatt based on their reading of the 1937 Tehran Treaty, while the Iranians claimed sovereignty up to the *thalweg* or deepest point of the waterway based on common international practice.⁶⁴ Tensions had been simmering for some time when the Iraqis sparked, in April 1969, what was the third crisis over the Shatt in a decade. Iraq asserted its sovereignty over the entire waterway by demanding that vessels sailing in the Shatt should neither raise the Iranian flag nor carry Iranian naval personnel. On 15 April, Iraq's deputy

⁶³ Alam, *Yad' dashtha-yi 'Alam*, Vol. I, p. 165. The English-language translation of this passage is taken from Alam, *The Shah and I*, p. 50.

⁶⁴ For a history of this territorial dispute see, Richard M. Schofield, *Evolution of the Shatt Al-'Arab Boundary Dispute* (Wisbech: Middle East & North African Studies Press, 1986), pp. 42-66.

foreign minister warned the Iranian ambassador in Baghdad that if Iran did not comply, Iraq would use force to block access to Iranian ports. Iran's response was to abrogate the 1937 Treaty and to warn the Iraqis that any interference with Iranian shipping would mean war.⁶⁵

The shah's uncompromising reaction to the Iraqi threat was entirely consistent with the bold claims he had made in Washington just two weeks earlier and the American assessment contained in the January NIE. However, the shah's advisors worried that if Iran were seen as the aggressor in a war with Iraq, then they would lose the support of the United States and find themselves fighting the Soviet-backed Iraqis all alone. Alam was vacationing on his family estate in Birjand in eastern Iran, when he received a frantic telephone call on 17 April from Gen. Nematollah Nasiri, the chief of Iran's intelligence service, SAVAK, urging him to return to Tehran immediately.⁶⁶ It seemed that the shah was planning on ordering an Iranian merchant ship to sail down the Shatt flying the Iranian flag, escorted by the Iranian air force and navy, as a test-case to demonstrate Iranian sovereignty. Fearing that hostilities might break out, Nasiri begged Alam to use his influence with the shah to avert a war. Alam concurred, worrying that if Iran were seen as the aggressor, "American public opinion will easily turn against us." He immediately cabled his concerns to the shah who was then on a state visit to Tunisia.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Chubin and Zabih, *The Foreign Relations of Iran*, pp. 185-187; Ramazani, *Iran's Foreign Policy*, pp. 417-418; Hussein Sirriyeh, 'Development of the Iraqi-Iranian Dispute, 1847-1975', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20/3 (1985), pp. 485-487.

⁶⁶ SAVAK is the Persian acronym for the 'National Intelligence and Security Organization,' which carried out both domestic and foreign intelligence and security functions in Iran from 1957 to 1979.

⁶⁷ Alam, *Yad'dashtha-yi 'Alam*, Vol. I, pp. 173-174; Telegram 1399 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 20 April 1969, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State (RG59), Central Foreign Policy Files (CFPF), 1967-69, Box 2218, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.

Ambassador Meyer was aware of the rising military tensions between Iran and Iraq thanks to reports he was receiving from the U.S. Consulate in Khorramshahr near the border.⁶⁸ According to Gen. Fereydoun Djam, the acting chief of the Supreme Commander's Staff, the Iranian military had activated contingency plans for a war with Iraq, although there had been considerable confusion and delay in mobilizing the armed forces because of the shah's absence.⁶⁹ On the afternoon of 17 April, Meyer was attending a reception at the U.S. Officers' Club in Tehran, where he spoke with Djam's deputy, Gen. Mohammad Fazeli, who confirmed that Iran intended to assert its sovereignty in the Shatt with a test-case ship. Meyer, without instructions from Washington, expressed to Fazeli "the fervent hope that there would be no shooting". The ambassador later reported to the State Department that he had "mentioned current Congressional sensitivities RE things military and I feared repercussions with Iran."⁷⁰ Fazeli interpreted Meyer's concerns as a warning that in the event of a war with Iraq, the United States would cut off military supplies to Iran. Shocked by Meyer's comments, he set off for the Supreme Commander's Headquarters where he was due to attend a meeting that evening between Iran's top military brass, Prime Minister Amir Abbas Hoveyda, and the permanent secretary of the Foreign Ministry, Amir Khosrow Afshar, to

⁶⁸ Telegram 1340 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 16 April 1969, and Telegram 1390 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 19 April 1969, RG59, CFPF 1967-69, Box 2218.

⁶⁹ Gen. Fereydoun Djam in an interview with Habib Ladjevardi, 10 March 1983, London, Tape 4, Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University.

⁷⁰ Telegram 1367 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 18 April 1969, RG59, CFPF 1967-69, Box 2218.

discuss the crisis. Fazeli conveyed Meyer's comments to Hoveyda, who then instructed Afshar to report them to the shah in Tunisia.⁷¹

One can imagine the shah's fury in Tunis upon reading the messages from Alam and Afshar advising restraint in the Shatt, lest Iran's actions anger the United States. He was in no mood to back down, cabling back to Alam that "you are not in the picture on this issue. They [the Iraqis] have caused such offence that these actions are necessary."⁷² On instructions from the shah, Afshar summoned Meyer to his home on the morning of 18 April, where he conveyed the shah's displeasure with the ambassador's comments to Fazeli and asked Meyer "whether [the] Shah in assuring Iran's legitimate self-defense should seek supplies from quarters where no conditions [are] attached." Meyer responded by refuting Fazeli's account and assuring Afshar that he had spoken without any instructions from Washington. Meyer told Afshar: "I had merely voiced to Fazeli certain concerns as [a] true friend of [the] Shah and Iran." He reported to Washington that he "emphasized that [the] decision as to what to do or not to do in Shatt is strictly for Iran to make." Meyer's sole concern was that Iran's image in the United States not be "tarnished", especially as Congressional authorization would be required for the arms sales that the shah wanted.⁷³ The State Department approved the steps that Meyer had taken and shared his concern that "military action in the Shatt might tarnish Iran's

⁷¹ Gen. Mohammad Fazeli in an interview with Seyed Vali Reza Nasr, Bethesda, 14 May 1991, Tape 1B, FISOHC.

⁷² Alam, *Yad 'dashtha-yi 'Alam*, Vol. I, p. 175.

⁷³ Telegram 1371 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 18 April 1969, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 11.

excellent image in the US” and “hoped that restraint would be shown by both sides.”⁷⁴

American officials in Tehran were determined to avoid any entanglement in Iran’s confrontation with Iraq, and the Iranians seemed reluctant to push the issue up the chain of command to the White House. Gen. Mohammad Khatam, the commander of the Imperial Iranian Air Force (IIAF), had been asked by the shah to report on the ability of Iran’s American-supplied F-4 Phantom jets to support military operations against Iraq. Khatam, a highly respected officer who was also the shah’s brother-in-law, asked the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) in Tehran if they would be willing to transfer the U.S. Air Force (USAF) technicians who maintained Iran’s Phantoms to air bases in southern Iran, to support IIAF operations against Iraq.⁷⁵ When the request was rejected by Gen. Roy Casbeer, who headed the USAF section of MAAG, Khatam agreed to Meyer’s suggestion that the decision not be appealed to Washington, where it would certainly be denied and would only damage Iran’s relations with the United States. Meyer was convinced that Khatam and other Iranian officials, knowing that Washington would resist being drawn into the crisis, were using the threat of a rupture in relations with the United States to try to constrain the shah and prevent a war with Iraq.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Telegram 60660 from the Department of State to the Embassy in Iran, 19 April 1969, RG59, CFPF 1967-69, Box 2218.

⁷⁵ See, Abbas Milani, ‘Mohammad Khatam’ in his *Eminent Persians*, Vol. 1, pp. 457-461.

⁷⁶ Telegram 1401 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 20 April 1969, Nixon Presidential Materials (NPM), National Security Council Files (NSCF), Country Files – Middle East, Box 601, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.

Despite calls for restraint from both the U.S. ambassador and his closest civilian and military advisors, the shah sent Afshar before the Iranian Senate on 19 April to abrogate the 1937 Treaty and warn that Iran would retaliate against any Iraqi attack.⁷⁷ In the face of overwhelming Iranian military power, the Iraqis backed down. On 20 April Iraqi Defence Minister Hardan al-Takriti informed the SAVAK station chief in Baghdad that Iraq had no appetite for a war with Iran.⁷⁸ The Iraqis privately relayed a message that they would not challenge the test-case Iranian ship.⁷⁹ Waiting until the shah had returned to Tehran, Iran ended the crisis by sailing the freighter *Abu Sina* down the Shatt flying the Iranian flag with an air and naval escort. As expected, the *Abu Sina* did not meet any resistance from the Iraqis and the crisis ended in victory for Iran.⁸⁰ The Shatt crisis left little doubt about the shah's resolve to assert Iran's power in the Persian Gulf against any regional rival. There were some in the American bureaucracy who were clearly unhappy with the shah's actions. The State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, which had earned a reputation as a critic of the shah, went so far as to characterize Iran's actions as "belligerence".⁸¹ But the shah's willingness to risk upsetting Washington in pursuit of regional primacy demonstrated Iran's growing autonomy from the United States. Furthermore, Iran's triumph over Iraq in a regional dispute, without

⁷⁷ Telegram 1396 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 19 April 1969, and Telegram 1398 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of States, 20 April 1969, RG59, CFPF 1967-69, Box 2218.

⁷⁸ Alam, *Yad 'dashtha-yi 'Alam*, Vol. I, p. 176.

⁷⁹ Telegram 1416 from the Embassy in Iran to the State Department, 21 April 1969, RG59, CFPF 1967-69, Box 2218.

⁸⁰ Telegram 1444 from the Embassy in Iran to the State Department, 22 April 1969, RG59, CFPF 1967-69, Box 2218.

⁸¹ Intelligence Note 295 from Hughes to Rogers, 22 April 1969, *FRUS 1969-76*, E-4, 12. See also, Archie Bolster in an interview with William Burr, Washington, 24 March 1988, Tape 3BB, FISOHC.

any direct American military intervention, was a harbinger of the role Iran could play under the Nixon Doctrine.

Change: Nixon and Iranian Primacy

The ongoing British withdrawal from the Persian Gulf had clearly tilted the regional balance of power in Iran's favour, requiring a response from the United States. Consequently, in July 1969, Kissinger ordered an inter-agency review of U.S. Gulf policy in National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) 66.⁸² The shah was due to make a state visit to Washington in October and Nixon faced the immediate task of responding to the shah's constant appeals for what Kissinger described as a "special relationship" in the context of the Nixon Doctrine, amounting to a policy of Iranian primacy in the Gulf. Both the State Department and Kissinger advised the president to avoid any premature commitment to the shah's entreaties and to continue, for now, with the balancing policy of the Johnson administration.⁸³ Kissinger advised Nixon to tell the shah that "The President of the US cannot make policy as easily as the imperial ruler of Iran."⁸⁴ Every effort was made to ensure that the shah would enjoy his visit, even if the Americans were not yet ready to respond to his calls for a special relationship. As he would not be accompanied by the empress, the State Department suggested inviting Miss America to join the shah at the state dinner in the White House.⁸⁵ The president's personal secretary, Rose Mary Woods, advised against cancelling the post-dinner entertainment because the shah, "a man of great

⁸² National Security Study Memorandum 66, 12 July 1969, RMNL, available at: <http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/virtuallibrary/documents/nssm/nssm_066.pdf>.

⁸³ Memorandum from Rogers to President Nixon, 17 October 1969, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 26.

⁸⁴ Memorandum from Kissinger to President Nixon, 21 October 1969, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 29.

⁸⁵ Memorandum from Mosbacher to Woods, 18 September 1969, NPM, President's Personal File, White House Social Events 1969-1974, Box 123.

interests – great sex appeal”, was “much more the ‘swinger’ type than most visiting dignitaries.”⁸⁶ Despite these arrangements, the shah must have left Washington a disappointed man. In his private discussions with Nixon he failed to secure agreement for increased Iranian oil exports to the United States, the revenue from which he pledged to use to buy more American weapons.⁸⁷ He warned the Americans against continuing with the balancing policy of the past, arguing that although King Faisal was a wise leader, Saudi domestic instability and the absence of a strong successor meant that in the long-run the United States could not rely on Saudi Arabia to protect the Gulf. Rather, Washington should help Iran “stand by itself if necessary” as the protector of the waterway.⁸⁸

Despite the criticism by some scholars that the history of Nixon’s Persian Gulf policy “has often been reduced to an account of the burgeoning U.S.-Iranian relationship,” the documentary record suggests that between 1970 and 1972 Iran and the Gulf did indeed become largely synonymous in the minds of Nixon and Kissinger.⁸⁹ Nixon wrote to the shah in February 1970 to tell him that he shared the shah’s view that Iran should play an important role in the Nixon Doctrine: “As you know, your thoughts and mine coincide at many points on this subject, and a number of the positions I expressed during my Asian trip last summer – as you have noted – would apply to the problems in your region as well.”⁹⁰ Nixon was clearly intrigued by the idea that Iran, as the paramount power of the Gulf, could contain

⁸⁶ Memorandum from Woods to Haldeman, 6 October 1969, NPM, President’s Personal File, White House Social Events 1969-1974, Box 123.

⁸⁷ Memorandum for the Record, 22 October 1969, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 31.

⁸⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 22 October 1969, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 33-35.

⁸⁹ W. Taylor Fain, *American Ascendance and British Retreat in the Persian Gulf* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 199.

⁹⁰ Letter from President Nixon to the Shah of Iran, 23 February 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 48.

Soviet influence in that vital theatre of the Cold War. In the spring of 1970, during a meeting with the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) foreign ministers in Washington, the president asked Joseph Sisco, assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern and South Asian affairs, to prepare a study on whether Iran could indeed play such a role.⁹¹ The first real test of this changing American attitude towards the shah came in April when Douglas MacArthur II, U.S. ambassador to Iran, recommended that the United States extend the annual commitment on foreign military sales (FMS) credits that Johnson had made to the shah in June 1968 for an additional three or four years. MacArthur was responding to the shah's repeated demands that Iran's military needed larger quantities of American weapons to prepare for the role they would play after the British withdrawal from the Gulf.⁹²

Ambassador MacArthur's recommendation set off a bureaucratic battle in Washington over arms sales to Iran with major implications for the ongoing review of Persian Gulf policy. The principal opposition came from the Pentagon, particularly G. Warren Nutter, a University of Chicago-trained economist who served as assistant secretary of defence for international security affairs. The Pentagon objected that Iran did not have the absorptive capacity for integrating the large volume of sophisticated weapons – including four additional squadrons of F-4 Phantoms – in the short span of time that the shah envisaged, and that a decision to increase arms sales to Iran would prejudice the ongoing review of Gulf policy.⁹³ Others in the administration were eager to avoid angering the shah, whom they saw

⁹¹ Memorandum from Kissinger to President Nixon, Washington, 25 June 1970, *FRUS 1969-76*, E-4, 75.

⁹² Telegram 1247 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 1 April 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 57.

⁹³ Letter from Packard to Richardson, 14 April 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 60.

as a stable and reliable ally in an important region. Jack Miklos, who had replaced Elliot as country director for Iran at the State Department, was a “long-time friend” of Harold Saunders, the principal aide on Kissinger’s NSC staff dealing with Iran. Miklos thought that acquiescing to the shah’s request was “a very wise, sound approach” and with support from Saunders at the NSC was able overcome the Pentagon’s objections.⁹⁴ Unlike broader Middle East issues, where a major difference in views emerged between Kissinger’s NSC staff and the State Department, the two bureaucracies were largely of the same mind when it came to Iran and the Gulf.⁹⁵ The prevailing view, which Under Secretary of State Elliot Richardson expressed to Gen. Earle Wheeler, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was that despite Nutter’s concerns, “we have no real option but to bank on Iran.”⁹⁶ Richard Helms, the director of central intelligence, advised the White House that “it is in our own interest to support this concept of a special relationship with Iran” and reminded his colleagues of the vital intelligence the United States gathered on the Soviet Union from American listening posts in northern Iran.⁹⁷ By April 1970, a consensus had emerged in the administration that Iran, and Iran alone, could be relied upon to contain Soviet influence in the Gulf. After all, the shah asked Ambassador MacArthur, “who else in the area can supply a credible military

⁹⁴ Jack Miklos in an interview with William Burr, 28 July 1986, Oakland, Tape 1D, FISOHC.

⁹⁵ See, Salim Yaqub, ‘The Weight of Conquest: Henry Kissinger and the Arab-Israeli Conflict’ in Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston (eds.), *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977*.(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 227-248; Noam Kochavi, ‘Joining the Conservative Brotherhood: Israel, President Nixon, and the Political Consolidation of the Special Relationship, 1969-73’, *Cold War History*, 8/4 (2008), pp. 449-480.

⁹⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 14 April 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 61.

⁹⁷ Memorandum from Saunders to Kissinger, 16 April 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 63. Helms himself had negotiated permission from the shah to place these installations in Iran in 1957. See, Richard Helms with William Hood, *A Look Over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency* (New York: Random House, 2003), p. 417.

deterrent in the Gulf? Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the small weak Gulf States? Of course not.”⁹⁸

Kissinger cautiously weighed in on the side of the shah and, with the president’s approval, authorized Under Secretary Richardson to inform the shah in Tehran in April 1970 that the United States would be willing to extend the 1968 FMS commitment.⁹⁹ Richardson told the shah that “we fully appreciate [the] unique contribution Iran can make to [the] defense of free world interest in [the] Gulf.”¹⁰⁰ The ‘special relationship’ that the shah had failed to secure in his two trips to Washington in 1969 was now, just a year later, taking shape. Just as the Pentagon had feared, the administration’s increasing tilt towards Iran prejudiced the ongoing Persian Gulf policy review. This is hardly surprising given that Miklos and Saunders, who had supported the shah on FMS credits, were the principal authors of the report that the NSC Interdepartmental Group for the Near East and South Asia (NSC/IG) submitted to Kissinger in June 1970. On the face of it, the report considered five main options for U.S. policy in the Gulf: 1) assuming the role in the Gulf abandoned by Britain; 2) backing either Iran or Saudi Arabia as a “chosen instrument”; 3) promoting Saudi-Iranian cooperation; 4) establishing bi-lateral relations and a major U.S. presence in the Lower Gulf; or 5) sponsoring a regional security pact. However, given the American public’s complete aversion to any expansion of America’s global commitments in the context of Vietnam, the only

⁹⁸ Telegram 1019 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 19 March 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 55.

⁹⁹ Memorandum from Kissinger to President Nixon, 16 April 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 62.

¹⁰⁰ Telegram 1626 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 21 April 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 64.

real choice confronting Nixon was whether to continue with Johnson's balancing policy (Option 3) or to back Iran (Option 2).¹⁰¹

Kissinger's staff saw Iranian primacy in the Persian Gulf as a sound choice, given that Iran was "the most powerful and most stable state in the area" and that "there are strong elements of this in what we are already doing". However, they feared that openly backing the shah would "alienate the Saudis". Therefore, "The logical strategy lies in marrying what is already in fact extensive support for Iran as the unquestioned power in the area with the logic of cooperation between a strong Iran and a weak Saudi Arabia."¹⁰² While the substance of this new Gulf policy would be Iranian primacy, its rhetoric would pay lip-service to Saudi-Iranian cooperation so as to avoid offending Arab sensibilities. Miklos later recalled that the idea of Saudi Arabia as a "pillar" of U.S. policy in the Gulf was considered "ludicrous".¹⁰³ On 5 June 1970, Kissinger convened a meeting of the NSC's Review Group to discuss the NSC/IG report. In a brief twenty-minute meeting, the Review Group approved the report and agreed that it was ready for the president's consideration.¹⁰⁴ There were signs by the summer of 1970 that Nixon was seriously contemplating whether the "the Shah's ideas for Iran...playing a greater role in the Persian Gulf" were feasible. Despite Assistant Secretary Sisco's advice that Iran should be encouraged to gain the "active cooperation" of the Saudis in the Gulf, the administration was inching ever closer to a policy of Iranian primacy.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Paper prepared by the NSC Staff, 4 June 1970, NPM, National Security Council Institutional Files (NSCIF), Meeting Files, Box H-046. See also, *FRUS 1969-1976*, XXIV, 82, f. 1.

¹⁰² Memorandum from Saunders and Kennedy to Kissinger, 3 June 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 70.

¹⁰³ Jack Miklos in an interview with William Burr, Oakland, 31 July 1986, Tape 2A, in the FISOHC.

¹⁰⁴ Minutes of a Review Group Meeting, Washington, 5 June 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, XXIV, 83.

¹⁰⁵ Memorandum from Kissinger to President Nixon, 25 June 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 75.

A One Pillar Policy

The NSC/IG report did not reach the president's desk until October 1970. In the intervening four months, the White House's attention was focused elsewhere in the Middle East as the War of Attrition between Israel and Egypt raged until August and then in September a crisis broke out in Jordan where America's ally, King Hussein, was almost overthrown by Palestinian guerrillas and an invading Syrian army. By comparison the shah looked secure on his throne and Iran seemed to be the cornerstone of a largely stable Persian Gulf. The shah had embarked on a diplomatic charm offensive in the Arab world, peacefully relinquishing Iran's claim to Bahrain in March and restoring diplomatic relations with Egypt in August after a ten-year rupture.¹⁰⁶ It was in this context that Kissinger presented the NSC/IG report to President Nixon, who approved a general U.S. strategy in the Gulf that would "promote Saudi-Iranian cooperation as the mainstay of a stable regional system"; "recognize that Iran is in fact the preponderant power in the Gulf"; and "do what we can to develop a working relationship with the new political entities in the lower Gulf." This strategy rested, according to Kissinger, on the assumption that, "If a radical regime were to take over in Saudi Arabia, the U.S. would have little choice but to move closer to Iran – and there is no reason now not to go on preparing Iran for that contingency."¹⁰⁷

With the benefit of hindsight, it seems counterintuitive that Nixon and Kissinger would see the shah as a safe bet and the Saudis as a long term liability. While Mohammad Reza Shah would be deposed and exiled in 1979, the Saudi

¹⁰⁶ Roham Alvandi, 'Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and the Bahrain Question, 1968-1970', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 37/2 (2010), pp. 159-177.

¹⁰⁷ Memorandum from Kissinger to President Nixon, 22 October 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 91.

monarchy would survive the assassination of King Faisal in 1975 and successfully manage the succession to Kings Khalid, Fahd and Abdullah. But in the autumn of 1970 many American observers imagined that a strong Iran might one day have to come to the aid a weak Saudi Arabia. At the Islamic summit conference in Rabat in September 1969, the shah had assured Faisal that although a security pact between their two countries was not feasible, he would provide the Saudis with whatever support they asked for in a crisis.¹⁰⁸ As MacArthur observed from Tehran, there was a growing consensus among the Arab rulers of the Persian Gulf that after the British withdrawal, Iran would be the only “moderate neighbor with both the will and the capacity to come to their aid.”¹⁰⁹ Just a few months after the Rabat conference, when South Yemeni forces attacked Saudi Arabia, Faisal turned to Iran for help and the shah quickly airlifted 40mm anti-aircraft guns and 60mm anti-tank recoilless rifles to Saudi Arabia to repel the Yemenis.¹¹⁰ The shah also assured Faisal that the Iranian air force would provide Saudi Arabia with air cover in the event of a future Yemeni attack.¹¹¹ Indeed, in July 1973, Kissinger and the shah would begin secret discussions on a contingency plan for Iran to secure Saudi Arabia’s oil fields and restore the Al Saud to their throne if the Saudi monarchy were ever threatened, as other Arab monarchies in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, and Yemen had

¹⁰⁸ Douglas MacArthur II in an interview with William Burr, Washington, 29 May 1985, Tape 2A, FISOHC.

¹⁰⁹ Telegram 862 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, NPM, NSCF, Country Files – Middle East, Box 602.

¹¹⁰ Telegram 34 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 5 January 1970, and Telegram 2436 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 9 June 1970, NPM, NSCF, Country Files – Middle East, Box 601; Research Study RNAS-6 prepared by the Department of State, 12 April 1973, RG59, Subject Numeric Files (SNF) 1970-73, Box 2380.

¹¹¹ Telegram 7 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 3 January 1970, NPM, NSCF, Country Files – Middle East, Box 601.

been.¹¹² The vulnerable Saudis were never regarded by the Americans as a ‘pillar’ of Nixon’s Persian Gulf policy in the same sense as Iran. From Washington’s perspective, it was a role that the Saudis were both unwilling and unable to play. Harold Saunders later recalled that Iran was, in fact, the sole pillar of Nixon’s Gulf policy, “with the Saudi pillar being a nominal pillar there for obvious necessary regional political reasons.”¹¹³

The United States had important economic interests in oil-rich Saudi Arabia. By 1969, their bi-lateral economic relationship contributed \$500 million annually to America’s balance of payments, and moreover, Saudi Arabia’s ability to provide a steady flow of cheap oil to Western Europe and Japan was a vital American interest.¹¹⁴ However, the Saudis were unwilling to play a regional role that would leave them open to accusations from Arab nationalists of complicity in American or Iranian ‘imperialism’. Both British and American diplomats in Saudi Arabia were aware that Saudi reticence was tilting the balance of power in the Persian Gulf in Iran’s favour.¹¹⁵ In Anglo-American discussions in Washington in March 1969, Geoffrey Arthur, assistant under-secretary at the Foreign Office, complained to his American counterparts that the Saudis had been “passive in their relations with the Gulf” and asked the Americans for their views on “Saudi inattention to Gulf matters.” William Brewer, the State Department’s country director for the Arabian

¹¹² Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 24 July 1973, 5.00-6.40pm, Electronic Briefing Book No. 265 (EBB 265), National Security Archive, George Washington University, Washington, D.C. (NSA-GWU), available at: <<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB265/>>; Memorandum from Saunders to Kissinger, 23 July 1973, NPM, NSCF, Country Files – Middle East, Box 603.

¹¹³ Harold Saunders in an interview with William Burr, 24 February 1987, Washington, DC, Tape 2B, in the FISOHC.

¹¹⁴ Memorandum from Sisco to Kissinger, 21 November 1969, *FRUS 1969-1976*, XXIV, 133.

¹¹⁵ Morris (Jeddah) to McCarthy (London), 23 December 1968, FO 248/1652.

Peninsula, responded “that the Saudi attitude could be explained by a combination of slothfulness, statesmanship and preoccupation with other matters”, a reference to Saudi fears of growing Israeli power in the aftermath of the Six-Day War of June 1967.¹¹⁶ Saudi reticence was no match for the shah’s vigorous diplomacy. The following year, the British Residency in the Gulf concluded that the Saudis “have chalked up the same nil score as in pervious years” in their rivalry with Iran.¹¹⁷

King Faisal’s commitment to the Arab struggle against Israel severely limited Saudi Arabia’s ability to play any leadership role under the Nixon Doctrine. While the shah saw the Nixon Doctrine as an opportunity for Iran to become a major Cold War actor, Faisal saw it as a dangerous development that would only draw the United States and Israel closer together.¹¹⁸ For Saudi Arabia, the immediate threat to regional stability came from Israel, not the Soviet Union. Faisal was a firm believer in the anti-Semitic ‘Protocols of Zion’, which he had had published and distributed, and never tired of telling his American interlocutors that Zionism and Communism were conspiring together to drive a wedge between the United States and the Arab world.¹¹⁹ He warned Nixon in an Oval Office meeting in May 1971 that “Communism is the child, the offspring of Zionism. Zionism is in collusion with Communism for the destruction of the world”, and went on to argue that the anti-war demonstrations in the United States were in fact part of a Zionist-Communist global conspiracy.¹²⁰ This hostility towards Israel, whether rhetorical or

¹¹⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 11 March 1969, *FRUS 1969-1976*, XXIV, 72.

¹¹⁷ ‘Persian Gulf: Annual Review for 1970’, 1 January 1971, FCO 8/1570.

¹¹⁸ Telegram 42979 from the Department of State to the Embassy in Saudi Arabia, 24 March 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, XXIV, 139.

¹¹⁹ Telegram 112 from the Consulate General in Dhahran to the Department of State, 5 February 1969, *FRUS 1969-1976*, XXIV, 127.

¹²⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 27 May 1971, *FRUS 1969-1976*, XXIV, 151.

indeed “deeply felt” as Kissinger thought it to be, stood in contrast to the shah’s quiet military, intelligence and trade relationship with Israel that dated back to the 1950s.¹²¹ According to Gen. Mansur Qadar, who served as Iran’s ambassador to Jordan and Lebanon throughout this period, Iran’s close relations with Israel made the shah deeply unpopular in Arab public opinion.¹²² Consequently, the Saudis could not afford to be seen as having too cosy a relationship with the shah. Foreign Minister Zahedi confided to MacArthur in May 1971, after a brief stop-over in Tehran by the Saudi king, that “while Faisal and the Saudis make all the right noises in private about [the] desirability and need for close Saudi-Iranian cooperation and coordination in [the] Gulf area, they don’t even want to hint about this in public.”¹²³ Nixon’s view was that whereas America’s alliance with Israel “makes us unpalatable to everybody in the Arab world”, the shah is “awfully good on that subject”.¹²⁴ If there were two states that constituted the ‘twin pillars’ of the Nixon Doctrine in the Middle East, they were Iran and Israel, not Saudi Arabia.

In the evolution of Nixon’s Persian Gulf policy between 1969 and 1972, domestic instability and succession problems in Saudi Arabia cast doubt on the Kingdom’s ability to act as a viable regional partner for the United States. The shah was seen by the United States as a modernizing monarch, having inaugurated his

¹²¹ Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982), p. 662. On the shah’s relations with Israel see, Uri Bialer, ‘The Iranian Connection in Israel’s Foreign Policy – 1948-1951’, *The Middle East Journal*, 39/2 (1985), pp. 292-315; Uri Lubrani, ‘Yigal Allon in the Palace of the Shah’ in Itamar Rabinovich and Jehuda Reinharz (eds.), *Israel in the Middle East*, Second Edition (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2008), pp. 357-362; Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the U.S.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

¹²² Gen. Mansur Qadar in an interview with Gholam Reza Afkhami, Washington, 4 May 1986, Tapes 6A and 6B, FISOHC.

¹²³ Telegram 2674 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 20 May 1971, RG59, SNF 1970-73, Box 2380.

¹²⁴ Conversation among President Nixon, MacArthur, and Haig, 8 April 1971, Washington, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 122.

‘White Revolution’ of social and economic reforms in the early 1960s.¹²⁵ According to Richard Arndt, the former head of the U.S. Information Agency mission in Tehran, Iran’s progress was seen by the United States as a “model” for the entire region.¹²⁶ This stood in stark contrast with the deeply conservative King Faisal, whose leadership was characterized in an April 1970 NIE as “more appropriate to the problems of the past than to those of the present and future. He is deeply religious in the context of the rigid Muslim orthodoxy which still characterizes many Saudis, and in large measure he is attuned to the desires of the traditional elements of the society.”¹²⁷ At the Rabat conference in September 1969 the shah had lectured Faisal on the need for social and economic reform in Saudi Arabia, if the monarchy was to weather the political storms ahead.¹²⁸ The shah never missed an opportunity to remind his American interlocutors that the Saudis were “very backward” and showed “no inclination to reform.”¹²⁹ This reluctance to modernize, the shah argued, made them deeply vulnerable to the subversive threat posed by the Soviet-backed radical Arabs.¹³⁰

Although Faisal had managed to wrestle the crown from King Saud in 1964 after a long internal power struggle, American assessments of the stability of the monarchy were cautious. In the summer of 1969 the Saudis uncovered a coup plot

¹²⁵ On the shah’s ‘white revolution’ see, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *Inqilab-i Sifid* [The White Revolution] (Tehran: Kitabkhanah-i Saltanati-i Pahlavi, 1967); Eric J. Hooglund, *Land and Revolution in Iran, 1960-1980* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982).

¹²⁶ Richard Arndt in an interview with William Burr, Washington, 9 May 1988, Tape 1B, in the FISOHC.

¹²⁷ National Intelligence Estimate 36-6-70, 7 April 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, XXIV, 140.

¹²⁸ Telegram 2648 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 20 May 1971, RG59, SNF 1970-73, Box 2380.

¹²⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, Tehran, 31 May 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 201.

¹³⁰ Telegram 3312 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 2 August 1970, NPM, NSCF, Country Files – Middle East, Box 601.

that involved air force officers who hoped to overthrow the monarchy and establish a Nasserist regime. The coup was followed by a brutal and widespread crackdown on anyone suspected of disloyalty and a crisis atmosphere pervaded the Kingdom, particularly after the overthrow of the Libyan monarchy in September 1969.¹³¹ By November, the NSC/IG had concluded that though there was little likelihood of unrest in Saudi Arabia in the short term, “in the longer run we cannot assume the continuation of the political and social order upon which U.S.-Saudi cooperation was built.”¹³² Faisal’s health was in doubt, as he made numerous trips to Geneva throughout 1970 for treatment and surgery, and the perennial problem of royal succession loomed.¹³³ In April 1970 the U.S. intelligence community concluded that in the event of Faisal’s death, “a smooth transfer cannot be assured” and that Faisal’s designated successor, the reluctant Prince Khaled, would likely only serve as a “figurehead King”.¹³⁴

Meeting in Tehran in April 1970, the chiefs of America’s diplomatic missions in the region sat down to discuss future U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf. Surveying the two shores, they concluded that “On the Arab side of the Gulf what is impressive is the contrast between the Iranian image of strength and planning and the fact that the Arabs are divided, uncertain, suspicious and fearful. ...The lopsided situation has its own seeds of instability. The U.S. problem lies not on the Iranian

¹³¹ Gary S. Samore, ‘Royal Family Politics in Saudi Arabia (1953-1982)’, PhD thesis, Harvard University, 1983, 259-264; Alexei Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (London: Saqi Books, 2000), pp. 371-372.

¹³² Memorandum from Sisco to Kissinger, 21 November 1969, *FRUS 1969-1976*, XXIV, 133.

¹³³ Samore, ‘Royal Family Politics’, p. 268.

¹³⁴ National Intelligence Estimate 36-6-70, 7 April 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, XXIV, 140.

side – where a firm relationship can be built upon – but on the Arab side.”¹³⁵ The ghost of Johnson’s policy of balancing Iran and Saudi Arabia was now well and truly laid to rest. As Kissinger’s deputy, Gen. Alexander Haig, would later recall, the shah now “represented the political center in his own country and also in a region in search of a political center of balance.”¹³⁶ A new policy of Iranian primacy would eventually entail lifting virtually all restrictions on American conventional arms sales to Iran, thereby giving the Iranian armed forces the ability to deter any aggression by a regional rival.¹³⁷ As the shah had explained to Secretary of State William Rogers, Iran “must have an “over-kill” capability so that should anyone be tempted to attack Iran they would think twice or even three times.”¹³⁸ Despite the Pentagon’s continuing objection that an Iranian deterrence capability would spark a regional arms race, Nixon signed National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM) 92 on 7 November 1970, ordering a policy of promoting Saudi-Iranian cooperation while “recognizing the preponderance of Iranian power” in the Gulf.¹³⁹ NSDM 92 marked a turning point in the evolution of U.S. Gulf policy from balancing to Iranian primacy.

¹³⁵ Memorandum from Saunders to Kissinger, 24 April 1970, NPM, NSCF, Country Files – Middle East, Box 601. See also, F. Gregory Gause, ‘British and American Policies in the Persian Gulf, 1968-1973’, *Review of International Studies*, 11/4 (1985), pp. 262-263.

¹³⁶ Alexander M. Haig, Jr. with Charles McCarry, *Inner Circles: How America Changed the World, a Memoir* (New York: Warner Books, 1992), p. 536.

¹³⁷ On the Iranian military build-up in this period see, Steven R. Ward, *Immortal: A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2009), pp. 191-201.

¹³⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 22 October 1969, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 33.

¹³⁹ Letter from Laird to Rogers, 27 October 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 93; National Security Decision Memorandum 92, 7 November 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 97.

Red Star over Baghdad

In accounting for this American tilt towards Iran in the Persian Gulf, Kissinger has challenged the view that Nixon's personal relationship with the shah played any role in U.S. policy: "America's friendship with Iran reflected not individual proclivities but geopolitical realities. Iran's intrinsic importance transcended the personalities of both countries' leaders."¹⁴⁰ Kissinger argues that Nixon backed a policy of Iranian primacy in order to contain the radical Soviet-backed Ba'th regime in Iraq, which seized power in a military coup in July 1968. In the chaos that engulfed Baghdad after the Ba'thi coup, Iraq's new rulers vacillated between extreme violence and political cooption in their efforts to eliminate all domestic opposition, while looking to Iraq's long-standing relationship with the Soviet Union for military and economic assistance. They signed an agreement with Moscow in July 1969 for exploitation of the North Rumaila oil field, followed by a series of military and economic assistance agreements that culminated in the fifteen-year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in April 1972. Washington was taking note of Iraq's burgeoning ties with the Soviet Union, as well as the nationalisation in June of the Iraq Petroleum Company, owned by a consortium of Western firms including Mobil and Standard Oil of New Jersey. Kissinger argues that following the British withdrawal from the Gulf, "Iraq was thereby transforming itself into a geopolitical challenge and was on the way to becoming the principle Soviet ally in the area."¹⁴¹ He and Nixon wanted to ensure that "The vacuum left by British withdrawal, now menaced by Soviet intrusion and radical momentum, would be

¹⁴⁰ Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 667.

¹⁴¹ Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999), p. 581.

filled by a local power friendly to us.”¹⁴² The logical choice was Iran, given its power and ambitions.

Kissinger’s geopolitical explanation for the U.S. tilt towards Iran reflects his superficial understanding of politics in Iraq and the Persian Gulf. In reality, the Ba’thi regime was too busy consolidating its weak position at home to pose much of a subversive threat abroad.¹⁴³ By the summer of 1968, the State Department’s assessment was that the Ba’th would not last long in power, despite their extensive use of violence.¹⁴⁴ They had to contend not only with their opponents in Baghdad, but also with a Kurdish insurgency in northern Iraq as well as the threat of another war with Israel.¹⁴⁵ The shah had demonstrated Iran’s military superiority over Iraq in the Shatt crisis of April 1969. Iraq, weakened by the purges and instability of a military coup, had far more to fear from Iran, than vice versa. The Ba’th could do little more than hurl insults at the shah on Radio Baghdad, for example accusing him in July 1969 of being homosexual.¹⁴⁶ Following a particularly vitriolic Iraqi broadcast, Alam recorded in his diary on 9 August that “if our friends and allies let us” Iran would “sort them out.”¹⁴⁷ Covertly, Iran tried to overthrow the Ba’th, sponsoring two unsuccessful coup attempts in Baghdad in the summer of 1969 and

¹⁴² Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1979), p. 1264.

¹⁴³ Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958: from Revolution to Dictatorship* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), pp. 116-123; Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, Third Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 186-197.

¹⁴⁴ Research Memorandum RNA-6 from Hughes to Rogers, 14 February 1969, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 251.

¹⁴⁵ CIA Information Cable TDCS DB-315/01044-70, 9 March 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 267.

¹⁴⁶ Airgram A-322 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 8 July 1969, RG59, CFPF 1967-69, Box 2218. The Ba’th did provide some modest material support for Arab and Baluchi separatists in Iran as well as safe-haven for Gen. Teymour Bakhtiar, the first chief of SAVAK who had fallen out with the shah in the early 1960s. See, Abbas Milani, ‘Teymour Bakhtiar’ in his *Eminent Persians*, Vol. 1, pp. 430-437; Ramazani, *Iran’s Foreign Policy*, p. 434; Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, p. 194.

¹⁴⁷ Alam, *Yad’dashtha-yi ‘Alam*, Vol. I, p. 233.

in January 1970.¹⁴⁸ As for the Soviet Union, Moscow took great pains to assure the shah that Soviet support for Iraq posed no threat to Iran.¹⁴⁹ As discussed in *Chapter One*, Soviet-Iranian relations had been normalised in 1962 and the trade and investment relationship between the two countries had developed significantly since then. The Soviet Union was playing a “balancing act” between Iran and Iraq, hoping to nudge the shah towards a non-aligned position while cultivating Ba’thi Iraq as its local client.¹⁵⁰

The advice that Nixon and Kissinger were receiving was that there were tensions in Soviet-Iraqi relations and that Soviet aid to Iraq posed little threat to either Iran or the Persian Gulf.¹⁵¹ In the briefing papers prepared for Nixon’s trip to Tehran in May 1972, written just one month after the signing of the Iraqi-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, the State Department argued that Soviet influence in Iraq may actually constrain and moderate Iraqi behaviour, given Moscow’s support for a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and its normalisation of relations

¹⁴⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 15 October 1969, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 262; Telegram 598 from the Embassy in the United Kingdom to the Department of State, 23 January 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 265. McKearney (Baghdad) to Acland (London), 24 January 1970; Symons (Baghdad) to Hinchcliffe (London), 31 January 1970; and Balfour Paul (Baghdad) to Tripp (London), 31 January 1970, FCO 17/1240. Alam, *Yad ‘dashtha-yi ‘Alam*, Vol. I, pp. 355-356; Majeed Mehran, *Dar kuridurha-yi Vizarat-i Umur-i Kharijah chih khabar: khatirat-i yak diplomat-i qadimi* [In the Corridors of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: the Memoirs of a Retired Diplomat] (Tehran, Nashr-i Tarikh-i Iran c. 2004), pp. 415-418. See also, Majid Khadduri, *Socialist Iraq: A Study in Iraqi Politics Since 1968* (Washington: Middle East Institute, 1978), pp. 53-57.

¹⁴⁹ Memorandum from Eliot to Kissinger, 13 April 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 305; Telegram 67657 from the Department of State to the Embassy in Iran, 19 April 1972, RG59, SNF 1970-73, Box 2380.

¹⁵⁰ Smolansky and Smolansky, *The USSR and Iraq*, p. 164. See also, Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Soviet Policy Toward Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan: The Dynamics of Influence* (New York: Praeger, 1982), pp. 83-90; Richard Herrmann, ‘The Role of Iran in Soviet Perceptions and Policy, 1946-1988’ in Nikki R. Keddie and Mark J. Gasiorowski (eds.), *Neither East Nor West: Iran, the Soviet Union, and the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press), pp. 70-74.

¹⁵¹ Telegram 4546 from the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, 13 August 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 274; Telegram 12737 from the Department of State to the Embassies in Iran, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union, 22 January 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 295; Intelligence Memorandum 0865/72 prepared by the CIA, 12 May 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 307.

with Iran.¹⁵² The NSC staff advised Nixon that Ba’thi Iraq was “regarded as about the most unreliable and least realistic of Mid-East states, even in the view of other Arabs. This has meant not only Iraq’s isolation within the Arab world but also ambivalent and unsteady relations with the outside world and great powers, including the Soviet Union.”¹⁵³ Nor did America’s British allies see Iraq as a real danger to Gulf stability. For example, Sir William Luce, Britain’s special envoy for the Gulf, told the State Department in January 1971 that “Iraq has relatively little scope for doing mischief in the Persian Gulf states. The people of the area dislike the Iraqis, and Iraq is probably too fearful of Iran’s reaction to risk any adventures in the Gulf.”¹⁵⁴

Why, then, were Nixon and Kissinger apparently convinced of the need to help Iran contain the danger from Soviet-backed Iraq, despite all the contradictory advice they were receiving from their own officials and their British allies? The answer lies in the nature of the relationship between Nixon, Kissinger, and the shah, under the Nixon Doctrine. Absorbed with the Vietnam War, détente with the Soviet Union, the opening to China, and seeking a second term in office, Nixon and Kissinger had little time to devote to the complexities of Iraqi or Persian Gulf politics. Instead, they relied on the shah’s judgement on local issues as their regional partner under the Nixon Doctrine. They discussed Iraq with the shah during their meetings in Tehran on 30 and 31 May 1972. The shah made a direct appeal for the United States to help Iran foment the Kurdish rebellion in northern

¹⁵² Briefing Paper entitled ‘Iran’s Role in Regional Security’ prepared by the Department of State, 12 May 1972, NPM, NSCF, President’s Trip Files, Box 479.

¹⁵³ Briefing Paper prepared for President Nixon, 18 May 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 308.

¹⁵⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 13 January 1971, *FRUS 1969-1976*, XXIV, 93.

Iraq, in order to block Soviet influence in the region.¹⁵⁵ As I will discuss in detail in the following chapter, a few months after the Tehran visit, Nixon authorized the CIA to provide arms and money for Iran's secret war in Iraqi Kurdistan, over the objections of virtually the entire U.S. foreign policy bureaucracy. The geo-strategic arguments in favour of U.S. intervention in Iraq were weak, but Nixon supported Iran's Kurdish effort "primarily as a favor" to the shah, as a leaked 1976 Congressional report on U.S. covert operations concluded.¹⁵⁶ American support for Iran against Iraq was an affirmation of, not an explanation for, Nixon's policy of Iranian primacy. Nixon and Kissinger came to see Iraq and the Gulf through the shah's eyes. Kissinger later wrote that some of the shah's "analysis was, of course, self-serving in the sense of providing a rationale for existing policy. But self-interest is no inhibition against accuracy."¹⁵⁷

Rethinking the Shah

An account of the origins of Nixon's Persian Gulf policy that simply examines the material constraints on American decision-making only tells half the story. America's war in Vietnam and the British withdrawal from the Persian Gulf, as well as Iran's rising oil revenues, Saudi instability, and the rise of the Ba'th in Iraq, all limited Washington's options in the Gulf. But when confronted with this array of factors, Johnson and Nixon adopted distinct Gulf policies. To understand why Johnson chose to continue with a British policy of balancing Iran and Saudi Arabia,

¹⁵⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, Tehran, 30 May 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 200; Memorandum of Conversation, Tehran, 31 May 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 201; Kissinger, *The White House Years*, pp. 1264-1265; Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, pp. 583-584.

