ABSTRACT

BIZIEFF, MICHAEL PATRICK. Jimmy Carter and the Shah: US Foreign Relations with Iran a Year before the Fall of the Shah (Under the direction of Dr. Nancy Mitchell).

This thesis investigates US relations with Iran by focusing on the Shah of Iran’s visit to Washington D.C. in November 1977, President Carter’s visit to Tehran the following December, and the US response to the protests in Qom a week after Carter’s departure. It analyses the objectives of the two visits as well as their impact. It then looks at the tragic moment when the Iranian government fired on protestors in Qom. By focusing on this two-month period, which is considered the beginning of the Iranian Revolution, this thesis deepens our understanding of the Carter administration’s policies toward Iran prior to the Iranian Revolution.
Jimmy Carter and the Shah: US Relations with Iran a Year before the Fall of the Shah

by
Michael Patrick Bizieff

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APPROVED BY:

_______________________________
Dr. Nancy Mitchell
Committee Chair

_______________________________
Dr. Katherine Mellen Charron

_______________________________
Dr. Julia Rudolph

_______________________________
Dr. Golbarg Rekabtalaei
External Member
DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and my two beautiful children,

Tristan James and Thea Noël Bizieff.
BIOGRAPHY

Michael Patrick Bizieff received his undergraduate degree from North Carolina State University in Raleigh, North Carolina. His interests include the history of US diplomacy, the Cold War, the Middle East, the Iranian Revolution and the Iranian diaspora.
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There are countless friends, colleagues, and family members who have helped me on my journey to complete this paper. There will never be enough words to match their unwavering support; however, I will try by just simply saying thank you. Among all the people who walked with me on this journey, there are two whom I would like to specifically recognize. First is my advisor, Dr. Nancy Mitchell. This thesis would never have existed without her support. Her patience and encouragement guided me through this work even when I became a father and started a new job. Thank you for all you have done. Finally, I must acknowledge my beautiful wife, Vesal. You have sacrificed so much to help me obtain this dream. Without you, I would have given up a long time ago. Thank you for all you have done for our family and for believing in me. I love you.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 1  

CHAPTER ONE: The Context .......................................................................................... 6  
I. The White Revolution .................................................................................................. 8  
II. The Shah and The US Media ...................................................................................... 9  
III. The United States, Iran, and Oil ............................................................................... 11  
IV. The United States, Iran, and Human Rights ......................................................... 14  
V. The United States, Iran, and Military Arms Sales .................................................. 16  
VI. The United States, Iran and Middle East Peace Talks ........................................... 19  
VII. The United States, Iran, and the Horn of Africa .................................................... 21  
VIII. Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 22  

CHAPTER TWO: The Shah of Iran Arrives .................................................................. 23  
I. Ambassador William Sullivan and the Tehran Embassy ........................................... 24  
II. The Arrival of Mohammad Reza Shah ....................................................................... 26  
III. Oil .............................................................................................................................. 28  
IV. Arms Sales ............................................................................................................... 29  
V. Human Rights Violations ........................................................................................... 30  
VI. Assessment of Meeting ........................................................................................... 32  
VII. An Extended Invitation ............................................................................................ 34  

CHAPTER THREE: Carter in Tehran and the Cycle of (De)Liberalization .................... 37  
I. The Carters Arrive ....................................................................................................... 40  
II. Negotiations for Peace in Tehran .............................................................................. 41  
III. AWACS, Nuclear Energy, and Africa in Tehran ...................................................... 44  
IV. Rosalynn Carter in Tehran ....................................................................................... 45  
V. Toasts for Respected and Distinguished Guests ....................................................... 47  

CHAPTER FOUR: *Ettela’at*, Qom, and Silence ...................................................... 51  
I. The City of Qom .......................................................................................................... 52  
II. *Ettela’at* and the 1978 Qom Uprising ..................................................................... 54  
III. The Carter Administration’s Response ...................................................................... 60  