¹⁵⁶ U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Intelligence, *CIA: the Pike Report* (Nottingham, 1977), p. 196.

¹⁵⁷ Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 676.

while Nixon opted for a policy of Iranian primacy, we need to also consider the shift in American thinking about the shah from Johnson to Nixon. As discussed earlier, two ideas lay just below the surface of the balancing policy developed in Whitehall and embraced by Foggy Bottom. The first was that Mohammad Reza Shah was an upstart – the ‘Middle East de Gaulle’ – whose ambitions for Iranian primacy would lead to regional instability and invite Soviet subversion. The second was that the shah’s insatiable appetite for U.S. arms was diverting resources away from Iran’s economic development. Both of these ideas were absent in Nixon and Kissinger’s thinking, thereby creating an opportunity for the shah to push the White House to abandon balancing in favour of Iranian primacy.

An Oval Office conversation in April 1971 between Nixon, Haig, and MacArthur, reveals the clear differences between Nixon’s views on the shah, based on their long-standing friendship, and those of Johnson’s advisors or the British. Gone is any notion of the shah as dangerous upstart. The question now is not how to contain the shah’s ambitions, but instead whether the shah is indeed up to the task of fulfilling them. Nixon declares that he is “stronger than horseradish” for the shah but asks his advisors if the shah can “fill that—the role out there, you know, in the whole darn Gulf area.” He wants to know if the shah has “got the stuff” or is he “thinking too big”? Nixon tells his advisors, “If he could do it, it'd be wonderful because he's our friend.” “I like him, I like him, and I like the country. And some of those other bastards out there I don't like”. In Nixon’s view Iran is America’s “one friend there” and “by God if we can go with them, and we can have them strong,

and they're in the centre of it, and a friend of the United States, I couldn't agree more—it's something.”¹⁵⁸

Although Kissinger did not meet the shah until 1969, the ideas he developed about the Iranian monarch were entirely in accord with those of Nixon. In his memoirs he vigorously refutes the idea that the shah was as an irresponsible leader whose extravagant weapons purchases needed to be curtailed: “Iran’s economic growth was not slowed nor was its political cohesion affected by its defense spending.” Far from being a dangerous upstart, Kissinger thought of the shah as statesman who, “In his grasp of the international trends and currents...was among the most impressive leaders that I met. He had a sure grasp of the importance of both the global and the regional balance of power.”¹⁵⁹ When Jeremi Suri writes that Kissinger advocated “a stable hierarchy of international power, with the United States at the top”, he might as well have been writing about the shah.¹⁶⁰ Both men were cold warriors who firmly believed that containing the Soviet Union “required the tolerance of brutality as a bulwark against worse suffering.”¹⁶¹ The pro-Western Pahlavi monarchy was a perfect fit in such a strategy of containment. The shah was conscious of the importance of this new American thinking, and as the documentary record suggests, he consistently used the language of the Nixon Doctrine to advocate a policy of Iranian primacy in the Persian Gulf. He later wrote that

¹⁵⁸ Conversation among President Nixon, MacArthur, and Haig, Washington, 8 April 1971, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 122.

¹⁵⁹ Kissinger, *The White House Years*, pp. 1260-1261.

¹⁶⁰ Jeremi Suri, ‘Henry Kissinger, the American Dream, and the Jewish Immigrant Experience in the Cold War’, *Diplomatic History*, 32/5 (2008), p. 731.

¹⁶¹ Jeremi Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 270.

Kissinger's "geo-political ideas coincided perfectly with mine."¹⁶² His foreign minister, Ardeshir Zahedi, says that when Mohammad Reza Shah argued for Iranian primacy, Kissinger "understood what we were saying."¹⁶³ Iran's role in Cold War came to be seen by Kissinger as a text-book example of the Nixon Doctrine:

"Under the Shah's leadership, the land bridge between Asia and Europe, so often the hinge of world history, was pro-American and pro-West beyond any challenge. Alone among the countries of the region – Israel aside – Iran made friendship with the United States the starting point of its foreign policy. That it was based on a cold-eyed assessment that a threat to Iran would most likely come from the Soviet Union, in combination with radical Arab states, is only another way of saying that the Shah's views of the realities of the world paralleled our own. Iran's influence was always on our side ... The Shah absorbed the energies of radical Arab neighbors to prevent them from threatening the moderate regimes in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the Persian Gulf."¹⁶⁴

Implementing the Nixon Doctrine

In the year that followed the adoption of NSDM 92 in November 1970, the shah took two steps that confirmed Washington's assessment of 'the preponderance of Iranian power' in the Persian Gulf. First, in the landmark 'Tehran Agreement' of 14 February 1971 between the international oil companies and the oil producing countries of the Gulf, the shah cajoled the companies into increasing the producers' share of oil profits and raising the price of oil.¹⁶⁵ Then on 30 November 1971, just a day before Britain's defence treaty obligations to the Arab rulers of the Lower Gulf expired, the shah deployed Iranian troops on the Gulf islands of Abu Musa and the Tunbs, which were claimed by both Iran and the British protected states of Sharjah

¹⁶² Pahlavi, *The Shah's Story*, p. 144.

¹⁶³ Ardeshir Zahedi in an interview with the author, Montreux, 11 June 2009.

¹⁶⁴ Kissinger, *The White House Years*, p. 1262.

¹⁶⁵ Ian Skeet, *OPEC: Twenty-Five Years of Prices and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 66-68.

and Ras al-Khaimah.¹⁶⁶ London could protect neither British Petroleum nor its Arab clients in the Gulf from the shah. Both actions demonstrated that Iran, with the full support of the United States, had taken Britain's place as the principal power of the region.

As the mantle of regional primacy passed from Britain to Iran, the shah would play an increasingly active role in the Nixon Doctrine, beginning with the 1971 South Asian crisis. The crisis was sparked when the martial law regime of Gen. Agha Mohammad Yahya Khan, who had come to power in Pakistan in a coup in March 1969, held national and provincial elections in both East and West Pakistan in December 1970 in order to transfer power to civilian hands and create a constitutional order. In elections for the federal National Assembly the Awami League, led by Sheikh Mujib al-Rahman and representing the Bengalis of East Pakistan, achieved an absolute majority, defeating the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), which held seats only in West Pakistan. Negotiations between the Awami League and the PPP to form a government failed, and when the Pakistani army attempted to impose a military solution in late March a civil war erupted. The Awami League declared East Pakistan's secession as the independent state of Bangladesh while the Pakistani army pursued a brutal crackdown on the Bengali separatists, creating a massive flow of refugees into India. The civil war became an

¹⁶⁶ See, Balfour-Paul, *The End of Empire*, pp. 131-134; Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf*, pp. 87-97; Richard A. Mobley, 'The Tunbs and Abu Musa Islands: Britain's Perspective', *Middle East Journal*, 57/4 (2003), pp. 627-645.

Indo-Pakistan war on 21 November 1971, when the Indian military intervened on the side of Bangladesh, leading to the surrender of Pakistan on 16 December.¹⁶⁷

Throughout the crisis, Nixon wanted to help Pakistan, which was not only aligned with the United States, but also a friend of Communist China, with which the United States was secretly cultivating a *détente*. Furthermore, Pakistan was pitted against India, which had signed a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union in August 1971. The tide of American opinion was against Pakistan because of the massacres of Bengali civilians. Consequently American military transfers to Pakistan were suspended by the State Department in April and economic aid was halted in July. Initially, Nixon and Kissinger limited their efforts to preventing the United States from aiding India, over the strong objections of a State Department that had been left in the dark about the opening to China.¹⁶⁸ It was in this context that the shah played a secret role in providing American arms from Iran's own inventories to Pakistan.

Pakistan was Iran's CENTO ally and the shah had already intervened once in 1965 to support Pakistan against India. With the outbreak of the 1971 crisis the shah worried that if Pakistan was not given assistance Yahya would increasingly turn to Beijing, extending Communist influence along Iran's borders. Foreign Minister Zahedi described such an eventuality as a "disaster for Iran."¹⁶⁹ Moreover,

¹⁶⁷ See, Richard Sisson and Leo E. Rose, *War and Secession: Pakistan, India, and the Creation of Bangladesh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

¹⁶⁸ See, Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect*, 154-184; Robert J. McMahon, 'The Danger of Geopolitical Fantasies: Nixon, Kissinger, and the South Asia Crisis of 1971' in Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston (eds.), *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 249-268; Christopher Van Hollen, 'The Tilt Policy Revisited: Nixon-Kissinger Geopolitics and South Asia', *Asian Survey*, 20/4 (1980), pp. 339-361.

¹⁶⁹ Telegram 3328 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 22 June 1971, RG59, SNF 1970-73, Box 2378.

the shah's greatest fear was that an Indian victory in East Pakistan might also lead to the collapse of West Pakistan. This was a nightmare scenario for Iran, given the Baluchi separatist movement along the Iranian-Pakistani border regions.¹⁷⁰ The shah had quietly taken a number of steps throughout 1971 to defuse tensions and encourage a negotiated solution. In April he had advised the Pakistani ambassador in Tehran that it was futile to try and use force to control 75 million people in East Pakistan.¹⁷¹ After the Pakistanis arrested Mujib and threatened to put him on trial, the shah acted on an American request in August to press Yahya not to make a "martyr" of Mujib by trying and executing him.¹⁷² As the situation in East Pakistan deteriorated, Yahya made a sudden 24-hour trip to Tehran on 14 and 15 September to ask for the shah's assurance that Iran would provide military aid to Pakistan if war broke out with India. According to American intelligence sources, the shah's response was "reserved", agreeing only to "provide some limited military material" and his good offices for resolving the crisis, but refusing to join Pakistan in any war with India.¹⁷³

In October the shah hosted a lavish celebration of the 2,500-year anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire at the ancient Achaemenid capital of Persepolis. He tried to use the occasion to mediate the South Asian crisis by arranging a meeting between Indian President V. V. Giri, Soviet leader Nikolai

¹⁷⁰ Shirin Tahir-Kheli, 'Iran and Pakistan: Cooperation in an Area of Conflict', *Asian Survey*, 17/5 (1977), pp. 474-490.

¹⁷¹ Telegram 1946 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 15 April 1971, RG59, SNF 1970-73, Box 2531.

¹⁷² Telegram 4292 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 4 August 1971, and Telegram 4462 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 14 August 1971, RG59, SNF 1970-73, Box 2533.

¹⁷³ Telegram 5209 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 17 September 1971, and Intelligence Note RNAN-27 prepared by the Department of State, 27 September 1971, RG59, SNF 1970-73, Box 2523.

Podgorny, and Yahya, all of whom were attending the celebration. Nothing emerged from the Persepolis meeting other than a quiet Soviet warning to the shah not to provide military assistance to Pakistan.¹⁷⁴ After his mediation efforts had come to naught and with India's military intervention in late November, the shah began working with the Nixon administration to secretly support Pakistan. Following an urgent appeal for help from Yahya on 4 December 1971, Nixon decided to covertly provide assistance to Pakistan via Iran. This way, the president told Kissinger that morning, "If it is leaking we can have it denied. Have it done one step away."¹⁷⁵ The need for secrecy stemmed from the problem that such third-party transfers of U.S. arms were illegal, "unless the United States itself would transfer the defense article under consideration to that country."¹⁷⁶ Kissinger's staff advised him that, "The President could, of course, give his consent to third-party transfers if he were also willing to establish, as a matter of policy, our willingness to supply the same items directly."¹⁷⁷ But given the popular mood against Pakistan among the public and in Congress, Nixon was unwilling to pay the political price of lifting the embargo, so he looked to the shah for help.

An unnamed American official, most likely the CIA station chief in Tehran, met with the shah on 5 December and secured his agreement to Nixon's request.¹⁷⁸ The next day, Nixon confirmed the arrangement with Kissinger, who warned the

¹⁷⁴ Telegram 6210 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 1 November 1971, NPM, NSCF, Country Files – Middle East, Box 602.

¹⁷⁵ Memorandum from Haig to Kissinger, 19 January 1972, NPM, NSCF, Country Files – Middle East, Box 643. See also, *FRUS 1969-1976*, XI, 222, f.3.

¹⁷⁶ Note prepared by the Department of Defense, 7 December 1971, NPM, NSCIF, Meeting Files (1969-75), Washington Special Action Group Meetings (WSAGM), Box H-083.

¹⁷⁷ Memorandum from Saunders to Kissinger, 9 December 1971, NPM, NSCIF, Meeting Files (1969-75), WSAGM, Box H-083.

¹⁷⁸ *FRUS 1969-1976*, XI, 222, f. 4. This official was most likely the CIA chief of station in Tehran.

president that these secret arms transfers were “not legal...strictly speaking” and that the White House should make sure “the Democrats don’t know about it and we keep our mouths shut.”¹⁷⁹ Four days later in New York, Kissinger assured the Chinese ambassador to the United Nations, Huang Ha, that the United States would supply military assistance to Pakistan through third parties, including Iran. He reported to the Chinese that the White House had assured the shah that if Iran’s “security requires shipment of American arms to Pakistan, we are obliged to protest, but we will understand. We will not protest with great intensity. And we will make up to them in next year’s budget whatever difficulties they have.”¹⁸⁰ This was the Nixon Doctrine in action: Iran was intervening in the Third World where the United States could not, by providing ammunition and other military equipment to defend Pakistan against Soviet-backed India.

‘Protect Me’

The U.S. policy of Iranian regional primacy under the Nixon Doctrine, formulated in NSDM 92 and tested in the 1971 South Asian Crisis, was ratified during Nixon’s May 1972 trip to Tehran, the first visit by a sitting American president to Iran in nearly thirteen years.¹⁸¹ Iran was the president’s first port of call after the historic Moscow summit between Nixon and Brezhnev, which in itself was an indication of Nixon’s esteem for Mohammad Reza Shah. In the first meeting of the visit on the afternoon of May 30, Nixon thanked the shah for the role Iran had played in

¹⁷⁹ Conversation between President Nixon and Kissinger, Washington, 6 December 1971, 12:02-12:06 p.m., NPM, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 630-2.

¹⁸⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, New York, 10 December 1971, *FRUS 1969-1976*, XI, 274.

¹⁸¹ President Eisenhower had visited Iran in 1959 and Vice President Johnson had also visited in 1962.

supporting Pakistan. He briefed the shah on his discussions with Brezhnev and asked if America's allies had anything to fear from U.S.-Soviet détente, implying that détente did not mean a weakening of America's commitment to Iran. The shah replied, "Not if you have the right allies...If they are self-reliant they will welcome it. If they have the principle of fighting until the last American they will not welcome it." Clearly alluding to the Nixon Doctrine, the shah emphasized that "Iran, like Israel, must be able to stand alone."¹⁸² The following morning, the shah finally received the American acknowledgement that all of Nixon's predecessors had denied him. In his minute of the May 31 meeting, Kissinger records that Nixon, "asked the shah to understand the purpose of American policy. "Protect me," he said. "Don't look at détente as something that weakens you but as a way for the United States to gain influence." The Nixon Doctrine was a way for the U.S. to build a new long-term policy on [the] support of allies."¹⁸³ Nixon's choice of words was extraordinary. The president of the United States had travelled to the court of the shah of Iran to ask Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to protect him. In addition to a commitment to support Iran's secret war in Iraqi Kurdistan, which will be discussed in the following chapter, Nixon also assured the shah that his administration would sell Iran advanced F-14 and F-15 fighter jets, as well as laser-guided bombs.¹⁸⁴ The shah rightly boasted to Alam that Nixon "gave me everything I asked for."¹⁸⁵

The Tehran summit was, as Harold Saunders later recalled, the "capstone event" in the shift in U.S. Persian Gulf policy from balancing to Iranian primacy.

¹⁸² Memorandum of Conversation, Tehran, 30 May 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 200.

¹⁸³ Memorandum of Conversation, Tehran, 31 May 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 201.

¹⁸⁴ Kissinger, *The White House Years*, pp. 1264-1265; Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, pp. 583-584.

¹⁸⁵ Alam, *Yad'dashtha-yi 'Alam*, Vol. II, p. 260.

The turning point had come with NSDM 92 in November 1970. A year and a half later, Nixon had made commitments to the shah in Tehran which were, in Saunders' words, "a ratification of a posture that had long since crystallized."¹⁸⁶ But after returning to Washington from Tehran, Kissinger found that Nixon's policy of Iranian primacy was encountering resistance in the American bureaucracy, particularly in the Pentagon, where many officials objected to giving the shah a blank cheque on conventional arms sales to Iran.¹⁸⁷ Kissinger was compelled to write to both Secretary of Defence Melvin Laird and Secretary of State William Rogers in July, to remind them that "decisions on the acquisition of military equipment should be left primarily to the government of Iran."¹⁸⁸ At the time of the 1972 Tehran meeting, Iran's military expenditure was already three times that of Iraq and nearly twice that of Saudi Arabia.¹⁸⁹ During Nixon's presidency, annual U.S. military sales to Iran would grow more than seven-fold, from \$94.9 million in 1969 to \$682.8 million in 1974. They would go on to reach a peak of more than \$2.55 billion in 1977.¹⁹⁰ This burgeoning military spending would give Iran a position of largely uncontested power in the Gulf. Far from being an "Anglo-American lake", for a decade the Gulf was a region where Iranian power was profoundly felt.¹⁹¹ As I will discuss in the next chapter, in Iraq, the shah used the Kurdish rebellion against Baghdad to pressure Saddam Hussein into settling the dispute over the Shatt in Iran's favour in 1975. The Iranian military were deployed

¹⁸⁶ Harold Saunders in an interview with William Burr, 24 February 1987, Washington, DC, Tape 2A, in the FISOHC.

¹⁸⁷ Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, pp. 201-202.

¹⁸⁸ Memorandum from Kissinger to Laird and Rogers, 25 July 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 214.

¹⁸⁹ SIPRI, *SIPRI Yearbook 1973*, pp. 238-239, Table 7A.8.

¹⁹⁰ Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy*, p. 112, Table 6.

¹⁹¹ Petersen, *Richard Nixon*, p. 60.

in Dhofar from 1972 until 1979, playing a pivotal role in defeating the Communist-backed insurgency against the sultan of Oman, which threatened to spread to the other conservative monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula.¹⁹² Nixon's policy of Iranian primacy endured beyond his resignation in 1974, but as I will discuss in *Chapter Four*, the U.S.-Iran partnership would experience a decline under his successor, President Gerald Ford, in part because of the absence of a strong personal relationship between president and shah.

Conclusion

Richard Nixon's presidency was the high-water mark of Iran's relations with the United States because of the long-standing friendship between Nixon and the shah. Never before, nor ever since, has an Iranian leader enjoyed such access and influence in the White House. Hints of Iran's evolution from a client to a partner of the United States were already apparent during Lyndon Johnson's presidency, as Iran's rising oil revenues afforded the shah a growing measure of autonomy from his American patrons. But it was under Nixon that the United States acknowledged and embraced Iran's primacy in the Persian Gulf. Some have argued that "the Nixon Doctrine, as implemented in the Persian Gulf, was actually little more than an Iranian policy eagerly embraced by an administration caught in the morass of the Vietnam War."¹⁹³ But the Vietnam quagmire tells us very little about the choices Nixon made in the Gulf. It was certainly the case that the United States, consumed

¹⁹² Chubin and Zabih, *The Foreign Relations of Iran*, pp. 310-312; Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*, pp. 329-331; Ramazani, 'Iran's Search for Regional Coöperation'; Jonathan C. Randal, *After Such Knowledge, What Forgiveness? My Encounters with Kurdistan* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1997), pp. 145-182.

¹⁹³ Michael A. Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf: A History of America's Expanding Role in the Persian Gulf, 1833-1992* (New York: Free Press, 1992), p. 88.

by the war in Indochina, could not take on the role that Britain had abandoned in the Gulf. Like his predecessor, Nixon looked to local actors to fill the vacuum left by the British. But his decision to back Iranian primacy was not the obvious choice that Kissinger has made it out to be. Nixon could have continued with Johnson's policy of balancing Iran and Saudi Arabia as the 'twin pillars' of the Gulf. Instead, he tilted towards Iran as the principal power of the region. Soviet influence in Iraq and Saudi instability both played their part in the origins of Nixon's Gulf policy. But the crucial factor was that under Nixon, the shah's ambitions were seen by the White House as an asset rather than a liability. Nixon did not share the view of his predecessors or the naysayers in the Pentagon that the shah's military spending needed to be curtailed. Instead, he saw his old friend Mohammad Reza Pahlavi as a strong, modernising, anti-Communist statesman, and so he felt comfortable giving the shah whatever arms he wanted in order to make Iran the principal power of the region.

In this chapter I have outlined this shift in U.S. Persian Gulf policy from balancing to Iranian primacy during Nixon's first term in office. The process began with the confrontation between Iran and Iraq in the April 1969 Shatt crisis, when the shah demonstrated that that he was willing to defy the United States, if necessary, to assert Iran's primacy in the Gulf. Iran was no longer a Third World 'client' which, as discussed in *Chapter One*, had little choice but to take the interests of its superpower patron into consideration when making decisions of national consequence. Instead, the Nixon administration acknowledged in NSDM 92 of November 1970 that Iran was now a power to be reckoned with, seeking for

itself a role as an autonomous partner of the United States in the global Cold War. Using the language of the Nixon Doctrine, the shah convinced Nixon and Kissinger that the United States should rely on Iran to maintain Gulf stability without American military intervention. Beginning with the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War, the shah demonstrated that he was both able and willing to intervene in regional Cold War conflicts where his American partners feared to tread. This partnership crystallised in the commitments that Nixon made to the shah in Tehran in May 1972. With a raft of more pressing international issues on their agenda, Nixon and Kissinger deferred to the shah's judgement on Gulf matters, just as their predecessors had relied on the British. Instead of containing a rising Iran, Nixon embraced it. Instead of curtailing the shah's military spending, he ordered his administration not to second-guess the shah. This was not only a partnership between a superpower and a rising regional power, but also a personal commitment by Nixon to the shah. As we shall see in the next chapter, this partnership would have profound consequences for the international relations of the Gulf as the shah used his influence in the Nixon White House to draw his American partners into Iran's secret war with Iraq in Kurdistan.

CHAPTER THREE:

NIXON, KISSINGER AND THE SHAH-FORSAKEN KURDS, 1972-1975

By the 1970s Iran had been transformed from a battleground of the Cold War to an autonomous actor in the Cold War. The U.S. policy of Iranian primacy in the Persian Gulf, forged by Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Richard Nixon, and Henry Kissinger, was an acknowledgement of Iran's evolution from a client of the United States to a partner in the containment of Soviet influence in the Persian Gulf and its environs. The shah had emerged as a Cold War statesman who harnessed Iran's wealth and military power to defend conservative pro-Western regimes in the region against their Soviet-backed enemies. Both overtly and covertly, Iran was helping Pakistan against India, Jordan against the Palestinians, Saudi Arabia against Yemen, and the Sultan of Oman against the Dhofari rebels. By 1972 the shah had expressed his ambitions for projecting Iran's power into the Indian Ocean and had begun discussions with Australia, Mauritius and South Africa for access to their ports for the Iranian navy.¹ For Mohammad Reza Shah, this newfound status presented an opportunity to redress a number of Iran's historical grievances with its neighbours. This included, for example, settling Iran's numerous territorial disputes in the Gulf, where the shah relinquished Iran's claim to Bahrain in 1970 and seized the islands of Abu Musa and the Tunbs in 1971. The most contentious dispute was with neighbouring Iraq, over their common maritime border along the Shatt al-Arab waterway. The shah was determined to rid himself of the Tehran Treaty that his

¹ Memorandum from Eliot to Kissinger, 14 December 1972, NPM, NSCF, Country Files – Middle East, Box 602.

father, Reza Shah, had agreed to in 1937 under pressure from the British, which established Iraqi sovereignty over the entire waterway.² As discussed in the previous chapter, the shah had demonstrated in the April 1969 Shatt crisis that he was willing to use force independently of the United States to secure Iranian control of the eastern half of the Shatt up to the *thalweg*, or deepest point, of the waterway.

The shah's principal leverage over the Iraqis was the support that Iran, and to a lesser extent Israel, provided to the Kurdish insurgency in northern Iraq. Between 1972 and 1975 the United States covertly backed this Iranian operation in Iraqi Kurdistan as part of the American commitment to Iranian primacy under the Nixon Doctrine. Nixon, Kissinger, and the shah would work together to paralyze the Iraqi army in a guerilla war in Kurdistan. Their goal was to prevent Soviet-backed Iraq from posing a threat to Iran or the Persian Gulf. Tied down by the war with the Kurds, the Iraqis could neither challenge Iran in the Shatt nor project their influence into the Gulf. This chapter explores the shah's role in the U.S. decision to support the Iraqi Kurds in 1972, and then to abandon them in 1975. Here I contend that the nature and dynamics of U.S.-Iran relations during the Kurdish episode were characteristic of the partnership that had emerged between the two countries during Nixon's first term in office, as discussed in the previous chapter. Nixon and Kissinger attached so much importance to their relationship with the shah that they were willing to support the Iraqi Kurds at his behest, against the advice of their own officials, and despite the risk that this might upset *détente* with the Soviet Union. Iran had achieved such a degree of autonomy from the United States that when the

² On Britain's attitude towards the 1937 Treaty see, Schofield, *Evolution of the Shatt Al-'Arab*, pp. 54-55.

shah deemed it expedient to abandon the Kurds in 1975, in order to make a deal with Iraq over the Shatt, he did so with little regard for the interests of his American partners, causing great domestic embarrassment to the Ford administration and to Kissinger personally.

In this chapter I begin by describing the origins of Iranian and Israeli support for the Iraqi Kurds, which started in the 1960s after the overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy and within the context of the Israel's 'peripheral pact' with Iran. Then I turn to the long-standing U.S. policy of non-intervention in Kurdistan under Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson. The turning point in U.S. policy came in 1972 when the shah convinced Nixon and Kissinger to support the Iraqi Kurds as part of their commitment to Iranian primacy under the Nixon Doctrine. I then discuss the beginning of the covert CIA operation to aid the Kurds in 1972 and the escalation of that support in 1973 as the pressure on the Kurds from both Baghdad and Moscow mounted. The chapter then focuses on Kissinger's role in keeping the Kurdish operation going in the shadow of the Watergate crisis that paralyzed Richard Nixon, leading ultimately to the president's resignation in 1974. Under President Gerald Ford, Kissinger would maintain the American commitment to the Iraqi Kurds until March 1975, when against his advice, the shah decided to abandon the Kurds in a deal with Iraq's Saddam Hussein. This chapter seeks to answer a number of historical questions that address the nature and dynamics of U.S.-Iran relations during the Nixon and Ford administrations. First, why did Nixon and Kissinger agree to help Iran support the Iraqi Kurds in 1972, despite a long-standing U.S. policy of non-intervention in Kurdistan? Second, why did they

escalate their assistance to the Kurds in 1973 and continue the operation in 1974, despite the rising cost and diminishing prospects of success? And finally, why did they acquiesce to the shah's decision to abandon the Kurds in 1975, despite the embarrassment and domestic recriminations that followed?

The Origins of Iranian and Israeli Support for the Iraqi Kurds

The Kurdish tribes that live along the mountainous border between Iran and Iraq have been pawns in the perennial conflict between Iran and its western neighbours since the wars of the Safavid shahs of Persia and the Ottoman sultans of Anatolia in the sixteenth century. The emergence of the modern state system in the Middle East after the First World War left the Kurds without a state of their own. The Kurds of Iran and Iraq found themselves fighting for autonomy from both the Hashemite kings in Baghdad and the Pahlavi shahs in Tehran. Mulla Mustafa Barzani, a tribal and religious leader from Iraqi Kurdistan, rose to prominence in the 1940s, when he led a number of revolts against the Hashemites and their British patrons.³ Driven out of Iraq, he crossed the border into Iranian Kurdistan in 1945 where he fought to defend the short-lived Kurdish 'Republic of Mahabad', which was supported by the Soviet Union during its wartime occupation of northern Iran. But the Mahabad republic collapsed in December 1946 as the Red Army withdrew from Iran. Barzani fled into exile in the Soviet Union, while the erstwhile president of Mahabad, Qazi Mohammad, was left to face the advancing Iranian army and ultimately the shah's

³ 'Mulla' is a religious title that refers to Barzani's descent from the Barzinji shaikhly family that was associated with the Qadiri *tariqa* (Sufi order). See Martin Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Sheikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (London: Zed Books, 1992), pp. 205-264.

gallows.⁴ Mohammad Reza Shah would be eternally suspicious of Barzani because of his support for Iran's secessionist Kurds and his ties to the Soviet Union, where he lived in exile for more than a decade under the surname 'Mamedov' and studied at the Higher Party School.⁵

Barzani was elected chairman of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) in 1946 while still in exile, but he returned to Iraq in 1958 after Brig. Abd al Karim Qasim overthrew the pro-Western Hashemite monarchy in a bloody military coup. For the next two decades Barzani would work both with and against a succession of radical regimes in Baghdad in the hope of gaining autonomy for the Kurds of Iraq. As Iraq abandoned its alliance with Britain and Iran in the Baghdad Pact, seeking instead closer ties with the Soviet Union, the shah began to see Barzani as a potential ally against an emerging Iraqi threat. Iran's newly created National Intelligence and Security Organisation, known by its Persian acronym SAVAK, established contact with Barzani in 1958 as a source of political and military intelligence on both Qasim's regime and the Iranian Kurds. SAVAK was worried about the growing Communist influence among the Kurds of both Iran and Iraq. Under the direction of Gen. Hassan Pakravan, then in charge of SAVAK's foreign intelligence operations, Col. Mujtaba Pashai, chief of Middle East operations, and Maj. Issa Pejman, the head of the Kurdish desk, SAVAK orchestrated a propaganda campaign to counter subversive Kurdish-language broadcasts from the Soviet

⁴ See, Archie Roosevelt, Jr., 'The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad', *The Middle East Journal*, 1/3 (1947), pp. 247-297.

⁵ Research Study RNAS-10 prepared by the Department of State, 31 May 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 310; Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 12 April 1962, *FRUS 1961-1963*, XVII, 243; Yevgeny Primakov, *Russia and the Arabs: behind the scenes in the Middle East from the Cold War to the present*, trans. Paul Gould (New York: Basic Books, 2009), p. 326. Massoud Barzani, *Mustafa Barzani and the Kurdish Liberation Movement (1931-1961)*, ed. Ahmed Ferhadi (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 135-150.

Union and to encourage the Kurds' loyalty to Iran. This hearts-and-minds campaign was premised on the view that the Kurds were, in the shah's words, "the purest Persians, pure Aryans, from their tradition, their language and their history."⁶ SAVAK's activities included Kurdish-language radio broadcasts from Mashad and Kermanshah, sponsoring international conferences among the Kurdish émigré communities in Europe, and publishing a Kurdish-language newspaper. Iran also began providing Barzani with modest amounts of material assistance, including a small amount of arms and ammunition, as well as allowing a KDP radio station to operate from Iranian territory.⁷

However, Iran's support for Barzani did not begin in earnest until the mid-1960s, when the pan-Arabist regime of Iraqi President Abdul Salam Arif began pressing Iraq's claims of sovereignty over both the Shatt al-Arab and Iran's oil-rich province of Khuzistan, with its large Arabic-speaking population.⁸ Barzani and his army of *Pesh Merga* ('those who face death') guerrillas had launched a full scale Kurdish rebellion against Iraq's central government in 1961. By providing money and arms for this Kurdish insurgency the shah hoped to inhibit the pan-Arab ambitions of the regime in Baghdad, to paralyse the Iraqi army and prevent it from meddling in Khuzistan and the Persian Gulf, and to provide a valuable bargaining chip in any future negotiations with Iraq over the Shatt. The significance of Iran's assistance to the Kurds was evident in Iraq's decision to launch a major military

⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 13 April 1962, *FRUS 1961-1963*, XVII, 247; Telegram 1044 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 20 January 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, XXI, 179.

⁷ Edgar O'Ballance, *The Kurdish Struggle, 1920-94* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 61. Col. Issa Pejman in an interview with Akbar E'temad, 8 April 1983, Paris, Tape 1B and; 4 March 1983, Paris, Tape 1, in the HIOHP. Abbas William Samii, 'The Role of SAVAK in the 1978-1979 Iranian Revolution', PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1994, pp. 133-135.

⁸ Letter from the Shah of Iran to President Johnson, 7 January 1964, *FRUS 1964-1968*, XXII, 2.

offensive in May 1966 to sever the mountain supply routes from the Iranian border to Rawanduz in Iraqi Kurdistan, where Barzani's headquarters was located. The Iraqi offensive involved a commitment of 40,000 troops supported by 100 combat aircraft. However, the Iraqis soon found themselves trapped at Mt Handrin at the eastern entrance to the Rawanduz Gorge, where they were routed by Barzani's *Pesh Merga* on 11 and 12 May, resulting in thousands of Iraqi casualties and the loss of large quantities of abandoned arms and ammunition. According to the British military historian Edgar O'Ballance, "The Mount Handrin ambush severely shook Iraqi military morale and confidence, and prematurely brought the...Offensive to an abrupt and humiliating end."⁹ The Iraqi military would not launch another offensive in Kurdistan until January 1969.

Despite this military success, the shah's support for the Iraqi Kurds was never wholehearted and Barzani and the shah were not natural allies. The danger always existed that the Kurdish insurgency in Iraq would spill over into Iranian Kurdistan. What if Barzani was in fact a Soviet agent, working with Moscow to create a Kurdish state on Iran's doorstep, as they had tried to do in Mahabad in 1946? Barzani was aware of the shah's suspicions about his ties to Moscow, so he regularly handed over to SAVAK Iranian Communists, including Kurds, who had sought refuge in his territory, in an effort to reassure the shah about his intentions.¹⁰ Barzani was aware that the shah did not share his goal of autonomy or independence for the Iraqi Kurds. Rather, Iran's interests lay in a stalemate between Baghdad and the Kurds that would paralyse the Iraqi army on Iran's western border

⁹ O'Ballance, *The Kurdish Struggle*, p. 84.

¹⁰ Randal, *After Such Knowledge*, pp. 131-132; Saad Jawad, *Iraq & the Kurdish Question, 1958-1970* (London: Ithaca Press, 1981), p. 297.

and give the shah some leverage over Baghdad. Whenever the Iraqis came close to resolving their differences with Barzani, or to defeating him on the battlefield, the shah would escalate Iran's support for the Kurds. Conversely, whenever the Kurds came close to achieving autonomy, the shah would urge restraint. Consequently, Barzani was interested in diversifying his sources of external support, looking in particular to Israel and the United States as potential allies against Iraq.

Israel also had cause to worry about the radical direction that Iraq had taken after 1958. The covert support that Israel gave to Barzani was part of a broader strategy to balance against the rising radical Arab threat following the disastrous 1956 Suez Crisis. Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion sought to consolidate Israel's regional position by seeking an informal "peripheral pact" with other non-Arab states encircling the Arab world: Ethiopia, Iran and Turkey. These pro-Western non-Arab allies would provide Israel with a counterweight to its Soviet-backed Arab enemies like Iraq.¹¹ As Avi Shlaim writes, the peripheral pact was intended to "strengthen Israeli deterrence, to reduce Israel's isolation, and to add to its influence and power as an actor on the international stage."¹² Iran had extended *de facto* recognition to Israel in 1950 and by 1957 was secretly working with the Israelis to construct the Eilat-Eshkalon oil pipeline from the Gulf of Aqaba to the Mediterranean Sea, allowing Iran to export oil to Israel and Europe while bypassing the Egyptian-controlled Suez Canal.¹³ A formal tri-lateral intelligence relationship

¹¹ Michael Bar-Zahor, 'David Ben-Gurion and the Policy of the Periphery' in Itamar Rabinovich and Jehuda Reinharz (eds.), *Israel in the Middle East*, Second Edition (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2008), pp. 191-197.

¹² Avi Shlaim, 'Israel, the Great Powers, and the Middle East Crisis of 1958', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 27/2 (1999), p. 182.

¹³ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, p. 23.

between Iran, Israel and Turkey was established in 1958 with the name 'Trident', which involved intelligence sharing and semi-annual meetings of the three countries' intelligence chiefs. Mossad, Israel's foreign intelligence service, assisted SAVAK with intelligence operations in Iraqi Kurdistan, Lebanon and Yemen, and provided the shah with intelligence on any threats to Iran emanating from the Arab world.¹⁴

At the same time that the peripheral pact was taking shape, Barzani reached out to the Israelis for help against their common foe in Baghdad. He sent an envoy, Kamuran Ali Bedir Khan, to meet with Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir in Zurich in 1959 to ask her for Israel's political and diplomatic support against Qasim. After Barzani launched his rebellion against Baghdad in 1961 the Israelis were keen to support the Kurds as way of weakening Iraq. By keeping the Iraqi army pinned down in a guerrilla war in Kurdistan, the Israelis hoped to prevent Iraq from entering the Arab-Israeli conflict on the Jordanian or Syrian fronts. However, Israel faced considerable logistical difficulties in supplying the Kurds, given that it does not share a land border with Iraq. The only possible conduit for Israeli assistance to the Iraqi Kurds was Iran, but SAVAK was initially quite hesitant to allow Mossad to establish a presence in Kurdistan.¹⁵ While the Israelis saw support for the Iraqi Kurds as a logical part of the periphery strategy, their interests in Kurdistan were not the same as those of Iran or Turkey. Worried about their own Kurdish secessionists, neither Iran nor Turkey wanted to see an independent Kurdish entity emerge in Iraq. Aware of these concerns, Ben-Gurion warned

¹⁴ Samii, 'The Role of SAVAK', pp. 149-152; Airgram A-2294 from the Embassy in the United Kingdom to the Department of State, 8 March 1967, RG59, CFPF 1967-69, Box 2218.

¹⁵ Samii, 'The Role of SAVAK', p. 136.

Mossad to support Barzani “without stepping on Iranian and Turkish toes.”¹⁶ But these obstacles were eventually overcome and Israel’s support for Barzani began in the mid-1960s in tandem with Iran’s decision to escalate its support for the Iraqi Kurds.

In 1963 Bedir Khan returned to Israel, where he met again with Golda Meir, as well as Ben-Gurion, Mossad chief Meir Amit, and Gen. Tzvi Tzur, the chief of staff of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). Bedir Khan asked the Israelis for money, a powerful radio transmitter, and anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons. Ben-Gurion authorized Mossad to discreetly help the Kurds, in co-ordination with SAVAK, and a Mossad envoy met with Barzani in Iraq in May 1963 to discuss the arrangement. The following month Amit himself travelled to Paris to discuss the operation with his Iranian counterpart, Pakravan, who had been promoted to chief of SAVAK. Addressing Iran's anxieties about the threat of Kurdish nationalism, Amit and Pakravan agreed that the purpose of any assistance to the Kurds was to keep “the coals [of rebellion] burning, without letting them burst into flames.”¹⁷ Knowledge of the Kurdish operation would be kept strictly secret within the two governments and would be withheld from other allies. If the operation were exposed, both governments would deny any knowledge. By the winter of 1963 the first Israeli shipment of weapons and ammunition had reached Barzani via Iran, and in May 1965 Pejman, the SAVAK liaison with Barzani, escorted Tzur and two senior

¹⁶ Noa Schonmann, ‘The Phantom Pact: Israel’s Periphery Policy in the Middle East’, DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2009, p. 259.

¹⁷ Schonmann, ‘The Phantom Pact’, p. 259.

Israeli military intelligence officers to Barzani's headquarters for two days of talks on military cooperation.¹⁸

After Tzur's meeting with Barzani, Israeli assistance dramatically expanded to include a permanent IDF and Mossad presence at Barzani's headquarters. The Israelis established a four-man radio relay team there, so that they could have direct communications with Israel, and provided the Kurds with a full field hospital, medical training, military instructors, and a regular supply of arms, ammunition and funds. While Iran provided the bulk of the material assistance for the Kurds, the Israelis supplemented this with a \$50,000 monthly stipend. They also established a three-month officers' training course for the Kurds, while Mossad and SAVAK worked together to train a Kurdish intelligence organisation called Parastin, with the goal of collecting military intelligence on the Iraqi army.¹⁹ As we shall see, the most crucial Israeli role in the Kurdish operation was providing the Kurds with Soviet weapons they had captured from the Arabs. Soviet arms were ubiquitous throughout the Third World and would allow the Kurds' foreign sponsors to plausibly deny any involvement in Iraq's civil war. While American-made weapons in the hands of the Kurds would suggest Iranian or Israeli involvement, the presence of Soviet-made weapons on the battlefields of Kurdistan would not raise any eyebrows. But Iran remained the principal sponsor of the Kurds and the Israeli role was ultimately marginal. The war in Kurdistan would prevent the Iraqi army from

¹⁸ David Kimche, *The Last Option: After Nasser, Arafat & Saddam Hussein, the quest for peace in the Middle East* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991), p. 189; Col. Issa Pejman in an interview with Akbar E'temad, 8 April 1983, Paris, in the FISOHC, Tape 1B; Samii, 'The Role of SAVAK', p. 137.

¹⁹ Edmund Ghareeb, *The Kurdish Question in Iraq* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981), pp. 133; Samii, 'The Role of SAVAK', p. 137; Schonmann, 'The Phantom Pact', p. 260, f. 179.

making any significant contribution to the Arab forces during the 1967 or 1973 Arab-Israeli wars. But as we shall see, the Israelis were never able to exercise much influence over Barzani or the course of the Kurdish war.

The Reluctant Americans

Despite Washington's concerns about Iraq's burgeoning relationship with the Soviet Union after 1958, successive American administrations steadfastly refused to be drawn into the conflict in Kurdistan. The Americans were suspicious of Barzani's ties to Moscow and they feared that any civil war in Iraq would generate instability that the Iraqi Communists and the Soviet Union would exploit.²⁰ The United States consistently rejected Barzani's appeals for military and financial assistance, despite promises that he would purge any Communists from his ranks and "burn all bridges to Russia" if American aid was forthcoming.²¹ After Qasim's overthrow in February 1963, the United States sought to improve relations with Iraq as part of the Kennedy administration's broader strategy of placating Arab nationalism in the Middle East as a bulwark against Soviet influence. The Americans warned the shah to "keep [his] hands off" Iraq and in August they secretly provided arms for the Iraqi army, which were most likely used in the ongoing fighting with the Kurds.²² Washington regarded the Kurds' dispute with the central government as "strictly an internal matter" and consistently encouraged

²⁰ Telegram 1312 from the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State, 14 October 1958, *FRUS 1958-1960*, XII, 138.

²¹ Telegram 150 from the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State, 20 September 1962, *FRUS 1961-1963*, XVIII, 49; Telegram 383 from the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State, 22 June 1962, *FRUS 1961-1963*, XVII, 305.

²² Memorandum from Komer to Bundy, 1 March 1963, *FRUS 1961-1963*, XVIII, 305.

Barzani and the KDP to reach an “equitable settlement” with Baghdad.²³ As Iran and Israel escalated their support for the Kurds in the mid-1960s, the Johnson administration kept Barzani at arms length. While the shah urged the Kurds to resume their fighting against the Iraqi army, after Barzani had agreed to a cease-fire in 1964, American diplomats in Baghdad congratulated the Kurds for having “wisely resisted Persian blandishments” and encouraged them to “remain calm and try work out solution with GOI [Government of Iraq].”²⁴ By April 1965 the cease-fire had broken down and Iran and Israel were escalating their support for the Kurds. But the United States continued to turn down Kurdish requests for arms and money, despite Barzani’s promises that an independent Kurdistan would be “another state of the union” where American firms would enjoy privileged access to Kirkuk’s oil fields.²⁵

The United States did not support Iran’s strategy of using the Kurds to paralyse Iraq. The Americans wanted to strengthen Iraq so that it would be less dependent on the Soviet Union.²⁶ But the shah wanted to keep the Iraqi army bogged down in Kurdistan in order to keep the regime in Baghdad off balance and prevent them from posing a direct military threat in the Shatt or an indirect threat of subversion in Khuzistan or the Persian Gulf. Robert Strong, the U.S. ambassador to

²³ Circular Airgram CA-9411 from the Department of State to Certain Posts, 2 March 1963, *FRUS 1961-1963*, XVIII, 174; Memorandum from McKesson to Bundy, 6 August 1963, *FRUS 1961-1963*, XVIII, 307; Telegram 331 from the Department of State to the Embassy in Iraq, 5 April 1963, *FRUS 1961-1963*, XVIII, 208.

²⁴ Telegram 486 from the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State, 16 December 1964, *FRUS 1964-1968*, XXI, 171

²⁵ Telegram 1128 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 12 April 1965, *FRUS 1964-1968*, XXI, 172. Memorandum from Saunders to Watson, 29 April 1965, National Security File (NSF), Country File Middle East (CFME), Box 136, LBJL; Memorandum from Saunders to Joyce, 30 April 1965, Files of Robert W. Komer, Box 28, LBJL.

²⁶ Memorandum from Atherton to Hare, 1 November 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, XXI, 185.

Iraq, advised Washington in October 1965 that, “Continued Iranian/Israeli intervention is a threat to the United States position in Iraq but, unfortunately, neither country is likely to be heedful of United States interests in the matter.”²⁷ While the Americans could do little about the flow of Iranian aid to the Kurds, they continued to rebuff repeated Kurdish attempts to draw them into the war in Kurdistan in the late 1960s.²⁸ Strong’s analysis was correct; that shah was not about to heed American warnings to keep his hands off Iraq. As discussed in the previous chapter, Iran asserted its sovereignty in the Shatt during the April 1969 border crisis with Iraq and then backed two unsuccessful coup attempts in Baghdad, in the summer of 1969 and again in January 1970, in the hope of installing a friendly government in Iraq. Not only did the shah defy the Americans on Iraq, he would eventually draw them into the Kurdish war against Baghdad alongside Iran.