CONCLUSION .................................................................................................................... 64  
REFERENCES .................................................................................................................. 68  
APPENDIX ....................................................................................................................... 72
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Jimmy Carter and the Shah of Iran</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>The Shah of Iran and Shahbanou of Iran present Jimmy Carter and Rosalynn Carter with a tapestry of George Washington</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>President Carter waves from Air Force One on his arrival in Tehran, Iran</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Arrival ceremony for Jimmy Carter and Rosalynn Carter in Tehran, Iran</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>Jimmy Carter and US officials meet with the Shah of Iran and Iranian officials</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>Jimmy Carter with King Hussein of Jordan, the Shah of Iran and Shahbanou of Iran</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7</td>
<td>Jimmy Carter and the Shah toast at a State Dinner hosted by The Shah of Iran</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8</td>
<td>Jimmy Carter and King Hussein of Jordan in Tehran, Iran</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

This thesis began at a small table while drinking tea and playing a game of Persian rummy. Surrounded by my future wife’s family, I listened to their stories about Iran before the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Growing up in the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks, I thought of the Middle East and Southwest Asia as a region of the world that harbored ill feelings toward the United States and supported terrorists. Iran, being in the “Axis of Evil,” was the most dangerous. Nevertheless, my curiosity drove me to challenge my understanding of Iran. Gradually I discovered that the relationship between Iran and the United States is a vastly complicated subject. As my knowledge of the two countries’ relationship expanded, a single question drove my preliminary research: how did the United States, at the height of the Cold War, fail to foresee the Iranian Revolution and the fall of the shah?

The origins of the Iranian Revolution have attracted a plethora of scholarly inquiries. Scholars who have sought to understand the revolution have fallen into three camps: those who focus on the Iranian economy, or its social structure, or its oppressive government. Several academics, such as Ervand Abrahamian and Andrew Scott Cooper, situate the origins of the revolution in the uneven development caused by the shah’s economic policies. These scholars focus on the contrast between the glut of petrodollars and the stagnated domestic growth caused by the failure of the shah’s agricultural program and the increasing unemployment rates in the major cities.¹ Social historians, such as Charles Kurzman and Nikki Keddie, observe how the complex social interactions of Iranian society shaped the revolution.² These scholars examine how diverse groups bonded together to remove the shah from power. Other scholars, such as

² Charles Kurzman, The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran (Harvard University Press, 2005), 6-11; Nikki Keddie, Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution (Yale University Press, 2006), 94.
Michael Fischer, have stressed the ideological evolution of the religious movement as the genesis of the revolution. Despite the differences in how researchers approach the revolution, the accepted historiography cites the week of January 1st, 1978 as the beginning of the final stage of the revolution. This week is highlighted due to President Carter’s visit to Tehran on New Year’s Eve 1977 and the Qom protest on 9 January, 1978.

As my interest in the revolution grew, a select group of scholars became the foundation for my research. Nikki Keddie’s *Roots of the Revolution*, Ervand Abrahamian’s *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, Charles Kurzman’s *The Unthinkable Revolution*, James Bill’s *The Eagle and the Lion*, Richard Cottam’s *Iran and the United States*, and Michael Fischer’s *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* gave me an understanding of the Iranian Revolution that I had lacked. However, it was frustrating to discover that these scholars treated Carter’s visit and the Qom protest as two separate events. There was no scholarly attempt to understand if a correlation between President Carter’s visit and the Qom protest existed. In addition, there was very limited research on how the US government, via the embassy in Tehran, perceived the protest in Qom. Instead, what I discovered was that scholars often reduced Carter’s Tehran visit to the single moment when he delivered his New Year’s Eve toast. During his toast, in a line meant to flatter his host, Carter described Iran as “an island of stability”— a phrase that would come to haunt him. Historian Marvin Zonis describes the toast as a great betrayal of the shah’s opposition: “Where [the opposition] had anticipated a year of fundamental changes… [after Carter’s visit] they imagined that it would be back to business as usual.”

In interviews conducted after the Iranian Revolution, Charles Kurzman noted that many of the shah’s opponents had hoped to hear

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Carter discuss the need for change. This was best described by Sadegh Ghotbzadeh, an aide to Ayatollah Khomeini, who described Carter’s visit when he wrote, “it is the fact that our people see the Americans supporting the Shah as the primary cause of repression in Iran.” Before Carter’s arrival in Tehran, many Iranians believed the American president would change this perspective; however, Carter offered no criticism of the shah’s dictatorial regime. Scholars of the revolution have highlighted Carter’s New Year’s Eve toast as an example of the US government’s failure to understand the shifting political climate in Iran. In fact, both Michael Fischer and Marvin Zonis assert that Carter’s effusive praise for the shah encouraged the Iranian leader to become overconfident in his power, which pushed Iran towards the revolution.

While Carter’s toast has become the iconic moment of the visit, my research into the US archives revealed that this layover stop included several important diplomatic meetings. I was fortunate that my interest in this topic coincided with the US National Archives' release of the 1977 State Department cables – all 307,219 of them! In addition, traveling to the Jimmy Carter Library in Atlanta, where the declassification process is well underway but still incomplete, allowed me to deepen my research. I discovered that the leaders of the United States, Iran, and Jordan discussed issues such as the price of oil, peace in the Middle East, military arms deals, and international humanitarian violations when Carter visited Tehran. Therefore, one aim of this thesis is to use recently declassified documents to analyze Carter’s visit and place it in the historical context it deserves. It will then investigate any possible connection between Carter’s visit to Tehran and the uprising at Qom.

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Perhaps the greatest weakness in this research is its overreliance on the available US sources. This serves as a reminder of the work that still needs to be done to fully understand the Iranian Revolution. This work will be completed only when the US and Iranian governments release additional documents that are now hidden from the public. Moreover, I have not used any Iranian documents: my Farsi is rudimentary; I did not have funds to travel to Iran; and my understanding is that no relevant Iranian documents are open to researchers. Nevertheless, I am confident that by building on the secondary literature with research in the National Archives and the Carter Library, along with studying the press coverage and available memoirs, I have been able to develop a reliable account of this period from the US point of view. This work will attempt to answer the following questions. What was the purpose of Carter's visit to Tehran? What was the relative importance of the following goals: strengthening relations with Iran, stabilizing the price of oil, promoting Middle East peace, and encouraging Iran to thwart Soviet expansion? Is there any evidence to suggest that the visit encouraged the shah to maintain or escalate his harsh oppression of the Iranian people? What was the Carter administration’s perception of how Iranians responded to the president’s visit and to events in Iran following the Qom protest? Did the White House offer an official response to the disturbances in Qom, and if not, why not? Did the killings in Qom affect the relationship between Washington and Tehran? Was there any connection between Carter's visit and the protest in Qom?

To answer these questions, chapter one places the arrival of President Carter in Tehran in the context of 1977 and looks at US goals for the Tehran visit. It investigates Carter’s campaign promises as well as his achievements (particularly vis-à-vis Iran) in his first year in office. Chapter one looks at the political issues, such as nuclear energy policies, Soviet containment, the United States economy, and arms deals, that shaped the discussions between the two leaders
during the shah’s visit in November. To understand the relationship between Carter and the shah, it relies on the cable traffic between the US Embassy in Tehran and the State Department.

Chapter Two seeks to understand how the issues discussed in chapter one impacted the shah’s visit to Washington D.C. in November 1977. It then analyzes the outcome of the November visit.

Chapter Three reconstructs Carter’s visit to Tehran by using the presidential itinerary as well as memoirs of those present during the visit. It analyzes topics discussed by the Americans and the Iranians, as well as by representatives of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and other Middle Eastern countries present in Tehran around the time of Carter’s visit. In addition, this chapter examines the objectives of Rosalynn Carter, who travelled with the president, while in Tehran. Chapter Four focuses on the days immediately following Carter’s visit. It analyzes how the American Embassy in Tehran interpreted the response to the visit relying largely on the reports of the American ambassador’s interactions with the shah and ambassadors from neighboring countries.

This chapter also explores the US response to the protests in Qom, how the US embassy interpreted the unrest, and how this perception shaped the Carter Administration’s response to the shah’s actions on 9 January.