After six failed offensives against the Kurds since 1961, Iraq’s leaders begrudgingly came to the conclusion in 1970 that there were only two ways to end the debilitating war in Kurdistan. One option was to give the shah the territorial concessions he wanted in the Shatt, in exchange for an end to Iranian support for Barzani. The problem with this solution was that the fragile legitimacy of the Ba’th regime, which had seized power in a military coup in 1968, rested on its claim to being champions of Arab nationalism. Therefore, the Ba’th could hardly afford to

²⁷ Airgram A-424 from the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State, 30 October 1965, *FRUS 1964-68*, XXI, 177.

²⁸ Telegram A-625 from the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State, 12 March 1966; Memorandum from Saunders to Komer, 23 March 1966, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, Box 28, LBJL. Memorandum from Rostow to President Johnson, 20 February 1967; Memorandum from the Department of State to Rostow, 16 February 1967, White House Central File (WHCF), Confidential File, CO 124 Iraq, Box 9 [1 of 2], LBJL. Memorandum prepared by Saunders, 30 July 1968, WHCF, Subject File, CO 124 Iraq, Box 41, LBJL.

be seen to surrender Arab territory to the Persian shah.²⁹ The second, more palatable, option was to pursue Iraqi national unity through a negotiated settlement with Barzani, who could not have been happy that Iran and Israel were using the Kurds to tie down the Iraqi army.³⁰ Negotiations between the KDP and the central government began in December 1969 and following face-to-face talks in February 1970 between Barzani and Saddam Hussein, then vice chairman of Iraq's Revolutionary Command Council, an agreement was announced by the government on 11 March. The new accord guaranteed the cultural and linguistic rights of the Kurds, gave them full autonomy in Kurdish majority areas, and also assured them a share of power in Baghdad. As a result of the accord the Kurdish language was taught for the first time in schools throughout Iraqi Kurdistan, Kurds were appointed to the cabinet in Baghdad and to provincial posts throughout Kurdistan, and government funds began to flow into the impoverished Kurdish region. Barzani was given a generous monthly stipend and his soldiers were put on the government payroll as 'border guards'. By mutual agreement, a census would be conducted the following spring to determine which Kurdish-majority areas of Iraq would fall within the autonomous Kurdish province that was to be established by 1974.

The shah was furious that Barzani had signed the March 1970 accord. If implemented, the accord would mean an end to the stalemate in Kurdistan, in which Iran had so heavily invested. Iranian Prime Minister Amir Abbas Hoveyda informed the U.S. Ambassador in Tehran, Douglas MacArthur II, that the shah

²⁹ Telegram 7641 from the Embassy in Tehran to the Department of State, 10 December 1968; Telegram 367 from the Embassy in Tehran to the Department of State, 29 January 1969, RG59, CFPF 1967-69, Box 2218.

³⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 15 October 1969, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 262.

wanted the “top level” of the U.S. Government to know that the accord was a “very grave development greatly increasing [the] threat to [the] Gulf area and [the] Arabian Peninsula.” The agreement would allow Iraq to redeploy troops and resources from Kurdistan to the Persian Gulf “for subversion and other mischief against [the] small Gulf states.” This was all part of Moscow’s master plan, the shah argued, for creating an independent Kurdish state that would border with the Soviet Union and “thus enable [the] Soviets to overcome [the] present Turkey-Iran barrier to their direct penetration of [the] Middle East.” The accord was all the more reason, the shah argued, for the United States to back Iranian primacy in the Gulf as a bulwark against Soviet encroachment in the region after the British withdrawal.³¹ The State Department, however, was unconvinced and instructed Ambassador MacArthur to convey to the shah their view that the agreement would not last very long. They doubted that the Iraqis would redirect their forces away from Kurdistan as they were hardly likely to trust Barzani to abide by the agreement, and they were also sceptical that the Soviets wanted a “Kurdish corridor” into the Gulf.³² The initiative for the March Accord had come from Baghdad, not Moscow, though the Soviet Union had encouraged and warmly welcomed the development. Soviet President Nikolai Podgorny and Premier Alexei Kosygin congratulated Iraq on the agreement in an official telegram on 17 March and Soviet Arabists like Yevgeni Primakov and Alexei Vassiliev lauded the accord in the pages of *Pravda* as a blow against the both “reactionary forces” within Iraq and the “agents of Israel and of the

³¹ Telegram 928 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 12 March 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 53.

³² Telegram 37806 from the Department of State to the Embassy in Iran, 14 March 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 268.

imperialist powers.”³³ A border conflict between Iran and Iraq was now taking on a distinctive Cold War shade, because of the economic and military support that Iraq received from the Soviet Union and the partnership between Iran and the United States under the Nixon Doctrine. Despite the State Department’s scepticism, the shah now saw an opportunity to push the United States to abandon its long-standing hands-off policy towards the Iraqi Kurds and become directly involved in the Kurdish conflict on Iran’s side.

The State Department was correct in its assessment that the accord would not last. There was precious little trust between the Ba’th and Barzani. But as the Kurdish leader later explained, he could hardly tell his own people that he had refused the Iraqi offer of self-rule after so many years of war and suffering. Instead, Barzani accepted the offer while also maintaining his ties with Iran and Israel.³⁴ Shortly after the accord was reached, SAVAK asked for consultations with the Kurds on their agreement with Baghdad. Barzani’s son, Idriss, led a delegation to Tehran from 4 to 7 March, where he met with the chief of SAVAK, Gen. Nematollah Nasiri, as well as Israeli intelligence officers. In a coordinated effort, Iran and Israel told the Kurds that they were ready to supply them with anti-aircraft guns, artillery pieces, and even captured Soviet tanks, if they would continue their rebellion against Baghdad. In the month of February 1970 alone, Iranian and Israeli financial assistance to the Kurds amounted to more than \$3.3 million.³⁵ Barzani’s

³³ Smolansky and Smolansky, *The USSR and Iraq*, pp. 70-76. See also, Haim Shemesh, *Soviet-Iraqi Relations, 1968-1988: In the Shadow of the Iraq-Iran Conflict* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1992), pp. 34-35.

³⁴ David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, Third Edition (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), p. 328.

³⁵ CIA Information Cable, TDCS DB-315/010440-70, 9 March 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 267.

ambivalence about the accord was matched by that of the Ba'th, who dragged their feet on the appointment of a Kurdish vice president in the central government, resisted Kurdish demands that oil-rich Kirkuk be included in the autonomous Kurdish area, and continued an 'Arabization' policy of resettling Arabs and Kurds in order to create demographic facts on the ground ahead of the planned census. Barzani now found himself confronting the very difficult choice of siding with either Iran or Iraq, neither of which favoured any meaningful Kurdish autonomy. He realised that the autonomy that the Ba'th were offering was a trap. If his *Pesh Merga* stood down and allowed the Iraqi army to take up positions along the border with Iran, his supply routes would be cut off. And if the Kurds were denied control of the revenues from Kirkuk's oil, they would be left at the mercy of the central government in Baghdad. As the U.S. Embassy in Beirut concluded, Barzani was not prepared to settle for "the mere trappings of an autonomy" where the Ba'th would "retain all the essentials of real political power in their own hands."³⁶ By the summer the CIA was already receiving intelligence that the Kurds were "anticipating a showdown with the Iraqi government" and had begun "strengthening their forces and lining up potential allies."³⁷ Barzani was willing to continue fighting for meaningful autonomy, but first he needed a guarantee that the shah would not sell him out when the prospect of an autonomous Kurdistan materialised. For this guarantee, he looked to Iran's Cold War partner, the United States.

³⁶ Airgram A-38 from the Embassy in Lebanon to the Department of State, 2 February 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 297.

³⁷ CIA Informational Cable, IN 143628, 10 August 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 273.

Drawing the United States into the Kurdish War

It would not be easy for the shah and Barzani to draw the United States into the war in Kurdistan. For more than two decades the Americans had steadfastly refused to become embroiled in Iraq's civil war and in the early years of Nixon's administration they were still unconvinced that Iraq's growing military and economic ties with the Soviet Union necessitated a revision of that long-standing policy. Soviet-backed Iraq did not look very menacing and it appeared to the State Department that the Iraqis had "turned inward" and were "isolated even from mainstream of Arab world."³⁸ The Americans saw "little likelihood that Iraq will be able to expand its influence very much in [the] Arab world."³⁹ Despite repeated efforts in 1971, the Kurds were unable to convince the Nixon administration to help them resume their war against Baghdad. Zayd Uthman, a Barzani envoy, contacted the U.S. Embassy in Beirut in July. He complained that the Kurds were tired of Iran's "heavy-handed" attitude and asked for direct high-level talks with Washington, but this request was rebuffed.⁴⁰ After Barzani narrowly escaped an assassination attempt in September, which was almost certainly the work of the Iraqi security services, the Kurds redoubled their diplomatic efforts to secure American backing.⁴¹ Another Kurdish envoy, Habib Mohammad Karim,

³⁸ Telegram 67409 from the Department of State to various posts, 21 April 1971, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 286.

³⁹ Telegram 213299 from the Department of State to the Embassy in Iran, 24 November 1971, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 294.

⁴⁰ Airgram 222 from the Embassy in Lebanon to the Department of State, 16 July 1971, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 292.

⁴¹ For a vivid description of the assassination attempt see, John Bulloch and Harvey Morris, *No Friends but the Mountains: The Tragic History of the Kurds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 133.

approached the U.S. Embassy in Beirut in November and reiterated Barzani's request for high-level talks, which was again rejected.⁴²

Having signed the March 1970 accord with Barzani, Iraq's Ba'thi rulers were now close to achieving their goal of neutralising all domestic threats to their power. In November 1971 they promulgated a National Action Charter (NAC), a manifesto of sorts that spelled out the Ba'th's determination to maintain their grip on power while also expressing ideological affinity with other 'progressive' Leftist groups like the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP). The Ba'th invited the ICP to reach an accommodation with them, as the Kurds had, by agreeing to the principles in the Charter and joining the government. Since taking power in 1968, the Ba'th had alternated between brutally suppressing the Iraqi Communists and trying to co-opt them into the government.⁴³ The Soviet Union was putting pressure on the Ba'th, to bring the ICP and the Kurds into a national unity government, in the hope of ending Iraq's chronic domestic instability. Moscow had a clear interest in a strong unified Iraq, which could act as the Soviet Union's local client in the Persian Gulf and balance the rising power of Iran, the regional partner of the United States.⁴⁴ Saddam Hussein visited Moscow in February 1972, where he met with Brezhnev and signed a number of agreements on military supply and economic cooperation, particularly in the area of oil production.⁴⁵ Soviet officials made it clear to Hussein that their continuing support for Iraq was conditional on bringing the ICP into the

⁴² Telegram 9689 from the Embassy in Lebanon to the Department of State, 3 November 1971, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 293.

⁴³ Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, pp. 126-127.

⁴⁴ Smolansky and Smolansky, *The USSR and Iraq*, pp. 16-25; Shemesh, *Soviet-Iraqi Relations*, pp. 67-68; Charles Tripp, 'Iraq' in Yezid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim (eds), *The Cold War in the Middle East* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 203.

⁴⁵ Telegram 1501 from the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, 18 February 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 298.

government.⁴⁶ But as Charles Tripp argues, the Ba'th never had any intention of sharing power with the Communists. Instead, by making conciliatory gestures towards the ICP, they hoped to secure Soviet support against Iran, while luring the Iraqi Communists into the open where they could be more easily eliminated.⁴⁷ The ICP, however, saw an opportunity to revive their party in Iraq and were therefore responsive to the Ba'th's offer. In a decision characterised by the Slugletts as "an almost suicidal act", the ICP agreed to join the government following a visit by Kosygin to Iraq in April 1972.⁴⁸ Two Communists were appointed to the cabinet in May and the attacks by the Iraqi security services on the ICP abated. The Communists were allowed to operate openly in Iraq for a number of years and the ICP formally joined the Ba'th in a National Patriotic Front in July 1973. But the Communists were not given any real political power by the Ba'th; at best, they were tolerated. When Iraq's oil revenue skyrocketed in 1973/74, reducing Iraq's need for Soviet assistance, the Ba'th's violent suppression of the ICP slowly resumed.⁴⁹

The Kurds military strength in northern Iraq meant that they were able to resist the combined Ba'thi and Soviet pressure to sign up to the NAC and submit to Ba'thi rule in a national front, but it was not clear how long they would be able to hold out. Given the Ba'th's determination to end the war in Kurdistan once and for all, Barzani would soon have to choose between capitulating to Baghdad or resuming the fight for meaningful autonomy. Shortly after Hussein's visit to Moscow in February 1972, a Soviet delegation visited Barzani's headquarters in

⁴⁶ CIA Information Cable TDCS DB-315/02084-72, 10 March 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 300.

⁴⁷ Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, p. 189.

⁴⁸ Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, p. 152.

⁴⁹ Tripp, 'Iraq', pp. 190-193.

Kurdistan, led by V. P. Rumanytsev of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Rumanytsev pressured Barzani to join a national front with the Ba'th, in exchange for guarantees of Soviet support. When Barzani replied that he could not trust the Ba'th, particularly after the attempt on his life the previous year, Rumanytsev offered to station a permanent Soviet liaison at his headquarters to monitor Iraqi compliance with any agreement. The Soviet envoy advised Barzani to reduce his dependence on Iran, warning him implicitly that he should not trust the shah. Barzani agreed to consider the Soviet proposal, in order to buy himself more time to secure American support for a renewed campaign against Baghdad.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, the shah was desperate to prevent the Kurds from submitting to Ba'thi and Soviet pressure. He could sense Iran's leverage over Iraq slipping away and he knew that only an American commitment to the Kurds could keep Barzani from giving in. Through SAVAK and the CIA, the shah put his weight behind the Kurdish appeals for the United States to join Iran in supporting Barzani. In late November 1971, shortly after the NAC was announced, SAVAK advised the CIA that Barzani "represented the only available figure around whom effective anti-BPI [Ba'th Party of Iraq] activity could be organized."⁵¹ On 6 March, shortly after Rumanytsev's visit to Barzani, SAVAK again warned the CIA that Soviet efforts to establish a national unity government in Baghdad "presage further Soviet inroads into Iraq with consequent difficulties for Iran and for the Persian

⁵⁰ Memorandum from Saunders to Haig, 27 March 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 301; Memorandum from Helms to Kissinger, Rogers and Laird, 31 March 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 303; Memorandum from Killgore to Sisco, 3 April 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 304.

⁵¹ Memorandum from Saunders to Haig, 27 March 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 301

Gulf.”⁵² A week later, SAVAK relayed a warning from Barzani to the Americans “that if the present trend continued, Iraq would assume a status similar to that of the East European satellites.”⁵³ This Iranian intervention was crucial to bringing the Kurdish conflict to the direct attention of the White House.

Soviet influence in Iraq was undeniably an important consideration in American thinking about the Kurds. But the growing Soviet role in Iraq, in and of itself, was not enough to draw the United States into Kurdistan. An obscure local conflict in the faraway mountains of northern Iraq was hardly a top priority for an administration focused on the war in Vietnam, détente with the Soviet Union, the opening to Communist China, and a presidential election in November. Harold Saunders, the principal aid on Kissinger’s NSC staff dealing with the Middle East, later recalled that, “I doubt that Nixon and Kissinger would have had it at the top of their personal agendas.”⁵⁴ Kurdish developments were monitored by mid-level officials in the State Department, few of whom, as we shall see, considered Soviet influence in Iraq as much a threat to Iran or the Persian Gulf. But SAVAK’s warnings to the CIA by-passed the State Department and propelled the Kurdish issue up the chain of command to the personal attention of Kissinger, because of the high priority that Nixon gave to relations with Iran. The shah’s request for American assistance for the Kurds could not be ignored, as similar requests from various Kurdish envoys had been. The Iranian backchannel messages prompted a discussion within the Nixon administration on whether the United States should

⁵² Memorandum from Waller to Sisco, 9 March 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 299.

⁵³ Memorandum from Saunders to Haig, 27 March 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 301.

⁵⁴ Harold Saunders in an interview with William Burr, Washington, DC, 24 February 1987, Tape 2B, in the FISOHC.

abandon its long-standing policy of non-intervention in Kurdistan. Without the shah's intervention, it seems unlikely that any such debate would have taken place.

The advice that Nixon and Kissinger were receiving from the State Department, the CIA, and the NSC staff in the early months of 1972 consistently contradicted the shah's claims that Soviet influence in Iraq posed a threat to Iran or the Persian Gulf. The State Department's view was that the various military and economic agreements that Moscow had signed with Iraq were "designed to placate Baghdad, not to pose [a] threat to [the] Shah."⁵⁵ The U.S. Embassy in Beirut was convinced that the Ba'th's purges of the Iraqi army had been so extensive that, according to one of their sources, Iraq "could not fight its way out of a wet paper bag."⁵⁶ Both the CIA and the State Department advised the White House to stick with the long-standing non-intervention policy in Kurdistan. Harold Saunders advised Kissinger on 27 March that "for one thing, any assistance that may be needed by Barzani is fully within the capability of Iran or Israel to provide. There is nothing absolutely needed from us except that they want to involve us. Another factor is that the odds are against the Kurds succeeding. Also, our involving ourselves for the first time at this point could be regarded by the Soviets as a move directed against them." With Nixon's historic summit meeting with Brezhnev only months away, Kissinger recognised that he could not risk upsetting Moscow by encouraging the Kurds to resume fighting in Iraq. Therefore he concurred with the advice he was receiving and instructed his staff to turn down Barzani's request "in

⁵⁵ Telegram 12737 from the Department of State to various posts, 22 January 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 295.

⁵⁶ Airgram A-38 from the Embassy in Lebanon to the Department of State, 2 February 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 297.

[the] least abrasive way possible.”⁵⁷ As he explained in his memoirs, “we did not want to provoke a further influx of Soviet arms and influence [into Iraq].”⁵⁸

Barzani and SAVAK were now co-ordinating a plan to overthrow the Ba’thi regime with a coalition of Iraqi opposition forces operating from Kurdish territory in northern Iraq. In March 1972 Kurdish envoys were dispatched to Amman, London and Washington to ask the Jordanian, British and U.S. governments to back the plan and to recruit the exiled former Iraqi premier, Col. Abd al-Razzaq al-Nayif, for the operation. A former chief of Iraqi military intelligence, Nayif had helped the Ba’th seize power in 1968 and was briefly prime minister before being ousted and sent into exile. Just weeks earlier, Iraqi agents had tried to assassinate him at his home in London on 18 February.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, the Iranians had asked Idriss Barzani to send a list of all the Kurds’ military and financial needs for the operation, which the Kurds had done. But, as CIA Director Richard Helms reported, Barzani still “did not trust the Iranians to implement their promises.” The Iraqi opposition, both Arabs and Kurds, made it very clear to the Americans that, “while accepting their [Iran’s] military and other material assistance, they would not welcome direct control or intervention by Iran in Iraqi internal affairs.”⁶⁰ This was one reason why Barzani sought to involve King Hussein of Jordan in his plans. Given the king’s close friendship with the shah, Jordan could act as a mediator

⁵⁷ Memorandum from Saunders to Haig, 27 March 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 301.

⁵⁸ Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, p. 581.

⁵⁹ Clive Borrell, ‘Iraq politician’s wife shot in assassination attempt’, *The Times*, 19 February 1972. The Iraqi regime would succeed in assassinating Nayif in London on 9 July 1978.

⁶⁰ Memorandum from Helms to Kissinger, Rogers, and Laird, 29 March 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 302; Memorandum from Helms to Kissinger, 6 June 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 313.

between Iran and the Kurds. Furthermore, the Kurds suggested that Jordan could serve as an alternative to Iran as a conduit for American aid to the Kurds.⁶¹

The appeal for American aid was reiterated in April 1972 by another Kurdish envoy, Zayd Uthman, who warned the Americans that if the United States did not intervene, Barzani would have no choice but to join the national front with the Ba'th. But the State Department continued to resist the idea of U.S. intervention in Kurdistan. They warned that even if Barzani were able to overthrow the Ba'th, the new Iraqi regime would be very weak and heavily dependent on the Soviet Union. Furthermore, empowering the Iraqi Kurds would surely inflame Kurdish nationalism in Iran and Turkey, and any American involvement in a coup in an Arab country would further harm U.S. relations with the Arab world.⁶² Shortly after Uthman's visit to Washington, Iraq and the Soviet Union signed a fifteen-year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation on 9 April. But even this did not cause the State Department to change its position on the Kurds. They saw the treaty as a watered down version of the agreements that the Soviet Union had signed with Egypt and India. It was the product of an Iraqi initiative, orchestrated by Saddam Hussein, who wanted Soviet backing to consolidate his own position at home.⁶³ Nor, in fact, did the treaty cause the White House to reconsider its attitude towards Barzani, as Kissinger claims in his memoirs.⁶⁴ In fact, when Kissinger had rejected the Kurdish appeals for help in March, he was well aware that "a Soviet treaty with

⁶¹ Memorandum from Killgore to Sisco, 3 April 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 304.

⁶² Memorandum from Killgore to Sisco, 3 April 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 304.

⁶³ Memorandum from Eliot to Kissinger, 13 April 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 305. See also, Tripp, 'Iraq', p. 202-

⁶⁴ Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, p. 581.

Iraq similar to that one with Egypt is in the offing.”⁶⁵ The decisive factor in the ultimate American decision to back Barzani was not Soviet influence in Iraq, but the pressure that the shah was bringing to bear on the White House. The turning point in U.S. policy came in late May, during Nixon and Kissinger’s visit to Tehran. The president and his national security adviser went into their meetings with the shah on 30 and 31 May having rejected the Kurdish appeals for help. In fact, the Kurds had tried to arrange a meeting with Kissinger in Tehran, but had again been rebuffed.⁶⁶ But, as we shall see, the Americans emerged from their talks with the shah convinced of the need to support Barzani.

While Nixon and Kissinger were in Tehran, the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) issued an insightful analysis of the Kurdish situation, outlining the difficult choices that lay ahead for the United States. At the age of sixty-nine, INR concluded, Barzani saw “the goals that his people fought for and almost attained slipping away unless he can force some substantial political gains in what may be his last campaign.” Barzani knew that the unity government that Baghdad and Moscow were pressuring him to join would mean the end of any meaningful autonomy for the Kurds in Iraq. Their only other choice was to fight a “long-drawn-out insurgency”, which at best might lead to the overthrow the Ba’th, but even then the new regime would still have to reach some sort of accommodation with the Soviet Union, given Moscow’s entrenched position in Iraq. At worst, Barzani would be defeated, leaving, “A complaisant pro-Ba’th or even pro-Soviet clique in control of Iraqi Kurdistan [that] could of course bring pressure on Iran and

⁶⁵ Memorandum from Saunders to Haig, 27 March 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 301.

⁶⁶ Memorandum from Helms to Kissinger, 6 June 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 313.

even create a nuisance in eastern Turkey.”⁶⁷ For the United States, backing the Kurds in order to contain Soviet influence in Iraq was a lose-lose proposition. But for Iran, it was imperative to bring the United States into the conflict in order to prevent Barzani from capitulating to Baghdad. If Barzani were to succumb to the combined Iraqi-Soviet pressure and join the national front, Iran would lose whatever leverage it had over Iraq and would then confront the Iraqi army all along its western border.

In his meetings with Nixon and Kissinger in Tehran, the shah portrayed the Kurdish war to the Americans as a Cold War struggle to block Soviet penetration into the Persian Gulf, rather than a long-standing regional conflict between Iran-Iraq over their common border. On the afternoon of 30 May, the shah expressed to Nixon and Kissinger his fear that Moscow was working in Iraq to “establish a coalition of the Kurds, the Baathists, and the Communists”. If they succeeded, “the Kurdish problem instead of being a thorn in the side [of the Ba’th] could become an asset to the Communists.” When Kissinger asked, “what could be done”, the shah replied, “Iran can help with the Kurds.”⁶⁸ Just as Iran had worked with the United States to secretly assist Pakistan against Soviet-backed India, now the shah asked the Americans to help him finance and arm the Kurds so that they could continue to resist Soviet-backed Iraq. The next morning, the shah complained to Nixon and Kissinger that the immediate danger to Iran came “mostly from Baghdad, or at least

⁶⁷ Research Study RNAS-10 prepared by the Department of State, 31 May 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 310.

⁶⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, Tehran, 30 May 1972, 5.35 p.m. to 6.35 p.m., *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 200.

Baghdad would take credit for it.”⁶⁹ Alam recorded in his diary on 1 June that Kissinger had agreed that “the Russians have advanced quite far in Iraq, and we must stop them”.⁷⁰ In his memoirs, Kissinger writes that he and Nixon were swayed by the shah’s argument that, “without American support, the existing Kurdish uprising against the Baghdad government would collapse.” Kissinger parrots the shah’s argument that if Kurdistan fell to the Iraqi army, it would become “a base for subversion of Kurdish areas in all the neighbouring countries. In time, this subversion, backed by the rapidly growing Iraqi armed forces, had the potential to become a powerful weapon against the Gulf States, Iran, and even Turkey.” He writes that Nixon confronted a “Hobson’s choice” in Iraq: while U.S. intervention might eventually lead to an escalation of Soviet assistance to Iraq, non-intervention would certainly result in the collapse of the Iraqi Kurds and the domination of Kurdistan by the Ba’th and their Soviet patrons. As Kissinger explained, “In a choice between the certain and the conjectural danger, the far-off risk tends to appear more attractive.”⁷¹ Therefore, Nixon agreed in Tehran to work with the shah to support the Iraqi Kurds.⁷²

The shah quickly acted on Nixon’s assurance of support. Just one week later he sent a message to Kissinger via the CIA asking him to receive two Kurdish envoys, Idriss Barzani and Mahmoud Uthman, who would present the joint Iranian-Kurdish plan to overthrow the Ba’th. The shah was asking Kissinger to agree to the

⁶⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, Tehran, 31 May 1972, 10.30 a.m. to 12.00 p.m., *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 201.

⁷⁰ Asadollah Alam, *Yad ‘dashtha-yi ‘Alam: virayish va muqaddamah-i mashruhi dar barah-i Shah va Alam az Ali naqi Alikhani* [The Alam Diaries: Edited by Alinaghi Alikhani], Vol. II: 1970, 1972 (Bethesda: Iranbooks, 1993), p. 260.

⁷¹ Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, pp. 583-584.

⁷² Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 1264-1265.

highest-level contacts the Kurds had ever had with the U.S. Government. Harold Saunders reiterated to Kissinger the same advice he had given his boss in March: to avoid becoming embroiled in Kurdistan. He warned Kissinger that the best that could be achieved would be a stalemate, and, “If the battle turned against the Kurds, we would have neither the assets nor the interest to provide decisive support.” Rather than becoming directly involved, Saunders advised that the U.S. should leave it to regional actors like Iran to support the Kurds, in line with the Nixon Doctrine. Furthermore, Saunders was worried that U.S. intervention would be seen by Moscow as a “direct counter-Soviet move.” But he acknowledged that Kissinger’s decision to receive the Barzani envoys depended “on how committed you feel to the Shah on this particular point.” As Saunders recognised, the decision to receive the Kurds was as much about the White House’s relationship with the shah, as it was about containing the Soviet Union in Iraq. Saunders offered to meet with the envoys in Kissinger’s place, so as to avoid giving Barzani the impression of a commitment by the White House to his cause. But Nixon’s decision to support the Kurds had already been made in Tehran, without any consultation with the NSC staff, the State Department or the CIA. Kissinger scribbled on Saunders’ memo, “I thought we arranged,” indicating that he had already decided to go ahead with the meeting.⁷³

Kissinger’s decision to receive the Kurdish envoys at senior levels of the U.S. Government was a reversal of the United States’ decades-old hands-off policy towards the Kurds. It marked the beginning of U.S. involvement in Iraq’s civil war,

⁷³ Memorandum from Helms to Kissinger, 6 June 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 313. The Nixon Library has released a copy of this memorandum, with the names of Idriss Barzani and Mahmoud Uthman not redacted. It is available at NPM, NSCF, Country Files – Middle East, Box 603.

at the behest of the shah. Both the State Department and the NSC staff had warned against becoming embroiled in the Iranian-backed Kurdish rebellion. But Nixon and Kissinger ignored the advice of their own officials and heeded the shah's counsel to back Barzani. Consumed by Vietnam, détente, rapprochement with China, and a looming presidential election, the White House had paid little attention to the guerrilla war in the mountains of northern Iraq. Repeated Kurdish appeals for help had been rejected by the Nixon administration, including by Kissinger himself in March 1972. But the shah's intervention had changed the White House's calculations. During their meetings in Tehran in May 1972, the shah had successfully convinced Nixon and Kissinger that if Barzani capitulated and joined a national front with the Ba'th and the ICP, then Kurdistan would fall to the Iraqi army, from where the Ba'th would project Soviet influence into Iran and the Persian Gulf. Nixon and Kissinger knew precious little about the war in Kurdistan. As Kissinger later recalled, "we did not know much about the Kurds – we thought they were some kind of hill tribe."⁷⁴ Instead, they relied on the advice and judgement of the shah, their regional partner in the Gulf under the Nixon Doctrine. If the shah said that a Kurdish collapse would increase the Soviet threat to Iran and the Gulf, then Nixon and Kissinger listened, regardless of what their own advisers were telling them. They were persuaded that the war in Kurdistan was not only a border conflict between Iran and Iraq, but also battle in the global Cold War. Saunders recalled that his boss wanted to show the Iraqis that "they would pay a certain price

⁷⁴ Randal, *After Such Knowledge*, p. 149.

for being an ally of the Soviet Union.”⁷⁵ Without the shah’s intervention, Nixon and Kissinger would have continued to ignore the Kurds’ appeals for help, much as they had done during their first three years in office. But thanks to the shah’s vigorous backchannel diplomacy, the United States agreed to join Iran in supporting the Iraqi Kurds.

U.S. Covert Action in Kurdistan

Having agreed to a high-level meeting with the Kurds in Washington, Kissinger took Saunders’ advice not to personally receive the Kurdish envoys, perhaps to avoid directly implicating himself or the president in this *sub rosa* affair. Instead, it was decided that CIA Director Richard Helms and Col. Richard Kennedy, a senior member of the NSC staff, would receive the Kurdish emissaries.⁷⁶ The CIA warned the White House that the Kurds’ goal would be to secure both American “moral” support to balance Soviet support for the Ba’th, and also American material support for a major military operation to defeat the Iraqi army and overthrow the Ba’th. They estimated that Barzani would need as much as \$24 million annually just to pay the salaries of the 50,000-man army he hoped to raise.⁷⁷ Again Saunders advised caution, emphasizing that, “The major view in town is that we should stay out of direct support for the Kurds.” The U.S. role was unlikely to remain secret, Saunders warned, and would damage America’s relations with Moscow and its position in the Arab world if it were revealed. Furthermore, the Iranians and the

⁷⁵ Harold Saunders in an interview with William Burr, Washington, DC, 24 February 1987, Tape 2B, in the FISOHC.

⁷⁶ Initially, it seems that Kissinger’s deputy, Gen. Alexander Haig, was to meet with the Kurdish emissaries. But even this may have been too close for comfort for Kissinger, as the task ultimately fell to Col. Kennedy.

⁷⁷ Memorandum from Waller to Helms, 12 June 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 315.

Israelis were already committed to supporting Barzani, so U.S. support was not essential.⁷⁸ But all these arguments fell on deaf ears. Before the two Kurdish emissaries had even arrived in Washington, Nixon asked his friend and political ally John Connolly, who had just stepped down as Treasury secretary, to travel to Tehran and personally inform the shah that the U.S. was committed to helping Barzani. The purpose of the Idriss-Uthman visit to Washington would be to discuss how, not whether, the U.S. could aid the Iraqi Kurds.⁷⁹

Thanks to the shah's lobbying, the Kurds' long awaited high-level meeting with the Americans took place in Washington on 30 June 1972. Idriss Barzani and Mahmoud Uthman explained to Helms and Kennedy that without more assistance they could only resist the combined Iraqi-Soviet pressure to join the national front for another six months. The Kurds asked for U.S. recognition of the "Kurdish objective of autonomy", and sufficient financial, military, and intelligence assistance to create a Kurdish "offensive military force" that could launch a major attack on the Iraqi army and overthrow the Ba'th regime. They also argued, rather naively, that an American commitment to the Kurdish cause would reassure Iran and Turkey that they had nothing to fear from a Kurdish victory. Helms told the Kurds that "he and Colonel Kennedy have been authorized by Dr. Kissinger to express the sympathy of the United States Government for the Kurdish movement under Mulla Barzani." He assured the Kurdish envoys that the very fact that this meeting was taking place was a break with previous policy and "was proof of our position and readiness to consider their requests for assistance." He asked the Kurds

⁷⁸ Memorandum from Saunders to Haig, 23 June 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 318.

⁷⁹ Backchannel Message from Kissinger to Connolly, 29 June 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 209; Memorandum from Saunders to President Nixon, 12 July 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 211.

for a comprehensive briefing on the material assistance they needed so that the U.S. could “provide assistance as quickly as possible.” But there were two strict caveats to U.S. support. First, Helms told the Kurds that the only reasons they were being received in Washington was, as Uthman later recalled, “because the Shah wanted the American government to help us”.⁸⁰ Therefore, the Kurds should not entertain any idea of circumventing Iran in order to deal directly with the United States. Second, Helms emphasized that the U.S. role must remain hidden and warned the Kurds that “the relationship could indeed be soured by a failure to honour our need for such secrecy.” For both of these reasons all U.S. assistance would be channelled through Iran. The following day CIA officials held a second meeting with the Kurdish envoys to discuss the Kurds’ needs in detail. These meetings marked the beginning of a covert U.S. operation that was undertaken at the behest of Iran as a way for Barzani to overcome his mistrust of the shah.⁸¹

It took the CIA less than a month to put together a Kurdish operation for the president’s approval. In late July 1972, Helms advised the White House that while Barzani was asking for something in the region of \$60 million annually to raise an army and build a Kurdish government infrastructure, the CIA felt that that the Kurds should be discouraged from “such an ambitious, highly provocative, and probably impractical scale of activity, which would exceed the limits of covert capability.” The Kurds only needed \$18 million annually, the CIA argued, to maintain their current strength of 25,000 *Pesh Merga* soldiers “for guerrilla warfare of an essentially defensive nature.” The Iranians would pay \$9 million and the U.S.

⁸⁰ Randal, *After Such Knowledge*, p. 153.

⁸¹ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 5 July 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 319.

would contribute \$3 million in financial aid and \$2 million worth of munitions, while the balance of \$4 million would be covered by Britain and Israel.⁸² The weapons that the CIA would provide would consist of “non-attributable” foreign manufactured arms and ammunition in American inventories or U.S. ordinance ordinarily in Iranian and Iraqi inventories. The Agency advised against providing the Kurds with American-made anti-aircraft weapons or tanks, the source of which could not be disguised.⁸³ The limited operation that the CIA was proposing was designed to serve Iranian, not Kurdish, interests. The goal was to keep the Iraqi army pinned down in Kurdistan and prevent the formation of a national front government in Baghdad, not to achieve autonomy or independence for the Iraqi Kurds.

Although the CIA had initially opposed any American involvement with the Kurds, like Kissinger they now reversed their position. Their assessment was that, “There can be no doubt that it is in the interests of ourselves, our allies, and other friendly governments in the area to see the Ba’thi regime in Iraq kept off balance and if possible overthrown, if this can be done without increasing Soviet influence in Iraq or escalating hostilities to a dangerous international level.” How can we account for this dramatic change in the CIA’s position? The Agency’s own explanation was that increasing Soviet support for Iraq now warranted a revision of U.S. policy towards the Kurds: “While Ba’thi aspirations heretofore may have seemed far beyond their capabilities, developments of the past few months suggest

⁸² Kissinger makes passing references to the British role in the Kurdish operation in his memoirs, but any mention of Britain has been redacted from declassified U.S. documents. Furthermore, there is no evidence in the available British documents that the Foreign Office was aware of covert British assistance to Barzani, while all records of the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) remain closed.

⁸³ Memorandum prepared by the CIA, 18 July 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 321.

that they now should be taken much more seriously.” But another explanation was provided by a CIA officer who later told Congressional investigators that after the White House had decided to back the Iraqi Kurds, the “CIA was told to prepare a paper on ‘how’ the project could be done, not ‘whether’ the project should be done.”⁸⁴ The best that the Agency could do was to limit the scale of the operation to the modest goal of preventing Barzani from joining a national unity government and “keeping Kurdish resistance alive.” Providing the Kurds with the offensive military capability that Barzani wanted would be “unrealistic”. Instead, the CIA argued that, “the Kurds do best against the Iraqi army when they remain well within their mountains and engage in aggressive guerrilla tactics, hitting the Iraqis in many places and keeping them off balance.” The situation called for a limited war that would allow “plausible denial” of U.S. involvement.⁸⁵ Kissinger writes that this plan for a limited war was conveyed by the shah to Barzani, after discussions between the shah and King Hussein of Jordan from 31 July to 2 August at the shah’s summer palace in Nowshahr on the Caspian Sea. The two monarchs had discussed the ground rules for the Kurdish operation and the shah warned Barzani to “avoid dramatic moves that might trigger an all-out Iraqi assault, such as declaring a separate Kurdish state.”⁸⁶

Nixon approved the CIA operation on 1 August 1972 and Kissinger dispatched a brief memorandum of no more than a few sentences, which was hand-

⁸⁴ U.S. House of Representatives, *CIA: the Pike Report*, p. 212.

⁸⁵ Memorandum prepared by the CIA, 18 July 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 321.

⁸⁶ Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, p. 585.

delivered to the members of the NSC's 40 Committee to ensure secrecy.⁸⁷ Chaired by Kissinger, the 40 Committee included CIA Director Helms, Under Secretary of State Alexis Johnson, Deputy Secretary of Defence Bill Clements, and Admiral Thomas Moorer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and was charged with approving sensitive U.S. covert operations.⁸⁸ But Connolly had already communicated the go-ahead for the Kurdish operation to the shah in June, and this bureaucratic exercise with the 40 Committee was, according to Haig, an insurance policy so that "in the event that something blows...we could insist that that established procedures were followed."⁸⁹ Kissinger's decision not to meet with the Kurdish envoys in late June, Helms' warning to the Kurds about the need for secrecy, and now Kissinger's attempts to cover his tracks and avoid a paper-trail all indicate a keen awareness by the White House of the risks they were running by going along with the shah's plans to back Barzani, against the advice of their own officials.⁹⁰ If it were revealed that the United States was covertly working with Iran to fuel a civil war in an Arab country allied with Moscow, it could set back the détente with the Soviet Union that Nixon and Kissinger had so carefully crafted. Kissinger's desire for secrecy was understandable, but it also seems likely that he did not want to directly implicate himself or the president in a covert operation, which, as he was being warned, might ultimately end in disaster. If so, his political instincts would prove to be correct.

⁸⁷ Memorandum from Kissinger to members of the 40 Committee, undated, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 322.

⁸⁸ National Security Decision Memorandum 40, 17 February 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, II, 203.

⁸⁹ Memorandum from Haig to Kissinger, 28 July 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 321.

⁹⁰ For a first-hand account of the culture of secrecy in the Nixon White House see, David R. Young, 'The Presidential Conduct of American Foreign Policy, 1969-1973', DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1981.

As the CIA's covert operation in Kurdistan got underway, Nixon's focus was on his domestic political fortunes. With elections looming in November, he spent much of the autumn trying to cover-up his staff's role in a break-in at the Democratic National Committee's headquarters in Washington's Watergate complex in June. A Federal Grand Jury indicted the Watergate burglars in September, but Nixon successfully obstructed the investigation by paying off the burglars to keep them quiet.⁹¹ When Nixon was re-elected in a landslide victory against his hapless Democratic rival, Senator George McGovern, Helms relayed a message of congratulations from Barzani to Nixon, telling Kissinger that, "The President might enjoy seeing this message from his new friends."⁹² That autumn the first deliveries of CIA arms and money were reaching the Iraqi Kurds via Iran and in October Kissinger reported to the president that the operation was proceeding "without a hitch." Monthly cash payments were reaching the Kurds and more was in the pipeline. The first planeload of 10 tons of Soviet-made arms and ammunition, including 500 AK-47 rifles, 500 submachine guns, and 200,000 rounds of ammunition, had already been delivered. By the end of October the Kurds would have received 222,000 lbs of arms and ammunition from CIA stocks and a further 142,000 lbs from the other countries involved. The operation was achieving its objective, Helms reported, of protecting Iran's western border by strengthening the Kurds' defences against the Iraqi army: "Barzani's maintenance of a secure redoubt

⁹¹ See, Stanley I. Kutler (ed.), *Watergate: A Brief History with Documents* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

⁹² Memorandum from Helms to Kissinger, 13 November 1972, NPM, NSCF, Country Files – Middle East, Box 603.

will continue to pin down two-thirds of the Iraqi army and deprive the Bathists of a secure base from which to launch sabotage and assassination teams against Iran.”⁹³

By the end of the year the State Department had opened a U.S. Interests Section in Baghdad, after five years in which the United States had no diplomatic presence in Iraq. The head of the new U.S. mission, Arthur Lowrie, was being kept in the dark about the CIA’s Kurdish operation, like most of his colleagues in the State Department.⁹⁴ Writing from Baghdad, “a city of whispered conversations and glances over the shoulder”, Lowrie reported that the situation in Kurdistan had settled into an uneasy stalemate with sporadic minor clashes. “Neither side seems to want a renewal of large scale fighting, but neither is there sufficient mutual confidence to bring about the implementation of the agreement.”⁹⁵ This must have been music to Kissinger’s ears. The stalemate in Kurdistan had been maintained, without the kind of dramatic escalation that would lead the Soviets to pour more arms and money into Iraq. This is not to say that the Iraqis were unaware that Barzani was receiving aid from a variety of foreign sources. As Lowrie reported, an Iraqi government newspaper declared on 17 December that, “What is now going on is close coordination between Tehran and Amman and some other Arab capitals under overall supervision of imperialistic intelligence services with [the] object of launching [a] fresh onslaught on [the] Arab national liberation movement and on

⁹³ Memorandum from Kissinger to President Nixon, 5 October 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 325.

⁹⁴ Arthur Lowrie in an interview with Patricia Lessard and Theodore Lowrie, 23 December 1989, The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, available at: <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/diplomacy/index.html>>.

⁹⁵ Airgram A-6 from the Interests Section in Iraq to the Department of State, 1 December 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 328.

revolutionary Iraq in particular.”⁹⁶ But without proof, such accusations could be dismissed as the usual vitriolic propaganda that emanated from Baghdad. The shah too must have been delighted. He had kept Barzani out of the national front while the Iraqi army remained in Kurdistan, unable to pose a threat to Iran. As the U.S. intelligence community concluded in December, Iran had the upper hand and wanted to maintain the status quo: “Iraqi leaders have a healthy respect for the Shah's military edge and have backed down from military confrontation whenever large-scale action seemed likely. This caution is likely to persist even in the face of provocations by the Shah. We do not think Iran is likely to initiate major military action against Iraq.”⁹⁷

Escalation in the Shadow of Watergate

Beneath the surface of the initial success of the Kurdish operation lurked a nagging problem that would eventually undermine the entire effort: the goals of Barzani and his foreign sponsors were entirely disparate. Barzani sought, at a minimum, to establish an autonomous Kurdish government in northern Iraq. But Iran, Israel, and the United States had the far more limited objective of maintaining the stalemate between the Kurds and Iraqi army, thereby keeping the Iraqis tied down in Kurdistan and preventing them from entering the Arab-Israeli conflict or making mischief in Iran or the Persian Gulf. The cost of maintaining this stalemate steadily rose in 1973, as Iran and the United States offered more aid to Barzani to counter the intense pressure on the Kurds from the Ba’th and the Soviet Union to join the

⁹⁶ Telegram 92 from the Interests Section in Iraq to the Department of State, 19 December 1972, , *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 329.

⁹⁷ National Intelligence Estimate 36-2-72, 21 December 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 330.

national front. At the same time that the United States was trying to extricate itself from the war in Vietnam, with the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in January, it found itself being drawn ever deeper into Kurdistan. The Kurds remained in their mountain strongholds and the Iraqi army controlled the plains of northern Iraq. While skirmishes between Iraqi and Kurdish troops were a regular occurrence, neither the Ba'th nor Barzani were ready in 1973 to renew open warfare. But as U.S. intelligence had concluded, the stalemate in Kurdistan was "inherently fragile" and after the harsh winter a renewal of fighting was likely when the snow and ice melted in the spring.⁹⁸ Ultimately, Barzani's international sponsors would have to confront the unpleasant truth that the stalemate was unsustainable. But it was the shah, not the Americans, who would first come to that conclusion.

Adding another layer of uncertainty to U.S.-Iranian cooperation on the Kurds was the weakening of the Nixon administration by Watergate. As the scandal slowly paralyzed the president, Kissinger's autonomy in foreign policy decision-making continued to grow, including the management of the Kurdish operation. Watergate began to impinge directly on the Kurdish effort on 20 November 1972 when Nixon unexpectedly asked Helms to resign as director of the CIA. Helms had clashed with the White House that summer when he had resisted Nixon's efforts to use the CIA to cover-up the Watergate scandal. The president offered Helms an ambassadorship as compensation and Helms chose Iran, a country he had become familiar with during his long career in the CIA.⁹⁹ Helms took up his post in March 1973, taking over from Ambassador Joseph Farland, a loyal Republican who had

⁹⁸ National Intelligence Estimate 36-2-72, 21 December 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 330.

⁹⁹ Helms with Hood, *A Look Over My Shoulder*, pp. 409-412.

been abruptly told to resign after only a year in the job. When the shah heard that Helms was to be sent to Tehran he was delighted. In the words of Arthur Callahan, then the CIA station chief in Tehran, the shah saw it as the “ultimate recognition of his country’s importance.”¹⁰⁰ The Soviet ambassador to Iran criticised the Americans for sending the former head of the CIA to Tehran, but Prime Minister Hoveyda is said to have joked that while the Soviets only send their tenth ranking KGB officer, at least the Americans send their number one spy!¹⁰¹ While some suspected that Helms’ appointment was a comfortable exile, his role as the backchannel for communications between Kissinger and the shah was vital to keeping the American hand in the Kurdish operation hidden, especially from the State Department bureaucracy that neither Nixon nor Kissinger trusted.¹⁰² Within the CIA, Helms’ views were still the last word on Iran and the Kurds. His successor as director, James Schlesinger, did not question the wisdom of the Kurdish operation he had inherited and deferred to Helms’ judgement on matters relating to Iran. He later recalled that, “In general, the attitude within the agency was that you had as ambassador there a man who was quite knowledgeable about such matters and his sense of things probably was good enough. I think that there may have been some tendency for the agency to grow a little complacent with a former director as the ambassador.”¹⁰³ When it came to the Kurdish operation, the major decisions

¹⁰⁰ Cable from the CIA Station in Iran to Helms, 11 December 1972, CIA Electronic Reading, Special Collection: A Life in Intelligence – The Richard Helms Collection (CIA-Helms), available at: <<http://www.foia.cia.gov/helms.asp>>.

¹⁰¹ Cable from the CIA Station in Iran to Helms, 11 January 1973, CIA-Helms.

¹⁰² Thomas Powers, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets: Richard Helms & the CIA* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), pp. 277-312.

¹⁰³ James Schlesinger in an interview with William Burr, 15 May 1986, Washington, DC, Tape 1A, in the FISOHC.

would now be taken by the shah and Kissinger, with Helms acting as their go-between.

With his friend Nixon severely weakened by Watergate, the shah began to question the United States' long-term commitment not only to the Kurds, but also to the U.S.-Iran partnership. As discussed in the previous chapter, Nixon's presidency had heralded a new era in U.S.-Iran relations. The shah had forged a partnership with the United States under the Nixon Doctrine. But could the Nixon Doctrine endure without Nixon? The importance that Nixon attached to his relationship with the shah had played a major part in drawing the United States into Iran's Kurdish effort. The U.S. role was now the glue that held the disparate actors in the operation together. But how much longer could the shah count on American support for the Kurdish effort? If full-scale fighting between the Kurds and Iraq was renewed, could Iran depend on help from the crippled Nixon administration to balance Soviet support for Iraq? Cracks in American resolve were already apparent. When Kissinger had authorised the CIA to increase its level of aid to the Kurds in March 1973, he warned the Agency that the U.S. must "avoid [giving Barzani] the impression of a long-term escalating commitment".¹⁰⁴ At the same time the Soviet Union was ratcheting up the pressure on both Iran and Iraq to settle their differences and end the stalemate in Kurdistan. Moscow had cultivated economics ties with both countries and did not want to jeopardise its relations with either Iran or Iraq if the fighting in Kurdistan flared up. During a visit to Tehran from 14 to 16 March, Kosygin told the shah that the Soviet Union was urging Iraq to resolve its

¹⁰⁴ Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, p. 585.

differences with Iran peacefully.¹⁰⁵ The shah would later boast to the Americans that he had taken a very hard line with Kosygin, warning him that Iran could “crush Iraq in a few hours.”¹⁰⁶ But his actions after Kosygin’s visit suggest that he was, in fact, far more circumspect in his approach to Iraq. While we can never know what the shah’s calculations were, it appears that he began to hedge his bets.

The shah authorised his foreign minister, Abbas-Ali Khalatbari, to travel to Geneva in April 1973 for the first of a series of meetings with the Iraqis aimed at a diplomatic solution to Iran’s dispute with Iraq over the Shatt al-Arab waterway. In May, Khalatbari informed both the American and British ambassadors in Tehran that the Geneva talks, which had been brokered by Turkey, had produced neither an agreement on the Shatt nor a resumption of diplomatic relations between the two countries.¹⁰⁷ The Iraqis remained committed to the 1937 Tehran Treaty on the waterway, which Iran had unilaterally abrogated in 1969. Iraq refused to negotiate a new treaty that would recognise Iran’s *de facto* control over the eastern half of the Shatt.¹⁰⁸ Lowrie reported from Baghdad that Iran’s support for the Kurds was “probably [the] principal reason for Iraq’s desire for détente”.¹⁰⁹ Asadollah Alam explained to Ambassador Helms that the shah had decided to “play it tough for the

¹⁰⁵ Backchannel Message from Helms to Kissinger, 6 April 1973, CIA-Helms.

¹⁰⁶ Telegram 118336 from the Department of State to the Embassy in Iran, 18 June 1973, NPM, NSCF, Country Files – Middle East, Box 603; Memorandum prepared by Kissinger for the President’s File, 24 July 1973, EBB 265, NSA-GWU.

¹⁰⁷ Telegram 2990 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 1 May 1973, and Telegram 3383 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 16 May 1973, NPM, NSCF, Country Files – Middle East, Box 603; Telegram 2915 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 28 April 1973, and Telegram 5217 from the Embassy in Turkey to the Department of State, 29 June 1973, RG59, SNF 1970-73, Box 2380. Ramsbotham (Tehran) to the Foreign Office, 30 April 1973, FCO 8/2094.

¹⁰⁸ Telegram 3548 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 22 May 1973, RG59, SNF 1970-73, Box 2380.

¹⁰⁹ Telegram 266 from the Interests Section in Iraq to the Department of State, 17 May 1973, NPM, NSCF, Country Files – Middle East, Box 603.

moment” and was demanding that the Iraqis agree to the *thalweg*, or mid-point, of the Shatt as the border.¹¹⁰ The shah explained to British Ambassador Sir Peter Ramsbotham that in exchange for this territorial concession, the Iraqis would want him to give up his Kurdish “trump card,” which he might eventually have to do given that “Barzani would not last for ever and his successors, under Iraqi and Russian pressures, would find it difficult to maintain their position.”¹¹¹ The elements of a deal – Iraqi concessions in the Shatt in exchange for Iran’s abandonment of the Kurds – were now on the table.

As further talks between Iran and Iraq continued in May 1973, the shah prepared to make a state visit to the United States that summer.¹¹² The political position of his host, Richard Nixon, grew weaker by the day. The U.S. Senate’s Watergate Committee had begun live televised hearings in May and new revelations of presidential wrongdoing were broadcast on an almost daily basis. While the Iran-Iraq talks were ongoing, it was vital for the shah that the U.S. should continue supporting the Kurds so as to maintain the pressure on the Ba’th. But Watergate had shaken the shah’s confidence in the United States. According to the CIA, the shah told King Hussein in July 1973 that “the Watergate affair was unfortunate for everyone since it appeared to have brought the U.S. Government to a standstill. There were many problems between the U.S. and its friends which needed attention,

¹¹⁰ Telegram 3974 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 9 June 1973, RG59, SNF 1970-73, Box 2380.

¹¹¹ Ramsbotham (Tehran) to the Foreign Office, 333, 19 April 1973, and Ramsbotham (Tehran) to the Foreign Office, 334, 19 April 1973, FCO 8/2094.

¹¹² Renwick (Paris) to Wright (London), 28 May 1973, and Ramsbotham (Tehran) to the Foreign Office, 31 May 1973, FCO 8/2094.

the Shah continued, but these days they do not seem to be receiving it.”¹¹³ During his visit to Washington the shah wanted to take the pulse of his American partners and to secure a commitment from them to maintain the stalemate in Kurdistan. To prepare Nixon for the meeting, Helms wrote from Tehran that after the president’s visit to Iran in 1972, U.S.-Iran relations had taken on a “new texture”, which he characterised as a “sense of greater equality by Iran in its cooperative dealing with [the] U.S.” The United States, Helms wrote, had “mastered [the] tendency in recent years to second-guess [the] Shah about his policies while Iran in turn has recovered from its client status attitude.”¹¹⁴

The shah arrived in Washington on 24 July and met that morning with Nixon. His discussions with the president were limited to generalities, as Nixon was clearly distracted. The shah told Nixon, “You are helpful in Iraq. It is important for psychological reasons that the Kurds know that the great United States is behind them.” He assured Nixon that, “We are preventing a coalition of the Baaths, the Kurds, and the Communists. We are preventing this.” Nixon, who now relied on Iran more than ever to defend the Persian Gulf against Soviet encroachment, told the shah that, “I see the world and the part Iran plays pretty much as you do.”¹¹⁵ That afternoon, the shah met with Kissinger and Helms to go into the details of the Kurdish operation. He vigorously pushed the Americans to give more aid to Barzani and Kissinger responded that, “If you think more needs to be done, we will

¹¹³ Memorandum from Walters to Kissinger, Rogers and Schlesinger, 23 July 1973, NPM, NSCF, VIP Visits, Box 920.

¹¹⁴ Telegram 4639 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 2 July 1973, NPM, NSCF, Country Files – Middle East, Box 603.

¹¹⁵ Memorandum from Henry Kissinger for the President’s File, 24 July 1973, EBB 265, NSA-GWU.

seriously consider it.” The shah reiterated that he did not want to see an independent Kurdistan, but he reminded the Americans that “our only lever over the Iraqi Government is the Kurds.” It was vital, the shah argued, to keep the Kurds from joining the national front. When Kissinger asked if this was feasible, the shah assured him that Barzani had “promised not to do anything without our okay.” In exchange, Barzani had asked for “the moral support of the U.S.” and the shah had told him, “we could provide that.” The shah’s audacity in giving a commitment to the Kurds on behalf of the United States is an indication of the extent to which Nixon and Kissinger now deferred to his judgement on regional matters. He told the Americans that the Kurds were “a trump card that we do not want to let go.” Knowing that the shah would relay the message to Barzani, Helms emphasized that the Kurdish operation must stay “totally out of the public domain. Our problem is that when something like this gets into the public domain, then the pressure mounts in the Senate.”¹¹⁶

At the end of his visit the shah met again with Kissinger and Helms on 27 July. He knew that the Americans were aware of his talks with the Ba’th, so he played down the prospects of any deal between Iran and Iraq. The Iraqis felt “weak”, the shah explained, and he knew that they were simply negotiating “to gain time.” He told Kissinger that he had told Barzani “absolutely not to participate in a coalition government. I told them to stop receiving Soviet representatives or the Baath representatives from Baghdad. But if we are going to ask that of them,” the shah argued, “we will have to give them some more money.” Kissinger assured the

¹¹⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 24 July 1973, EBB 265, NSA-GWU.

shah, “you can count on it in principle.”¹¹⁷ The shah’s demand that Barzani cut off contact with Moscow was prompted by a visit to Barzani’s headquarters by two diplomats from the Soviet Embassy in Baghdad from 2 to 5 June, who tried to pressure the Kurds to join the national front. The Soviet diplomats had warned Barzani that Iran and Iraq were negotiating, implying that the shah would soon sell them out in a deal with Baghdad. Barzani had reported the visit to the Iranians and had, rather coyly, asked the shah whether he should join the government in Baghdad. The shah reportedly replied, “Do so if you want to commit suicide!”¹¹⁸ After the shah’s trip to Washington, Kissinger and Helms weighed several options for increasing support to Barzani as the shah had requested, including stockpiling weapons for the Kurds in case of a resumption of major fighting, or increasing the flow of money to Barzani. Ultimately the Americans decided to increase their monthly subsidy by 50 percent. Iran more than matched this increase, which Helms characterised as the shah’s “*noblesse oblige*”.¹¹⁹ According to Kissinger, this raised Iran’s annual assistance to the Kurds to \$30 million.¹²⁰

Mohammad Reza Shah had managed to keep a tight grip on the Kurdish operation. He had kept Barzani from joining the Ba’th in the national front government and he had convinced the United States to increase its assistance to the Kurds at a time when domestic imperatives militated against a bigger American commitment. Clashes between the Kurds and Iraqis escalated in 1973, though the

¹¹⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 27 July 1973, Virtual Library, RMNL, available at: <http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/virtuallibrary/documents/jun09/072773_memcon.pdf>.

¹¹⁸ Handwritten Note from Helms to CIA Official, 9 June 1973, and Cable from CIA Official to Helms, 11 June 1973, CIA-Helms.

¹¹⁹ Backchannel Message from Helms to Kissinger, 17 August 1973, and Backchannel Message from Helms to Kissinger, 25 August 1973, CIA-Helms.

¹²⁰ Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, p. 585.

scale of the fighting still fell short of outright war.¹²¹ By October it was clear that neither the Kurds nor the Ba'ath were interested in any kind of mutual accommodation. Barzani issued a new set of demands for what amounted to an independent Kurdish state that would include Kirkuk and its oil. The Ba'ath dismissed the Kurds' demands and instead set about drafting an autonomy law for Kurdistan, as per the March 1970 agreement, with or without Barzani's cooperation.¹²² Meanwhile, Egypt and Syria had launched a coordinated surprise attack against Israel's positions in the Sinai and the Golan Heights on 6 October, catching the Israelis off guard. Hoping to keep Iraq out of the war, the Israelis asked Barzani to launch an offensive to keep the Iraqi army tied down in Kurdistan.¹²³ The shah, however, was determined to maintain the status quo and managed to restrain Barzani from resuming the war in Kurdistan by quickly mobilising the United States against the Israeli proposal. Helms informed Kissinger that he shared the shah's view that it was a mistake to sacrifice the Kurds on the alter of Israeli security. "We have armed [the] Kurds for defensive purposes and their forces are in no sense equipped to come out of their mountain terrain and attack on the plains. If they were to get chewed up militarily, it would deprive the Shah of his "Kurdish card" and he does not want to see that."¹²⁴ The shah had also made it clear to Helms that he did not want the Kurds to be seen as "proxies of Israel and America."¹²⁵

¹²¹ Weekly Summary No. 0387/73 prepared by the CIA, 14 September 1973, CIA Records Search Tool (CREST), NARAI, College Park, Maryland.

¹²² McDowall, *A Modern History*, pp. 332-335.

¹²³ Cable from CIA Station in Iran to Colby, 16 October 1973, CIA-Helms.

¹²⁴ Backchannel Message from Helms to Kissinger, 16 October 1973, National Security Adviser (NSA), Kissinger-Scowcroft West Wing Office Files (KSWWOF), Box 19, Gerald R. Ford Library (GRFL), Ann Arbor, Michigan.

¹²⁵ Asadollah Alam, *Yad'dashtha-yi 'Alam: virayish va muqaddamah az Alinaqi Alikhani* [The Alam Diaries: Edited by Alinaghi Alikhani], Vol. III: 1973-1974 (Bethesda: Iranbooks, 1995), p. 222.

William Colby, a career intelligence officer who replaced Schlesinger as director of the CIA in September, concurred with the view from Tehran and advised restraint. Kissinger readily agreed with the shah, writing in his memoirs, “I considered it unwise to tie the Kurds too explicitly to Israel’s tactical preferences and thereby bring down on the already beleaguered Kurds the wrath of other Arab states.”¹²⁶ As soon as he received Helms’ cable, he instructed both Helms and Colby to tell Barzani, “We do not repeat not consider it advisable for you to undertake the offensive military action that the Israelis have suggested to you.”¹²⁷ With Kissinger’s help, the shah succeeded in keeping Barzani out of the October War.

The end of the stalemate in Kurdistan

As Nixon’s authority crumbled because of Watergate, Kissinger rose to the apex of his power. In August 1973 a beleaguered Nixon had appointed Kissinger as his secretary of state, while allowing him to retain his post as the president’s national security adviser. Kissinger, not Nixon, was awarded the 1973 Nobel Peace Prize for negotiating the Paris Peace Accords with the North Vietnamese. After the October War, Kissinger began his shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East to secure disengagement agreements between Israel and the Arab states. During one of these trips in November 1973 he visited Iran to discuss the regional implications of the conflict with the shah, particularly the Arab oil boycott of the West. During Kissinger’s visit to Tehran on 9 November, the shah promised not to join the Arab oil embargo and agreed to intervene with both President Anwar Sadat of Egypt and

¹²⁶ Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, p. 587.

¹²⁷ Memorandum from Kissinger to Colby, 16 October 1973, NSA, KSWWOF, Box 19, GRFL; Backchannel Message from Kissinger to Helms, 16 October 1973, CIA-Helms.

King Faisal of Saudi Arabia to try to end the energy crisis.¹²⁸ While Kissinger was encouraging Egypt to move away from the Soviet camp and make peace with Israel, he was aware that Iraq was emerging as “the principal Soviet client in the Middle East” and “the driving force in the “rejection front” seeking to block Arab-Israeli peace initiative.”¹²⁹ To prevent the Iraqis from dominating the Middle East, the shah told Kissinger, Iran must “keep Iraq occupied by supporting the Kurdish rebellion within Iraq, and maintaining a large army near the frontier.”¹³⁰ The two men agreed to keep the Kurdish operation going. Kissinger’s visit demonstrated that despite Watergate, the U.S.-Iran partnership would survive under the stewardship of the shah and Kissinger. But the problem they would soon confront was that Iraq’s strength was growing and its leadership was determined to resolve the Kurdish conflict by whatever means necessary.

By the autumn of 1973 the Ba’th were firmly entrenched in Baghdad. A failed coup attempt in June by Nadhim Kazzar, the head of the Iraqi security services, gave Saddam Hussein an opportunity to execute over thirty of his rivals in the regime and to reorganise the security services by placing his half-brother, Barzan al-Takriti, in charge. The following month the ICP, under pressure from the Soviet Union, joined the Ba’th in a ‘National Patriotic Front,’ leaving Barzani’s Kurdish forces as the only significant domestic threat to the Ba’th.¹³¹ Iraq had nationalised the Western-owned Iraq Petroleum Company the previous year and as oil prices skyrocketed thanks to the Arab oil embargo, so too did Iraq’s revenues,

¹²⁸ Memorandum from Scowcroft to President Nixon, 9 November 1973, NPM, NSCF, Country Files – Middle East, Box 603.

¹²⁹ Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, p. 585.

¹³⁰ Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, pp. 675-676.

¹³¹ Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, pp. 149-170; Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, pp. 201-202.

giving Baghdad ample resources to confront both Iran and the Kurds.¹³² Between 1972 and 1973 Iraq's oil revenue tripled from \$600 million to \$1.8 billion. In 1974 it would more than triple again to reach \$5.7 billion.¹³³ Despite the restoration of diplomatic relations between Iran and Iraq during the October War, tensions between the two countries soon resurfaced and serious border clashes in February 1974 threatened to escalate into war. The UN Security Council reluctantly asked UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim to investigate the situation, but Waldheim's staff advised him that the Council was "collectively and individually...embarrassed by the dispute," as none of them wanted to take sides in the conflict between Iran and Iraq.¹³⁴ The Iraqis did not want a war with Iran, but they hoped that a show of strength would bring the shah to the negotiating table. Saddam Hussein met with the Iranian ambassador to Iraq on 3 and 6 March and reached a "gentleman's agreement" with him for a cease-fire.¹³⁵ He assured the ambassador that any Iraqi soldier in violation of the cease-fire would be "executed on the spot" and asked him to convey an invitation to the shah to come to Baghdad to negotiate a "package deal" that would resolve the dispute.¹³⁶

While the Iraqis were signalling their willingness to make a deal, they also needed to convince the shah that the stalemate in Kurdistan was untenable. The

¹³² Memorandum from the Department of State for Kissinger, 3 March 1973, NPM, NSCF, Country Files – Middle East, Box 603.

¹³³ Skeet, *OPEC*, p. 240.

¹³⁴ Note prepared by the Executive Office of the Secretary-General entitled 'Iraq-Iran dispute', 27 March 1974, S-0904-022-04, United Nations Archives and Record Management Section (UNARMS), New York. Memorandum prepared by the British Mission to the United Nations, 5 June 1974, FCO 8/2315.

¹³⁵ Note from Prohaska to Waldheim, 8 March 1974, S-0904-022-04, UNARMS. Weekly Summary No. 0011/74 prepared by the CIA, 15 March 1974, CREST.

¹³⁶ 'Meeting held at the Iraqi Foreign Ministry in Baghdad on Monday, 8 April 1974, at 5.30pm', S-0904-0022-08, UNARMS.

shah had kept Barzani from joining the Ba'th in the national front, but the Iraqis had pressed on with drafting a law for limited Kurdish autonomy without him. On 11 March 1974 (the deadline set by the March 1970 accord) Iraq unilaterally promulgated an autonomy law that, according to the British ambassador in Baghdad, "went as far as any previous Iraqi government had gone to meet Kurdish demands. Indeed, it is difficult to see how much further they could have gone without setting in train a process which would have led to the break-up of Iraq."¹³⁷ But the law excluded Kirkuk and its oil from Kurdish control and allowed the central government to retain powers that would deny the Kurds any meaningful self-rule. Barzani realised that the conflict was coming to a head and he was confronted with the choice of either capitulating to Baghdad or renewing the war in Kurdistan. He visited Tehran from 16 to 19 March, accompanied by Mahmoud Uthman, to consult with the shah as well as the CIA and SAVAK. Barzani tried to convince his sponsors to support a major Kurdish offensive against the Iraqi army by providing him with anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons. He also wanted them to recognise and finance an autonomous Kurdish government with an annual budget of between \$180-360 million. The shah was willing to substantially increase his assistance to the Kurds, but only enough, according to Helms, "to avoid creating a situation where they would have to capitulate to Baghdad."¹³⁸ Kissinger was also unwilling to go beyond what was required to keep the Kurds on their feet, given the domestic weakness of the Nixon administration. Colby, who was facing intense Congressional scrutiny of the CIA following Watergate, opposed any increase in

¹³⁷ Diplomatic Report 167/75, 'Iraq and the Kurds', 23 February 1975, FCO 8/2535.

¹³⁸ Backchannel Message from Helms to Scowcroft, 18 March 1974, and Backchannel Message from Helms to Scowcroft, 20 March 1974, CIA-Helms.

aid to the Kurds. Kissinger tried to steer a middle course, instructing his deputy at the White House, Gen. Brent Scowcroft, to work with Helms to prepare a proposal for a modest increase in U.S. assistance to Barzani.¹³⁹

As the Persian New Year, *Norouz*, arrived in March 1974 the Iraqi Kurds had few reasons to celebrate the coming of spring. Barzani had rejected the autonomy law, despite the opposition of a number of KDP leaders including his own son, Ubayd Allah, who had defected to the central government. As the winter snows melted, the CIA reported that clashes between Kurdish and Iraqi forces were increasing. The Iraqi army had strengthened its defensive positions in Kurdistan by withdrawing from “exposed out-lying garrisons” and Barzani was expecting a major Iraqi offensive.¹⁴⁰ The Israelis, who had a military and intelligence presence on the ground in the Kurdistan, were also worried about the Kurds. The Israeli ambassador to the United States, Simcha Dinitz, warned Kissinger that the Kurds were in a “desperate situation” and urged him to help Barzani.¹⁴¹ Neither Kissinger nor the shah wanted to see the resumption of a full-scale war in Kurdistan. They both thought that Barzani’s best strategy would be to defend his mountain strongholds. After receiving Helms and Scowcroft’s recommendation, Kissinger secured Nixon’s approval in April for a modest increase in U.S. assistance to the Kurds. The United States would not support Barzani’s goal of creating a “separatist government” and did not want to see the war in Kurdistan escalate into a war

¹³⁹ Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, pp. 588-589.

¹⁴⁰ Memorandum for Kissinger prepared by the CIA, 21 March 1974, NPM, NSCF, Country Files – Middle East, Box 603.

¹⁴¹ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 21 March 1974, 01078, Digital National Security Archive (DNSA), available at: < <http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com/home.do>>.

between Iran and Iraq.¹⁴² U.S. assistance to the Kurds would increase modestly from \$5 to \$8 million each year, plus another \$1 million in overt support for Kurdish refugees. But the shah was far more generous, agreeing to more than double Iran's aid from \$30 to \$75 million a year.¹⁴³ Kissinger explained to the shah that, "Supporting a Kurdish government on a long-term basis on the scale which Barzani requests would be beyond our financial resources for this project and could not be carried out [secretly]. We do not feel an open confrontation with [the] government of Iraq would serve U.S. and Iranian interests or the interest of long-term Kurdish survival."¹⁴⁴ The shah agreed and warned Barzani not to declare an autonomous government in northern Iraq.¹⁴⁵

Barzani did not have to wait long for the Iraqi onslaught. In late April 1974 the Iraqi army launched its seventh offensive against the Kurds with 110,000 troops. Their goal, as always, was to cut off the Kurds from their supply lines along the Iranian border. The Soviet-equipped Iraqi air force provided cover for the Iraqi armoured columns as they slowly moved up the mountain roads and relieved towns that had been besieged by the Kurds. At a regular meeting with his senior State Department staff on 22 April, Kissinger was advised that a resumption of the war in Kurdistan was not "necessarily a bad thing", as it would distract the Iraqis, and so "we can sit back and be fairly relaxed about it." But the secretary of state was far from relaxed. Unlike his officials, he knew that the United States was covertly helping Iran to keep the Kurdish resistance on its feet. He had kept the State

¹⁴² Memorandum from Kissinger to President Nixon, 11 April 1974, NSA, KSWWOF, Box 19, GRFL.

¹⁴³ Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, p. 589.

¹⁴⁴ Backchannel Message from Kissinger to Helms, NSA, KSWWOF, Box 19, GRFL.

¹⁴⁵ Backchannel Message from Helms to Kissinger, 21 May 1974, CIA-Helms.

Department in the dark about U.S. support for Barzani, so when the discussion steered towards international support for the Kurds, Kissinger joked, “I don’t even know where the place is” and quickly changed the subject to a discussion of a fishing dispute with Ecuador.¹⁴⁶ As the war heated up, he was determined to keep the U.S. role hidden, even from his own officials. The running joke in the State Department was that Kissinger treated the U.S. Foreign Service like mushrooms: ‘he kept them in the dark, piled manure on them, and in the end, they got canned.’¹⁴⁷ In Tehran, the shah assured Helms that despite the Iraqi offensive, he remained committed to the Kurdish operation and would not give up his “Kurdish card” so easily.¹⁴⁸

After the UN Security Council’s decision to take up the Iran-Iraq issue in March, Secretary-General Waldheim had appointed a Mexican diplomat, Luis Weckmann-Munoz, as his special representative to investigate the situation on the Iran-Iraq border. After some shuttle diplomacy between Tehran and Baghdad, Weckmann-Munoz reported privately to Waldheim in April that he had secured a commitment from both Iran and Iraq to restart diplomatic talks. But he warned that the central sticking point was the question of the Shatt. The Iraqis refused to accept Iran’s abrogation of the 1937 Tehran Treaty because, as Saddam Hussein had explained to the UN envoy, the Ba’th Party had taken power “through revolution and not through the democratic process” and therefore any concession on the Shatt

¹⁴⁶ Minutes of the Secretary’s Principals and Regionals Staff Meeting on 22 April 1974, 3.00pm, 23 April 1974, 01111, DNSA.

¹⁴⁷ Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War, 1945-2006*, Tenth Edition (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2008), p. 275.

¹⁴⁸ Telegram 3088 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 20 April 1974, NPM, NSCF, Country Files – Middle East, Box 603.

would erode their fragile legitimacy at home and be interpreted as a “sign of weakness” abroad.¹⁴⁹ But Weckmann-Munoz told Waldheim that Iraq might be able to make this concession as part of a “package deal.”¹⁵⁰ It was his judgement that the Iraqis were more eager than the shah to come to an agreement. The shah had been hawkish, telling the UN envoy that Iran could “easily destroy” Iraq, which the shah described as “artificial” and “a mere creation of Churchill.” As per the earlier Iran-Iraq talks in 1973, it was obvious to Weckmann-Munoz that any agreement between the shah and Saddam Hussein “will, almost inexorably, be at the expense of the Kurds of Iraq.”¹⁵¹ After the UN envoy presented his formal report, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 248 on 28 May, which “welcomed the determination on the part of Iran and Iraq to de-escalate the prevailing situation”.¹⁵² When the British ambassador asked the shah if the Security Council resolution meant he would seek détente with Iraq, “he replied unhesitatingly that he could not let down the Kurds.” But the British were convinced that the shah would “abandon them [the Kurds] to their fate if he calculated that there was a chance of a genuine accommodation with the government in Baghdad.”¹⁵³

As the shah pondered a settlement with Iraq, Kissinger continued with his shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East to deal with the aftermath of the October War.

¹⁴⁹ ‘Meeting held at the National Assembly in Baghdad on Thursday, 18 April 1974, at 6.30 p.m.’, S-0904-0022-08, UNARMS.

¹⁵⁰ Coded Cable from Weckmann-Munoz (Beirut) to Waldheim (New York), 25 April 1974, S-0303-0003-01, UNARMS.

¹⁵¹ Note from Weckmann-Munoz to Waldheim, 30 April 1974, S-0904-0022-11, UNARMS.

¹⁵² United Nations, Security Council, ‘Report by the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Consensus adopted by the Security Council on 28 February 1974 regarding the complaint by Iraq concerning incidents on its frontier with Iran’, 20 May 1974, S/11921. United Nations, Security Council, Resolution 348, 28 May 1974, S/RES/348, UN Official Documents System (ODS), available on-line at: <<http://documents.un.org/>>.

¹⁵³ Arbuthnott (Tehran) to Clark (London), 13 June 1974, FCO 8/2307.

During his frequent visits to Jerusalem his Israeli hosts pressured him to do something to reverse the tide of the Kurdish war. On 7 May 1974 Prime Minister Golda Meir handed Kissinger a report on the situation in Kurdistan, warning him that the Kurds were in “trouble” and asking the Americans to help provide Barzani with anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons to defend themselves against the Iraqis. But Kissinger was non-committal and in June he got Nixon to authorise a continuation of U.S. support for the Kurds at the same level as the previous year.¹⁵⁴ The shah, too, maintained his support at roughly \$74 million per year, but he worried that with hundreds of thousands of Kurdish refugees pouring into Iran, he would have a humanitarian disaster on his hands when winter arrived.¹⁵⁵ The pressure on the shah to reach a deal with Iraq was mounting. Despite the massive injection of Iranian arms and money, the Iraqi army was making steady progress against the Kurds. To compound his worries, the U.S. House of Representative’s Judiciary Committee passed the first of three articles of impeachment against Nixon on 27 July, charging the president with obstruction of justice. Four days earlier Helms had sent a telegram to Washington warning that Watergate had made the shah “somewhat restive and in a bit of quandary” about his relations with the United States.¹⁵⁶ The shah had confided to Alam on 14 July that Nixon’s downfall was a conspiracy orchestrated by powerful business interests and the CIA. The same people who had assassinated President Kennedy were now after Nixon for some unknown reason. In any event, he hoped this was the case, because if Nixon’s fate was a mere twist of

¹⁵⁴ Memorandum from Kissinger to President Nixon, 24 June 1974, NSA, KSWWOF, Box 19, GRFL.

¹⁵⁵ Backchannel Message from Helms to Scowcroft, 8 July 1974, CIA-Helms.

¹⁵⁶ Telegram 6159 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 25 July 1974, NPM, NSCF, Country Files – Middle East, Box 603.

fortune then it boded ill for future of the free world.¹⁵⁷ Three trends now converged to push the shah towards a settlement with Iraq: the weakening of the United States because of Watergate; a vigorous diplomatic offensive by Iraq; and a decisive turn against Barzani in the tide of the war in Kurdistan.

The Iraqis had asked Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, with whom the shah enjoyed a warm friendship, to communicate to Iran an offer of diplomatic talks. Sadat had told the shah that Iraq genuinely wanted to distance itself from the Soviet Union and end its isolation in the Arab world. But the shah was still unconvinced that the Ba'th were willing to make the concessions Iran wanted. In late July, after talks with both Barzani and King Hussein of Jordan, the shah told the Americans that Iraq's diplomatic initiative was a "tactical move to divert attention from Iraq's serious internal problems."¹⁵⁸ But from Baghdad, Arthur Lowrie's assessment was that the Iraqi approach to Iran was genuine, and part of a larger Iraqi diplomatic initiative to reduce their dependence on Moscow given their rising oil revenues.¹⁵⁹ Despite his suspicions, the shah was not in a position to dismiss the Iraqi offer. In early August the Iraqi army had forced the Kurds to retreat even further into the mountains and the shah suffered a major blow on 9 August when his friend and Cold War partner, Richard Nixon, resigned the presidency of the United States. The shah decided to test Iraq's intentions and so he authorised low-level preliminary

¹⁵⁷ Asadollah Alam, *Yad'dashtha-yi 'Alam: virayish va muqaddamah az Alinaqi Alikhani* [The Alam Diaries: Edited by Alinaghi Alikhani], Vol. IV: 1974-1975 (Bethesda: Ibex, c.1995), p. 145.

¹⁵⁸ Telegram 6206 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 28 July 1974, NPM, NSCF, Country Files – Middle East, Box 603. Alam, *Yad'dashtha-yi 'Alam*, Vol. IV, pp. 154-155.

¹⁵⁹ Telegram 1109 from the Interests Section in Iraq to the Department of State, 2 August 1974, NPM, NSCF, Country Files – Middle East, Box 603.

diplomatic talks with the Iraqis in Istanbul from 12 August to 1 September.¹⁶⁰ Meanwhile, the Israelis provided Kissinger with a report on 23 August baring the grim news that “The present Iraqi offensive is liable to become a turning point in favor of the Iraqis in this war.” The Israelis warned that there was now a danger that the Iraqi army would capture Barzani’s headquarters and reach the Iranian border, disrupting the supply lines from Iran.¹⁶¹ The next day, Mordechai Shalev, a diplomat at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, read to Scowcroft a cable from Jerusalem that described the Kurds’ military position as “critical”. The Kurds had no long-range artillery or anti-tanks weapons with which to stop the Iraqi advance and “they may collapse and be destroyed as a political entity.”¹⁶² The Israelis proposed that they could provide Soviet anti-tank missiles to the Kurds, if the U.S. would then re-supply Israel with American-made missiles.¹⁶³

The shah desperately wanted to prevent a Kurdish collapse, which would destroy whatever leverage he had over Baghdad in the ongoing talks. Iran’s long-range artillery had been hitting the Iraqis from across the border, but the shah now ordered Iranian troops, dressed in Kurdish mufti, to cross the border into Iraq to help the Kurds. The Israelis were also stepping up their delivery of arms. SAVAK chief Nasiri informed Helms on 25 August 1974 that Iran was shortly expecting

¹⁶⁰ Telegram 6788 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 14 August 1974, and Telegram 583 from the Interests Section in Iraq to the Department of State, 7 September 1974, RG59, CFPPF 1973-76, Access to Archival Databases (AAD), NARA, available at: <<http://aad.archives.gov/aad/>>. Browne (Tehran) to Williams (London), 22 August 1974, and Parsons (Tehran) to the Foreign Office, 4 September 1974, FCO 8/2315.

¹⁶¹ Note prepared by the Government of Israel, 24 August 1974, NSA, KSWWOF, Box 19, GRFL.

¹⁶² ‘Cable from Jerusalem translated by Shalev and dictated to General Scowcroft’, 24 August 1975, NSA, KSWWOF, Box 19, GRFL.

¹⁶³ Note prepared by the Government of Israel entitled ‘Assistance to Kurds’, 22 August 1974, NSA, KSWWOF, Box 19, GRFL; Backchannel Message from Scowcroft to Helms, 24 August 1974, CIA-Helms.

delivery of 300 tons of ordinance from Israel for the Kurds.¹⁶⁴ Kissinger took the Israeli re-supply proposal to Nixon's successor, President Gerald Ford, for his approval. Ford had known nothing of the Kurdish operation when he was vice president, and so Kissinger brought him up to speed, warning him that "The danger is the Kurds will collapse." The shah was going to send Iranian troops into Iraq to reinforce the Kurds, which Kissinger supported, but he told Ford that, "I hate to be on record because of all the leaks." The president authorised the military re-supply arrangement that the Israelis had proposed and asked Kissinger if the Kurds would prevail. Kissinger replied, "Yes. It is their existence at stake."¹⁶⁵ But by the end of the summer the Iraqis held more Kurdish territory than at any time since 1961. The CIA's assessment was that Iraq was willing to sustain "heavy casualties" in order to "end the Kurds' organized military resistance" before the winter.¹⁶⁶ The question now was whether the Kurds could hold on during the autumn until the annual lull in the fighting that the cold Kurdish winter would impose.

With President Ford's approval, the Israelis agreed in September to provide the Kurds with 82 Strela shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles and 507 Sagger portable guided anti-tank missiles, both of Soviet manufacture, in exchange for which the U.S. would re-supply Israel with American-made Redeye anti-aircraft

¹⁶⁴ Backchannel Message from Helms to Scowcroft, 25 August 1974, CIA-Helms.

¹⁶⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 26 August 1974, NSA, Memoranda of Conversations (MEMCONS), Box 5, GRFL. Backchannel Message from Helms to Scowcroft, 24 August 1974; Backchannel Message from Scowcroft to Helms, 24 August 1974; and Backchannel Message from Kissinger to Helms, 26 August 1974, CIA-Helms.

¹⁶⁶ Memorandum prepared by the CIA for President Ford, 30 August 1974, NSA, Presidential Country Files for the Middle East and South Asia (PCFMESA), Box 14, GRFL.

missiles and TOW anti-tank missiles.¹⁶⁷ These weapons would help the Kurds to slow the Iraqi advance and allow them to survive through the autumn. With the pressure easing on the battlefield, the shah was in no hurry to make a deal with the Iraqis. He continued to see the Ba’th as a “bunch of thugs and murderers implacably hostile to him” and Iraq’s attempts at détente as nothing more than “tactical moves to ease internal and external pressures.”¹⁶⁸ The Iraqis, too, were deeply sceptical of American and Iranian intentions. Iraqi Foreign Minister Shadel Taqa told Lowrie in Baghdad that he was aware that the United States was “possibly providing indirect assistance to [the] Kurds through the Shah” and warned him that Barzani was a “losing horse.”¹⁶⁹ There were those in the State Department, like Lowrie, who were eager to improve relations with Iraq so that American companies could benefit from Iraq’s oil bonanza, but the secretary of state stuck to the shah’s hard line.¹⁷⁰ Kissinger advised Ford in early September that, “Iraq has recently hinted to other countries that it would like to end its isolation and its dependence on the Soviet Union; the Shah and Ambassador Helms feel the pressure should be kept on Iraq, to bring a more responsible government into power.”¹⁷¹ Helms, warned Kissinger to keep an eye on his staff at Foggy Bottom: “In our own government there appears to

¹⁶⁷ TOW stands for Tube-launched, Optically-tracked, Wire-date linked, guided missile. Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 17 September 1974, NSA, KSWWOF, Box 19, GRFL; Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 23 December 1974, 01463, DNSA.

¹⁶⁸ Telegram 10954 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 30 December 1974, NSA, PCFMESA, Box 14, GRFL.

¹⁶⁹ Telegram 564 from the Interests Section in Iraq to the Department of State, 29 August 1974, NSA, PCFMESA, Box 14, GRFL.

¹⁷⁰ Telegram 262660 from the Department of State to the Embassy in Iran, 28 November 1974, NSA, PCFMESA, Box 13, GRFL.

¹⁷¹ Memorandum from Kissinger to President Ford, 6 September 1974, NSA, PCFMESA, Box 12, GRFL.

be confusion as to where our own interests lie up to a significant level in the Department of State.”¹⁷²

The steps that the shah and Kissinger had taken in August and September 1974 seemed to have slowed the Iraqi advance and by October it looked as if the Kurds would survive until the annual winter lull in the fighting.¹⁷³ The Kurds’ situation was extremely precarious. According to reports that the British Embassy in Baghdad was receiving, the morale of the Iraqi army was high and, unlike previous Iraqi offensives, there was no sign that the Iraqis would be withdrawing from the Kurdish mountains for the winter. Instead they were fortifying their positions and stockpiling supplies, in order to finish off the Kurds in the spring.¹⁷⁴ Barzani travelled to Tehran in late October and again pleaded with the shah for more help.¹⁷⁵ He wrote a letter to Kissinger saying that the Kurds had suffered 1,200 casualties and estimated Iraqi casualties at 6,000. He said that his headquarters was coming under fire from Iraq’s long-range artillery.¹⁷⁶ The Iranians had helped to halt the Iraqi advance by moving twenty-four 130mm and twelve 177mm guns inside Iraq, raining down artillery fire on the Iraqi positions.¹⁷⁷ The Iranian guns were protected by British-made Rapier surface-to-air missiles, with which the Iranians shot down at least two Iraqi aircraft that were trying to take out the Iranian artillery positions.¹⁷⁸ As Alam confided to British Ambassador Anthony

¹⁷² Backchannel Message from Helms to Kissinger, 25 August 1973, CIA-Helms.

¹⁷³ Parsons (Tehran) to the Foreign Office, 11 September 1974, FCO 8/2307.

¹⁷⁴ Graham (Baghdad) to the Foreign Office, 27 November 1974, FCO 8/2309.

¹⁷⁵ Parsons (Tehran) to Wright (London), 24 October 1974, FCO 8/2308.

¹⁷⁶ Letter from Barzani to Kissinger, 22 October 1974, NSA, KSWWOF, Box 19, GRFL.

¹⁷⁷ Memorandum prepared by the CIA entitled “Defence and Humanitarian Support for General Barzani”, 31 October 1974, NSA, KSWWOF, Box 19, GRFL. Parsons (Tehran) to the Ministry of Defence, 10 September 1974, FCO 8/2307.

¹⁷⁸ Parsons (Tehran) to the Foreign Office, 18 December 1974, FCO 8/2309.

Parsons, Iran could use its superior air power to turn back the Iraqi columns in Kurdistan, but this was extremely risky, as it would trigger an all-out war with Iraq that would also draw in the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the Iranians were now caring for more than 100,000 Kurdish refugees and with the winter fast approaching, something would have to be done to allow these Kurds to return to their homes in Iraq.¹⁷⁹ Parsons predicted that the shah could not stomach either a Kurdish defeat or a Kurdish victory so, before the fighting erupted again in the spring, he was likely to reach a settlement with Iraq.¹⁸⁰

While the Iraqis had signalled their willingness to negotiate with Iran, they had shown little interest in improving relations with the United States, and they remained implacably hostile to Israel. When Lowrie had suggested a possible meeting with Kissinger to Taqa, the Iraqi foreign minister had told him that the idea was “premature” given the continued U.S. support for Israel and the Kurds.¹⁸¹ Consequently, the policies of the Kurds’ sponsors now began to diverge. While the shah continued the talks with Iraq, Kissinger and the Israelis pressed ahead with the supply of sophisticated anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons to the Kurds. In Jerusalem on 13 October, Kissinger told Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin that there had been some “improvement” in the position of the Kurds. When he returned to Washington the Israelis provided him with a list of \$24 million worth of weapons that they wanted to supply the Kurds, for which they asked to be reimbursed by the

¹⁷⁹ Note from Prohaska to Waldheim, 9 October 1974, S-0904-0022-11, UNARMS.

¹⁸⁰ Parsons (Tehran) to the Foreign Office, 28 November 1974, FCO 8/2309.

¹⁸¹ Telegram 564 from the Interests Section in Iraq to the Department of State, 29 August 1974, NSA, PCFMESA, Box 14, GRFL.

United States.¹⁸² Ambassador Dinitz gave Kissinger the list on 19 October, but Kissinger insisted on consulting with the shah before agreeing.¹⁸³

Kissinger flew to the region and visited Tehran from 1 to 3 November 1974, where his talks with the shah were dominated by the ongoing energy crisis.¹⁸⁴ Although no record of their conversation is available, it seems that the shah approved the Israeli proposal. Four days after he left Tehran, Kissinger met again with Prime Minister Rabin in Jerusalem, where the Israelis informed him that the Kurds had successfully used the Sagger missiles to destroy a number of Iraqi tanks. Kissinger assured the Israelis that both he and the shah supported the Kurdish operation. When Rabin complained that “the Kurds are very disappointed about the US attitude”, Kissinger told him that because of Watergate there was little more that he could do.¹⁸⁵ Just getting the CIA and the Pentagon to agree to the secret arms re-supply that the Israelis wanted would prove to be a “bureaucratic nightmare”, Kissinger later recalled. Colby, for example, opposed any augmentation of the Kurdish operation and suggested that the shah should pick up the tab.¹⁸⁶ By November Kissinger had secured authorisation for the transaction and he told the Israelis to go ahead and supply the Kurds with the additional weapons.¹⁸⁷

While Kissinger and the Israelis were busy arming the Kurds with more sophisticated weapons, the shah continued to explore the idea of a deal with Iraq. He had authorised Khalatbari to meet with Taqa on the sidelines of the UN General

¹⁸² Memorandum of Conversation, Jerusalem, 13 October 1974, 01366, DNSA.

¹⁸³ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 19 October 1974, 01377, and Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 22 October 1974, 01379, DNSA.

¹⁸⁴ Telegram TOHAK 132 from Scowcroft to Kissinger, 3 November 1974, Declassified Documents Remote Archive Capture (DDRAC), Box 16, GRFL.

¹⁸⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, Jerusalem, 7 November 1974, 01405, DNSA.

¹⁸⁶ Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, pp. 591-592.

¹⁸⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 16 November 1974, 01417, DNSA.