In the conclusion, I revisit the questions that inspired this work. What were the objectives of Carter’s visit? What was achieved during the visit? Is it accurate to cite Carter’s visit and toast as one of the origins of the Iranian revolution? How did the American government perceive the shah’s use of the military to suppress the Qom uprising? By answering these questions, it is my goal to gain a deeper understanding of the complex US-Iranian relationship.
CHAPTER ONE: The Context

The 1976 United States presidential election proved to be consequential to the US-Iranian relationship. As the election drew near, the shah grew nervous that Democratic nominee Jimmy Carter would defeat President Gerald Ford. During the Nixon-Ford-Kissinger years, the shah had become comfortable with his standing in the world, but the 1976 campaign made him nervous. He openly supported Ford because he feared that the election of Carter could mark the end of the Nixon Doctrine that had greatly benefited his regime. President Richard Nixon developed the “Nixon Doctrine,” in response to the long US involvement in Vietnam. One prong of this strategy was to empower the most powerful pro-Western country in each region to take the lead in containing the spread of Soviet influence. Under the Nixon Doctrine, the United States backed the shah’s rule in Iran and armed the Iranian government with sophisticated weapons. These arms sales accelerated dramatically after Iran gained an influx of cash following the 1973 Arab OPEC oil embargo. It was during this era that the shah increased his sphere of influence both in Africa and in the Arab world.\textsuperscript{10} Henry Kissinger, who served both as the National Security Advisor and then the Secretary of State, functioned as the doctrine’s bridge between the Nixon and Ford administrations. Under his guidance, the United States developed a closer relationship with the shah and the two country’s policies became even more mutually beneficial.\textsuperscript{11}

During the run-up to the 1976 election, Jimmy Carter campaigned in nearly every state to convince the American voters that the one-time Georgia governor should be their president. Carter’s primary focus was to distinguish himself from President Ford, and, by extension, Nixon and Kissinger, by focusing on what the character of an American president should be. Carter’s campaign to distinguish himself began in 1974, when he penned a \textit{New York Times} op-ed

\textsuperscript{11} Bill, \textit{The Eagle and the Lion}, 210.
criticizing the secrecy with which the Nixon and Ford administrations operated. Carter claimed that these administrations had broken the trust of the American people and that the government had a responsibility to repair the trust it lost with the American people.12 Carter wrote another op-ed in September 1975 in which he promised that as president, he would “restore the shattered belief that our Government can be open, honest, and competent.”13 Just prior to election day in October 1976, Carter wrote a piece in the New York Times. This article labeled the Ford administration as “ineffective and negative.” In contrast, Carter informed the reader that “I believe we can re-establish a sense of morality and purpose in our national character in both domestic and foreign affairs, and be bold in our search for world peace and the protection of human rights.”14 The strength of Carter’s campaign came from its focus on domestic issues; rarely did it articulate a detailed foreign policy. Carter won the election in November, but the ambiguity of his future foreign policy agenda left both voters and US allies to develop their own expectations of what Carter’s foreign policy might be.15 At a commencement speech following the election, Carter expressed his vision that foreign policy should work to illuminate the moral values of America’s past.16 His foreign policy would reestablish the principles on which the United States was founded. The Shah of Iran, who followed the election closely, believed that Carter would take a tougher stance on human rights violations and foreign arms sales than had Nixon and Ford. With no clear roadmap, the shah worried about the future of US-Iranian relations under the Carter administration.

16 Jimmy Carter, "Address at Commencement Exercises at the University of Notre Dame," 22 May 1977, APP.
I. The White Revolution

The term “liberalization” is an elastic and sometimes contentious word. Often used interchangeably with “modernization,” this term has come to mean the embracing of Western enlightenment ideals. However, as the academic field of history expands to embrace non-Western viewpoints, questions such as “Whose modern standards?” and “Whose ideals?” have helped shift historians from a Eurocentric focus to a more holistic understanding of world history. With this understanding in mind, throughout this thesis a country is referred to as “modern” when it has a government that incorporates a capitalist economy, democratic institutions, universal suffrage, as well as freedoms of expression, the press, and religion. During the Cold War, Americans considered the United States to be the standard toward which non-western societies should strive. The Shah of Iran frequently used the terms “liberalization” and “modernization” in dialogue with US officials. Primarily using petrodollars, the shah transformed Iran into his version of a “modernized” nation. In his country, the pillars of democratic institutions, a capitalist economy, and freedoms of expression all existed but operated under his watchful eye. Should any of these pillars offend the shah, he quickly addressed the problem. Naturally this created tension between what the shah believed the future of Iran should looked like versus what his opponents believed a “modernized” Iran should be.