Assembly in New York in October, but the Iranian foreign minister described their two meetings as “tough and certainly not smooth”.¹⁸⁸ With the Kurds facing defeat when the fighting resumed in the spring, the shah now began to make contingency plans. In December he instructed Alam to liaise with SAVAK and Iran’s top military brass to develop a plan to prevent Iran’s artillery pieces from falling into Iraqi hands if the Kurdish positions were overwhelmed.¹⁸⁹ Alam told Helms that the shah was very eager to resolve the Shatt dispute with Iraq, which he described as the “basic ingredient of any Iranian-Iraqi settlement.” He explained that the shah saw the 1937 Tehran Treaty, signed by his father, as a British “colonialist” diktat. The shah wanted to improve his dynasty’s image by revising this historical injustice and moving the border to the *thalweg* of the Shatt.¹⁹⁰ King Hussein had been working throughout 1974 to try and mediate between the shah and Saddam Hussein, but the shah remained sceptical that the Iraqis were ready for an agreement.¹⁹¹ Iraqi Information Minister Tariq Aziz travelled to Amman in November with a message containing Iraq’s terms for a deal with the shah.¹⁹² But the shah was playing hard to get. After a visit by the shah to Jordan in January 1975, Jordanian Prime Minister Zaid al-Rifai concluded that the issue was not simply the Shatt. The shah also worried about the political vacuum that would be created in Kurdistan if Barzani were defeated. Would the Iraqi Communists, now allied with the Ba’th and backed

¹⁸⁸ Telegram 8821 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 21 October 1974, RG59, CFPF 1973-76, AAD.

¹⁸⁹ Alam, *Yad’dashtha-yi ‘Alam*, Vol. IV, p. 267.

¹⁹⁰ Telegram 10592 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 16 December 1974, NSA, PCFMESA, Box 14, GRFL.

¹⁹¹ Telegram 7404 from the Embassy in Jordan to the Department of State, 11 December 1974, NSA, PCFMESA, Box 22, GRFL.

¹⁹² Lait (Baghdad) to Richardson (London), 23 November 1974, and Balfour Paul (Amman) to the Foreign Office, 13 January 1975, FCO 8/2546.

by the Soviet Union, take over the region? Rifai relayed to Washington the shah's comment that the "Iraqis should be pleased to have Barzani in the north rather than [a] Kurdish Communist Party."¹⁹³

As the bitter winter cold enveloped the Zagros Mountains between Iran and Iraq, the Kurds were under a constant barrage of air and artillery fire from the Iraqis and their only lifeline remained the Iranian border.¹⁹⁴ Helms, who had been involved in the Kurdish operation from its inception, tried to put a brave face on the situation. He advised Kissinger that, "It is not necessary for the Kurds to take Baghdad 'to win.' If they succeed in bringing down the Baathist government or, at a minimum, in forcing it to come to acceptable terms with them, then the Kurds will have 'won.'"¹⁹⁵ But these goals were now completely unrealistic for a Kurdish movement that might not survive beyond March. Helms' British counterpart in Tehran, Anthony Parsons, provided the Foreign Office with a far more realistic assessment: "I have a feeling that we are all – including the Shah – becoming uneasily aware that certain assumptions which we have hitherto been inclined to make about the Kurdish problem may no longer be entirely valid; and that a reassessment may be required which, on the Iranian side at least, could be painful." The Kurds would not survive without "the direct commitment of major Iranian fighting formations", which would mean war between Iran and Iraq. This was a path that the shah was unwilling to go down. Instead, Parsons predicted that the shah would help the Kurds to survive the winter, while looking for a deal with Iraq

¹⁹³ Telegram 166 from the Embassy in Jordan to the Department of State, 10 January 1975, NSA, PCFMESA, Box 22, GRFL.

¹⁹⁴ Cowgill (Tehran) to Norbury (London), 8 January 1975, FCO 8/2546.

¹⁹⁵ Telegram 10954 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 30 December 1974, NSA, PCFMESA, Box 14, GRFL.

that would “enable him to avoid plunging deeper into the Kurdish morass when the campaigning season re-opens.”¹⁹⁶ The Israelis had come to the same conclusion as Parsons, and on 16 January 1975 Israeli Foreign Minister Yigal Allon told Kissinger that “we’re losing the winter” and warned him that, “To abandon the Kurds is a crime”.¹⁹⁷

The very next day Khalatbari began three days of talks with his Iraqi counterpart, Foreign Minister Saadoun Hamadi, in Istanbul. The U.S. Embassy in Ankara reported to Kissinger that the basic demands of both parties were now clear. The Iraqis wanted Iran to end its support for the Kurds, while the Iranians wanted Iraq to concede on the Shatt.¹⁹⁸ The two foreign ministers agreed that the shah and Saddam Hussein would meet on the sidelines of the OPEC meeting in Algiers in March for talks that would be mediated by Algerian President Houari Boumediène.¹⁹⁹ Iran had managed to prevent a Kurdish collapse in 1974, but the Iranians were convinced that a Kurdish defeat in 1975 was now inevitable. Both the chief of SAVAK, Nasiri, and the chief of Iranian military intelligence, Gen. Nasser Moghadam, told Parsons that the Kurds could no longer resist the Iraqi army without drawing Iran into a war with Iraq.²⁰⁰ Iran, not the United States, was bearing the biggest financial and military burden in the Kurdish operation, so the Kurds’ fate now rested in the shah’s hands. As Kissinger explained in his memoirs, the U.S. could neither cut off support to the Kurds, which would have led to a

¹⁹⁶ Parsons (Tehran) to Weir (London), 2 January 1975, FCO 8/2546.

¹⁹⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 16 January 1975, 01477, DNSA.

¹⁹⁸ Telegram 904 from the Embassy in Turkey to the Department of State, 31 January 1975, RG59, CFPF 1973-76, AAD. Graham (Baghdad) to Weir (London), 6 February 1975, FCO 8/2534.

¹⁹⁹ Graham (Baghdad) to Lucas (London), 13 February 1975, FCO 8/2535; Graham (Baghdad) to Lucas (London), 6 February 1975, FCO 8/2546.

²⁰⁰ Parsons (Tehran) to Weir (London), 13 February 1975, FCO 8/2535.

precipitous Kurdish collapse, nor could it escalate its role “in a war so logistically difficult, so remote, and so incomprehensible to the American public.”²⁰¹ In late January, Kissinger received a letter from Barzani asking for more Sagger anti-tank missiles, with which the Kurds could “change the total impact of our military operations.” Barzani also asked to come to the United States to discuss the situation directly with Kissinger.²⁰² Colby advised against allowing Barzani to visit Washington, given that his presence would expose the U.S. role in the operation, and that the U.S. was in no position to meet his demands for increased aid.²⁰³ Kissinger did not reply to Barzani’s letter. Instead, he travelled to Switzerland to meet with the shah, who was on his annual skiing vacation.

During their four hours of discussions in Zurich on 19 February 1975 the shah told Kissinger that the Kurds “have no guts left” and that he was planning on meeting with Saddam Hussein in Algiers. The shah was clearly worried that Barzani would capitulate and join the national front with the Ba’th and the ICP. He told Kissinger that “he cannot accept an autonomous Kurdish state which would be under the dominance of a Communist Iraqi central government.” Kissinger reported to Ford that the shah was “tempted to try to move in the direction of some understanding with Iraq regarding the Kurds, but is understandably sceptical that much is possible. In the meantime, he intends to continue his support for the Kurds.”²⁰⁴ In his memoirs, Kissinger writes that he vigorously argued against abandoning the Kurds. He told the shah that any agreement with Saddam Hussein

²⁰¹ Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, p. 591.

²⁰² Letter from Barzani to Kissinger, 22 January 1975, NSA, KSWWOF, Box 19, GRFL.

²⁰³ Memorandum from Rodman to Kissinger, 6 February 1965, NSA, KSWWOF, Box 19, GRFL.

²⁰⁴ Memorandum from Scowcroft to President Ford, 19 February 1975, NSA, KSWWOF, Box 19, GRFL.

was “worthless” and that Barzani’s defeat would “destabilize the entire area”. He also worried that the Soviets would “view Iran’s retreat as symptomatic of the growing weakness of the West” thereby encouraging their “adventurism”. But it seems that he was unable to convince the shah. When he returned to Washington, Kissinger finally replied to Barzani’s letter from January, asking for a face-to-face meeting in Washington. He had little choice but to tell Barzani not to come, but to send an emissary instead. Kissinger also warned the Israelis that the shah was considering abandoning the Kurds, telling Ambassador Dinitz on 22 February that, “[the shah is] afraid the Kurds have had it. He may begin a negotiation with the Iraqis if they meet at OPEC, in exchange for a veto over whom they put in if Barzani gets driven out. I warned him strongly against it.”²⁰⁵

The Algiers Agreement

Despite Kissinger’s warnings, the shah went ahead with his meeting with Saddam Hussein in Algiers and on 5 March 1975 signed a communiqué announcing that Iran and Iraq had agreed to demarcate their land borders; to set the *thalweg* as their border in the Shatt; and to re-establish “security and mutual confidence” along their common border by ending “all infiltration of a subversive character from either side.”²⁰⁶ The basic elements of the agreement were already on the table before the Algiers meeting, but the shah had waited to meet Hussein face-to-face to judge if he was really willing to concede on the Shatt. In exchange for cutting off Iran’s assistance to the Kurds, the shah had secured Iraq’s recognition of Iranian

²⁰⁵ Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, p. 593. Letter from Kissinger to Barzani, 20 February 1975, NSA, KSWWOF, Box 19, GRFL.

²⁰⁶ Khadduri, *Socialist Iraq*, pp. 151-153. Sirriyeh, ‘Development of the Iraqi-Iranian Dispute’, pp. 489-491.

sovereignty over the eastern half of the Shatt, an elusive goal of Iranian diplomacy throughout his reign. The shah had not consulted with any of his civilian or military advisers, not even Alam, before making this deal with Hussein in Algiers.²⁰⁷ If he had, Alam might have warned him that he would go down in history as having used and betrayed the Kurds. But the shah was oblivious to such concerns. Returning to Tehran, he told Alam that he had not slept for more than two hours a night in Algiers and had lost 3 kg during the trip. He was proud of his achievement and glad to have finally rid himself of the 1937 Tehran Treaty that his father had signed under pressure from the British. When Alam asked him what would happen to the Kurds, the shah replied, “nothing.” He explained that, “These people who have been defeated so many times, they know very well that they cannot survive ten days without our support in the face of the Iraqi offensive; what can they say now?” The shah recalled that in his four and a half hours of talks with Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi leader had told him that on several occasions Iran’s troops and artillery were all that stood between the Iraqi army and victory. Hussein had told him, “your unsparing sword cut down the flower of Iraqi youth.” But Alam did not share the shah’s enthusiasm. He worried that international opinion would now blame his boss for whatever atrocities the Iraqis committed against the Kurds. He reminded the shah that he had told Barzani to reject a settlement with Baghdad just a year earlier. The shah replied, “both the Kurds and the Iraqis knew that it was all an act and that the Iraqis had every intention of taking over Kurdistan.” The next day Alam reported to the shah that the Western newspapers were unanimously accusing Iran

²⁰⁷ Col. Issa Pejman in an interview with Habib Ladjevardi, 4 March 1983, Paris, in the HIOHP, Tape 1.

of selling out the Kurds. The shah replied, “We couldn’t station our troops there indefinitely and keep fighting forever.” But when Alam saw the shah the next morning, he found him in poor spirits and deep in thought. He suspected that the accusations of betrayal weighed heavily on the shah’s mind.²⁰⁸

As the ink on the Algiers communiqué was still drying, Nasiri was dispatched to inform Barzani that the Iran-Iraq border would soon be closed and he could either surrender to the Iraqis or go into exile in Iran, where he and his *Pesh Merga* would be allowed to seek safe-haven if they agreed to disarm.²⁰⁹ According to David Kimche, then a senior Mossad official, the Israelis stationed in Kurdistan watched with dismay as the Iranian artillery battalions that were holding the Iraqis at bay withdrew across the border.²¹⁰ Kimche claims that the Israeli government had no warning of the Algiers agreement, but this seems unlikely given Kissinger’s conversation with Dinitz on 22 February. However, it appears that this information never filtered down to the Israelis on the ground in Kurdistan. Eliezer Tsafir, the Mossad liaison with Barzani, had to quickly flee across the border into Iran to avoid being captured by the Iraqis. He later recalled that, “I was cursing Iran all the way to Tehran. I was terribly disappointed.”²¹¹ The shah now had to tell his partners in the Kurdish operation why he had taken the decision to abandon the Kurds, without consulting them. He consistently took the line that he saw Iraq’s willingness to negotiate on the Shatt as a historic opportunity to both resolve the border dispute and to draw Iraq away from the Soviet Union. He told Ambassador Parsons that he

²⁰⁸ Alam, *Yad‘dashtha-yi ‘Alam*, Vol. IV, pp. 340-345.

²⁰⁹ U.S. House of Representatives, *CIA: the Pike Report*, p. 213. Jim Hoagland, ‘The Kurds Betrayed: Web of Deceit’, *The Washington Post*, 25 March 1975.

²¹⁰ Kimche, *The Last Option*, p. 195.

²¹¹ Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, p. 56.

had been “astonished” by Hussein’s willingness to make concessions on the Shatt, particularly at a time when the Kurds were “ready to admit defeat”.²¹²

Through Helms, the shah conveyed a message to Kissinger outlining the background to his decision. On 2 March, the shah explained, he had received an Egyptian envoy, Ashraf Marwan, who had just come from Baghdad with a message from Saddam Hussein saying that Iraq would move away from the Soviet camp if Iran ended the war in Kurdistan. When he met with Hussein in Algiers he struck a deal with the Iraqi strongman, who promised that Iraq would observe a cease-fire until 31 March to give Barzani and his troops enough time to surrender or go into exile in Iran. Iran and Iraq would then cooperate to ensure that Communists did not fill the vacuum left by Barzani in Kurdistan. “How it will work out,” the shah conceded, “I obviously do not know. But I feel that I had to take a chance since otherwise the Kurdish cause would be hopeless in the relatively near future and I might be accused of having destroyed a chance for getting the Iraqis out of the Soviet orbit.”²¹³ The shah omitted from his message any reference to the Iraqi concessions on the Shatt, which were the real prize that he had secured. Instead, he sought to justify his actions to his American partners in Cold War terms, arguing that it was his intention to draw Iraq away from the Soviet camp. Helms, for one, saw the agreement as a *fait accompli* and advised Washington to send the shah a congratulatory message.²¹⁴

²¹² Parsons (Tehran) to the Foreign Office, 10 March 1975, FCO 8/2535.

²¹³ Telegram TOHAK38 from Helms to Kissinger, 8 March 1975, DDRAC, Box 9, GRFL.

²¹⁴ Telegram 2254 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 10 March 1975, NSA, PCFMESA, Box 14, GRFL.

News of the Algiers agreement reached Kissinger while he was preparing for one of his regular shuttle diplomacy trips to the Middle East. He would later recall that he was “stunned” by the news, but it is difficult to understand why it came as such a shock to him. Just a month earlier he had described the shah to President Ford as a “cold-blooded realist”, and the shah himself had floated the idea of an Algiers agreement with Saddam Hussein during their meeting in Zurich.²¹⁵ Kissinger had been kept informed of the ongoing Iran-Iraq talks by the State Department since 1973 and almost every observer of these discussions had concluded that a *qui pro quo* on the Shatt and the Kurds was likely.²¹⁶ Yet Kissinger maintains that, “The Shah had not mentioned that a deal was imminent or that he would acquiesce in total Iraqi control of the Kurdish era.” The most likely explanation for this lapse in Kissinger’s judgement was that the secretary of state simply had too many domestic and international fires to extinguish to pay much attention to Kurdish affairs, and so he placed his faith in the shah’s judgement. In his memoirs Kissinger writes, “Only outsiders are in a position to reflect on events freed of the constraints of time....There was very little time available for any systematic review of the options in faraway Kurdish areas.”²¹⁷ The documentary evidence suggests that the Algiers communiqué did indeed come as a surprise to Kissinger, who hurriedly cabled Scowcroft on 9 March to cancel arrangements for a scheduled visit by Kurdish emissaries to Washington later that month.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 7 February 1975, NSA, MEMCONS, Box 9, GRFL.

²¹⁶ Briefing paper for President Nixon prepared by the Department of State, July 1973, and Memorandum from Kissinger to President Nixon, 23 July 1973, NPM, NSCF, VIP Visits, Box 920.

²¹⁷ Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, pp. 590, 593-594.

²¹⁸ Telegram HAKTO16 from Kissinger to Scowcroft, 9 March 1975, DDRAC, Box 9, GRFL.

Kissinger was scheduled to fly to Israel on 9 March from Damascus, where he had met with Syrian President Hafez al-Assad. On the way to the airport, Syrian Foreign Minister Abd al-Halim Khaddam told him that the end of the war in Kurdistan was good news for the Arabs: “solving that problem has left a lot satisfaction with us.”²¹⁹ With the diminished Iranian threat, the Iraqi army could now turn its attention to Israel. Arriving in Jerusalem, Prime Minister Rabin told Kissinger that the shah had “sold out the Kurds”, and by extension, Israel. Kissinger replied, “I warned the Shah against it and he did it anyway.” Rabin was worried that the shah’s decision reflected “a whole different outlook” by the shah towards Israel. Rabin’s concerns were well founded, given that Iran had extended nearly \$1 billion in loans and aid to Egypt in 1974. “As Iran’s ties with the Arabs deepen,” the CIA had concluded in January 1975, “its Israeli connections will probably become an increasing liability.”²²⁰ Kissinger sympathised with the Israelis’ anger, telling Rabin, “I was shaken too by the Iranian decision. Because we had participated in it too. The brutality of it.” He told Rabin that he had warned the shah, “it was a bad idea – particularly the idea that he believed the assurances that no Communist would be put in [Kurdistan].”²²¹

Barzani sent a message to Kissinger on 10 March pleading with the secretary of state to help the Kurds: “our hearts bleed to see that an immediate by-product of this agreement is the destruction of our defenceless people in an

²¹⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, Damascus, 9 March 1975, 01522, DNSA.

²²⁰ Intelligence Memorandum prepared by the CIA entitled, ‘Iran’s Arab World Initiatives and their Implications’, 14 January 1975, CREST. Intelligence Memorandum prepared by the CIA entitled, ‘Iran: The Shah’s Lending Binge’, December 1974, 00918, DNSA.

²²¹ Memorandum of Conversation, Jerusalem, 9 March 1975, NSA, Kissinger Reports on USSR, China and Middle East Discussions, Box 3, GRFL.

unprecedented manner...Our movement and people are being destroyed in an unbelievable way with silence from everyone.”²²² Drove of *Pesh Merga* and their families were trying to flee Iraq to safety in Iran before the border was sealed on 31 March, swelling the numbers of Kurdish refugees already there.²²³ Kissinger was angry at the shah’s “deceptive methods” and considered Iran’s actions “brutal and indefensible.” But even the political realist, he accepted that, “in terms of a cold-blooded assessment of Iran’s security, the Shah’s decision was as understandable as it was painful.” The shah had left Kissinger with little choice but to acquiesce to the abandonment of the Kurds. Colby explained to Kissinger that without Iranian participation, the CIA had neither the resources nor the logistical capability to carry on the Kurdish operation. The CIA planned to make one last monthly payment to Barzani, in the hope of preventing “undesirable indiscretions” by the angry Kurds.²²⁴ Kissinger was keenly aware that at a time when Congress was cutting off assistance for beleaguered U.S. allies in Indochina, the American public was hardly likely to support a massive increase in U.S. assistance for a guerrilla war in Kurdistan. He ignored Barzani’s desperate appeals because, as he would later explain, “there was nothing I could say”. Crucially, at no point did Kissinger consider threatening Iran with any sanctions on arms sales to pressure the shah to resume supplies to the Kurds: “Our commitment to the defense of Iran had not been a favor to be withdrawn when we were displeased but an expression of our own

²²² Telegram 1188 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 10 March 1975, NSA, KSWWOF, Box 19, GRFL.

²²³ Weekly Summary No. 0013/75 prepared by the CIA, 28 March 1975, CREST.

²²⁴ Memorandum prepared by the CIA for Scowcroft, 13 March 1975, NSA, KSWWOF, Box 19, GRFL.

geopolitical interest.”²²⁵ Instead, he meekly sent a message to the shah, saying that, “This is obviously a matter for Your Majesty to decide in the best interests of your nation. Our policy remains as always to support Iran as a close and staunch friend of the United States.”²²⁶

Barzani refused to give up the fight and sought an audience with the shah, who, according to Alam, was not keen to receive him. Alam sensed that the shah was embarrassed to speak to Barzani even though he felt that “in truth we were the ones doing the fighting.” The shah received Barzani on the afternoon of 11 March 1975, exactly five years after Barzani had defied the shah by signing a peace accord with Saddam Hussein. The shah told Barzani that the Algiers agreement was vital to Iran and promised to give him and his *Pesh Merga* sanctuary in Iran, but refused to allow any Kurdish civilians to accompany them.²²⁷ As Barzani returned to Kurdistan, both Helms and the CIA station chief in Tehran, Arthur Callahan, feared that the angry Kurds might reveal the CIA’s covert role in the Kurdish war.²²⁸ Helms warned Kissinger that something must be done to placate the “distressed and disconsolate” Barzani, if Kissinger wanted to avoid a “batch of unpleasant publicity”.²²⁹ But all that the secretary of state could offer Barzani, in a message that was relayed to the Kurdish representative in Tehran on 17 March, was his “great admiration” and “prayers” for the Kurds and a promise to intervene with the Iranians. Kissinger instructed Helms to “find a tactful way” to make the shah understand how embarrassing it would be “if there is a massacre and Barzani

²²⁵ Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, pp. 594-596.

²²⁶ Memorandum from Scowcroft to Helms, 10 March 1975, NSA, KSWWOF, Box 19, GRFL.

²²⁷ Alam, *Yad'dashtha-yi 'Alam*, Vol. IV, pp. 326-327, 359.

²²⁸ Randal, *After Such Knowledge*, p. 166.

²²⁹ Backchannel Message from Helms to Scowcroft, 10 March 1975, CIA-Helms.

charges that he has been let down.”²³⁰ The fighting in Kurdistan continued as some Kurdish forces refused to surrender, while Barzani remained near the Iranian border, paralysed by indecision in his moment of defeat.²³¹ Finally, on 21 March, he ordered an end to all Kurdish resistance and on the night of 27-28 March he and his entourage crossed into exile in Iran. As the cease-fire expired on 1 April, the Iraqi army pushed forward into the heart of Kurdish territory, meeting very little resistance, finally reaching the Iranian border for the first time since 1961. The Iraqis now set about establishing a *cordon sanitaire* along their border with Iran and Turkey, raising hundreds of Kurdish villages and forcefully resettling thousands of Kurds in other parts of the country.²³² For Barzani, this was a repeat of the events of December 1946, following the collapse of Mahabad. Nearly three decades later, he once again found himself defeated and in exile.

Kissinger and the Shah in the Shadow of Algiers

While the dust was still settling on the battlefields of Kurdistan, the foreign ministers of Iran and Iraq met in Tehran on 15 March 1975 to begin negotiations on a treaty that would codify the Algiers communiqué. The détente between the two countries proceeded, with official visits by Premier Hoveyda to Iraq in March and by Saddam Hussein to Iran in April.²³³ Finally, on 13 June the Baghdad Treaty was signed, which divided the Shatt al-Arab between Iran and Iraq along the *thalweg*.

²³⁰ Telegram HAKTO 52 from Kissinger to Scowcroft, 15 March 1975, and Telegram TOHAK141 from Helms to Kissinger, 19 March 1975, DDRAC, Box 9, GRFL.

²³¹ Telegram 2272 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 11 March 1975, NSA, PCFMESA, Box 14, GRFL. Jim Hoagland, ‘The Death Of a People’, *The Washington Post*, 6 April 1975.

²³² McDowall, *A Modern History*, pp. 338-340; O’Ballance, *The Kurdish Struggle*, pp. 98-99.

²³³ Temple (Baghdad) to McCluney (London), 5 April 1975, and Westmacott (Tehran) to Williams (London), 7 May 1975, FCO 8/2546.

As thousands of Kurdish refugees returned to Iraq from Iran to face an uncertain future, Barzani remained in exile in Iran. The shah was assailed in the American press for leaving the Kurds to be “obscurely hanged”, as C. L. Sulzberger wrote in *The New York Times*.²³⁴ The opinion page of *The Washington Post* concluded that after the Algiers agreement, “Just about everyone comes out ahead except the Kurds, who are mourning their ravaged hopes and their dead.”²³⁵ The shah tried to explain his actions to the American public by drawing an analogy with the U.S. decision to withdraw its support for South Vietnam. He told Joseph Kraft, a sympathetic columnist, that the Kurds “were making no progress in the war. They were running, not as fast as the South Vietnamese but nearly as fast. We Iranians would have to do the fighting. I decided I didn’t want a war with Iraq at time when the Near East was a powder keg and the Russians supported Iraq and the United States suffered from a Watergate complex.”²³⁶ As will be discussed in the next chapter, it was easy for the U.S. media to portray the shah as the villain of the Kurdish episode, at a time when the American public, the U.S. Congress, and even some in the Ford administration were turning against him on questions of human rights, arms sales, and rising oil prices.²³⁷ Indeed, when the issue of a presidential visit to Iran came up in July, the NSC staff advised against a visit by Ford, arguing that, “the high visibility given to our closing relations with the Shah, about whose

²³⁴ C. L. Sulzberger, ‘To Be Obscurely Hanged’, *The New York Times*, 12 March 1975.

²³⁵ ‘The Kurds Have No Friends’, *The Washington Post*, 25 March 1975.

²³⁶ Joseph Kraft, ‘What Restrains the Shah?’, *The Washington Post*, 27 April 1975.

²³⁷ See, Cooper, ‘Showdown at Doha’.

policies and long-term ambitions there are many questions, has created increasing doubts and resistance in Congress concerning our policies toward Iran.”²³⁸

Despite the growing public criticism of the shah in the United States, Kissinger remained committed to the U.S.-Iran partnership that had been forged under the Nixon Doctrine. Preparing Ford for his first ever meeting with the shah in May 1975, Kissinger advised the president that, “I see the Shah as playing an increasingly important role in the Persian Gulf, the Middle East, South Asia, and further afield. He may have some excessive ideas of his importance and some people consider him arrogant, but there is no gainsaying the sharply rising economic and military strength of which he disposes.” Kissinger warned Ford that the shah was “upset by Congressional and American public criticism”, so he was coming to Washington to “test the firmness and reliability of his ties with the U.S., on which he has so heavily staked his position over the past three decades.”²³⁹ Ford met with the shah in the Oval Office on 15 and 16 May 1975, making him the sixth U.S. president to welcome the shah to the White House. The shah was angry with the American media’s portrayal of his decision at Algiers, telling Ford, “I have to say this in the face of all the press reports that I abandoned them. They weren’t fighting – we were. The Kurds weren’t fighting. Sadat, Hussein, Boudemiene [sic] said ‘Give them [Iraq] a chance to cut loose from the Soviet Union and adopt a more independent policy.’ So at Algiers I had talks which settled the border and opened the way for Iraq to be more independent of the Soviet Union.”²⁴⁰

²³⁸ Memorandum from Oakley to Scowcroft, 17 July 1975, NSA, PCFMESA, Box 13, GRFL.

²³⁹ Memorandum from Kissinger to President Ford, 7 May 1975, NSA, Presidential Briefing Material for VIP Visits, Box 9, GRFL.

²⁴⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 15 May 1975, NSA, MEMCONS, Box 11, GRFL.

When reports emerged during the shah's visit that Iraq had begun executing some Kurds, Kissinger shrugged off the news by telling his senior staff, "In fact, it's inevitable, sooner or later. It doesn't surprise me."²⁴¹ But public sympathy, stoked by the media, was with the Kurds. For example, shortly after the shah's visit, Ford received a letter from George Meany, president of the AFL-CIO, the largest federation of trade unions in the United States, asking the president to intervene to help the Iraqi Kurds. Kissinger dismissed the appeal, advising Ford that "the Iraqis are making an effort to treat the Kurds humanely."²⁴² But recriminations over the plight of the Kurds continued and the blame would soon be directed at Kissinger himself. Watergate had shattered the public's trust in government, particularly the CIA, and Congress took the opportunity to assert greater oversight of the intelligence community.²⁴³ Much to Kissinger's fury, a U.S. House of Representatives' Select Committee on Intelligence, led by Rep. Otis Pike, began investigating a variety of recent covert operations, including the CIA's support for the Kurds. When Kissinger was preparing to testify before the hostile Pike Committee in October, he told Ford that revealing the Kurdish operation would "infuriate the Shah" and he worried that the Committee was determined "to show I am the evil genius."²⁴⁴ As Kissinger feared, it was not long before *in camera* testimony to the Pike Committee was leaked to the media. In November, revelations of U.S. acquiescence in the shah's decision to abandon the Kurds hit the

²⁴¹ Minutes of the Secretary's Principals' and Regionals' Staff Meeting, 16 May 1975, 01624, DNSA.

²⁴² Memorandum from Kissinger to President Ford, 19 May 1975, Presidential Handwriting File, Box 6, GRFL.

²⁴³ See, Cynthia M. Nolan, 'Seymour Hersh's Impact on The CIA', *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 12/1 (1999), pp. 18-34.

²⁴⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 31 October 1975, NSA, MEMCONS, Box 16, GRFL.

headlines.²⁴⁵ Some in Barzani's camp, angry that the U.S. had done nothing to help them, now began publicly pointing the finger at Kissinger.²⁴⁶

But the worst was yet to come. The leaks from the Pike Committee included embarrassing details of the gifts that Barzani had sent Kissinger, including Persian carpets and a gold necklace, which was a wedding present for Kissinger's bride, Nancy Maginnes.²⁴⁷ Then, on 5 February 1976, William Safire attacked the secretary of state in his column in *The New York Times*, accusing Kissinger of being "callous" and "amoral" for advising Ford to remain silent in the face of the shah's "unconscionable sellout" of the "Shah-forsaken" Kurds. Quoting from the leaked final report of the Pike Committee, Safire claimed that Kissinger had told Committee investigators, "Covert action should not be confused with missionary work."²⁴⁸ As the White House and the State Department denied the accusations, a furious Kissinger worked the phones that afternoon to limit the damage to his reputation.²⁴⁹ At 2.50 p.m. he spoke with journalist John Osborne: "The assumption has to be when people are in high office they are trying to do the right thing for their country. The picture that this paints of the senior officials has to be destructive of public morality." When Osborne told him that he thought the Kurds had been "let down", Kissinger responded that "Once the Iranians stopped supporting them, there

²⁴⁵ John Crewdson, 'U.S. Said to Arm Iraqi Kurds in 72', *The New York Times*, 2 November 1975.

²⁴⁶ Joseph Fitchett, 'Kurds Say CIA Betrayed Them', *The Washington Post*, 13 November 1975.

²⁴⁷ 'Kurdish Rebels in Iraq Gave Three Rugs to Kissinger', *The New York Times*, 26 January 1976; Maxine Cheshire, 'Now You See Them...', *The Washington Post*, 29 January 1976. See also, Memorandum from Rodman to Covey, 10 November 1975, and Memorandum from Catto to Scowcroft, 12 February 1976, NSA, KSWWOF, Box 19, GRFL; Cable from Koplowitz to Helms, 26 March 1976, and Cable from Blee to Helms, 30 March 1976, CIA-Helms.

²⁴⁸ William Safire, 'Mr. Ford's Secret Sellout', *The New York Times*, 5 February 1976.

²⁴⁹ Memorandum prepared for Ron Nessen entitled 'Safire Column on U.S. Policy Toward the Kurds', 5 February 1976, Ron Nessen Papers, Box 123, GRFL. 'Column by Safire on Kurds Assailed', *The New York Times*, 6 February 1976.

was no technical means for us to get in there. It would have cost \$500 million to do it as a unilateral effort.”²⁵⁰ At 3 p.m. Kissinger called Israeli Ambassador Dinitz to ask him to pressure Safire to back off. Kissinger asked Dinitz, “Do you think you could get your friend under some sort of control. What we did for the Kurds was not exactly against the interests of Israel.” Dinitz said that Safire had a grudge against Kissinger, and he doubted that he could exert much influence over the *Times* columnist.²⁵¹

Safire had worked with Kissinger in the White House as Nixon’s speechwriter and had been recruited by the *Times* in 1973 to refute charges that the newspaper was biased against Nixon and the Republican Party. But when Safire learned that his White House phone had been bugged since 1969 on Kissinger’s orders, he became a trenchant critic of the secretary of state.²⁵² The pressure on Kissinger kept mounting as the entire final report of the Pike Committee was leaked to the media in February 1976. Safire was unrelenting in his attacks and hit back at Kissinger’s denials on 12 February, citing specific documents mentioned in the Pike Report.²⁵³ At a press conference that day Kissinger was confronted with the question of whether he would consider resigning. He lashed out at the Pike Committee, accusing them of a “new version of McCarthyism”.²⁵⁴ When Safire launched another salvo at Kissinger on 12 April, this time over the removal of

²⁵⁰ TELCON between Kissinger and Osborn, 12 February 1976, 2.50pm, DNSA.

²⁵¹ TELCON between Kissinger and Dinitz, 12 February 1976, 3.00pm, U.S. Department of State Electronic Reading Room, Kissinger Transcripts (State-Kissinger), available at: <<http://foia.state.gov/SearchColls/CollsSearch.asp>>.

²⁵² Aaron Latham, ‘The Kissinger-Safire Feud’, *New York Magazine*, 29 March 1976, pp. 34-36.

²⁵³ William Safire, ‘Son of ‘Secret Sellout’, *The New York Times*, 12 February 1976.

²⁵⁴ Bernard Gwertzman, ‘Kissinger Assails Report By Pike as ‘Malicious Lie’, *The New York Times*, 13 February 1976. Murrey Marder, ‘Kissinger Hits Leaks of Pike Report’, *The Washington Post*, 13 February 1976.

classified documents from the White House, Ford told Kissinger, “That Safire article is the damndest thing I ever saw” and asked, “Why is Safire so vicious?” Kissinger replied, “He thinks I was responsible for tapping him.... I didn’t even know he was being tapped, as is the case with several others.”²⁵⁵ Safire’s accusation that Kissinger had cynically betrayed the Kurds would continue to dog the secretary of state. Ford joked with the Kissinger that, “You have a real friend in Safire”, while Kissinger’s long-time journalist friend Ted Koppel asked if Safire “is going to write that on your tombstone.”²⁵⁶

And so the abandonment of the Kurds was added to the litany of charges arrayed against Henry Kissinger by his critics, but in reality this was neither the first nor the last time that the Kurds would fall victim to great power politics.²⁵⁷ Barzani, suffering from cancer, was allowed to secretly visit the United States in the summer of 1975 for medical treatment and to finally settle in Washington’s Virginia suburbs the following year, where he lived a life of exile.²⁵⁸ Barzani was a living reminder to Kissinger that he had steered the United States into the war in Kurdistan at the shah’s behest in 1972, and that he had been forced to accept the shah’s abandonment of the Kurds in 1975, for which he was now being held responsible. Kissinger complained to his senior State Department staff that the charges against him of abandoning the Kurds were unfair: “What do they say we should have done without the Iranians? How could we have supported him if we had had the means?”

²⁵⁵ William Safire, ‘Mr. Ford’s Cover-Up’, *The New York Times*, 12 April 1976; Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 12 April 1976, NSA, MEMCONS, Box 19, GRFL.

²⁵⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 8 July 1976, NSA, MEMCONS, Box 20, GRFL. TELCON between Kissinger and Koppel, 9 July 1976, 12.30pm, State-Kissinger.

²⁵⁷ See, Louise Fawcett, ‘Down But Not Out? The Kurds in International Politics’, *Review of International Studies*, 27 (2001), pp. 109-118.

²⁵⁸ David A. Korn, ‘The Last Years of Mustafa Barzani’, *Middle East Quarterly*, 1/2 (1994).

He asked if Barzani was “running around town telling people that the fault really ends up here at the Department of State?” Notoriously thin-skinned when it came to criticism, Kissinger stuck to the line that the Kurdish operation “couldn’t have been sustained without the introduction of Iranian regular forces there at that point. This is what I recall the judgement was.”²⁵⁹ Twenty-three years later, in the last volume of his memoirs, he wrote that that same critics who had called for the U.S. to abandon South Vietnam had then “salved their conscience” by attacking him for abandoning the Kurds. He accepted no responsibility for the fate of the Kurds, writing instead that their tragedy was “imposed” by history, geography, and the weakening of the United States thanks to the Vietnam War and Watergate. He begrudgingly acknowledged the lessons of the Kurdish episode for the United States: “the need to clarify objectives at the outset; the importance of relating goals to available means; the need to review an operation periodically; and the importance of coherence among allies.”²⁶⁰ Implicit in these ‘lessons’ was an acknowledgement that the Iranian tail had wagged the American dog.

Conclusion

In 1975 the Pike Committee concluded that the partnership forged between the United States and Iran under the Nixon Doctrine meant that, “Our national interest had thus become effectively meshed with his [the shah’s].” The report characterised Nixon and Kissinger as the shah’s “junior American partners” in the Kurdish episode, and concurred with Kissinger’s judgement that the Ford administration had

²⁵⁹ Minutes of the Secretary’s Staff Meeting, 30 July 1976, 02000, DNSA.

²⁶⁰ Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, pp. 578, 596.

“no choice but to acquiesce” to the shah’s decision to abandon the Kurds.²⁶¹ Thirty years later, many of the same documents that were available to the Pike Committee investigators have been declassified. This documentary record confirms the findings of the report and provides an interesting window into the nature and dynamics of U.S.-Iran relations during this period of the Cold War. The shah’s role in the American decision to enter the Kurdish conflict in 1972, to escalate and sustain American support for the Kurds in 1973 and 1974, and to cut off assistance to the Kurds in 1975, are all consistent with the nature and dynamics of a Cold War ‘partnership’ between a superpower and a Third World actor, as discussed in the *Chapter One*. As a consequence of the shah’s lobbying, the Nixon administration broke with a long-standing U.S. policy of non-intervention in Kurdistan to back Barzani in 1972. The decision to intervene was taken at the behest of the shah and against all the advice that the White House was receiving from the State Department, the CIA, and the NSC staff. Consistent with a Cold War partnership, Nixon and Kissinger had recognised Iran’s regional leadership under the Nixon Doctrine and deferred to the shah’s judgement on the need to maintain a stalemate in the war between Barzani’s *Pesh Merga* and the Iraqi army. When the shah told Nixon and Kissinger in Tehran in May 1972 that it was vital to prevent a Kurdish collapse in order to contain Soviet influence in the region, they readily agreed, regardless of what their own advisers were telling them. The shah persuaded Nixon and Kissinger that the Iran-Iraq confrontation in Kurdistan was in fact a battle in the global Cold War, thereby drawing the United States into the conflict alongside Iran.

²⁶¹ U.S. House of Representatives, *CIA: the Pike Report*, p. 198.

The purpose of the American role in Iran's Kurdish effort was to assure Barzani that the shah would not abandon the Kurds once they came close to achieving their goal of autonomy. But Washington never enjoyed sufficient leverage over the shah, or played a big enough role in the operation, to be able to provide Barzani with such a guarantee. From its inception, the CIA's planning focused on a limited operation intended to serve the Iranian goal of maintaining the stalemate in Kurdistan, rather than achieving Barzani's aim of Kurdish autonomy. As Kissinger later acknowledged, "the lesson to be learned concerns the original commitment, not the final outcome. The United States should have determined from the start how far it could reasonably go in helping the Kurds, and should have made these limits unequivocally clear before offering assistance."²⁶² The question then arises; why did Barzani accept such hollow assurances from the United States? While some see him as naïve for trusting Nixon and Kissinger, the evidence suggests that he was fully aware of the risk he was taking by siding with the shah, but he trusted Saddam Hussein and the Ba'th even less. In a 1973 interview with Jim Hoagland he asked for a *public* commitment by the United States to "protect us from the wolves", a year after the *private* assurances that Helms had given his envoys.²⁶³ Off the record, Barzani told Hoagland, "We do not trust the Shah. I trust America. America is too great a power to betray a small people like the Kurds." Barzani's mistake was that he did not understand the nature and dynamics of the U.S.-Iran relationship. He thought that the shah was a client of the United States and would never abandon the Kurds without a green light from Washington. As one

²⁶² Henry Kissinger, 'Hard Choices to Make in the Gulf', *The Washington Post*, 5 May 1991.

²⁶³ Jim Hoagland, 'The Kurds Gird For Another War', *The Washington Post*, 24 June 1973.

of his lieutenants recalled, Barzani “believed nothing was done in the Middle East, or most of the world, without the support of the U.S.”²⁶⁴ By underestimating Iran’s autonomy, he overestimated Nixon and Kissinger’s leverage over the shah.

It was the shah, not Nixon and Kissinger, who controlled the ebb and flow of the Kurdish operation throughout 1973 and 1974. At his request, the United States agreed to escalate its support for the Kurds in July 1973, at the same time that the shah was exploring the idea of a settlement with Iraq. When the shah vetoed the Israeli request for the Kurds to launch an offensive during the October War, Kissinger readily concurred. Unlike a relationship between a superpower patron and a Third World client, all of these decisions were made by the shah without any real consideration of how these choices would impact American interests. Furthermore, throughout the Kurdish episode the shah’s direct access to the White House allowed him to cut the naysayers in the State Department out of the loop, a task in which Kissinger was happily complicit. The shah and Kissinger directed the secret operation through SAVAK and the CIA, with Helms as their intermediary. The extreme secrecy surrounding the operation prevented any dissenting views from reaching Presidents Nixon or Ford, which might have caused them to think twice before meddling in Iraq’s civil war. But this secrecy also allowed Kissinger to keep the operation going at a time of profound domestic opposition to any expansion of America’s overseas commitments. The shah’s decision to abandon the Kurds at Algiers, despite Kissinger’s objections, and Washington’s inability to do anything other than to acquiesce to this *fait accompli*, expose how little leverage the United States enjoyed over Iran in 1975. Kissinger later wrote that, “I thus had to bear

²⁶⁴ Randal, *After Such Knowledge*, p. 157.

witness to the enslavement of yet another friendly people, aware that, while the Shah's conduct could be used as an alibi, our paralyzing internal crisis had been a contributing cause." As the media heaped scorn on Kissinger, it must have been apparent to the secretary of state that the shah had used both the Kurds and the United States to secure Iran's goal of sovereignty over the eastern half of the Shatt al-Arab. There is no evidence that the shah, for his part, was much concerned about the mess he had landed Kissinger in. When Alam had once spoken to the shah of Kissinger's bad press, the shah had replied, "this is what happens to someone who is so arrogant."²⁶⁵ But as we shall see in the next chapter, despite Kissinger's public humiliation, he remained committed to the shah and the U.S.-Iran partnership.

²⁶⁵ Alam, *Yad'dashtha-yi 'Alam*, Vol. IV, p. 211.

CHAPTER FOUR:
U.S.-IRAN NUCLEAR NEGOTIATIONS, 1974-1976

Richard Nixon's resignation in 1974 presaged a period of decline in U.S.-Iran relations. Henry Kissinger had sustained Nixon's policy of Iranian primacy throughout the turmoil of Watergate and he would defend the U.S. partnership with the shah during the presidency of Gerald Ford, against critics within the Republican administration and opponents in the Democratic-controlled Congress. This chapter explores the dynamics of U.S.-Iran relations during this period of decline, through a history of the negotiations between the shah and the Ford administration for an agreement on American nuclear exports to Iran.¹ The negotiations began with much enthusiasm in May 1974 in the final months of Nixon's presidency, but ultimately failed to produce an agreement by the time Ford and Kissinger were preparing to leave office in December 1976. This chapter is concerned with the question of why the United States and Iran failed to reach agreement on a nuclear accord during Ford's presidency. The detailed historical study of these negotiations presented here suggests that the main obstacle to a nuclear accord was the reluctance of the United States to allow Iran to reprocess spent nuclear fuel, a sensitive nuclear technology that would also allow Iran to stockpile plutonium for a nuclear weapons program. Driven largely by domestic political considerations, the Ford administration tried to impose stringent nuclear safeguards on Iran, which went beyond Iran's commitments as a party to the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The shah

¹ This chapter builds on the work of William Burr, who is responsible for locating and making available many of the U.S. government documents cited here. See, Burr, 'A Brief History'.

rejected these additional safeguards as a violation of Iranian sovereignty and instead turned to suppliers in Europe for Iran's nuclear energy program. The U.S.-Iran nuclear talks failed because the Ford administration reverted to treating Iran as a client, rather than a partner, of the United States. Under Ford, the shah no longer exercised the same influence in the White House as he had enjoyed under his friend Nixon. However, Washington's inability to impose additional safeguards on Tehran suggests that although the U.S.-Iran partnership faltered under Ford, the shah's autonomy from the United States endured.

This chapter begins by introducing the history of Iran's nuclear program, which began in 1957 as a modest nuclear research project and expanded dramatically after 1974 in the context of Iran's 'big push' for industrialisation. The primary focus of the chapter is on the course of the U.S.-Iran nuclear negotiations between 1974 and 1976, spanning both the Nixon and Ford administrations. Throughout this period a growing concern with the spread of nuclear weapons, following India's 1974 nuclear test, and a popular view of the shah as a megalomaniac responsible for soaring oil prices combined to make the idea of nuclear exports to Iran unpopular among the American public, the U.S. Congress, and critics of the shah within the Ford administration. These domestic political considerations limited President Ford's ability to negotiate an agreement for nuclear exports to Iran. Under Nixon, the shah's close personal relationship with the president had buffered decisions on Iran policy from the shah's critics both within and outside the administration. But the shah had no such relationship with Ford, who proved to be far more responsive to these critics than Nixon had been. In a

year-long process, from April 1975 to April 1976, Kissinger worked to build a consensus in favour of a nuclear deal with Iran, which would address both Iran's desire for mastery of the complete nuclear cycle and the worry within both the Ford administration and the Congress that the shah was seeking to build nuclear weapons. But as the final section of the chapter shows, despite efforts by both Kissinger and the shah to bridge this nuclear divide, the politics of nuclear proliferation in Washington prevented a nuclear accord from being reached ahead of the 1976 U.S. presidential elections.