The greatest example of the shah’s policy of liberalization is seen in his economic reforms known as the White Revolution. Beginning in 1963 and ending in 1978, the White Revolution was the shah’s attempt to force Iran to modernize quickly. The greatest impacts of the White Revolution were seen in land reform, the expansion of Iran’s road, rail, and air
networks, the introduction of modern medicine in rural areas, the encouragement of industrial growth, the creation of literacy and health corps, and women’s suffrage.\textsuperscript{17}

Two groups arose to challenge the White Revolution. One was the Shi’a religious leaders known as the Mullahs. The Mullahs opposed the shah’s reforms because they stripped power from the religious community. The shah’s education reforms pushed secular and religious universities to mirror Western education. Many religious leaders, such as Ruhollah Khomeini, were vocal in their critiques of the shah. In addition, their economic power was taken away as their land was redistributed to the poor. The tension between the shah and the religious community was exacerbated by the shah's perception that religious leaders were supported by the Soviet Union. While there is no proof that there was indeed a communist threat from the religious community, the shah’s perception of threat shaped his response to the mullah’s criticism.

The main communist party in Iran during the shah’s rule was the Tudah Party. There is much debate about how much of a threat the members of the Tudah party were to the shah. The Tudah party was at its peak strength during the years of Prime Minster Mossedeq; however, after the 1953 Coup, its power ebbed. Nevertheless, the shah feared its potential power. The purported threat posed by the Tudah party, as well as the mullahs, gave rise to the shah's anti-communist policies and justified his military spending.

II. The Shah and The US Media

The Shah of Iran believed in the power of perception and was intensely interested in how his rule was interpreted around the world. Domestically, the shah controlled his image through censorship and coercion. Internationally, and particularly in the United States, much media coverage focused on the brutal methods employed by SAVAK and the lack of human rights and

basic freedoms in Iran. This negative coverage frustrated the shah as he considered it the American president’s responsibility to protect the image of important allies. The shah's dismay grew during the Nixon and Ford presidencies as a gradually increasing number of members of congress and the media began to question the benefits of the US-Iranian relationship. Articles like that written by James Clarity titled “Rich but Underdeveloped, Iran seeks more power,” or “Iran's Vast Purchases of Weaponry Strain Ability of Country to Absorb It All” by Eric Pace openly critiqued the shah’s rule.18 The American media not only questioned the US government’s relationship with Iran but also highlighted the shah’s oppressive practices. When asked about these critiques, the shah often discredited the stories and warned of the dangers of any change in policy. In 1976, the shah and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger were asked about a congressional report that advised a decrease in arms deals with Iran. The shah redirected criticism by asking the question, “Can the United States or the non-Communist world afford to lose Iran?” Kissinger responded that the United States placed “great importance to relations with Iran as well as to the crucial role Iran plays in the security and balance of the whole area.”

Kissinger’s answer was the standard White House response; however, growing criticism of the shah crystalized during the 1976 presidential election when candidate Jimmy Carter openly criticized the US relationship with him.19 This created tension between Carter and the shah even before the Georgian was elected. However, the shah’s fears were unfounded: candidate Carter publicly criticized the shah, but President Carter did not. Despite his campaign promises, Carter walked a fine line to keep an important ally happy, bucking congressional and media pressure.

III. The United States, Iran, and Oil

As the US consumption of oil grew exponentially after World War Two, oil became a cornerstone of the relationship between Iran and the United States. The Cold War philosophy of containment led the United States to recognize the strategic importance of a pro-American leader in the Persian Gulf who would prevent the Soviet Union’s access to Iran’s oil and the Indian Ocean. For decades, the British had maintained a presence in Iran that had prevented the spread of the Soviet Union; however, after 1945 the British sphere of influence waned and the United States filled this void. The US doctrine of containment meant that successive American administrations conflated the rise of third world nationalism with the spread of communism. When countries exemplified nationalist practices that threatened pro-Western business, Washington quickly reacted against the perceived threat. An example of this is seen in the early 1950s when Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh nationalized Iranian oil in 1951 and broke diplomatic relations with the British in 1952. The West viewed him as a Soviet sympathizer and therefore dangerous. In 1953 the CIA with the British and a group of pro-shah Iranians successfully orchestrated a coup against Mossadegh. Following the coup, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, who ruled Iran after his father abdicated in 1941, began to strengthen his power through the use of secret police (SAVAK) to suppress any political opposition and through the consolidation of petroleum production.

The creation of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1960 helped oil producing countries work together to limit competition and raise revenue. As

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21 For the struggle between oil producing countries and foreign oil companies, see Aaron D. Wood, Charles F. Mason, and David Finnoff, “OPEC, the Seven Sisters, and Oil Market Dominance: An Evolutionary Game Theory and Agent-based Modeling Approach,” Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization 132, (June 2016): 66-78.
production in Iran increased, revenue for the Iranian government rose from $200 million in 1960 to $800 million in 1971 and then, in the wake of the 1973 war, to nearly $2 billion.\textsuperscript{22}

Domestically, the shah used petroleum dollars to expedite his modernization policies, which became known as the White Revolution.\textsuperscript{23} Internationally, this increased money supply was used to expand the shah’s influence around the world. The shah’s leverage over his Western allies correspondingly grew. In the early 1970s, the United States imported roughly 8 percent of its oil from Iran; however, by 1976, imports from Iran grew to 38 percent, peaking at 50 percent during the winter of 1977.\textsuperscript{24} By 1977, nearly 55 percent of NATO countries depended on the shah’s oil while the West’s strongest Asian ally, Japan, imported 90 percent of its oil from Iran. Israel, surrounded by hostile countries, depended on Iran to import about $40 million worth of oil every year during the 1970s.\textsuperscript{25}

The escalating importance of Iranian oil can be dated back to the 1973 Yom Kippur War. To protest America’s support of Israel during the war, the Organization of Arab Petrol Exporting Countries (OAPEC), led by Saudi Arabia, declared a 20 percent cut in oil production. The shah capitalized on this and raised the price of Iranian oil while continuing to provide oil to the US and Israel. This moment, dubbed the shah’s “oil coup,” occurred at the 1973 OPEC meeting in Tehran when the shah persuaded delegates to increase the price of a barrel of oil from $5.11 to $11.65. In a span of 12 months, petroleum revenue for OPEC countries rose by 470 percent, a sum of nearly $112 billion, and Iran’s revenue quadrupled from the year before.\textsuperscript{26} In a BBC interview shortly after the “oil coup,” the shah justified the price increase by citing a simple

\textsuperscript{22} Gasiorowski, \textit{U.S. Foreign Policy}, 102.

\textsuperscript{23} It should be noted that the windfall of cash generated animosity among Iranians since benefits were not distributed evenly. For additional reading, see Maral Jefroud, “Revisiting ‘The Long Night’ of Iranian Workers: Labor Activism in the Iranian Oil Industry in the 1960s,” \textit{International Labor and Working-Class History} 84, (Fall, 2013): 176-194.

\textsuperscript{24} Barry Rubin, \textit{Paved with Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran} (Oxford University Press, 1980), 140.

\textsuperscript{25} Cooper, \textit{Oil Kings}, 19 and 47.

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Ibid.}, 146.
reason: the scientific consensus was that the world’s petroleum was running out; therefore, it was his duty to get as much value out of Iranian oil as he could in order to benefit his country. When asked if he was attempting to ruin the world’s economy, the shah replied that ruining the global order would be counterproductive since he anticipated that Iran would soon become a global leader. He warned that “the era of extraordinary progress based on cheap oil has ended. They [the West] should find a new energy resource and gradually tighten their belts.”