The Origins of Iran's Nuclear Program

Like many countries in the Third World, Iran's nuclear program began in the 1950s thanks to assistance from the United States under the 'Atoms for Peace' program, which sought to redirect the use of nuclear technology away from the nuclear arms race and towards peaceful civilian applications.² In December 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower pledged to the United Nations that his country would "devote its entire heart and mind to find the way by which the miraculous inventiveness of man shall not be dedicated to his death, but consecrated to his life."³ The United States would encourage the spread of civilian nuclear energy, which would be safeguarded by a new International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The United States and Iran signed an agreement on the civil uses of atomic energy in 1957, which would permit private American firms to build a small research reactor in

² Richard G. Hewlett and Jack M. Holt, *Atoms for Peace and War, 1953-1961: Eisenhower and the Atomic Energy Commission* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 305-325. See also, Joseph F. Pilat, Robert E. Pendley, and Charles K. Ebinger (eds.), *Atoms for Peace: an analysis after thirty years* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985).

³ 'Address Before the General Assembly of the United Nations on Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy,' New York City, December 8, 1953, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1953 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960), p. 256.

Tehran and would allow Iran to lease up to 6 kg of enriched uranium to fuel this reactor. Under Article IX of the agreement, Iran pledged that its nuclear program would not “be used for atomic weapons or for research on or development of atomic weapons, or for any other military purposes”.⁴ In 1964 a tri-lateral agreement was signed in Vienna between Iran, the United States, and the IAEA, placing Iran’s nuclear facilities and materials under IAEA safeguards.⁵ The 5 MW Tehran Research Reactor (TRR), built by a subsidiary of the General Dynamics Corporation, went on-line in 1967 and a year later Iran signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which was then ratified by Iran’s Majlis in 1970.

Despite growing international concern about nuclear proliferation in the 1960s following the French and Chinese nuclear tests, Iran’s modest program of nuclear research attracted little attention. Iran was not considered a significant proliferation risk; the shah was spending huge sums on conventional weapons for national defence and his nuclear facilities and materials were fully safeguarded by the IAEA under the NPT. He frequently assured visiting American dignitaries that Iran had no interest in provoking a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. But this assurance always came with the caveat that “should a country such as India develop [a] nuclear weapons capability at some future time, perhaps with Soviet assistance having China in mind, Iran would have to reconsider its present policy and would

⁴ ‘Agreement for Cooperation between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of Iran Concerning Civil Uses of Atomic Energy’, *United States Treaties and Other International Agreements*, Volume 10, Part 1, 1959 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960), pp. 733-738.

⁵ ‘Atomic Energy: Application of Safeguards by the IAEA to the United States-Iran Cooperation Agreement’, *Treaties and Other International Acts Series* 6390 (Washington U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968).

probably itself wish to develop a similar capability.”⁶ During Nixon’s presidency, a continuing disregard for Iran’s nuclear ambitions also reflected the administration’s general lack of concern with nuclear proliferation. Nixon and Kissinger were deeply sceptical that the NPT, which their Democratic predecessors had worked so hard to construct, would prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. They doubted that any pledge or treaty would ultimately inhibit states like India or Israel from going nuclear, given their intense security dilemmas.⁷ However, they were quite willing to accept, as Michael Brenner writes, “the facile opinion held in many circles...that the treaty had put a cap on the proliferation problem for the time being”, so as to avoid having to spend any political capital on defending the non-proliferation regime.⁸ In the case of Iran, this meant that concerns about nuclear proliferation rarely intruded into the administration’s deliberations of Iran policy during Nixon’s first term in office.

Washington’s quiet complacency about Iran’s nuclear program was shattered in 1974 when the shah announced plans for a dramatic expansion of Iran’s nuclear energy program, financed by soaring oil prices. The Arab oil boycott, launched in the midst of the October War, followed by OPEC’s decision in Tehran in December 1973 to raise oil prices, meant that Iran’s annual oil revenues more

⁶ Telegram 66 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 5 January 1972, NPM, NSCF, Country Files-Middle East, Box 602.

⁷ On the Johnson administration’s commitment to the non-proliferation regime see, Hal Brands, ‘Rethinking Nonproliferation: LBJ, the Gilpatric Committee, and U.S. National Security Policy’, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 8/2 (2006), pp. 83-113. On the Nixon administration’s proliferation pessimism see, Francis J. Gavin, ‘Nuclear Nixon: Ironies, Puzzles, and the Triumph of Realpolitik’ in Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston (eds.), *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 139-140.

⁸ Michael J. Brenner, *Nuclear Power and Non-Proliferation: The Remaking of U.S. Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 63.

than quadrupled in a single year from \$4.4 billion in 1973 to \$17.8 billion in 1974.⁹ Consequently, the total amount of public and private sector investment in Iran's Fifth Development Plan (1973-1977) was increased from roughly \$36.8 billion to \$69.6 billion.¹⁰ In his March 1974 *Norouz* (New Year) message, the shah announced that, "We shall, as fast as we can, enter the age of using the atom and other sources of energy in order to save oil for production of chemical and petrochemical products. We shall not use oil, this noble substance, as common fuel."¹¹ The shah launched what was, in effect, a crash program of nuclear energy production. A Swiss-trained nuclear physicist, Akbar Etemad, was quickly selected as the president of a new Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran (AEOI) and was charged with rapidly building, virtually from scratch, a full-scale civilian nuclear energy program.¹² The shah's reasoning for this decision, Etemad recalled, was that Iran's petroleum reserves were finite and that in order to meet the long-term energy needs of Iran's rapidly growing economy, the country would have to begin investing in a variety of alternative energy sources. The shah set a rather arbitrary national goal of 70,000 MW of electricity production by the 1990s. While most of this capacity was to come from Iran's vast reserves of natural gas and its hydroelectric dams, roughly 23,000 MW was to come from nuclear power plants.¹³ Instead of burning oil as a fuel, the shah wanted to use this 'noble substance' to

⁹ Skeet, *OPEC*, pp. 99-104, 240. OPEC is the acronym for the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

¹⁰ Hossein Razavi and Firouz Vakil, *The Political Environment of Economic Planning in Iran, 1971-1983: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic* (Boulder: Westview, 1984), p. 71, Table 4.1.

¹¹ Afkhami, *The Life and Times*, pp. 346-347.

¹² See, Abbas Milani, 'Akbar Etemad' in his *Eminent Persians: The Men and Women Who Made Modern Iran, 1941-1979*, Vol. I (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), pp. 134-138.

¹³ Akbar Etemad in an interview with Farrokh Ghaffari, 27 October 1982, Paris, Tape A-4B, in the FISOHC.

manufacture and export petrochemical products, which would be of far greater value to Iran's balance of payments than the crude oil they were made from.¹⁴

Few in the Iranian government were privy to the shah's thinking on nuclear matters. Given that the country was both awash in petroleum and still struggling to establish more elementary industries, some wondered if atomic energy was an extravagance divorced from Iran's economic realities. Khodadad Farmanfarmaian was director of the Plan and Budget Organisation, the body responsible for drafting the Fifth Development Plan.¹⁵ Widely regarded as both incorruptible and highly competent, he later recalled that nuclear energy was one of the many white elephants that he could not cut from the Plan because it was "very dear and close to his [the shah's] heart."¹⁶ Etemad, however, shrugged off these concerns, telling himself, "they must know something I don't know."¹⁷ The rationale behind the massive increase in expenditure in the Fifth Plan was that, with one 'Big Push' to industrialize Iran's economy, financed by the oil windfall, Iran could break out of the "vicious circles" of underdevelopment and join the ranks of the world's leading industrialised economies.¹⁸ Iran would have to move quickly, because although the resources existed for a crash program in nuclear energy in 1974, it was not clear if in four or five year's time those same resources would still be available. Etemad

¹⁴ Gholam Reza Afkhami (ed.), *San'at-e petroshimi-e iran: az aghaz to astane-ye enqelab* [The Evolution of Iran's Petrochemical Industry], Interview with Baqer Mostowfi, Managing Director of the National Iranian Petrochemical Company, 1964-1978, (Bethesda: Foundation for Iranian Studies, 2001)

¹⁵ See, Milani, 'Aziz, Khodadad, Maryam, & Sattareh Farmanfarma'ian' in his *Eminent Persians*, Vol. I, pp. 143-151.

¹⁶ Khodadad Farmanfarmaian, in an interview with Habib Ladjevardi, 19 January 1983, Cambridge, MA, Tape 15, Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University.

¹⁷ Akbar Etemad in an interview with Gholam Reza Afkhami, 5 September 1995, London, Tape C1-1A, in the FISOHC.

¹⁸ Razavi and Vakil, *The Political Environment*, pp. 66-67.

understood that the shah expected quick results; otherwise the monarch would lose both his interest in atomic energy and his faith in AEOI. “My duty was to convince the government,” Etemad recalled, “from His Majesty on down, that atomic energy was achievable, and in this way to secure His Majesty’s future support.”¹⁹

Thanks to the shah’s patronage, within three years AEOI rapidly grew into a bureaucracy of over 1,000 employees with an annual budget of more than \$1 billion. In November 1974, Iran reached preliminary agreements with Kraftwerk Union, a subsidiary of the German firm Siemens, to build two 1,200 MW nuclear reactors near Bushehr, to be completed in 1981 and 1982, and with Framatome of France to build another two 900 MW reactors on the Karun River between Ahvaz and Khorramshahr by 1983 and 1984. The enriched uranium that would fuel Iran’s nuclear reactors would be provided by EURODIF, a European conglomerate that was building an enrichment plant in France. After agreeing to help finance the construction of the plant with a \$1 billion loan, Iran would receive a 10 percent share in EURODIF and a similar share of the nuclear fuel that the plant would produce. Iran also looked to a variety of African countries as sources of uranium ore and signed a secret agreement with South Africa in October 1975 to purchase enriched uranium.²⁰

¹⁹ Akbar Etemad in an interview with Gholam Reza Afkhami, 11 April 1996, Bethesda, Tape C2-2B, in the FISOHC.

²⁰ Clyde H. Farnsworth, ‘France Gives Iran Stake in Uranium’, *The New York Times*, 4 January 1975. Memorandum prepared by the CIA, ‘Israel and Iran in Sub-Saharan Africa’, 19 June 1975, CREST. Thomas O’Toole, ‘S. Africa Set To Sell Iran Uranium Ore’, *The Washington Post*, 12 October 1975. Airgram A-76 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 15 April 1976; Airgram A-69 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 11 May 1977, Electronic Briefing Book No. 268 (EBB 268), NSA-GWU, available on-line at: <<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb268/index.htm>> .

The dubious economic rationale for Iran's nuclear program points to considerations of prestige and security behind the shah's quest for nuclear technology. The late 1960s saw a boom in the use of nuclear power in Europe, North America, and Japan.²¹ Furthermore, all five of the permanent member of the UN Security Council now possessed nuclear weapons. In this context, the shah's dream of Iran achieving military and economic parity with the great powers implied that Iran must also be a member of the nuclear club, with the capacity to produce nuclear energy and, if necessary, nuclear weapons. Although there is no evidence that the shah ever took a decision, even in his own mind, to actually build nuclear weapons, his advisers suspected that this was his ultimate goal. His closest confidante, Court Minister Asadollah Alam, recorded in his diary in November 1975 that, "His Majesty has a grand plan for Iran and I am sure that he is also thinking of developing the atomic bomb (although he repeatedly denies this)."²²

Etemad worried that the shah might not be aware of the technical barriers to using a civilian nuclear program for military ends. After giving the shah six months of weekly tutorials on the technical aspects of the nuclear program, he finally summoned the courage to ask whether AEOI should plan for a military program. The shah replied that he saw no place for nuclear weapons in Iran's defence doctrine. A regional nuclear arms race would only neutralise Iran's conventional military superiority over its neighbours, while a small nuclear arsenal would not deter the Soviet Union. But the shah gave Etemad his usual caveat that if a hostile regional power developed nuclear weapons, then Iran would have no choice but to

²¹ Walker, 'Nuclear Power', p. 218.

²² Asadollah Alam, *Yad'dashtha-yi 'Alam: virayish va muqaddamah az Alinaqi Alikhani* [The Alam Diaries: Edited by Alinaghi Alikhani], Vol. V: 1975-1976 (Bethesda: Ibex, c.1995), p. 361.

develop its own nuclear deterrent. Etemad recalled that nuclear weapons were a “taboo” subject in the AEOI, never to be openly discussed. However, he and his colleagues understood that it was their patriotic duty to develop the scientific know-how for a nuclear weapons program, in the event that it ever proved necessary to build such weapons. Etemad quietly approved budget allocations for dual-use projects, such as research into uranium enrichment, which might later prove useful for a weapons program.²³

The Long Shadow of India’s Nuclear Test

After the dramatic acceleration of Iran’s nuclear plans in 1974, American firms were conspicuous by their absence in Iran’s nuclear program. The United States was the world’s principal nuclear supplier and there was certainly no lack of interest on the part of Iran in securing access to American nuclear technology and materials. During an audience with the shah on 21 February 1974, World Bank President Robert McNamara ‘overheard’ the shah telling one of his ministers that Iran was interested in purchasing a 10,000 MW nuclear reactor and wondered if any American company was capable of building it.²⁴ Again, in early March, Fazlollah Akbari, deputy minister of science and higher education, approached the U.S. Embassy in Tehran asking for American help with the organizational and management aspects of Iran’s nuclear program.²⁵ Secretary of State Henry Kissinger responded enthusiastically to the Iranian overtures and established a task

²³ Akbar Etemad in an interview with Gholam Reza Afkhami, 5 September 1995, London, Tape C1-3A, in the FISOHC.

²⁴ Telegram 1477 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 23 February 1974, NPM, NSCF, Country Files-Middle East, Box 603.

²⁵ Telegram 1783 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 6 March 1974, AAD.

force in the State Department to plan for a U.S.-Iran Joint Commission that would institutionalise economic cooperation between the two countries in a variety of areas, including atomic energy. As discussed in the previous chapter, the U.S.-Iran partnership had been badly shaken by Watergate and relations with the shah were strained by the rise in oil prices following the October War. Kissinger was keen to take advantage of Iran's oil boom to benefit the U.S. balance of payments. The CIA's economic analysts thought that Kissinger might also be trying to "develop close US tie-ins with Iranian economic development which will give the US leverage in future oil-policy deliberations."²⁶ The Joint Commission was established during Kissinger's visit to Tehran in November 1974, and was co-chaired by him and Iranian Minister of Economy and Finance Hushang Ansary.²⁷

The shah's keen personal interest in Iran's nuclear program meant that nuclear cooperation quickly took on great importance in the U.S.-Iran relationship. Helms reported that when he had first broached the subject of a Joint Commission with the shah on 14 March 1974, "I had difficulty getting beyond the subject of nuclear power, because he wanted to get down to brass tacks on that right away." He reported to Kissinger that "there is no mistaking his preoccupation with satisfying his considerable ambitions in the nuclear field." Helms recalled that the shah's "eyes visibly brightened" when the ambassador mentioned some of the industrial applications of nuclear technology.²⁸ Unfortunately for the shah, the

²⁶ Memorandum for the Record prepared by the acting chief of the Near East/Africa Branch of the CIA, 'Briefing of State in Preparation for Commission on Cooperation with Iran', 13 September 1974, CREST.

²⁷ Telegram 1546 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 26 February 1974; Telegram 48689 from the Department of State to the Embassy in Iran, 12 March 1974, AAD.

²⁸ Telegram 2091 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 15 March 1974, AAD.

dramatic expansion of Iran's nuclear program was announced just months before India's 'peaceful nuclear explosion' on 18 May 1974, which started a panic in Washington about nuclear proliferation. It appeared that India had carried out its nuclear test with plutonium from a research reactor supplied by Canada, which used heavy water provided by the United States. It was a source of embarrassment for the Nixon administration that the Indian test had been carried out with materials provided by the United States. Embroiled in the death throes of Nixon's presidency, and not wishing to inflate India's newfound nuclear status, Kissinger's public condemnation of the test was muted. His tempered reaction only further enraged critics in Congress, who accused the administration of gross nuclear negligence and worried that the Indian test was the death toll of the non-proliferation regime. Belatedly and begrudgingly, Kissinger was compelled to respond to the outcry by ordering an inter-agency study of the implications of the Indian test in NSSM 202.²⁹ The result of these deliberations was an order from Nixon in June to begin consultations with other nuclear supplier countries on common rules for nuclear exports that would prevent further nuclear proliferation. This ultimately led to the convening in early 1975 of the London Suppliers Group, consisting of Britain, Canada, France, West Germany, Japan, the Soviet Union, and the United States.³⁰

The Indian nuclear test could not have come at a worst time for Iran. The news broke just as a delegation from the AEC, led by its chairman, Dixy Lee Ray, had arrived in Tehran to discuss Iran's interest in American participation in its

²⁹ Brenner, *Nuclear Power*, pp. 62-75; Walker, 'Nuclear Power', pp. 220-225. National Security Study Memorandum 202, 23 May 1974, Virtual Library, RMNL.

³⁰ National Security Decision Memorandum 255, 3 June 1974, Virtual Library, RMNL. Brenner, *Nuclear Power*, pp. 93-97.

nuclear program.³¹ A biologist by training, Ray was an outspoken advocate of the Nixon administration's 'mercantile' approach to nuclear energy. Lacking foreign policy credentials, she was a strong advocate for the American nuclear industry and showed little sensitivity to the dangers of nuclear proliferation.³² Her views on nuclear exports were increasingly at odds with the growing fear, both within the Republican administration and the Democratic-controlled Congress, that the Indian nuclear test would set off a cascade of nuclear proliferation in conflict-prone regions like the Middle East and South Asia. Etemad recalled that he was having lunch with Ray and Helms at the U.S. Embassy when an aide brought the news of the Indian test. Much to his surprise, her reaction was muted and the visit proceeded unperturbed.³³ Ray and her team met with Iran's "best trained minds in nuclear energy" to discuss how the AEC could help the AEOI select nuclear projects and choose American firms to build them. In addition to her talks with Etemad, she also met with Iraj Vahidi, Iran's energy minister, and was received by the shah in a private audience on 21 May. Over a total of seven hours of talks in Tehran, Ray urged the Iranians to press ahead with the selection of sites for their planned nuclear reactors and briefed them on the various commercially available reactor designs. The Iranians responded enthusiastically and asked the AEC to prepare a draft bilateral agreement, covering the supply of both nuclear reactors and nuclear fuel, which would replace the original 1957 agreement.³⁴

³¹ Telegram 98119 from the Department of State to the Consulate in Jerusalem, 11 May 1974, AAD.

³² Brenner, *Nuclear Power*, pp. 49-51.

³³ Akbar Etemad in interview with Farrokh Ghaffari, 27 October 1982, Paris, Tape A-6A, in the FISOHC.

³⁴ Telegram 4169 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, AAD; Memorandum from Friedman to Sober, 17 June 1974, EBB 268, NSA-GWU.

Despite Ray's enthusiasm for nuclear cooperation with Iran, India's nuclear test dramatically changed American perceptions of Iran's nuclear program. In the immediate aftermath of the Indian test, the American media speculated that Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had given the shah advance notice of the test and that India was now helping Iran develop its own 'peaceful nuclear explosion' in a barter agreement for oil.³⁵ According to the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, the Iranians were "calm if somewhat ambivalent" about the Indian test. When the issue came up in conversation between Hoveyda and Helms, the Iranian premier "seemed very relaxed about the event," and ascribed the test to domestic political motives on the part of Gandhi.³⁶ The shah had frequently said that if India ever developed nuclear weapons, then Iran might have to follow suit. Therefore, the Iranians had every interest in downplaying the significance of India's test and the likelihood that it would prompt Iran to build its own bomb. But the mood in Washington was now firmly against nuclear exports to unstable regions of the Third World. During a trip to the Middle East in June 1974, just a month after the Indian test, a beleaguered Nixon had offered to provide Egypt and Israel with civilian nuclear technology, even though neither country was a party to the NPT.³⁷ The news had been greeted with dismay by many members of Congress, despite assurances by the State Department that nuclear exports to Egypt and Israel would be covered by stringent safeguards that went far beyond those mandated by the NPT.³⁸ Alfred Atherton, the

³⁵ Drew Middleton, 'Who's Next in Atom Club?', *The New York Times*, 26 May 1974. James. F. Clarity, 'Iran Negotiates for Nuclear Energy Aid', *The New York Times*, 27 May 1974.

³⁶ Telegram 4059 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 21 May 1974, AAD.

³⁷ Brenner, *Nuclear Power*, p. 72; Walker, 'Nuclear Power', p. 222.

³⁸ 'Atom Energy Pact with Israel Seen', *The New York Times*, 15 June 1974; John W. Finney, 'U.S. Will Rely on Controls on Military Nuclear Uses', *The New York Times*, 15 June 1974.

assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, now advised Kissinger to impose the same additional safeguards on Iran, a party to the NPT, as the U.S. was imposing on Egypt and Israel. Atherton worried that, if the shah's regime were toppled, the nuclear materials stored in Iran might fall into the hands of "domestic dissidents", "foreign terrorists", or "an aggressive successor". Furthermore, he hoped that additional safeguards could head off the likely press and Congressional criticism of the deal. But he acknowledged that the shah was likely to object to Iran being treated as "a potential regional trouble spot" and to any discrimination against Iran as a party to the NPT.³⁹

American fears about Iran's nuclear ambitions were again heightened in June when the press picked up on comments by the shah on the eve of a state visit to France, where he planned to sign a nuclear agreement with French President Valery Giscard d'Estaing. In an interview with the French business news magazine *Les Informations*, he was asked if Iran would one day have nuclear weapons. He replied, "Without any doubt, and sooner than one would think."⁴⁰ The Iranian Embassy in Paris was quick to deny the comments and the shah denied ever having given the interview.⁴¹ The next day *Le Monde* published an interview with the shah in which he was asked if he would consider withdrawing Iran from the NPT. He replied, "certainly not yet" and reiterated his long-standing position that the Middle East should be declared a nuclear-weapons-free zone. He insisted that nuclear weapons were useless for Iran. A small nuclear arsenal would not give Iran parity

³⁹ Memorandum from Atherton to Kissinger, 20 June 1974, EBB 268, NSA-GWU.

⁴⁰ Ronald Koven, 'Iran Eyes Nuclear Weapons', *The Washington Post*, 24 June 1974.

⁴¹ Telegram 15305 from the Embassy in France to the Department of State, 24 June 1974, EBB 268, NSA-GWU.

with the great powers and would only invite proliferation by its regional rivals. While he considered a nuclear arms race to be “ridiculous”, he warned that if any country in the region went nuclear “then perhaps the national interests of any country at all would demand that it do the same.”⁴² Meanwhile, in Tehran, both Information Minister Gholam Reza Kianpour and Court Minister Alam denied that the shah had indicated a desire to develop a nuclear arsenal. Instead, they clarified the official Iranian position that Iran would only consider withdrawing from the NPT if another country in the region, like Egypt or Israel, introduced nuclear weapons into the Middle East. Helms was satisfied with this explanation and advised Washington that the shah had no intention of building nuclear weapons regardless of “whatever he may have said off the cuff to French journalists.”⁴³

Despite the Iranian denials, the shah’s comments in Paris on nuclear weapons further heightened fears in Washington about Iran’s nuclear ambitions. James Noyes, the deputy assistant secretary for the Near East in the Pentagon’s Office of International Security Affairs (ISA), prepared a memorandum for Secretary of Defence James Schlesinger warning that a U.S. decision to provide Iran with nuclear reactors and fuel would be widely interpreted as “assistance towards a weapons capability.”⁴⁴ However, the media coverage of the shah’s trip to France also drew attention to the reality that Washington’s trepidation about nuclear exports to Iran was costing American firms lucrative Iranian nuclear contracts,

⁴² Telegram 15445 from the Embassy in France to the Department of State, 25 June 1974, EBB 268, NSA-GWU.

⁴³ Telegram 5192 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 25 June 1974, EBB 268, NSA-GWU. Takashi Oka, ‘France and Iran sign aid pacts’, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 28 June 1974. ‘France and Iran Sign \$4-Billion Accord; Shah Will Receive 5 Nuclear Reactors’, *The New York Times*, 28 June 1974.

⁴⁴ Memorandum from Noyes to Schlesinger, June 1974, EBB 268, NSA-GWU.

which were going to their European competitors. At the conclusion of his visit the shah and Giscard d'Estaing signed letters of intent for a multi-billion dollar nuclear deal that would include the sale of five 1,000 MW nuclear reactors as well as a nuclear research centre to train Iranian scientists.⁴⁵ At a time when Europe was struggling to deal with soaring oil prices, the agreement was characterized by *The Washington Post* as an “economic coup” for France.⁴⁶ Noyes’ comments reflected a broader concern in the Pentagon that the White House was downplaying the proliferation risk posed by Iran in order to placate the shah and secure Iranian nuclear contracts for American industry. Col. Donald Marshall wrote to his boss, Donald Cotter, the special assistant to Schlesinger on nuclear policy, expressing his concern “that nowhere can I find that the military, or anybody with political-military background, is being plugged into the nuclear energy relationship with Iran.”⁴⁷ Schlesinger later recalled that he was deeply sympathetic to these concerns and opposed the “excessive closeness” in U.S.-Iran relations under Nixon.⁴⁸ Having served as chairman of the AEC during Nixon’s first term, he was also familiar with the issues surrounding nuclear proliferation. Under Schlesinger’s leadership, and that of his successor Donald Rumsfeld, the Defence Department would remain the most forceful advocate within inter-agency debates of stringent bilateral safeguards on Iran’s nuclear program.

The shah was aware of the suspicions about his nuclear intentions, particularly after his comments in Paris. He launched a diplomatic initiative in the

⁴⁵ Telegram 5564 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 8 July 1974, AAD.

⁴⁶ ‘France Gets \$4 Billion in Iran Trade’, *The Washington Post*, 28 June 1974.

⁴⁷ Memorandum from Marshall to Cotter, 7 January 1975. Provided by William Burr, NSA-GWU.

⁴⁸ James Schlesinger in an interview with William Burr, 15 May 1986, Washington, DC, Tape 1A, in the FISOHC.

summer of 1974 to reassure the international community that Iran was not seeking nuclear weapons by reviving the idea of declaring the Middle East a nuclear-weapons-free zone. He told Ambassador Helms on 2 July that Iran would sponsor a resolution to this effect at the United Nations. Although he did not expect it to pass, he thought that this would be “a good and reassuring gesture” by Iran to the international community.⁴⁹ The Iranian Foreign Ministry scrambled to put together a draft resolution that would “have maximum psychological effect on world opinion.”⁵⁰ Iran’s ambassadors around the world were instructed to secure backing for the resolution, with the hope that this would “reassure” Iran’s neighbours and promote an image of Iran as a “constructive and responsible” emerging power.⁵¹ A message from the shah was delivered at the opening of the plenary session of the UN General Assembly in September, in which he warned that nuclear proliferation in the Middle East “might mean more than a mere involvement of adversaries in a senseless and wasteful nuclear arms race.” As part of this public relations exercise, copies of the shah’s message were distributed by the Iranian Embassy throughout Washington to individuals such as Tom Korologos, the deputy assistant to the president for legislative affairs.⁵²

Daryoush Bayandor, then the political counsellor at the Iranian Mission to the UN in New York, was charged with steering the resolution through the General Assembly. He recalled that, “Nobody believed it was implementable; it was thus some sort of posturing and propaganda for us.” The chief obstacle was Israel, the

⁴⁹ Telegram 5465 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 3 July 1974, AAD.

⁵⁰ Telegram 5510 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 5 July 1974, AAD.

⁵¹ Telegram 5652 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 10 July 1974, AAD.

⁵² Letter from Zahedi to Korologos, 17 September 1974, White House Central Files (WHCF), Subject File ND 20, Box 71, GRFL.

sole state in the region with an (undeclared) nuclear arsenal. Bayandor conducted discreet discussions with his Israeli counterpart at the UN, in order “to prevent them from voting ‘no’ or make a pernicious campaign in Washington to torpedo the whole idea.”⁵³ After months of negotiations the Iranians were able to convince the Israelis to abstain on the vote, and with the help of Egypt, were also able to enlist the support of the Arab League. They agreed to an American demand that the resolution should not permit non-nuclear states to conduct ‘peaceful nuclear explosions,’ as India had done.⁵⁴ Resolution 3263 was adopted by the General Assembly on 9 December 1974, calling on all states in the region to “proclaim solemnly and immediately their intention to refrain, on a reciprocal basis, from producing, testing, obtaining, acquiring, or in any other way possessing nuclear weapons”.⁵⁵

Iran’s rather transparent diplomatic efforts in 1974 did little to convince the opponents of nuclear exports to Iran that the shah could be trusted with nuclear technology. In a special NIE prepared in August, the U.S. intelligence community acknowledged that Iran’s nuclear program was “entirely in the planning stage” and saw little likelihood that Iran would withdraw from the NPT while its nascent nuclear program was under construction. But they warned of “the Shah’s ambition to make Iran a power to be reckoned with” and outlined a series of conditions under which Iran would likely build nuclear weapons in the 1980s: “if Iran has a full-

⁵³ Daryoush Bayandor in correspondence with the author, 11 July 2010.

⁵⁴ Telegram 236975 from the Department of State to the Embassy in the Soviet Union, 27 October 1974, NSA, Presidential Country Files for Europe and Canada, Box 20, GRFL. Telegram 4684 from the Mission at the United Nations in New York to the Department of State, 2 November 1974, AAD.

⁵⁵ United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 3263 ‘Establishment of Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in the Middle East’, 29th Session, 2309th Plenary Meeting, 9 December 1974, ODS.

fledged nuclear power industry and all the facilities necessary for nuclear weapons, and if other countries have proceeded with weapons development, we have no doubt that Iran will follow suit.”⁵⁶ In Tehran, Helms sensed that the Indian test might kill any chance of a nuclear deal with Iran. He cabled the State Department “to emphasize personally that there has been no change in Iran’s declared policy not to acquire nuclear weapons.” But Helms’ efforts to keep the U.S.-Iran nuclear negotiations on track were complicated by an announcement in July 1974 that the AEC was imposing a moratorium on U.S. exports of enriched uranium reactor fuel because of a domestic supply shortage.⁵⁷ After Ray’s visit to Tehran, Iran had asked the AEC to approve eight contracts for the supply of enriched uranium for the reactors that Iran planned to buy from the United States. Because of the moratorium, the AEC approved only two of these contracts as a “political concession” to Iran. Helms reported that both Alam and Foreign Minister Khalatbari had told him that the shah was “very upset” with the AEC’s decision.⁵⁸

Iranian Primacy under Ford

During Ford’s presidency, the opposition in Washington to a nuclear deal with Iran was driven not only by a general concern about nuclear proliferation, but also by tensions in the U.S.-Iran relationship over issues such as rising oil prices, arms sales, and human rights. The same Democrats in Congress who had driven Nixon from office were now pressuring Ford to abandon the partnership that the disgraced

⁵⁶ Special National Intelligence Estimate 4-1-74, 23 August 1974, EBB 268, NSA-GWU.

⁵⁷ See, Brenner, *Nuclear Power*, pp. 14-16.

⁵⁸ Telegram 5389 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 1 July 1974, EBB 268, NSA-GWU; Telegram 5458 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 3 July 1974, NPM, NSCF, Country Files-Middle East, Box 603; Telegram 8057 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 24 September 1974, AAD.

former president had forged with the shah. The Democratic Party increased its majority in both Houses of Congress in the November 1974 mid-term elections, thanks to the backlash against Republicans after Watergate. Congress passed the 1974 Foreign Assistance Act, which tried to restrict arms exports to states that violated human rights and required the State Department to provide annual human rights reports on countries that received security assistance from the United States, including Iran.⁵⁹ In this hostile domestic environment, Kissinger tried to shore up the relationship with Iran by championing the idea of a U.S.-Iran Joint Commission and travelling to Tehran in November 1974 for its first session.⁶⁰ Economy Minister Ansary, the Iranian co-chair of the Joint Commission, assured Kissinger that Iran intended to place a mammoth order for eight nuclear reactors from the United States. Etemad recalled that such a staggeringly large order was exorbitant even for oil-rich Iran, but the AEOI chief kept silent as he understood that Ansary's pledge had been made for the sake of political "atmospherics".⁶¹

Despite Nixon's resignation, there was still a significant 'Pahlavi lobby' in Washington on whom the shah could rely to influence U.S. policy. This lobby centred on the powerful Rockefeller family, including Vice President Nelson Rockefeller, for whom Kissinger had worked before serving Nixon, as well as many senior Republican members of Congress, such as Senators Barry Goldwater and

⁵⁹ Barbara Keys, 'Congress, Kissinger, and the Origins of Human Rights Diplomacy', *Diplomatic History*, 34/5 (2010), pp. 835-836. See also, Briefing Memorandum from Maw to Kissinger, 8 September 1975, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-3, 254.

⁶⁰ Telegram 8883 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 22 October 1974, NSA, PCFMESA, Box 14, GRFL.

⁶¹ Akbar Etemad in an interview with Gholam Reza Afkhami, 5 September 1995, London, Tape C1-2A, in the FISOHC.

Jacob Javits.⁶² But the personal relationship between the president and the shah, which as discussed in *Chapter Two* had played such a crucial role in the origin's of Nixon's policy of Iranian primacy, was now missing. The shah had enjoyed a longstanding friendship with Richard Nixon based on mutual esteem between two men who considered themselves grand geo-strategic thinkers. He had little respect for Nixon's successor, President Gerald Ford, who had a reputation as an honest but simple man.⁶³ Alam recorded in his diary that the shah once described Ford as "a real idiot" who says whatever his advisers tell him to say and signs whatever they put in front of him.⁶⁴

The strongest force for continuity in Iran policy between the two administrations was Henry Kissinger, whom Ford retained as both secretary of state and national security adviser, though he lost the latter post in November 1975 to his erstwhile deputy, Gen. Brent Scowcroft. At the same time that Kissinger was struggling to preserve Nixon's legacy of détente with the Soviet Union, which was now in decline, he also found himself defending the partnership that he and Nixon had forged with the shah against attacks from both Democrats in Congress and critics within the Ford administration.⁶⁵ For example, he blocked attempts by Congress to investigate the commitment that Nixon had given the shah in Tehran in May 1972, whereby nearly all restrictions on Iranian conventional arms purchases from the United States were lifted. Kissinger denied Congressional staff access to

⁶² Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, pp. 319-378.

⁶³ On Ford's reputation, see James Cannon, *Time and Change: Gerald Ford's Appointment with History* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998).

⁶⁴ Alam, *Yad'dashtha-yi 'Alam*, Vol. IV, p. 205.

⁶⁵ On the decline of détente during Ford's presidency see, Robert D. Schulzinger, 'Détente in the Nixon-Ford Years, 1969-1976' in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume II: Crisis and Détente* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 382-392.

two key memoranda that he had issued in the summer of 1972, one of which stated that, “in general, decisions on the acquisition of military equipment should be left primarily to the government of Iran.”⁶⁶ Both the State Department and the NSC staff advised Kissinger not to block requests for access to these documents from Rep. Clarence Long, chairman of the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations of the House Appropriations Committee, and Senator J. William Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.⁶⁷ But Kissinger denied that Nixon had given the shah a blank cheque on arms sales and was unwilling to make these potentially embarrassing memoranda available to his Democratic opponents in Congress. He instructed his staff to simply ignore the requests.⁶⁸

Kissinger also fought tenaciously against attempts by members of the Ford administration to dismantle Nixon’s policy of Iranian primacy. The most vociferous criticism from within the administration came from the Pentagon, which as discussed in *Chapter Two*, had resisted the shift from balancing to Iranian primacy under Nixon. Defence Secretary James Schlesinger was unhappy with the influence that the shah had wielded in the Nixon White House and he sought to steer Ford away from Nixon’s policy of Iranian primacy. He warned the president that “US interests and the Shah’s perception of his interest could easily collide, and soon. The question of nuclear safeguards for the reactors he seeks is also likely to be

⁶⁶ Memorandum from Kissinger to Rogers and Laird, 25 July 1972, *FRUS 1969-1976*, E-4, 214.

⁶⁷ Memorandum from Ingersoll to Kissinger, 5 December 1974, and Memorandum from Kennedy and Oakley to Kissinger, 13 December 1974, NSA, PCFMESA, Box 12, GRFL.

⁶⁸ This is Kissinger’s hand-written instruction on the 13 December memorandum from Kennedy and Oakley, cited above. See also, Memorandum from Davis to Springsteen, 10 February 1975, NSA, PCFMESA, Box 12, GRFL.

troublesome.”⁶⁹ Although this clash between Kissinger and Schlesinger on Iran policy was driven to some extent by a long-standing rivalry between the two men, the Pentagon’s objections to Iranian primacy would continue under Schlesinger’s successor, Donald Rumsfeld.⁷⁰ Kissinger also faced opposition on Iran policy from Treasury Secretary William Simon, who was working closely with Saudi Oil Minister Sheikh Ahmad Zaki Yamani to pressure the shah to lower oil prices.⁷¹ In an Oval Office briefing for the new president on the ongoing energy crisis, Kissinger warned Ford not to listen to Simon’s advice to abandon the policy of Iranian primacy and tilt towards Saudi Arabia in the Persian Gulf. Kissinger described the Saudis as “the most feckless and gutless of the Arabs”, whereas, “The Shah is a tough, mean guy.” He reminded Ford that the shah “is our real friend. He is the only one who would stand up to the Soviet Union. We need him for balance against India. We can’t tackle him without breaking him.”⁷² Kissinger had mixed success in fending off these attacks on Nixon’s Iran policy. Schlesinger later recalled that despite a “difference in tone” in U.S. policy towards Iran under the new administration, “President Ford tended to follow the commitments of his predecessor and the advice of Secretary Kissinger”.⁷³ As discussed in the previous chapter, Ford agreed to continue U.S. support for Iran’s covert operation in Iraqi

⁶⁹ Memorandum from Schlesinger to President Ford, undated [c. September 1975], NSA, PCFMESA, Box 13, GRFL.

⁷⁰ On the Kissinger-Schlesinger rivalry see, Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect*, pp. 363-364; Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, pp. 177-182.

⁷¹ On the Iran policy debates within the Ford administration see, Cooper, ‘Showdown in Doha,’ pp. 567-591; F. Gregory Gause, III, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 39.

⁷² Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 17 August 1968, NSA, Memoranda of Conversations, Box 5, GRFL.

⁷³ James Schlesinger in an interview with William Burr, Washington, DC, 15 May 1986, Tape 1A, in the FISOHC.

Kurdistan until the shah abandoned the Kurds in March 1975. He also continued to support U.S. arms sales to Iran, which became increasingly controversial during his presidency.⁷⁴ But when it came to new commitments to the shah, such as nuclear exports to Iran, Ford was far more responsive than Nixon had been to critics of the shah within his administration and in Congress. Kissinger's influence, however substantial, was ultimately not enough to make up for the absence of an intimate friendship between the president and the shah.

The Nuclear Fuel Reprocessing Problem

The Ford administration's initial deliberations on nuclear exports to Iran were heavily influenced by a December 1974 report on nuclear proliferation, produced by the NSC's Under Secretaries Committee (NSC/USC) in response to the study memorandum that Kissinger had issued in May. The report made two crucial recommendations that would prove to be major stumbling blocks in the nuclear negotiations with Iran. First, the report said that the United States should "Seek to limit the number independent reactor fuel reprocessing facilities and attempt to control the spread of independent uranium enrichment plants and technology." These two elements of the nuclear fuel cycle were the most sensitive in terms of proliferation risk. Uranium ore can be processed through a variety of enrichment methods in order to separate the denser isotope U-238 from the lighter U-235. Low-enriched uranium (LEU), containing 2-3% of U-235, is fabricated into fuel rods for use in reactors. However, the same enrichment technologies could be used to manufacture highly-enriched uranium (HEU), containing 90% or more U-235, for

⁷⁴ See, Haass, 'Filling the Vacuum', pp. 274-298; James H. Noyes, *The Clouded Lens: Persian Gulf Security and U.S. Policy* (Stanford: Hoover Institutional Press, 1979).

use in nuclear weapons. Once the LEU fuel rods have been irradiated in a nuclear reactor, the spent nuclear fuel still contains uranium and a small amount of plutonium, which can be chemically separated from the waste and reprocessed into nuclear fuel. In theory, such enrichment and reprocessing technology could allow a country to stockpile HEU or plutonium for use in nuclear weapons. Instead of permitting the recipients of U.S. nuclear exports to conduct enrichment or reprocessing in national facilities on their own territory, the NSC/USC advocated either the construction of “regional multinational plants”, whereby a number of neighbouring countries would make use of the same reprocessing plant, or a U.S. offer of favourable terms to reprocess nuclear fuel in the United States. This would prevent the recipient countries from covertly stockpiling these fissile materials away from prying foreign eyes.⁷⁵

Second, the report suggested “Obtaining agreement to place special conditions on nuclear exports to nations in sensitive regions.” These ‘special conditions’ went beyond the regular IAEA safeguards that applied to NPT state parties. They specifically precluded any reprocessing of spent fuel on the soil of the recipient country and gave the U.S. the option to ‘buy-back’ spent fuel derived from American-supplied nuclear materials or facilities. The NSC/USC pointed to the additional safeguards in the agreements the U.S. was negotiating with Egypt and Israel as a model that could be applied to not only “other Middle East states, but also to countries in other troubled or unstable areas of the world to be addressed on a case-by-case basis.”⁷⁶ The difficulty confronting the Americans in denying Iran

⁷⁵ On the genesis of the multinational plant concept see, Brenner, *Nuclear Power*, pp. 98-100.

⁷⁶ Memorandum from Ingersoll to President Nixon, 4 December 1974, EBB 268, NSA-GWU.

the right to master the complete nuclear fuel cycle or imposing additional safeguards on an agreement with Iran, along the lines of the NSC/USC report, was that the shah would interpret such conditions as both discriminatory and an American vote of no confidence in his leadership and Iran's stability. Unlike Egypt and Israel, Iran was a party to the NPT, so the shah would never agree to restrictions that the U.S. had not imposed on nuclear exports to other NPT state parties. The shah would simply turn to alternative nuclear suppliers like France or West Germany, with which Iran was already doing business, and the U.S. would lose a multi-billion dollar deal, including a proposed Iranian investment in a uranium enrichment plant in the United States.⁷⁷ Etemad had implied as much to Helms, when he had told the ambassador in October 1974 that the AEOI had been "flooded" with so many offers of sales for its nuclear program that his organisation "simply does not have the staff to respond to all its mail."⁷⁸ However, without any additional safeguards, the U.S. Senate was unlikely to ratify any nuclear agreement with Iran.

Shortly after the NSC/USC report was issued, the State Department's Near East Bureau sent its recommendation to Kissinger for a draft nuclear agreement with Iran, which had been stalled since Ray's visit to Tehran in May. Kissinger's officials presented him with options ranging from imposing no additional safeguards on Iran's nuclear program beyond those contained in the NPT, to asking Iran to agree to the same stringent safeguards contained in the agreements with Egypt and Israel. Kissinger opted for a middle course whereby Iran would be asked

⁷⁷ Telegram 9039 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 25 October 1974, AAD.

⁷⁸ Telegram 8541 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 9 October 1974, AAD.

to agree to additional physical security measures to protect nuclear materials from falling into the hands of terrorists, and would also consent to an American right to veto Iranian reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel. The U.S. would consider allowing reprocessing of spent fuel in either a foreign facility or a multinational facility in Iran, thereby diminishing the Iranians' ability to separate plutonium from its spent fuel and secretly stockpile it for a weapons program. But the secretary of state was clearly not happy with these additional safeguards, which were designed to placate a hostile Congress rather than strengthen U.S.-Iran relations. He was particularly angry that his officials had tied his hands by already briefing key members of Congress that any nuclear agreement with Iran would contain additional safeguards.⁷⁹

The first meeting of the U.S.-Iran nuclear energy committee, under the rubric of the Joint Commission, took place in Tehran on 21 and 22 January 1975. Negotiations began on a nuclear agreement, which the Americans hoped would be signed in March during the scheduled second meeting of the Joint Commission in Washington. Little of substance was achieved in these talks, but the mood of the discussions between Etemad and Ray, who had since moved to the State Department as assistant secretary for oceans and international environmental and scientific affairs, was "unusually frank and amicable".⁸⁰ The Iranians wanted American help to train their nuclear cadre, they expressed interest in diversifying

⁷⁹ Memorandum from Atherton to Kissinger, 6 December 1974; Memorandum from Gammon to Sober and Clingan, 11 December 1974, EBB 268, NSA-GWU.

⁸⁰ Ray had stepped down as chairman of the AEC when the Commission was abolished under the Energy Reorganisation Act of 1974. The AEC's functions were split between two new agencies: the Energy Research and Development Administration, which took charge of U.S. civilian and military nuclear policy, and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which took over the regulation of the nuclear industry, including the authority to veto nuclear exports.

their supply of enriched uranium fuel by signing contracts with American firms, and they hoped to award the Americans contracts for constructing dual-use nuclear reactors that could desalinate water in Iran's arid southern regions.⁸¹ But after studying the draft agreement that the Americans had brought with them to Tehran, Etemad quickly registered his displeasure with both the U.S. veto on Iranian reprocessing and the notion that nuclear exports to Iran would be treated no differently than those to Egypt and Israel.⁸² Etemad later recalled that the AEOI had made no decision as to whether Iran would reprocess its spent fuel, or simply rely on imports of nuclear fuel. Such a decision was premature, given that Iran would not be producing any nuclear energy for at least another decade. But the Iranians refused to rule out the possibility that they might wish to build the entire nuclear fuel cycle on their soil at some point in the future.⁸³

The State Department insisted that Iran was, in fact, being given preferential treatment as a party to the NPT, but in reality the difference between the proposed agreement with Iran and those with Egypt and Israel was negligible. Whereas in the Egyptian and Israeli cases the U.S. flatly refused to allow any national reprocessing and insisted on the right to 'buy-back' the spent fuel, in the Iranian case the Americans promised to "take into account" Iran's adherence to the NPT when deciding whether or not to exercise their veto over reprocessing.⁸⁴ This distinction provided little assurance to the Iranians that they would be allowed to reprocess

⁸¹ Telegram 1949 from the Embassy in France to the Department of State, 23 January 1975; Telegram 813 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 28 January 1975, AAD.

⁸² Telegram 1393 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 12 February 1975, AAD.

⁸³ Akbar Etemad in an interview with Gholam Reza Afkhami, 5 September 1995, London, Tape C1-3A, in the FISOHC.

⁸⁴ Telegram 35095 from the Department of State to the Embassy in Iran, 15 February 1974, AAD.

their own spent fuel on their own soil, so not surprisingly the negotiations ground to a halt as Iran refused to accept such discriminatory treatment. The second meeting of the U.S.-Iran Joint Commission came and went on 3-4 March 1975 during Hushang Ansary's visit to Washington, without any discussion of nuclear matters. All Etemad would agree to do was to send his comments on the U.S. draft to Washington and to invite the American negotiators back to Iran in late April to continue the negotiations.⁸⁵

Hoping to find a way to break the deadlock, Kissinger ordered an inter-agency review of the U.S.-Iran nuclear negotiations in NSSM 219 of 14 March 1975.⁸⁶ The issue of nuclear exports to Iran was gaining domestic saliency in the United States and would have to be handled delicately to balance the concerns of both the shah and Congress. Earlier that week, the editorial page of *The Washington Post* had warned that the French deal with Iran could lead to an Iranian nuclear bomb, as France had not signed the NPT and "French officials will have virtually no control over the reactors or the enriched uranium that will be supplied to Iran." In the proposed U.S. nuclear deal with Iran, the *Post* editors argued, the Ford administration should "induce Iran to agree that spent nuclear fuel will be shipped abroad for reprocessing, and not left in Iran where it might be used to make nuclear weapons." They acknowledged that this safeguard is not required by the NPT and that the U.S. was in a "ticklish position" when making such demands. But nonetheless, "everything must be done to ensure that the nuclear club does not

⁸⁵ Telegram 73577 from the Department of State to the Embassy in Japan, 1 April 1975, AAD.

⁸⁶ Memorandum from Elliott to Scowcroft, 12 March 1975; Memorandum from Ingersoll to Scowcroft, 10 March 1975, National Security Council (NSC), Institutional Records (IR), Box 34, GRFL. National Security Study Memorandum 219, 14 March 1975, Digital Library, GRFL, available at: <<http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/nsdmnssm/nsdmnssm.asp>>.

expand.”⁸⁷ The shah responded to these American fears in an interview with a sympathetic newspaper columnist, Joseph Kraft. The shah said that he had seen “the concern registered in newspapers that were partial to Israel” and he repeated his view that the prospect of a nuclear Iran was “ridiculous” and insisted that, “Only a few silly fools believe it.” He argued that the best evidence for Iran’s lack of interest in nuclear weapons was the vast sums he was spending on conventional arms: “I want to be able to take care of anything by nonnuclear means.” The shah insisted that Iran could never have a credible nuclear deterrent. “How many do you think it would take to count against the Russians? Or the United States? How much would they cost? Then we would have to buy all the equipment for launching missiles. It’s ridiculous.” When asked about additional safeguards, the shah replied, “I think it will not be difficult to come up with a formula so long as it is not an American *diktat*.”⁸⁸

Kissinger’s Opening Gambit

With the U.S. negotiators set to return to Tehran on 21 April and a scheduled visit by shah to Washington in May looming, the pressure on the Ford administration to reach a nuclear agreement with Iran was mounting. An ad hoc inter-agency working group quickly delivered its response to NSSM 219 on 15 April. The working group recognised that any discrimination against Iran as a party to the NPT would be interpreted by the shah as “a reflection on Iran’s stability and the integrity of its commitments as well as an indication that the U.S. cannot be relied upon because of the uncertainties of our political process.” The key stumbling block was the issue of

⁸⁷ ‘A Nuclear Iran?’, *The Washington Post*, 10 March 1975.

⁸⁸ Joseph Kraft, ‘What Restrains the Shah’, *The Washington Post*, 27 April 1975.

nuclear fuel reprocessing, but the Americans were very reluctant to give up their right to veto reprocessing. The U.S. position was that in deciding whether to exercise their veto, they would “look sympathetically” on Iran’s request, as long as the reprocessing was to take place in a properly safeguarded multinational facility where officials from other countries would be present. This would make it much more difficult for Iran to secretly divert and stockpile plutonium for a weapons program. The NSSM 219 report presented the Ford administration with five options for a U.S. negotiating position. Option 1 was to maintain the current U.S. position of opposing reprocessing in Iran; Option 2 was to retain the veto on reprocessing, but to give Iran a firm assurance that U.S. approval would be forthcoming if Iran agreed to a multinational facility; Option 3 was to retain the veto, but give up the demand for multinational reprocessing in exchange for bi-lateral safeguards; Option 4 was to give up the U.S. veto on reprocessing in exchange for “categorical assurances” from Iran that it would establish a multinational facility; and Option 5 was to give up any demand for additional safeguards beyond those imposed by the NPT. The American negotiators sensed that the shah was less opposed to the idea of bi-lateral safeguards or multinational reprocessing, than to accepting a U.S. right to veto reprocessing in the text of the agreement. The report also suggested that the idea of a multinational reprocessing facility in Iran, supplying nuclear fuel to other states in the region like Pakistan, might appeal to the shah’s ambitions for regional leadership.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Report prepared by the NSSM 219 Working Group, ‘Nuclear Cooperation Agreement with Iran’, April 1975; Memorandum from Davis to the various members of the NSC, 15 April 1975, NSC, IR, Box 34, GRFL.

In Tehran, Helms' primary concern was maintaining the partnership with the shah under the Nixon Doctrine, so he pushed Washington towards an accommodation of Iran's position. He recommended abandoning the U.S. veto over reprocessing, which would be seen in Iran as "an affront to the Shah's integrity, an encroachment on national sovereignty and a lack of good faith which could bring into question the whole range of our close and mutual advantageous ties with Iran." Aside from reiterating the familiar arguments about Iran's adherence to the NPT and the availability of alternative nuclear suppliers, Helms suggested moving towards a bilateral, rather than multilateral, solution to the reprocessing problem. He made the case that by becoming Iran's principal nuclear supplier, the United States could enhance its leverage over Iran by being in a position to threaten a cut-off of nuclear fuel, maintenance and spare parts, if Iran moved towards building a bomb. "Such a sanction," Helms argued, "affecting Iran's most vital interests in a situation in which a substantial part of its economy was dependent on the continued operation of its nuclear energy plants, would complement and reinforce the other deterrents built into NPT, IAEA and the bilateral agreement." Helms suggested that if the opposition in Washington to a nuclear agreement with Iran was simply too great to overcome in the span of a few months, it was "sufficient to his and our purposes that we reach agreement privately" during the shah's visit in May, and then sell the agreement to the public and Congress afterwards.⁹⁰

None of the agencies in Washington were willing to go as far as Helms and abandon the U.S. veto on reprocessing in Iran. Given the ongoing American effort

⁹⁰ Telegram 3437 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 15 April 1975, EBB 268, NSA-GWU.

to convince the other members of the London Suppliers Group to place limits on their own exports of reprocessing technology, and the opposition to a nuclear deal with Iran in Congress, it was vital to retain the U.S. veto. The most that the State Department was willing to concede, as a fallback position, was an assurance that the U.S. would approve reprocessing in Iran if the Iranians constructed a properly safeguarded multinational reprocessing facility, in which the United States might participate, along the lines of Option 2 in the NSSM 219 report.⁹¹ Both the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) and the newly created U.S. Energy Research and Development Administration (ERDA) concurred with the State Department's position.⁹² Defence Secretary Schlesinger, the most hawkish opponent of reprocessing in Iran, also weighed into the debate, recommending not only a retention of the U.S. veto, but also a bilateral safeguards agreement for any Iranian reprocessing facility, in case Iran ever withdrew from the NPT and blocked IAEA inspections. In exchange, the U.S. would give Iran a vague commitment that "barring unforeseen developments we would expect to give Iran our specific approval for reprocessing at a time consistent with the Iranian power reactor program's need for fuel reprocessing in the mid-1980s."⁹³

Kissinger proceeded cautiously, issuing NSDM 292 on 22 April 1975, laying out a negotiating position very similar to the consensus around Option 2 in the NSSM 219 report, but also incorporating Helms' idea of a smothering American embrace of the Iranian nuclear program and Schlesinger's advice to include bi-

⁹¹ Memorandum from Ingersoll to Kissinger, 18 April 1975, NSC, IR, Box 34, GRFL.

⁹² Memorandum from Ikle to Davis, 16 April 1975, NSC, IR, Box 34; Memorandum from Sievering to Elliott, 18 April 1975, NSC, IR, Box 59, GRFL.

⁹³ Memorandum from Schlesinger to Kissinger, 25 April 1975, EBB 268, NSA-GWU.

lateral safeguards. The United States would retain its veto over reprocessing of spent fuel in Iran, but would consider Iran's willingness to establish a multinational reprocessing plant an "important factor" in deciding whether to approve such reprocessing. As a "fallback" position, the U.S. would still retain its veto, but would give Iran a categorical assurance that it would approve reprocessing in a multinational facility on Iranian soil, "if the country supplying the reprocessing technology or equipment is a full and active participant in the plant and holding open the possibility of U.S. participation." In case Iran ever withdrew from the NPT and refused IAEA inspections, a "standard provision requiring mutual agreement as to safeguardability shall apply." The distinction between being "favourably disposed" towards multinational reprocessing in Iran in the original U.S. position (Option 1), and firmly agreeing to "approve" such reprocessing in the fallback position that Kissinger had authorised (Option 2), was a fine one. David Elliott, a PhD in high energy physics from Cal Tech who was director for science and technology on the NSC staff, hoped that this formula would allow the U.S. to retain its veto on reprocessing, thereby giving the administration "a fighting chance of obtaining Congressional approval", while not precluding reprocessing on Iranian soil, thereby satisfying "most of Iran's legitimate concerns."⁹⁴ Kissinger instructed the American negotiators to express U.S. willingness to help Iran construct a joint reprocessing facility "at an appropriate time should Iran so desire".⁹⁵ By supplying Iran with nuclear fuel, nuclear reactors, and potentially a reprocessing facility, the United States would become the principal supplier of Iran's nuclear program, as

⁹⁴ Memorandum from Elliott to Kissinger, 19 April 1975, NSC, IR, Box 59, GRFL.

⁹⁵ National Security Decision Memorandum 292, 22 April 1975, Digital Library, GRFL.

Helms' had suggested, and would then be in a position to monitor the implementation of safeguards as a full partner in Iran's nuclear program.

Armed with these new instructions, the American negotiators returned to Tehran for more talks on 26 and 27 April 1975. They presented the Iranians with the 'fallback' position that Kissinger had authorised in NSDM 292, and a new draft agreement was transmitted to the AEOI in early May.⁹⁶ Although the U.S. had tried to assure Iran that reprocessing on Iranian soil would not be precluded by the agreement, the AEOI was uncomfortable with the idea of agreeing to a multinational reprocessing facility as a precondition for American approval. The Iranians argued that they might not be able to secure supplier participation in their reprocessing facility. They wanted assurances that the U.S. would agree to reprocessing in a national plant on Iranian soil, if Iran made a "strenuous effort" to secure supplier participation and failed. But Washington was unwilling to acquiesce to a national reprocessing facility, where Iran could divert plutonium for a weapons program undetected. The U.S. would only agree to "give great affirmative weight" to Iranian efforts to secure supplier participation, when deciding whether to invoke their veto. From the Americans' perspective, "the added assurances against non-proliferation which accompany supplier involvement depend on its actually being achieved, and not merely on an effort to achieve it, however strenuous." But for the Iranians, agreeing to supplier participation as a precondition for reprocessing would give the foreign supplier tremendous leverage over Iran. By being able to suspend participation in the multinational facility, the supplier would enjoy an effective veto over Iran's ability to reprocess its spent fuel on its own territory. The Iranians

⁹⁶ Telegram 105820 from the Department of State to the Embassy in Iran, 6 May 1975, AAD.

complained that they “should not be penalized if, through no fault of their own, it [supplier participation] is not achievable.” It was clear to Etemad that no agreement would be reached before or during the shah’s visit to Washington in May, so he told the Americans that the shah would simply use the trip as an opportunity to seek resolution of any “major problems”.⁹⁷

The shah’s May 1975 trip to Washington came at a time when Congress was trying to place firmer controls on nuclear exports, while tensions in the U.S.-Iran relationship were also simmering to the surface. A bill had been introduced into the Senate that year for an ‘Export Reorganisation Act’, which would only allow nuclear exports to countries with nuclear safeguards that were “at least substantially comparable” to those in the United States itself.⁹⁸ One of the sponsors of the bill, Senator Abraham Ribicoff, a liberal Democrat who had served in the Kennedy administration, was of the view that Iran should give a “binding commitment” to forgo enrichment or reprocessing on its own soil, in exchange for an assurance from the supplier countries of a “reliable supply” of nuclear fuel.⁹⁹ This Congressional concern with Iran’s nuclear ambitions also reflected a growing unease with the shah in the United States, where he was often portrayed as a megalomaniac, leading the charge for higher oil prices in OPEC; the “emperor of oil” as *Time* magazine dubbed him in November 1974.¹⁰⁰ After the surge in oil prices in late 1973, the shah’s decision-making became increasingly imperious. In the spring of 1975 he

⁹⁷ Briefing paper prepared by the Department of State, ‘Peaceful Nuclear Cooperation’, May 1975, EBB 268, NSA-GWU.

⁹⁸ Walker, ‘Nuclear Power,’ p. 227. See also, Brenner, *Nuclear Power*, pp. 92-93.

⁹⁹ Abraham A. Ribicoff, ‘A Market-Sharing Approach to the World Nuclear Sales Problem’, *Foreign Affairs*, 54/4 (1976), p. 770.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Iran: Oil, Grandeur and a Challenge to the West’, *Time*, 4 November 1974.

made a sudden announcement that the handful of toothless state-sanctioned political parties in Iran would be replaced with a single *Rastakhiz-e Melli* (National Resurgence) Party.¹⁰¹ When questioned about his decision to establish a one-party state he replied, “What’s wrong with authority? Is anarchy better?”¹⁰² The shah bristled at criticism that he was bankrupting the economies of the West, by driving up oil prices in order to finance extravagant arms purchases and maintain his grip on power. He delighted in the leverage that oil gave him over the same Western powers that had once bullied Iran and he berated the West for its “permissive undisciplined society” where “you work not enough”.¹⁰³ Much to the chagrin of Israel’s friends in the United States, the shah had cultivated close ties with President Anwar Sadat, a moderate Arab leader who had taken Egypt out of the Soviet camp, while also normalising relations with Ba’thi Iraq, as discussed in the last chapter.¹⁰⁴ This shift in Iran’s policy towards the Arabs was largely rhetorical, aimed at cultivating moderate Arab support for Iran’s regional primacy.¹⁰⁵ Nonetheless, questions were being raised in Congress about the shah’s ambitions and the wisdom of unrestricted American arms sales to Iran. Democratic Congressman Clarence

¹⁰¹ Abbas Milani, *The Persian Sphinx: Amir Abbas Hoveyda and the Riddle of the Iranian Revolution* (Washington: Mage, 2001), pp. 275-280.

¹⁰² C. L. Sulzberger, ‘The Shah (II): Authority’, *The New York Times*, 22 March 1975.

¹⁰³ John Carvel, ‘Shah Gives Britain Word of Warning’, *The Guardian*, 29 January 1974.

¹⁰⁴ Telegram 83 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 6 January 1975, AAD; Henry Tanner, ‘Shah Gives Sadat Strong Backing For Arab Cause’, *The New York Times*, 13 January 1975.

¹⁰⁵ Telegram 1733 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 23 February 1975, AAD. See also, Trita Parsi, ‘Israel and the Origins of Iran’s Arab Option: Dissection of a Strategy Misunderstood’, *Middle East Journal*, 60/3 (2006), pp. 493-512; Rouhallah K. Ramazani, ‘Iran and the Arab-Israeli Conflict’, *Middle East Journal*, 32/4 (1978), pp. 413-428.

Long worried that Iran's growing military power would "increase the peril to the friendly state of Israel."¹⁰⁶

These two factors – nuclear proliferation and the shah's supposed megalomania – combined in the American popular consciousness to render the idea of nuclear exports to Iran deeply unpopular. For example, after the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Iran agreed in 1975 on a special training program for Iranian graduate students in nuclear engineering, opposition to the agreement erupted on campus, including a sit-in by both students and faculty at the Department of Nuclear Engineering on 25 April.¹⁰⁷ A letter from Bonnie Burrati, then a graduate student at MIT, to fellow members of a university committee studying the agreement reveals the intense emotions that the shah evoked for some in the United States in this period. She first wrote that it "seems suspicious that the Shah has chosen nuclear energy when he is wallowing in oil," and then went on to suggest that nuclear exports to Iran were part of a secret plan engineered by Kissinger to use a nuclear Iran to threaten other Persian Gulf oil-producing countries, "if the oil were shut off." Burrati asked if MIT should "get its hands dirty by doing dictators' dirty work?" She warned that "many of the entering Iranian students will be agents of SAVAK" and suggested that a nuclear Iran might be a threat to Israel, as "Iran itself is not what we might call a philosemitic nation" and the shah is "behind Egypt 100%".¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ John W. Finney, 'Arms Sale to Iran Scored As Drain on U.S. Military', *The New York Times*, 2 January 1975.

¹⁰⁷ John Kifner, 'Iranian Program Debated at M.I.T.', *The New York Times*, 27 April 1975.

¹⁰⁸ Letter from Buratti to the Members of the Corporation Joint Advisory Committee on Institute-Wide Affairs and the Ad Hoc Advisory Committee to Consider MIT's International Commitments, 3 June 1975, Council of Economics Advisers, Box 92, GRFL.

The same scepticism and opposition to Iran's nuclear ambitions that was palpable among the public and the Democrats in Congress was also reflected within the Ford administration. Those who saw the shah as a "nut", as Treasury Secretary Simon had crudely put it the previous summer, were convinced that nuclear weapons were a logical extension of the shah's plan to make Iran a "superpower".¹⁰⁹ In the summer of 1975, Helms' deputy chief of mission in Tehran, Jack Miklos, cabled Washington his concern that Iran's nuclear program had more to do with the shah's grandiose ambitions for Iran to achieve parity with the great powers, than with sensible economic planning. The nuclear reactors that the shah wanted were "symbols of arrival among the industrialized nations of the world." Miklos warned that "we cannot, of course, completely rule out the possibility that, in the event of further nuclear proliferation in the region, Iran might feel that it too must acquire nuclear weapons." The shah was keeping open the option of stockpiling plutonium for a weapons program, and this was why he was resisting the idea of a multinational reprocessing facility. While the Iranians protested that a multinational reprocessing facility would be "unworkable", Miklos suspected that "lurking unspoken in the background may be an unwillingness to submit their plant to foreign surveillance."¹¹⁰

Even Kissinger, who was deeply committed to the U.S.-Iran partnership, suspected that the shah's nuclear ambitions went beyond a civilian energy program. In the briefing materials he prepared for Ford in anticipation of the shah's arrival in Washington, he advised the president that the Indian nuclear test was "probably

¹⁰⁹ Cooper, 'Showdown at Doha', p. 571.

¹¹⁰ Telegram 6939 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 17 July 1975, EBB 268, NSA-GWU.

giving the Shah second thoughts about Iran's renunciation of nuclear weapons."

Kissinger noted that Iran was far from having the capacity to build a nuclear arsenal, but he warned that the shah,

"probably would like to move toward a position where he could eventually produce weapons on short notice if he believed it necessary. We can expect, therefore, that Iran over the next decade will continue present major efforts to acquire civilian nuclear facilities and develop the know-how and technology to manufacture nuclear weapons, but without taking a firm decision to undertake actual production. The Shah would hope that by avoiding a definite program to produce nuclear weapons he would forestall problems with the US and other over his nuclear intentions."

In case the shah raised the issue of the stalled nuclear deal during his visit, Kissinger advised Ford to only say that he would give Iran's objection to multinational reprocessing "further consideration", but to remind the shah that "we must weigh it carefully in light of general public and Congressional concerns over proliferation."¹¹¹ In any event, the shah made no mention of nuclear fuel reprocessing during his meetings with Ford and Kissinger in Washington. Instead, he used the visit to reassure the Americans of his good intentions by condemning India's nuclear test. "The Indians try to tell me they are peaceful," the shah told Ford and Kissinger on 15 May, "but if they are, why do they need the atom bomb?" He argued that it was "hard to believe" that India needed a nuclear deterrent against China and Pakistan. Rather, he feared that Hindu nationalism was behind the Indian drive for a nuclear bomb.¹¹² Returning to Tehran, the shah continued to express his interest in a nuclear deal, including Iranian investment in a uranium enrichment

¹¹¹ Briefing paper prepared by Kissinger for President Ford, 'Meeting with His Imperial Majesty Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Shahanshah of Iran', 15 May 1975, NSA, Presidential Briefing Material for VIP Visits, Box 9, GRFL.

¹¹² Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 15 May 1975, NSA, MEMCONS, Box 11, GRFL.

plant in the United States, in the hope of enticing the American to move the talks forward.¹¹³

Searching for a Washington Consensus

With no progress on the nuclear deal during the shah's visit to Washington, a U.S. negotiating team led by ERDA Administrator Robert Seamans met with Etemad in Vienna in September 1975 for further discussions on the American draft that had been transmitted in May. Etemad firmly rejected any U.S. veto over Iranian reprocessing of spent fuel and showed little enthusiasm for the idea of a multinational reprocessing facility in Iran. He told Seamans that Iran "could not tie its own hands for 30 years" by agreeing to the additional safeguards that the U.S. wanted to impose. Etemad made it clear that Iran's negotiations with other nuclear suppliers were "going smoothly," in contrast with the stalled talks with Washington. Tehran was quite happy to leave the agreement with the U.S. "undecided for the time being", unless the Americans stopped treating Iran like a "second class citizen" by insisting on safeguards that did not apply to U.S. nuclear exports to other countries that were parties to the NPT. While he did not rule out the idea of a multinational reprocessing plant, Etemad was very clear that the "final decision on [re]processing in Iran must rest with Iran – not [the] U.S." The American negotiators decided to float the idea of a "U.S. government presence" at Iran's reprocessing facility, if the Iranians could not secure participation by either a European supplier country or an American private partner, but Etemad was "non-committal". He warned his American interlocutors that the shah was "unhappy with

¹¹³ Telegram 6441 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 5 July 1975, NSA, PCFMESA, Box 14, GRFL.

[the] U.S. position” and that his boss was likely to summon Helms for discussions on the issue.¹¹⁴

While in Vienna, Etemad also met with representatives of American industry, including Dwight Porter, a former American diplomat who was vice president of the Westinghouse Corporation. Porter, who had known Etemad when he had been posted to the U.S. Mission to the IAEA in Vienna, was surprised by the “unusual vehemence” of Etemad’s remarks, considering the Iranian nuclear chief’s “normally mild manner.” Etemad confided that the shah had repeatedly instructed him that “under no circumstances” was he to agree to the additional safeguards that the U.S. was demanding. Etemad feared that the issue had become “entirely political” and was “driving a deep wedge” into the U.S.-Iran partnership. Iran would never agree to give its nuclear fuel supplier “the power to turn off the pipeline whenever it wished, for whatever reason.”¹¹⁵ So a nuclear agreement with Iran was nowhere in sight and, according to the Embassy in Tehran, Etemad “was not seized with a great sense of urgency” to break the deadlock.¹¹⁶

The State Department, in consultation with David Elliott from the NSC staff, set about trying to devise some new options to move the negotiations forward. They developed an options paper in later October, which in turn formed the basis of an inter-agency study issued in November by the NSC Verification Panel’s

¹¹⁴ Telegram 8210 from the Mission in Vienna to the Department of State, 25 September 1975, RG59, CFPF 1973-76, AAD.

¹¹⁵ ‘Summary of a discussion between Dwight J. Porter and Mr. Akbar Etemad, President, Iran Atomic Energy Organization, Vienna, September 22 and 23’, undated, NSC, IR, Box 59, GRFL.

¹¹⁶ Telegram 10396 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 23 October 1975, AAD.

Working Group on Non-Proliferation (VPWG).¹¹⁷ Ostensibly, the VPWG study addressed various options whereby the U.S. could move away from its veto on Iranian reprocessing in order to satisfy the shah. However, the report also reflected a palpable frustration within the Ford administration with Iran's refusal to compromise, particularly after Etemad's performance in Vienna. Some in the administration wondered if Iran really wanted U.S. involvement in its nuclear program and the VPWG study asked, "whether it is appropriate for the U.S. to offer any concessions to Iran, in the absence of further assurances that the GOI is, indeed, prepared to proceed with significant nuclear purchases from the United States."¹¹⁸ The VPWG study was distributed among the agencies for their comments, in the hope that a new consensus might emerge within the administration on how to proceed in the talks with Iran.

While the agencies prepared their responses to the study, Kissinger sent Helms a set of instructions for dealing with the shah in the interim. He instructed the ambassador to tell the shah that Iran was not being singled out for unfair treatment as a party to the NPT. Rather, Iran was subject to a new broad policy of safeguards that the U.S. would impose on all future nuclear exports. Kissinger also told Helms to suggest to the shah that a regional multinational facility in Iran, which could reprocess spent fuel for neighbours like Pakistan, would remove the need for national facilities in those countries. In this way, Iran's multinational facility would

¹¹⁷ The Verification Panel was an NSC committee that dealt with issues of arms control and disarmament. Memorandum from Ingersoll to Kissinger, 26 October 1975; Memorandum from Elliott to Davis, 20 November 1975, NSC, IR, Box 59, GRFL.

¹¹⁸ Memorandum from Davis to various members of the NSC, 20 November 1975, with attached study prepared by the NSC Verification Panel's Non-Proliferation Working Group, 'Nuclear Agreement with Iran', NSC, IR, Box 59, GRFL.

help reduce the risk of Pakistani nuclear proliferation and was thus “directly related to security and stability in the region, Iranian regional leadership and advancement of [the] Iranian economy.”¹¹⁹ But these attempts to appeal to the shah’s ambitions for regional leadership did not address his concerns about a double-standard when it came to questions of nuclear exports. In November 1975 the shah gave an interview to *Business Week* where he said that the safeguards the Americans were demanding were “incompatible with our sovereignty” and that the French or Germans “would never dream” of making such demands.¹²⁰

Administration officials in Washington viewed the issue of nuclear exports exclusively in terms of balancing the risk of nuclear proliferation with the economic interests of American industry. They gave no weight in their deliberations to the political sensitivity in Iran of foreign control over national resources, particularly in the context of Musaddiq’s nationalisation of Iranian oil in 1951 and the subsequent Anglo-American-sponsored coup that toppled the popular premier in 1953. The Americans showed no understanding of the damage that would be done to the shah’s already precarious legitimacy if he were seen to acquiesce to American ‘nuclear apartheid’, despite Iran’s adherence to the NPT and the billions of dollars that Iran would be paying to American firms for this technology.¹²¹ Furthermore, what kind of message would it send to the shah’s supporters and detractors, both at home and abroad, if the United States determined that Iran was either too unstable

¹¹⁹ Telegram 254826 from the Department of State to the Embassy in Iran, 25 October 1975, EBB 268, NSA-GWU.

¹²⁰ Telegram 11089 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 13 November 1975, NSC, IR, Box 59, GRFL.

¹²¹ See, Shane J. Maddock, *Nuclear Apartheid: the quest for American atomic supremacy from World War II to the present* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

to properly safeguard nuclear materials, or that the shah could not be trusted with nuclear technology? From Tehran, Helms wrote that “Iranian sensitivities in this area of nuclear cooperation run deeper than we had earlier thought.” He warned of a “backlash” against other U.S. economic interests in Iran and Iranian investment in the United States and bluntly asked if there was “a clear understanding in Washington of how serious a problem the nuclear deadlock has become.”¹²²

As the agencies delivered their responses to the VPWG study in the winter of 1975, there was little consensus within the administration on how to proceed.¹²³ At one end of the spectrum, Helms felt that additional safeguards, beyond those mandated by the NPT, would do little to deter Iran from going nuclear if its national interests dictated such a move, and that the shah simply would look to other nuclear suppliers if Washington continued to drag its feet. The present U.S. policy would not prevent Iranian nuclear proliferation. It would only damage the U.S.-Iran relationship and result in the loss of the lucrative Iranian nuclear market to European competitors. He advised Kissinger that “circumstances will not force Iran into America’s arms” and suggested that Washington abandon the idea of a regional multinational reprocessing facility, which the Iranians felt was “ridiculous in the Middle East setting.” Instead, the U.S. should propose a bi-national facility, jointly run by Iran and the United States “under stringent safeguards”. Helms was resigned to the reality that like India, Iran could “construct a nuclear explosive device if it so

¹²² Telegram 11089 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 13 November 1975, EBB 268, NSA-GWU.

¹²³ All of the relevant agencies weighed into the debate, except for the CIA. Curiously, the CIA representative on the VPWG sent a brief note to the NSC staff secretary saying that the Agency had “no comments or recommendations to make” on the VPWG study. See, Memorandum prepared by the CIA for Davis, 26 November 1975, NSC, IR, Box 59, GRFL.

desired” and that “whatever commitments Iran may have made to the US or under the NPT is likely to fall by the wayside if Iran’s perception of its national interests dictate.”¹²⁴ At the other end of the spectrum, the Pentagon, now under the leadership of Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld, continued to resist the idea of allowing Iran to reprocess spent fuel in a national facility. Rumsfeld recommended making no further concessions on reprocessing “pending clarification of the totality of Iran’s demands.”¹²⁵

Comments made by Etemad in New Delhi in late December 1975 seemed to confirm American suspicions that Iran was going down the same path as India. After discussions with Prime Minister Gandhi and Indian nuclear officials, Etemad told a press conference that “Iran has not yet considered peaceful nuclear explosions but will not rule them out all together”, though he insisted that “Iran is not interested in establishing facilities for recovery of plutonium from spent fuel from her reactors.”¹²⁶ These statements caused alarm and confusion in Washington, where Charles Robinson, the State Department’s under secretary for economic affairs, immediately sent a cable to Helms in Tehran asking for clarification.¹²⁷ When Jack Miklos met with Etemad on 5 January to clarify his statements in New Delhi, the Iranian nuclear chief said that Iran was not ruling out the use of ‘peaceful nuclear explosions’ (PNEs) for large development projects such as building canals or cutting through mountains. However, he insisted that “it is not a move Iran

¹²⁴ Telegram 11539 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 26 November 1975, EBB 268, NSA-GWU.

¹²⁵ Memorandum from Rumsfeld to Scowcroft, 4 December 1975, NSC, IR, Box 59, GRFL.

¹²⁶ Telegram 17228 from the Embassy in India to the Department of State, 29 December 1975, RG59, CFPF 1973-76, AAD.

¹²⁷ Telegram 304414 from the Department of State to the Embassy in Iran, 30 December 1975, RG59, CFPF 1973-76, AAD.

intended to make unilaterally and outside of the commitments it had undertaken under the NPT and IAEA agreements.” Such PNEs would only be conducted “with material and technical assistance provided by outside sources,” or in other words, with the knowledge and consent of Iran’s nuclear suppliers. Furthermore, Etemad’s point about reprocessing was that no decision had been taken to reprocess spent fuel in Iran, but he refused to rule it out altogether.¹²⁸ Reflecting the shah’s bigger concern, Etemad suggested to Miklos that they take steps to combat the perception that the hold-up in the nuclear negotiations was “somehow related to the overall quality of US-Iran relations.”¹²⁹

Those in the Ford administration who favoured some sort of compromise to break the deadlock recognised that this would mean moving away from multinational reprocessing and towards a bi-national U.S.-Iran reprocessing arrangement. Robert Seamans, the ERDA chief who had been leading the negotiations with Etemad, argued that the U.S. should neither abandon its veto over reprocessing, nor give up on the idea of a regional multinational reprocessing facility. But he advised the president that the U.S. should limit its veto by assuring the shah that if Iran failed to secure supplier participation in a multinational facility, “despite vigorous good faith efforts,” and if the U.S. also declined to participate in a bi-national plant, then the U.S. would consent to reprocessing in a national facility in Iran “subject to a joint U.S.-Iranian determination that (1) the plant is safeguardable and (2) the IAEA safeguards as they are to be applied to the plant

¹²⁸ Akbar Etemad in an interview with Gholam Reza Afkhami, 5 September 1995, London, Tape C1-3A, the FISOHC.

¹²⁹ Telegram 73 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 5 January 1976, EBB 268, NSA-GWU.

will be effective.”¹³⁰ Dropping supplier participation as a precondition for U.S. approval of reprocessing in Iran was a major concession. When the Iranians had objected to this precondition in the April talks in Tehran, the Americans had insisted that foreign participation in reprocessing was the only way to ensure that Iran would not secretly separate plutonium from its spent fuel and stockpile it for a nuclear weapon. Seamans’ proposal represented a significant departure from the established U.S. position in the NSDM 292.

The State Department also felt that compromise was necessary to move the negotiations forward, but like the Pentagon, they were unwilling to make any further concessions until the shah’s views were clarified. They suggested sending a high-level delegation to Tehran for “exploratory” talks with the shah “to ascertain directly the Shah’s views” on whether Iran was open to any kind of additional safeguards. Implicit in this suggestion of ‘direct’ talks with the Iranian monarch was a strategy of going over the head of the troublesome Etemad, in the hope that the shah might be more amenable to compromise in the greater interest of U.S.-Iran relations. It might still be possible to “moderate or overcome” the shah’s opposition to additional safeguards beyond the NPT, the State Department argued, by asking him to join the U.S. as a partner in efforts to curb nuclear proliferation. By appealing to his self-image as a responsible world statesman, they hoped to “enlist Iran’s positive support rather than cause it to feel that we seek to impose our will on them.”¹³¹ But convincing the shah that the U.S. regarded Iran as a non-proliferation partner, rather than a proliferation risk, was a tall order. The shah deeply resented

¹³⁰ Memorandum from Seamans to Scowcroft, 17 December 1975, NSC, IR, Box 59, GRFL.

¹³¹ Memorandum from Springsteen to Scowcroft, 13 January 1976, NSC, IR, Box 59, GRFL.

the discriminatory treatment that Iran was being subjected to as a party to the NPT and viewed with suspicion the secretive London Suppliers Group, which was seen in Tehran as a cartel or club of nuclear powers for controlling the price of nuclear fuel, a sort of “nuclear OPEC”.¹³²

The options presented in the VPWG study for abandoning the U.S. veto on Iranian reprocessing were unacceptable to the State Department, which had one eye on the ongoing talks in the London Suppliers Group and another on the mounting concern in Congress about nuclear proliferation. The administration could hardly make major concessions to Iran on reprocessing at the same time that it was asking other nuclear suppliers to withhold reprocessing technology from their clients and trying to assure Congress that nuclear exports to Iran posed no risk of proliferation. Like Helms and Seamans, they suggested retaining the U.S. veto on reprocessing, but shifting away from the idea of a multinational reprocessing facility and towards some sort of bi-national arrangement between Iran and the United States. If Iran was ultimately unable to secure supplier participation in a multinational or bi-national plant, then the U.S. could offer Iran two alternatives. First, Iran could sign a bi-lateral safeguards agreement with the United States, whereby it could reprocess spent fuel in a national facility in Iran, “subject to the continuing requirement that we be satisfied that the safeguards applied to these activities by the IAEA are effective.” Under this bi-lateral agreement, the U.S. would always be able to withdraw consent for reprocessing and it would also be allowed to station American personnel in the Iranian facility. Alternatively, the U.S. could ask Iran for a “buy-

¹³² William Branigin, ‘Iran, U.S. Near Nuclear Deal’, *The Washington Post*, 14 June 1976. Akbar Etemad in interview with Farrokh Ghaffari, 27 October 1982, Paris, Tape A-6B, in the FISOHC.

back option”, whereby it would have the right to purchase Iran’s irradiated fuel rods. If the U.S. chose not to exercise this option, then Iran would have the right to reprocess the spent fuel in a national facility, “subject to a mutual determination that such facilities can be effectively safeguarded.”¹³³

Despite the willingness of Seamans and the State Department to consider national reprocessing, the only thing that all the agencies agreed on was the need for further ‘exploratory talks’ with the shah. Both the Pentagon and the ACDA remained firmly opposed to any further compromise on the issue. Fred C. Iklé, the director of ACDA under both Nixon and Ford, took very seriously the risk of nuclear proliferation and had frequently clashed with Kissinger on the issue.¹³⁴ He insisted that the American negotiators “should avoid any statements that would lead the Shah to believe that we would be prepared to settle for a formula which concedes that there are circumstances under which we will consent to a [sic] reprocessing in a national plant in Iran.”¹³⁵ But the shah and Etemad had already made it abundantly clear that Iran would never agree to a U.S. veto over reprocessing. These ‘exploratory talks’ were not intended to bridge the gap between the Iranian and U.S. positions, but rather, to buy time for the administration to build some kind of consensus in Washington on how to move forward. Critics within the administration were already busy sabotaging the nuclear deal with Iran, leaking to journalists their concerns that “the Shah’s nuclear plans are overambitious – that the

¹³³ Memorandum from Springsteen to Scowcroft, 13 January 1976, NSC, IR, Box 59, GRFL.

¹³⁴ Brenner, *Nuclear Power*, p. 74.

¹³⁵ Memorandum from Iklé to Scowcroft, 19 January 1976, NSC, IR, Box 59, GRFL.

kingdom does not have the technology to support a rapid expansion of nuclear generating power.”¹³⁶

A political battle over nuclear exports to Iran was being waged on three fronts: in the diplomatic negotiations between the United States and Iran; the policy debate within the Ford administration; and the legislative contest between the administration and Congress. Scowcroft complained to Ford that, “We have, most recently, not been negotiating with Iran but with ourselves.” Under Nixon, decisions on Iran policy had been largely insulated from bureaucratic infighting and domestic political considerations because of the intimate relationship between the president and the shah. Nixon had strong opinions on the shah and all decisions relating to Iran were taken by him, with Kissinger’s advice, in the White House. The shah’s critics within the administration were either sidelined or by-passed through backchannels, while Congress was left in the dark. But Ford had taken office without a popular mandate, forcing him to govern by consensus.¹³⁷ He had no relationship with the shah and no strong views on Iran. Ford’s passivity and political weakness meant that the circle of decision-making on Iran expanded beyond the White House, to include critics within the administration and in Congress who were uncomfortable with the leverage that Iran had exercised over the United States under Nixon. The shah’s influence no longer trumped the views of his critics, particularly on the sensitive issue of nuclear reprocessing, as it might have done under Nixon. With this lack of consensus in Washington, Scowcroft

¹³⁶ Harry B. Ellis, ‘U.S., Iran nuclear talks stalled’, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 26 February 1976.

¹³⁷ See, Cannon, *Time and Change*; Yanek Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005).

cautiously advised Ford to put off any decision on Iranian reprocessing: “to resolve that problem now would require a detailed, controversial decision by you on a US position that might not be acceptable to the Shah.” Instead, he counselled the president to move ahead with the exploratory talks that the agencies had recommended.¹³⁸ Ford duly ordered Seamans to return to Tehran to speak with the shah, accompanied by Carlyle E. Maw, a Harvard-educated lawyer who was Kissinger’s under secretary for international security affairs at the State Department. In a 4 February memorandum, Scowcroft notified all the relevant agencies of the president’s decision and told them that Ford would “reserve his judgement” on the final U.S. position, as long as there was still hope that the shah might be willing to agree to multinational reprocessing. If, as expected, the shah refused to shift his position, Seamans and Maw were authorised to “explore with Iran other techniques for achieving the same objective.”¹³⁹

With few cards left to play, the president’s envoys could do little more than flatter the shah and appeal to his vanity, as the State Department had suggested. They carried with them a letter from Ford for the shah, in which the president praised Iran’s “leading role in supporting the Non-Proliferation Treaty and other efforts to abate the spread of nuclear weapons.” Referring to spent fuel reprocessing, Ford called on the shah to help “ensure that the sensitive aspect of the nuclear fuel cycle evolves in a manner that reassures the world.”¹⁴⁰ The U.S.

¹³⁸ Memorandum from Scowcroft to President Ford, 26 January 1976, and Memorandum from Elliott, Marcum, and Oakley to Scowcroft, 23 January 1976, NSC, IR, Box 59, GRFL.

¹³⁹ Memorandum from Scowcroft to various members of the NSC, 4 February 1976, NSC, IR, Box 59, GRFL.

¹⁴⁰ Letter from President Ford to the Shah of Iran, 21 February 1976, NSA, Presidential Correspondence with Foreign Leaders (PCWFL), Box 2, GRFL.

strategy was to convince the shah that he would be making a “major act of nuclear statesmanship” by forgoing national reprocessing on Iranian soil.¹⁴¹ This was a desperate move by the Americans, with little chance of success. Just weeks earlier, *The New York Times* had quoted the shah as saying: “We gave them [the Americans] guarantees that these reactors will be used only for peaceful purposes, and not for nuclear weapons. But they asked unnecessarily for additional guarantees that we won’t give.”¹⁴²

A Compromise on Reprocessing

The shah received Seamans and Maw in Tehran on 23 February 1976. After reading Ford’s letter, he asked them, “what more do you want me to do?” Iran was a party to the NPT and the shah could not understand “why the U.S. does not trust Iran to develop fully its peaceful nuclear power program.” Despite the shah’s exasperation, the overall mood of the meeting was positive and he agreed to send Etemad to Washington in April for further talks. He was still interested in purchasing reactors from the United States and in investing in a uranium enrichment plant in the United States, and he acknowledged “a shared responsibility to assure the proper use of U.S. supplied nuclear facility [sic] and materials.” But as Seamans reported to the president, the shah “never indicated, however, that he would accept U.S. conditions on reprocessing or whether or not he would accept reprocessing solely on a multinational scale.”¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Memorandum from Scowcroft to President Ford, undated; Memorandum from Elliot to Scowcroft, 19 February 1976, NSA, PCWFL, Box 2, GRFL.

¹⁴² David Burnham, ‘U.S. Export Ban on Nuclear Equipment Urged by Former Atomic Energy Chief’, *The New York Times*, 20 January 1976.

¹⁴³ Memorandum from Seamans to President Ford, 15 March 1976, CREST.

The exploratory talks in Tehran not only failed to elicit any hint of compromise from the shah, they seemed to confirm that the gap between the American and Iranian positions could not be bridged. In reply to Ford's letter, the shah wrote on 4 March that Iran would have to be reassured of the United States' reliability as a nuclear supplier if the talks were to move forward. The shah hoped that Ford's "non-proliferation policy would remain flexible enough to allow a fruitful and meaningful cooperation to prevail between our two countries in the field of nuclear energy."¹⁴⁴ The clear implication of the shah's message was that if the U.S. continued to drag its feet, Iran would look to other, more reliable, nuclear suppliers. Seamans recognised the lack of American leverage and reiterated to Ford his earlier proposal that if Iran tried and failed to secure foreign participation in its reprocessing facility, then Washington should agree to Iranian reprocessing in a national facility, as long as the U.S. was "satisfied the safeguards applied to these activities by the IAEA are effective" and as long as Iran allowed the U.S. "to assign staff to the facility if in the U.S. judgement this is necessary to supplement IAEA safeguards."¹⁴⁵ The Iranians had consistently resisted the idea of a multinational reprocessing facility and it was now clear that this demand would have to be dropped if Washington wanted a deal with the shah.

As the Americans prepared for Etemad's visit in April 1976, the administration debated Seamans' proposal to allow national reprocessing in Iran. The State Department was reluctant to make such a big concession to Iran, but they were willing to accept national reprocessing as a fall-back position. Kissinger's

¹⁴⁴ Letter from the Shah of Iran to President Ford, 4 March 1976, NSA, PCWFL, Box 2, GRFL.