The shah announced another escalation (as high as 35 percent) at the end of his visit to Washington in 1975; however, to offset Iran’s 20 percent inflation, Iran announced another 15 percent hike at the December 1976 OPEC meeting in Qatar. The Ford administration, anticipating Iran’s move, warned that another oil price increase would raise unemployment, lower America’s Gross National Product, increase inflation, and cause havoc in the Western world (particularly in Great Britain, France, and Italy). Therefore, Ford took a tougher stance against the shah’s petroleum policies than the Nixon administration ever had: he entered into clandestine talks with Saudi Arabia about restraining the price of oil. The results of these talks were evident after the December 1976 OPEC meeting in Qatar. The Saudis’ demanded only a 5 percent increase. OPEC delegates agreed to an immediate 7 percent that gradually rose to Iran’s initial demand of 15 percent. OPEC’s willingness to follow the shah was a testament to his increasing power in the region, but as lines grew longer at gas stations across the United States, exasperated Americans looked to their government to restrain their oil-producing ally. When asked about OPEC’s December 1976 price hike, newly elected Jimmy Carter stated it would be damaging to the industrialized world. After the meeting, Saudi Arabia continued to tighten the

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29 Zonis, Majestic Failure, 232.
screws on Iran. It threatened to increase production from its refineries and flood the oil market. This threat resulted in a price drop that created an economic crisis for the shah.30

Following the Saudi’s Doha threat, Iranian oil production fell by 38 percent and the government took out a $500 million emergency loan from the US and European banks.31 The shah’s trusted advisor Asadollah Alam recalled, “we have squandered every cent we had only to be checkmated by a single move from Saudi Arabia…Your Majesty, we are now in a dire financial peril and must tighten our belts if we are to survive.”32 Saudi Arabia’s bold move at Doha indicated its desire to replace Iran as the strongest regional ally of the United States during the Carter Administration. It was now up to the shah to convince Carter that maintaining a strong relationship with Iran was in the best interests of the White House.

IV. The United States, Iran, and Human Rights

During the campaign, Jimmy Carter’s stance on human rights enabled him to claim the moral high ground against the Ford administration.33 In National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski’s memoir, Power and Principle, he recalled the excitement felt throughout the administration during its first year about its commitment towards promoting human rights around the world.34 The shah feared that under the Carter Administration, Congress would have the executive support it needed to hold him accountable for his Iran’s human rights record, which had already garnered the attention of Congress. In June 1976, Congress had passed the Harkin Amendment, which sought to limit US economic and military aid to regimes that violated human rights. In September 1976, the House Committee on International Relations held a hearing about

31 Cooper, “Showdown at Doha,” 567.
the practices of the shah’s secret police force, known as the SAVAK. This hearing caught the US media’s attention and resulted in a public outcry against the shah.\textsuperscript{35}

Beginning in 1977, the Carter administration implemented a new human rights policy to help improve the image of the United States throughout the world and signal a new era of US foreign policy.\textsuperscript{36} To achieve this goal, the National Security memo, “Four-Year Foreign Policy Objectives,” listed ten objectives for the Carter administration that would improve America’s international position. The memo described America’s current international standing as having neither “permanent friends nor institutions on which it could rely.” It argued that the previous administration’s foreign policy had isolated the United States from its allies. To change this, the United States was to “discreetly advance human rights.” The Carter administration needed to specifically appear tough on the governments of Uganda, Cambodia, Cuba, and Vietnam. Unbeknownst to the shah, Iran was not on the list.\textsuperscript{37}