¹⁴⁵ Memorandum from Seamans to President Ford, 15 March 1976, CREST. Memorandum from Scowcroft to President Ford, 22 March 1976, NSA, PCWFL, Box 2, GRFL.

staff reiterated the idea they had put forward in January of first exploring an option to ‘buy-back’ the spent fuel Iran produced from reactors or nuclear material supplied by the United States. If Iran failed in its efforts to secure international participation in its reprocessing facility, and if the U.S. decided to forgo the option of buying back Iran’s spent fuel, only then should the U.S. consent to national reprocessing subject to the same safeguards that Seamans had proposed. This proposal had the benefit of at least delaying Iranian national reprocessing because of the obligation on Iran to first exhaust efforts to secure international participation in its reprocessing facility. However, the State Department begrudgingly recognised that additional safeguards could not be imposed on the shah. Under Secretary Joseph Sisco concurred with the view of the Policy Planning Staff, directed by Winston Lord, that it might be “counterproductive” to introduce new proposals like the buy-back option, which were not “realistic” given how determined the shah was to preserve for Iran the option of mastering the full nuclear fuel cycle.¹⁴⁶ Kissinger’s instinct was to accommodate the shah and he shared Sisco and Lord’s scepticism that the shah would agree to this new proposal. He had initially asked for a meeting with his senior staff to discuss their proposal, but with time running out before Etemad’s scheduled arrival in Washington on 20 April he reluctantly approved the Department’s recommendation to seek a U.S. buy-back option, with national reprocessing as a fall-back position.¹⁴⁷

The exploratory talks in Tehran had clarified for many in the Ford administration that they could not preclude national reprocessing, at least in

¹⁴⁶ Memorandum from Kratzer and Atherton to Kissinger, 26 March 1976, EBB 268, NSA-GWU.

¹⁴⁷ Memorandum from Robison to Kissinger, 14 April 1976, EBB 268, NSA-GWU. Memorandum from Springsteen to Scowcroft, 16 April 1976, NSA, IR, Box 64, GRFL.

principle, in any nuclear agreement with Iran. Kissinger, Seamans, and even Iklé, all acknowledged this reality. The only holdout was Rumsfeld, who was still “hardlining” against allowing national reprocessing.¹⁴⁸ Scowcroft put his weight behind the State Department’s recommendation, advising the president to ask the shah for a U.S. option to buy-back Iran’s spent fuel, while also assuring him that the U.S. would agree to national reprocessing if Washington decided not to exercise this option. If Iran rejected the buy-back proposal, then the U.S. negotiators would agree to national reprocessing under the safeguards that Seamans had proposed. Scowcroft argued that insisting on a multinational facility as a precondition to reprocessing “seems pointless and possibly counter productive”. The State Department’s proposal still held open the possibility of either full U.S. participation, or at least an American presence, in an Iranian national reprocessing facility, thereby satisfying Congressional non-proliferation concerns.¹⁴⁹ On the eve of Etemad’s arrival in Washington, President Ford signed NSDM 324, adopting a new U.S. negotiating position. The United States would try to retain its veto on spent fuel reprocessing in Iran, but would consent to reprocessing in a national facility on Iranian soil, if Iran failed in its efforts to establish a multinational facility. While the U.S. negotiators were instructed to seek a spent fuel buy-back option, NSDM 324 authorised them to drop this demand if they deemed it “essential” to reaching an “ad referendum” agreement with Iran.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Memorandum from Ikle to Scowcroft, 29 March 1976; Memorandum from Elliott and Oakley to Scowcroft, 16 April 1976, NSA, IR, Box 64, GRFL.

¹⁴⁹ Memorandum from Scowcroft to President Ford, 19 April 1976, NSC, IR, Box 64, GRFL.

¹⁵⁰ National Security Decision Memorandum 324, 20 April 1976, Digital Library, GRFL.

The United States' acquiescence to national reprocessing in NSDM 324 represented a significant diplomatic victory for Iran. In nearly two years of negotiations, the shah had evaded every American attempt to pin him down on additional safeguards beyond Iran's obligations under the NPT. Meanwhile, the Ford administration had first conceded fuel reprocessing on Iranian soil in April 1975 and was now, a year later, also conceding a multinational facility as a precondition to such reprocessing. Kissinger tried to justify these concessions to his State Department staff. He told them that he was very sceptical that any group of countries would ever agree to cooperate in a regional multinational reprocessing plant: "in any region you look at it is a fraud."¹⁵¹ He noted that Pakistan would never agree to a regional reprocessing plant in Iran, nor would the shah consent to a multinational facility in Pakistan. The shah was not about to sacrifice Iran's right to reprocess spent fuel on its own territory, for the sake of preventing Pakistan from going nuclear. He was resisting American attempts to enlist him in a campaign to pressure Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, his CENTO ally, to pull out of a nuclear deal with France that included the transfer of reprocessing technology. As both the shah and Etemad had intimated to the Americans on a number of occasions, the best way for Washington to prevent Pakistani nuclear proliferation was to sell Pakistan the conventional arms it needed to defend itself against India and to provide Islamabad with a meaningful security guarantee.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 12 May 1976, EBB 268, NSA-GWU.

¹⁵² Telegram 116392 from the Department of State to the Embassy in Iran, 12 May 1976; Telegram 4920 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 16 May 1976, NSA, PCFMESA, Box 14, GRFL. Telegram 5765 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 7 June 1976, EBB 268, NSA-GWU.

Initially, it appeared that this American compromise on national reprocessing might break the deadlock in the nuclear negotiations with Iran. The 20-21 April talks with Etemad in Washington had achieved “quite a bit of progress” on the buy-back option, Kissinger’s staff reported, and the Iranian nuclear chief had returned to Tehran to consult with the shah. But the secretary of state was well aware that Iran could easily turn to France or West Germany for its nuclear needs and he worried that U.S. insistence on additional safeguards was jeopardising lucrative nuclear contracts. The United States had lost its monopoly in the global nuclear market, as Canadian and European firms aggressively lobbied for contracts in emerging markets, including Iran.¹⁵³ A comprehensive German nuclear deal with Iran was already being negotiated in the spring of 1976.¹⁵⁴ Kissinger fumed that “we are the only country which is fanatical and unrealistic enough to do things which are contrary to our national interests. The Europeans are not so illogical.”¹⁵⁵ The revelations the previous summer that the Germans had agreed to sell the entire nuclear fuel cycle to Brazil, including enrichment and reprocessing technology, while France was negotiating similar deals with Pakistan and South Korea, had infuriated Congress.¹⁵⁶ In response, Congress passed the Symington Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act in June 1976, which blocked U.S. economic and military assistance to any country engaged in nuclear trade, unless all transferred nuclear materials and facilities were placed under strict multilateral safeguards.

¹⁵³ Paul L. Joskow, ‘The International Nuclear Industry Today: The End of the American Monopoly,’ *Foreign Affairs*, 54/4 (1976), pp. 788-803.

¹⁵⁴ Craig R. Whitney, ‘Bonn’s Atom Offer to Iran Stirs a Debate on Sharing’, *The New York Times*, 18 April 1976.

¹⁵⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 12 May 1976, EBB 268, NSA-GWU.

¹⁵⁶ James Reston, ‘The Nuclear Power Race’, *The New York Times*, 4 June 1975. ‘Nuclear Madness’, *The New York Times*, 13 June 1975.

Furthermore, the 1976 presidential elections were now in full swing and the Democratic candidate, Governor Jimmy Carter of Georgia, had made nuclear proliferation an election issue. In a speech at the United Nations in May, he had called for “a voluntary moratorium” by all nuclear supplier countries on transfers of enrichment and reprocessing technology.¹⁵⁷ The growing domestic political saliency of nuclear proliferation, in the middle of an election year increasingly narrowed Ford’s options in the nuclear negotiations with Iran.

Agreeing to Disagree

In the summer of 1976, after more than two years of negotiations, the Ford administration was still clinging to the hope that they could impose additional safeguards on a nuclear agreement with Iran, which would be crucial for ratification of the agreement by Congress. But that hope evaporated when West Germany signed a broad nuclear cooperation agreement with Iran which, like their controversial deal with Brazil, included the eventual transfer of reprocessing technology. Bonn had kept Washington apprised of its negotiations with Tehran and was now looking to Kissinger for his blessing for the deal, but the secretary of state worried that the Germans were trying to make him the “fall guy” for an agreement that would be deeply unpopular in Congress.¹⁵⁸ After seeing the text of the agreement on 2 July, an angry Kissinger reminded West German Ambassador Berndt Von Staden that “we had strongly urged that the FRG [Federal Republic of Germany] not transfer reprocessing to Iran. You know our position in this matter. I

¹⁵⁷ Brenner, *Nuclear Power*, pp. 91, 117-118; Walker, ‘Nuclear Power’, pp. 234-235.

¹⁵⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 12 May 1976, EBB 268, NSA-GWU. Memorandum from Elliott and Oakley to Scowcroft, 12 July 1976, NSA, PCFMESA, Box 27, GRFL.

don't want anyone in the FRG to say he didn't know." Von Staden tried to defend the agreement by arguing that it contained strict safeguards that were "breaking new important ground" and would serve as a "useful precedent." But regardless of these safeguards, Kissinger was convinced that "It will still look like Brazil." He warned the ambassador that "we cannot avoid saying that we did not approve of this agreement" and told him, "You should be under no illusion as to what will happen when the agreement is announced."¹⁵⁹ Von Staden was right that the German-Iranian deal set a new precedent, but hardly a useful one from Kissinger's perspective. By agreeing to supply Iran with reprocessing technology, the Germans had undercut the U.S. demand for a veto on Iranian reprocessing and a right to buy-back Iran's spent fuel.

The State Department had delivered a revised draft of the U.S.-Iran nuclear agreement to Etemad in June, hoping that the Iranians might respond positively to the compromise language on reprocessing, in accordance with NSDM 324. The draft agreement actually consisted of two documents: a new bilateral agreement between the United States and Iran to replace the original 1957 agreement on the civil uses of atomic energy, which the Americans hoped would be a template for future nuclear export deals; as well as a separate diplomatic note that elaborated the arrangements for managing Iran's spent nuclear fuel. Together, the two documents constituted an agreement whereby the United States would only allow Iran to reprocess spent fuel in a national facility on Iranian soil, under strict bilateral and IAEA safeguards, if the Iranians made a good faith effort to secure international participation in their reprocessing plant, and if the U.S. chose not to buy-back the

¹⁵⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 2 July 1976, EBB 268, NSA-GWU.

spent fuel from Iran's reactors. Article XI of the American draft allowed the United States to review the design of any reactors or other equipment purchased by Iran for its nuclear program and gave American officials access to "all places and data" in order to keep track of nuclear material exported to Iran.¹⁶⁰

The likelihood that the shah would agree to such intrusive and onerous safeguards, given the favourable terms of the German-Iranian deal, was very low. The Iranians were simply unwilling to forgo the option of national reprocessing of spent fuel, lest they leave themselves at the mercy of foreign nuclear fuel suppliers. Etemad sent the U.S. Embassy in Tehran a lengthy response to the revised American draft on 21 July, which left little hope that a U.S.-Iran nuclear deal could still be reached. Iran was willing to agree to "active participation" by the United States in its reprocessing facility, but Etemad wanted to make amendments to the American text that would make such participation "commensurate with the respective United States economic and financial contribution to the facilities on the basis of reasonable economic practice." In other words, the United States would have to invest in the reprocessing facility if it wanted a say in how the facility was managed. "Otherwise," he wrote, "Iran alone would be footing the bill for the non-proliferation objectives." Totally rejecting any U.S. veto over Iranian reprocessing, he insisted that "Iran considers reprocessing an important 'down stream' activity, and for obvious security of supply and economic reasons seriously intends to have it performed in facilities established in Iran." Iran would maintain "effective control of the management and operation of the reprocessing facilities", while the U.S.

¹⁶⁰ Telegram 132760 from the Department of State to the Embassy in Iran, 28 May 1976; Telegram 135520 from the Department of State to the Embassy in Iran, 2 June 1976; Telegram 5735 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 7 June 1976, EBB 268, NSA-GWU.

would have a “minority voting right without a veto power” in the operation of the plant. Etemad all but repudiated the ‘buy-back’ option as well, when he wrote that “Iran should have [the] full right to decide whether to reprocess or otherwise dispose or treat the materials provided under the agreement” subject to the agreed safeguards. He had transformed an American right to buy-back Iran’s spent fuel into an Iranian option to reprocess its spent fuel in the United States, if Iran decided “at any given time, that reprocessing in Iran is not advisable.”¹⁶¹

This uncompromising Iranian response posed a serious problem for Kissinger, who was scheduled to make a visit to Iran from 6-7 August 1976 for a meeting of the U.S.-Iran Joint Commission. While a host of contentious issues were on the agenda for Kissinger’s visit, with a proposed arms-for-oil barter agreement at the top of the list, the American media focused on a report in a Tehran newspaper that Kissinger would sign a deal for the sale of eight nuclear reactors to Iran worth \$26 billion. American officials downplayed expectations that any deal would be reached during Kissinger’s visit.¹⁶² Robert Oakley, who had succeeded Harold Saunders as senior director for the Middle East and South Asia on the NSC staff, had consulted with his colleagues in the White House and the State Department, and they agreed that Etemad’s 21 July reply was “a major set-back, returning our negotiations to the starting point.” Oakley advised Scowcroft that, “We are now so far apart that it may be better for the Secretary to discuss this exclusively with the Shah and not have a meeting of the Nuclear subcommittee of the Joint

¹⁶¹ Telegram 7485 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 23 July 1976, EBB 268, NSA-GWU.

¹⁶² ‘Kissinger Arrives in Iran for Economic Discussions’, *Los Angeles Times*, 6 August 1976.

Commission.”¹⁶³ Kissinger’s staff had to save him from the impossible task of negotiating a nuclear agreement with Iran that would not be seen by the shah as discriminatory, but would also satisfy Congress.

To make matters worse, on the eve of Kissinger’s departure, the Foreign Assistance Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee published a scathing report on U.S. arms sales to Iran, which was indicative of the prevailing attitude in Congress. The report concluded that because of the commitments that Nixon had made to the shah in Tehran in 1972, “U.S. arms sales to Iran were out of control”. The subcommittee was chaired by Senator Hubert Humphrey, a senior Democrat who had served as vice president under Lyndon Johnson and had lost the 1968 presidential election to Nixon. In an indictment of Nixon’s policy of Iranian primacy, Humphrey wrote that Washington had “ignored the substantial and far-reaching foreign policy implications which result from our deep involvement in sales, training and logistical supply programs with Iran.”¹⁶⁴ A *Washington Post* editorial lamented that Nixon’s tilt towards Iran “was never debated within the administration, let alone in public” and labelled it “high-handed and irresponsible”. The shah was portrayed as a dangerous megalomaniac who might draw the United States into a regional conflict in the Middle East or South Asia.¹⁶⁵ The Humphrey Report echoed increasing calls for the United States to distance itself from the shah because of human rights violations in Iran. Organisations like Amnesty

¹⁶³ Memorandum from Oakley to Scowcroft, 26 July 1976, NSA, International Economic Affairs Staff Files, Box 1, GRFL.

¹⁶⁴ U.S. Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on Foreign Assistance, *U.S. Military Sales to Iran* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976), pp. iii, xiii.

¹⁶⁵ ‘Iran and the Arms Trade’, *The Washington Post*, 5 August 1976; Tom Wicker, ‘President and Shah’, *The New York Times*, 6 August 1976.

International and the International Commission of Jurists, as well as vocal Iranian dissidents like Reza Baraheni, had brought the shah's human rights record to the attention of the national press.¹⁶⁶ Jimmy Carter had already given notice that a Democratic administration would block the sale of nuclear reprocessing technology to countries like Iran. Now, Humphrey was also indicating that a Carter White House might move away from the policy of Iranian primacy that Nixon had forged and Kissinger had sustained.

Kissinger's hoped that his visit to Iran would shore up the United States' partnership with the shah, which was under withering fire from the Democrats in Congress and critics within the administration. He complained to Ford that, "It couldn't be a worse time. Treasury and Defense are going after the Shah. Simon is going around saying the Shah is dangerous and shouldn't have exotic weapons." He warned Ford that, with this "vicious campaign" against the shah, "We are playing with fire."¹⁶⁷ The shah, sensing perhaps that his closest ally in Washington was under siege and that the U.S.-Iran partnership was in peril, eased the pressure on Kissinger in anticipation of his arrival in Iran. As Oakley had suggested, Kissinger would not attend the meeting of the joint nuclear energy committee. Instead, mid-level American officials attended the meeting with Etemad in Tehran on 3 and 4 August, before Kissinger's arrival. Helms reported that in those meetings, Etemad "retreated" from the position he had taken in his 21 July letter: "While contending [that the] U.S. has [an] obligation to assist Iran in all areas of nuclear technology,

¹⁶⁶ 'Iran Accused at Meeting Here of Torture and Repression; Speakers Urge "Tyranny" End', *The New York Times*, 29 February 1976; Reza Baraheni, 'Torture in Iran; "It is a Hell Made by One Man for Another Man"', *The New York Times*, 21 April 1976; Victor A. Lusinchi, 'Torture and Denials of Rights Laid to Iran by Jurists' Group', *The New York Times*, 29 May 1976.

¹⁶⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 3 August 1976, NSA, MEMCONS, Box 20, GRFL.

Etemad acknowledged this was impractical for [the] U.S. under current conditions, and Iran would not press [the] point.” The American negotiators insisted on framing the buy-back option as a U.S. right to purchase Iran’s spent fuel, rather than an Iranian option to reprocess its spent fuel in the United States. Some of the AEOI officials attending the meeting objected, but Etemad, who alone would have been privy to the shah’s instructions, overruled them and agreed to the original American formula. Both delegations agreed on a “bottom line” that any agreement would not preclude, at least in principle, national reprocessing on Iranian soil.¹⁶⁸

The shah received Kissinger on 6 August at his summer palace in Nowshahr on the Caspian Sea for four hours of private discussions.¹⁶⁹ He explained to Kissinger that he could not be seen to acquiesce to any agreement that treated Iran any differently than other parties to the NPT. He insisted, according to Kissinger, that “we avoid doing anything which would appear to be discriminatory against Iran.” But as Kissinger intimated to the shah, the political tide in Washington had turned decisively against the nuclear agreement. In the current climate in Washington, “reprocessing in Iran on a purely national basis would not be an acceptable solution.” Even American participation in a bi-national plant in Iran was not feasible “under current and foreseeable conditions”. Although the draft nuclear agreement did not, in theory, preclude Iranian national reprocessing, Kissinger explained that in practice Washington would always exercise its option to either buy-back or exchange Iran’s spent fuel. The shah “seemed agreeable” to this

¹⁶⁸ Telegram 7886 from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 3 August 1976, EBB 268, NSA-GWU.

¹⁶⁹ Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, p. 208.

arrangement, according to Kissinger.¹⁷⁰ He may well have concluded that a nuclear agreement with the United States was impossible and that it was more important to ensure the success of Kissinger's visit in order to buttress the flagging U.S.-Iran relationship. At a joint press conference following their talks, the shah defended Iran's arms purchases from the United States against the charges in the Humphrey Report. "Can the United States or the non-Communist world afford to lose Iran?" the shah asked the travelling American press corps.¹⁷¹ Kissinger, who was visibly "annoyed" with the journalists' questions, reminded his fellow Americans of the logic of the Nixon Doctrine: Iran's "effort at self-defence is strongly in the American interest."¹⁷² Back in Tehran, Kissinger and Ansary signed an economic agreement, which the secretary of state claimed would raise bi-lateral trade to \$40 billion for the period 1975 to 1980.¹⁷³

With November's presidential elections looming, the August 1976 trip had been Kissinger's last opportunity to secure a nuclear agreement with the shah during Ford's first, and potentially only, term in office. Unbeknownst to Kissinger, it would also be his last visit to Iran. The next time he would see the shah would be in exile in the Bahamas in the spring of 1979.¹⁷⁴ Both men had sensed that a window of opportunity for a nuclear deal was closing and both had compromised in

¹⁷⁰ Telegram SECTO 20089 from Kissinger to Robinson, 8 August 1976, RG 59, Records of the Policy Planning Staff, Director's Files (Winston Lord), 1969-1977, Box 368. See also, Memorandum from Irving, Vest and Lord to Kissinger, 12 August 1976; Memorandum from Robinson to Kissinger, 18 August 1976, EBB 268, NSA-GWU.

¹⁷¹ Bernard Gwertzman, 'Shah Cautions U.S. Against Arms Cut', *The New York Times*, 7 August 1976.

¹⁷² Harry B. Ellis, 'U.S., Iran Draw Up Giant Deal', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 9 August 1976.

¹⁷³ Thomas W. Lippmann, 'U.S., Iran Set \$40 Billion Trade', *The Washington Post*, 8 August 1976; Leslie H. Gelb, 'Nuclear Proliferation and the Sale of Arms', *The New York Times*, 11 August 1976.

¹⁷⁴ Marlise Simons, 'Shah, Entourage In Mexico with Aid of Kissinger', *The Washington Post*, 11 June 1979.

order to try and save the deal. Although progress had been made on the reprocessing problem, with a tentative agreement on the buy-back option, the domestic political environment in the United States ultimately rendered a deal in 1976 impossible. While the Ford administration was busy conducting a major review of its nuclear policy, in response to Carter's challenge in May, the shah was looking elsewhere for the nuclear reactors he had hoped to buy from the United States.¹⁷⁵ In October, during a visit by President Giscard d'Estaing to Iran, France secured an \$8 billion deal to build a total of eight nuclear reactors in Iran, beginning with two 900MW reactors near Abadan, as well as a nuclear research centre near Isfahan to train Iranian nuclear scientists.¹⁷⁶ The final nail in the coffin of the U.S.-Iran nuclear deal came three weeks later, when the shah received an advance copy of a major policy statement by Ford on nuclear policy.¹⁷⁷ In an audacious announcement on 28 October, the president declared that "the United States should no longer regard reprocessing of used nuclear fuel to produce plutonium as a necessary and inevitable step in the nuclear fuel cycle". Ford ordered a deferral of the commercialisation of chemical reprocessing in the United States as well as a three-year moratorium on U.S. exports of enrichment and reprocessing technology. He called on "nuclear suppliers to provide nuclear consumers with fuel services, instead of sensitive technology or facilities."¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Brenner, *Nuclear Power*, pp. 100-115. Walker, 'Nuclear Power,' pp. 234-236.

¹⁷⁶ 'France Agrees To Provide Iran Nuclear Plants', *The Washington Post*, 7 October 1976; 'French Sign Iran A-Deal, Assail U.S.', *The New York Times*, 8 October 1976.

¹⁷⁷ Telegram 264470 from the Department of State to the Embassy in Iran, 27 October 1976, NSA, PCFMESA, Box 14, GRFL.

¹⁷⁸ 'Statement on Nuclear Policy,' October 28, 1976, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, Gerald R. Ford, 1976-77, Book III (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979), pp. 2763-2778.

Ford's October statement meant that the nuclear deal with Iran would have to be renegotiated from scratch, but that would have to await the outcome of the presidential elections. In the meantime, the U.S.-Iran partnership continued to deteriorate, as Ford tried to protect the fragile global economic recovery, following the 1973 oil shock, from another increase in oil prices by OPEC at its scheduled summit in Doha in December 1976. Ford wrote to the shah on 29 October, informing him that Kissinger had relayed the shah's "concern about the need to maintain close cooperation between our two countries despite opposition in Congress and other circles." The president warned the shah that, "The struggle with certain segments of American opinion on this subject has by no means been won" and any move by Iran to raise oil prices "would play directly into the hands of those who have been attacking our relationship."¹⁷⁹ Ford's letter implied that Iranian defiance on oil prices would harm Iran's chances of winning Congressional approval for further arms sales or the proposed nuclear deal. The shah's reply reached the president soon after he had lost the election to Carter. In perhaps the strongest language ever used by the shah with an American president, he told Ford that Iran was not about to commit economic "suicide" because the West refused to reduce its dependence on oil or lower inflation through painful cuts in spending. He threatened that,

"if there is any opposition in the Congress and in other circles to see Iran prosperous and militarily strong, there are many other sources of supply to which we can turn, for our life is not in their hands. If these circles are irresponsible then it is hopeless, but should they be responsible, they will certainly regret their attitude to my country.

¹⁷⁹ Letter from President Ford to the Shah of Iran, NSA, Presidential Correspondence with Foreign Leaders, Box 2, GRFL.

Nothing could provoke more reaction in us than this threatening tone from certain circles and their paternalistic attitude.”

The tone of this exchange strongly suggests that the decline of the U.S.-Iran partnership was well under way during Ford’s presidency, rather than the common view that dates this waning of ties to the Carter administration.¹⁸⁰ President Carter would resume the nuclear negotiations with the shah in April 1977, but the rising tide of domestic unrest that engulfed Iran in 1978 prevented the two countries from signing a nuclear agreement before the shah’s overthrow in 1979.¹⁸¹

Conclusion

Tehran and Washington failed to reach an accord on nuclear exports to Iran because the Ford administration reverted to treating the shah as a client, rather than a partner, of the United States. In the two years of nuclear talks, from May 1974 to August 1976, the United States insisted on a veto over reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel in Iran in order to satisfy Congress that Iran would not be able to use American-supplied nuclear materials and facilities to stockpile plutonium for a nuclear weapons program. Mohammad Reza Shah considered this U.S. veto a violation of Iran’s sovereignty, so he consistently rejected it throughout the negotiations. His view was that the decision on how to dispose of its spent fuel was for Iran, and Iran alone, to make. Throughout the negotiations, Henry Kissinger struggled to build a consensus in favour of a nuclear deal with Iran, at a time when many in Washington worried that a megalomaniacal shah was following India down

¹⁸⁰ See, for example, Patrick Tyler, ‘Carter and the Shah: Khomeini’s Revolution,’ in his *A World of Trouble: The White House and the Middle East – from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009), pp. 210-248.

¹⁸¹ Burr, ‘A Brief History’, pp. 28-32.

the path of nuclear proliferation. Without going so far as to abandon the U.S. veto on reprocessing, the Ford administration made two concessions to the shah in the hope of securing a nuclear deal with Iran. First, in NSDM 292 of April 1975, the administration agreed that the United States would allow Iranian spent fuel reprocessing, as long as it was conducted in a multinational facility. Then, in NSDM 324 of April 1976, the administration dropped the multinational facility as a precondition to such reprocessing in Iran, but asked for an option to buy-back Iran's spent fuel. In doing so, the U.S. agreed, at least in principle, that the nuclear accord with Iran would not preclude national reprocessing on Iranian soil. During Kissinger's visit to Tehran in August 1976, the shah responded positively to this American concession in the hope of bolstering his faltering relationship with Washington. However, Ford's tough October 1976 statement on nuclear proliferation ended any prospect of a nuclear deal with Iran during his presidency.

The American demand for a veto over Iranian reprocessing was seen by the shah as discriminatory, given that the U.S. had made no such demand of any other country that had signed the NPT. From Washington's perspective this was simply a case of bad timing, as the nuclear negotiations with Iran came just after the Indian nuclear test, which forced the administration to rethink its policy on nuclear exports. But the shah had grown accustomed to being treated as an equal by Nixon, so he saw this attempt by Ford to discriminate against Iran as a weakening of the Iranian-American partnership. The notion that the United States would decide for Iran how it could dispose of its spent nuclear fuel was anachronistic in a U.S.-Iran relationship where, in the area of arms sales, Nixon had ordered his officials not to

second-guess the shah. Kissinger continued to see the shah as a vital Cold War partner and tried in vain to find a nuclear deal that would satisfy both the shah and Congress. But Kissinger could not overcome the opposition from those in Washington who saw the shah as the 'emperor of oil' and feared the consequences of placing nuclear technology in his hands. Under Nixon, the shah had been able to sideline these critics by dealing directly with the White House. But after Nixon's resignation, the shah no longer exercised the influence on American decision-making that he had once wielded. Frustrated and disappointed, the shah bargained hard, in the knowledge that Washington was in no position to try and impose additional safeguards that violated Iran's sovereignty, given that the United States had lost its monopoly over the global nuclear supply market. Unable to get the deal he wanted from the United States, the shah turned to France and West Germany for Iran's nuclear needs.

The dramatic rise in oil prices after 1973 afforded Iran even greater autonomy from the United States. The shah's decision to rapidly expand Iran's nuclear industry in 1974 had been made without consulting Washington, and had been taken with Iranian, not American, interests in mind. But the shah lacked a partner in the White House with whom he could do business on nuclear exports. Ford's presidency marked a period of decline in the U.S.-Iran partnership over the issues of oil prices, arms sales, and human rights. Nonetheless, the failure to reach a nuclear accord under Ford did not translate into a total repudiation of Nixon's policy of Iranian primacy. Ford honoured the commitments that Nixon had made to the shah. Annual U.S. arms sales to Iran nearly doubled during his presidency from

just over \$1 billion in 1975 to nearly \$2 billion in 1976. The figure would reach a peak of more than \$2.5 billion in 1977 during the first year of the Carter administration.¹⁸² But when it came to new commitments to Iran, such as a nuclear agreement, Nixon's unelected successor lacked the political capital to build a consensus within his administration and in Congress to preserve the U.S.-Iran partnership. Instead he tried to impose a discriminatory nuclear agreement on Iran that was rejected by the shah as a violation of Iran's sovereignty. Nixon's successor made light of his simplicity when he joked that he was 'a Ford, not a Lincoln.' But in the shah's eyes he was a Ford, not a Nixon.

¹⁸² Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy*, p. 112, Table 6.

CONCLUSION

How are we to remember Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and his place in the international history of the Cold War? We have become accustomed to thinking of the shah as a mere instrument of American power, a U.S. client who defended American interests in Iran and the Persian Gulf in exchange for Washington's economic and military support for his unpopular regime. Amin Saikal, a critical biographer of the shah, writes that Mohammad Reza Shah never managed "to overcome the indignity of his initial reliance on the CIA for wresting power from Mossadeq, nor break free from his initial dependence on the United States, and thus balance Iran's relations with that country on the basis of a symmetrical relationship."¹ This is a static view of the U.S.-Iran relationship that is forever fixated on the U.S. intervention in Iran against Musaddiq in 1953, at a time of intense Cold War competition between the United States and the Soviet Union and deep polarisation of the Middle East between revolutionary and conservative regimes. Yet Eisenhower's intervention in Iran in the 1950s can tell us very little about the nature and dynamics of Nixon's relationship with the shah in the 1970s, when the Cold War had entered into the era of superpower détente and the tide of revolutionary nationalism had receded in the Middle East. Homa Katouzian has suggested that we should avoid a static view of Mohammad Reza Shah's reign; the nature of his rule evolved over time as he gathered more power in his own hands. Even after the 1953 coup, the shah's dictatorship could still rely on a limited social

¹ Amin Saikal, *The Rise and Fall of the Shah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 202-203.

base. However, Katouzian argues, after the brutal suppression of the protests against the White Revolution in the summer of 1963, “the shah personally ruled Iran” as “politics itself began to disappear from the public sphere.”² Similarly, we should avoid taking a static view of the U.S.-Iran relationship during the Cold War. This thesis suggests that the nature and dynamics of the U.S.-Iran relations changed in the 1970s as Iran evolved from a client to a partner of the United States. It is time to revise the orthodox view of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi as a mere instrument of American power by acknowledging that, in the last decade of his reign, the shah had emerged as an autonomous Cold War actor who forged a partnership with Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, with implications for the global Cold War beyond Iran’s borders.

In *Chapter One* I drew on the theoretical and historical literature on the Cold War in the Third World to argue that the nature and dynamics of Iran’s relationship with the United States could be judged by looking at the degree of bargaining and reciprocity in the relationship, the extent to which the United States showed regard for Iran’s sovereignty, and the extent to which Iran and the United States could influence each others’ decision-making. Based on these three factors, I suggested that Iran was either a ‘client’ of the United States, which is the orthodox view in the scholarly literature, or a ‘partner’ of the United States, as I have argued in this revisionist thesis. But is there any significant difference between these two rather fluid concepts, which have been used as an analytical short-hand in this thesis? After all, clients and partners were both able to bargain with the superpowers in

² Homa Katouzian, *The Persians: Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press), pp. 263-264.

relationships that were based on reciprocity and mutual benefit. Both were penetrated by the superpowers because of the economic or military assistance they received from the Soviet Union and the United States. There were, in fact, two crucial differences. First, the superpowers attached such value to the benefits that a partner provided, that they were willing to acknowledge and support their partner's local interests and leadership. Whereas a client had to take its superpower patron's interests into account in its decision-making, a superpower often deferred to the judgement of its local partner on regional matters. Second, while Moscow and Washington often found it difficult to influence their Third World clients, they were themselves often influenced by their Third World partners. Whereas clients were instruments of the superpowers, regional partners were often architects of the superpowers' policies.

How, then, does the record of U.S.-Iran relations between 1969 and 1976 compare to these concepts of 'client' and 'partner'? The answer that emerges from the three episodes examined in this thesis is that Iran was a partner, not a client, of the United States in the 1970s. As I discussed in *Chapter Two*, this partnership was forged during Nixon's first term in office between 1969 and 1972. The shah relentlessly lobbied the new administration to abandon President Johnson's policy of balancing Iran and Saudi Arabia as the twin pillars of the Persian Gulf, an idea inherited from the departing British, and instead adopt a policy of Iranian primacy in the region. Thanks to his longstanding friendship with Richard Nixon, the shah found that he was pressing against an open door. Nixon brought new ideas about the shah to the White House. He did not see Mohammad Reza Pahlavi as a

megalomaniac, squandering Iran's oil income on exotic weapons. Rather, he saw the shah as a modernising anti-Communist statesman who shared his grand geopolitical view of the Cold War as well as his disdain for liberal intellectuals. In Nixon's mind, the question was not whether the shah should assume the leadership of the Gulf after the British withdrawal, but whether he was indeed up to the task of taking on such an important role in the Cold War. Iran's uncompromising defence of its regional primacy against the challenge from Iraq in the 1969 Shatt al-Arab crisis and its covert support for Pakistan during the 1971 South Asian crisis demonstrated that the shah was more than ready for this newfound role. In National Security Decision Memorandum 92 of November 1970 the Nixon administration recognised the preponderance of Iranian power in the Gulf and in the May 1972 meetings in Tehran Nixon and Kissinger assured the shah that Iran would be able to purchase whatever American conventional weapons it wanted in order to deter any regional adversary.

As a U.S. client in the 1950s and 1960s, Iran had been a battleground of the Cold War where the United States occasionally violated Iran's sovereignty in order to prevent what Washington perceived as Communist subversion. But as a U.S. partner in the 1970s, Iran was an autonomous actor in the Cold War, working with the United States to contain Soviet influence throughout the region. Nixon attached immense value to the shah's role in the Nixon Doctrine and, breaking with all his predecessors, embraced Iran's regional primacy. The intimacy of this partnership, at the heart of which was the friendship between Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and Richard Nixon, meant that the shah was able to exercise extraordinary influence in

the Nixon White House. As discussed in *Chapter Three*, the shah was able to draw the United States into Iran's secret war against Iraq in Kurdistan in 1972, by portraying Iran's long-standing regional conflict with Iraq as a Cold War confrontation with the Soviet-backed Ba'th regime in Baghdad. Preoccupied with Vietnam, superpower détente, the opening to China, and the presidential election in November, Nixon and Kissinger deferred to the shah's judgement on Iraq, despite all the contrary advice they were receiving from the CIA, the NSC staff, and the State Department. Nixon's decision to intervene in Kurdistan was as much about reaffirming his commitment to the partnership with the shah, as the need to rollback Soviet influence in Ba'thi Iraq. Throughout 1973 and 1974 the shah used the United States to keep the Kurds fighting and paralyse the Iraqi army, thereby preserving Iran's leverage over Iraq in the ongoing border dispute over the Shatt al Arab. But the shah's faith in the United States was shaken by Watergate. As the tide of battle turned against the Kurds and as Iraq signalled its willingness to reach a compromise, the shah agreed in March 1975 to abandon the Kurds in exchange for Iraqi territorial concessions in the Shatt. Although Kissinger had warned the shah not to abandon the Kurds, the U.S.-Iran partnership was so important that he had no choice but to accept the shah's decision as a *fait accompli* and suffer the domestic recriminations that followed.

Much as the shah feared, the partnership that he had forged with the United States began to decline following Nixon's resignation in August 1974. The shah did not enjoy the same intimate relationship with President Gerald Ford, as he had with Nixon. Although Kissinger worked hard to defend the U.S.-Iran partnership from

political opponents in the Democratic Congress and critics within with the Republican administration, the shah's detractors were no longer sidelined as they had been under Nixon. While Ford honoured the commitments that Nixon had made to the shah, he was unwilling to make any new commitments to an Iranian monarch who was increasingly unpopular in Washington. As discussed in *Chapter Four*, the shah hoped that his American partners would provide him with the nuclear technology and material he wanted, in order for Iran to reach economic and military parity with the great powers following the dramatic increase in oil prices in 1973. Instead, many in Washington were alarmed and angered by what they perceived as the shah's greed in driving up oil prices and his megalomania both at home and abroad. After the Indian nuclear test of 1974, the shah's critics feared that he would follow India down the path of nuclear proliferation. His critics within Congress and the Department of Defence vigorously opposed an agreement for U.S. nuclear exports to Iran. Although the Ford administration sought a compromise solution that would avoid reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel in Iran, President Ford ultimately sought to appease the shah's critics in Congress by foisting a nuclear agreement on the shah that included additional safeguards that went beyond Iran's commitments under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The shah saw these additional safeguards as a violation of Iran's sovereignty and a reversion by the United States to treating Iran as a client, rather than a partner of the United States. Although the U.S.-Iran partnership had declined as the shah's influence in Washington waned, he remained an autonomous Cold War actor and rejected Ford's demands, resulting in the failure of the negotiations.

We now know that Iran was not simply a Cold War battleground, to be ‘won’ or ‘lost’ by the United States as the literature on U.S.-Iran relations suggests. Rather, Iran evolved into an autonomous Cold War actor that defended the stability of the Persian Gulf and projected its power from the mountains of Kurdistan to the Bay of Bengal. The U.S.-Iran relationship under Nixon, Kissinger and the shah is only beginning to receive the attention it deserves, with implications for the emerging new Cold War history. For example, what can Nixon and Kissinger’s partnership with the shah tell us about American conceptions of superpower détente? Nixon and Kissinger’s willingness to upset Moscow by joining the shah’s secret war in Kurdistan, just after Nixon’s 1972 Moscow summit with Brezhnev, might suggest that Washington’s commitment to détente was limited and opportunistic when it came to superpower conflict in the Third World. As we write this new Cold War history, we can restore agency to the shah and place him at the centre of the U.S.-Iran relationship. This new history might suggest that blaming the shah’s downfall on the policies of Nixon or Carter is erroneous. Given the shah’s autonomy from the United States, could Nixon and Kissinger have pressured the shah to carry out meaningful domestic political reform? It seems unlikely that they would have had any more success than Kennedy in pressing for reform in Iran. Alternatively, could Carter have contemplated intervening in Iran in 1979 to save the shah, as Eisenhower had done in 1953? Surely the nature and dynamics of U.S.-Iran relations had changed so dramatically during the preceding decade that any such violation of Iran’s sovereignty was unthinkable. Perhaps the shah’s autonomy from the United States, rather than his dependence on Washington,

contributed to his downfall in 1979? These are all questions that merit further research based on the growing volume of documentary material on U.S.-Iran relations that is declassified every year. What seems likely, however, is that an acknowledgement of the shah's autonomy from the United States in the 1970s may prompt a reassessment of his place in the international history of the Cold War. While some have referred to the "flawed genius" or "majestic failure" of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in light of his overthrow in 1979, perhaps he will come to be remembered as the best foreign minister Iran never had.³

³ Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, p. 192; Marvin Zonis, *Majestic Failure: The Fall of the Shah* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991).

APPENDIX: SELECTED IRANIAN AND AMERICAN OFFICIALS

Iranian Officials

Afshar, Amir Khosrow	Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Alam, Asadollah	Prime Minister (1962-1964); Minister of the Imperial Court (1966-1977)
Ansary, Hushang	Ambassador to the United States (1967-1969); Minister of Economy (1969-1977)
Djam, Gen. Fereydoun	Chief of the Supreme Commander's Staff
Etemad, Akbar	Deputy Prime Minister and Director of the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran
Fazeli, Gen. Mohammad	Deputy Chief of the Supreme Commander's Staff
Hoveyda, Amir Abbas	Prime Minister (1965-1977)
Khalatbari, Abbas-Ali	Minister of Foreign Affairs (1971-1977)
Khatam, Gen. Mohammad	Commander of the Imperial Iranian Air Force
Nasiri, Gen. Nematollah	Deputy Prime Minister and Director of SAVAK (1965-1977)
Pahlavi, Mohammad Reza	Shah of Iran
Pakravan, Gen. Hassan	Deputy Director of SAVAK for Foreign Operations (1957-1961); Deputy Prime Minister and Director of SAVAK (1961-1965)
Pashai, Col. Mujtaba	Chief of Middle East Operations, SAVAK
Pejman, Maj. Issa	Chief of Kurdish Affairs, SAVAK
Zahedi, Ardeshir	Ambassador to the United States (1959-1962, 1971-1979); Ambassador to the United Kingdom (1962-1966); Minister of Foreign Affairs (1967-1971).

American Officials

Atherton, Alfred	Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs (1974-1978)
Battle, Lucius	Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs (1967-1968)
Brewer, William	Country Director for Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Yemen, and Aden, Department of State
Callaghan, Arthur	CIA Chief of Station, Tehran
Carter, Jimmy	President of the United States (1977-1981)
Colby, William	Director of Central Intelligence (1973-1976)
Connally, John	Secretary of the Treasury (1971-1972)
Eisenhower, Dwight	President of the United States (1953-1961)
Eliot, Theodore	Country Director for Iran, Department of State (1966-1969)
Elliott, David	Director for Science and Technology, NSC Staff
Farland, Joseph	Ambassador to Iran (1972-1973)
Ford, Gerald	Vice President of the United States (1973-1974); President of the United States (1974-1977)
Haig, Gen. Alexander	Senior Military Advisor to the President for National Security Affairs (1969-1970); Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, (1970-1973); Vice Chief of Staff of the Army (1973); White House Chief of Staff (1973-1974)
Helms, Richard	Director of Central Intelligence (1966-1973); Ambassador to Iran (1973-1976)
Humphrey, Hubert	Vice President of the United States (1965-1969); Democratic Candidate for President (1968); U.S. Senator for Minnesota (1971-1978); Chairman, Foreign Assistance Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Iklé, Fred	Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (1973-1977)
Kennedy, John	President of the United States (1961-1963)
Kissinger, Henry	Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (1969-1975); Secretary of State (1973-1977)
Johnson, Lyndon	Vice President of the United States (1961-1963); President of the United States (1963-1969)
Long, Clarence	U.S. Representative for Maryland; Chairman, Subcommittee on Foreign Operations of the House Appropriations Committee
Lowrie, Arthur	Chief of the U.S. Interests Section, Baghdad
MacArthur, Douglas, II	Ambassador to Iran (1969-1972)
Maw, Carlyle	Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Affairs (1974-1976)
Meyer, Armin	Ambassador to Iran (1965-1969)
Miklos, Jack	Country Director for Iran, Department of State (1969-1974); Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S. Embassy, Tehran (1974-1978)
Nixon, Richard	Vice President of the United States (1953-1961); President of the United States (1969-1974)
Noyes, James	Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence for Near Eastern, African and South Asian Affairs
Nutter, G. Warren	Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Security Affairs
Oakley, Robert	National Security Council Staff (1974-1977)
Ray, Dixie Lee	Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission (1973-1974); Assistant Secretary of State for International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (1974-1975)
Richardson, Elliot	Under Secretary of State (1969-1970)
Rogers, William	Secretary of State (1969-1973)
Rostow, Eugene	Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (1966-1969)

Rostow, Walt	Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (1966-1969)
Rumsfeld, Donald	White House Chief of Staff (1974-1975); Secretary of Defence (1975-1977)
Rusk, Dean	Secretary of State (1961-1969)
Saunders, Harold	National Security Council Staff (1961-1974)
Schlesinger, James	Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission (1971-1973); Director of Central Intelligence (1973); Secretary of Defence (1973-1975)
Scowcroft, Gen. Brent	Military Assistant to the President (1972-1973); Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (1973-1975); Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (1975-1977)
Seamans, Robert	Administrator of the Energy Research and Development Administration
Sisco, Joseph	Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs (1969-1974); Under Secretary of State (1974-1976)

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<<http://aad.archives.gov/aad/>>
Records of the Policy Planning Staff, Director's Files (Winston Lord), 1969-1977
Subject Numeric Files (SNF), 1970-73

Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (LBJL), Austin, Texas

National Security File (NSF)
Country File Middle East (CFME)
Files of Robert W. Komer
White House Central File (WHCF)
Confidential File
Subject File

Richard M. Nixon Presidential Materials Project (NPM), College Park, Maryland¹

National Security Council Files (NSCF)

¹ This collection was relocated to the Richard M. Nixon Presidential Library in Yorba Linda, California, in 2010.

Country Files – Middle East
President's Trip Files
VIP Visits
National Security Council Institutional Files (NSCIF)
Meeting Files
President's Personal File
White House Social Events 1969-1974
White House Tapes

Richard M. Nixon Presidential Library (RMNL), Yorba Linda, California

Virtual Library, available at:
<<http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/virtuallibrary/index.php>>
Wilderness Years

Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library (GRFL), Ann Arbor, Michigan

Council of Economics Advisers
Declassified Documents Remote Archive Capture (DDRAC)
Digital Library, available at:
<<http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/docs.asp>>
National Security Adviser (NSA)
International Economic Affairs Staff Files
Kissinger Reports on USSR, China and Middle East Discussions
Kissinger-Scowcroft West Wing Office Files (KSWWOF)
Memoranda of Conversations (MEMCONS)
Presidential Briefing Material for VIP Visits
Presidential Correspondence with Foreign Leaders (PCWFL)
Presidential Country Files for Europe and Canada
Presidential Country Files for the Middle East and South Asia
(PCFMESA)
National Security Council (NSC)
Institutional Records (IR)
Presidential Handwriting File
Ron Nessen Papers
White House Central Files (WHCF)
Subject File

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