Notwithstanding the shah’s anxieties, the Carter administration valued its relationship with Iran because the alliance played a critical role in stabilizing the US economy and in Soviet containment. The United States recognized that it was in its interests not antagonize the shah. Instead, the memo highlighted a different approach, one that it hoped would not put too much strain on the relationship. To encourage the shah to liberalize his government, this plan centered on reassuring the shah of the continuing strength of the White House’s commitment to his regime. In early 1977, Secretary Vance visited Tehran, where he publicly announced that the shah planned to pardon political prisoners.\textsuperscript{38} Following this visit, the Carter administration announced an “exchange of high-level visits, beginning with an invitation for the shah to visit the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{35} Javier Gil Guerrero, \textit{The Carter Administration and the Fall of Iran’s Pahlavi Dynasty: US-Iran Relations on the Brink of the 1979 Revolution} (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 32-33.
\item \textsuperscript{36} John Dumbrell, \textit{American Foreign Policy: Carter to Clinton} (St. Martin's Press, 1997) 18.
\item \textsuperscript{37} “Four-Year Foreign Policy Objectives,” Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, “Four Year Goals, 5/77-7/77,” Box 23, Jimmy Carter Library, Atlanta, Georgia (hereafter JCL).
\end{itemize}
US.” 39 This was the background to the invitation to the shah to Washington in November. Therefore, Jimmy Carter’s Iranian human rights agenda can be seen as a two-part process. The first step was to establish a positive relationship with the shah, and once accomplished, the second step, was to encourage the shah to liberalize.

V. The United States, Iran, and Military Arms Sales

The increased presence of American arms in Iran was rooted in the Cold War strategy to provide allied countries the ability to thwart Soviet activities. Once Iran joined the Baghdad Pact in 1955, it received military aid packages each year that allowed the shah to purchase equipment, construct military bases, and pay for military training teams in his country. After the 1958 Iraqi coup, the shah used the troubles of his neighbor to justify a military buildup in his country. Nevertheless, both the US executive and legislative branches limited the sale of military equipment to Tehran, explaining that increased military spending would only fuel domestic unrest. A shift in the bilateral relationship occurred in 1972 when the shah sought to increase the government’s military purchases, and President Nixon, who wanted to share the burden of containment, obliged. This soon resulted after the 1973 War in a 600 percent increase in Iranian military purchases which benefited both nations. The shah was able to purchase equipment such as fighter jets, tanks, Phoenix and Maverick missiles, destroyers, and surveillance systems that he had previously wanted, but had been blocked from acquiring.40 The shah’s purchases helped stabilize the US dollar and create a loyal regional watchdog against any Soviet activity. With the shah helping to contain the Soviets, the Nixon administration could focus Vietnam.

The US Congress was less enamored with the shah. A power struggle between the White House and Congress ensued. It was one of the first signals of the changing US attitude towards

39 "Four-Year Foreign Policy Objectives," Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, “Four Year Goals, 5/77-7/77,” Box 23, JCL.
40 Gasiorowski, U.S. Foreign Policy, 111-114.
the shah and Iran. Congress’s anxieties were due to fears about an escalating arms race in the region and its discomfort with SAVAK’s methods of repressing dissent. To limit the White House’s ability to sell weapons to Iran, Congress passed an amendment to the Foreign Aid Authorization Act in 1974. This amendment gave Congress the power to block arms sales valued over $25 million. The strength of this amendment was tested during 1976 when Ford administration announced an agreement to sell 160 F-16s for $3.4 billion to Iran. Ultimately, the deal passed, but the shah’s military spending spree was met with increasing resistance by both Congress and presidential candidate Jimmy Carter. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee report published in August 1976 was another setback for the shah. It stated that within the next ten years, Iran would be unable to maintain itself in a regional conflict without major support from the United States. The committee concluded that the United States could be dragged into major conflict unless drastic changes were made to the American-Iranian policy. In addition to this report, in a November interview, Carter argued that the United States was acting like a global arms dealer and criticized Ford’s willingness to sell military equipment to leaders with questionable human rights records. Any change in US arms policy would have a great impact on Iran, and the shah was worried.

There was no overt change in US policy toward Iran until May 1977, when Carter issued Presidential Decision Memorandum 13 (PD-13). The directive declared that the United States would no longer be the world’s supplier of advanced weaponry, prohibited the sales of weapons that were not already being used by the US military, and of any weapon system that required a large operation of US forces. This reversed the Nixon-Ford policy that had governed arms sales

41 Christos Ioannides, America’s Iran: Injury and Catharsis (University Press of America, 1984) 17.
42 Rubin, Paved with Good Intentions, 173-175.
to Iran. Immediately, the shah tested Carter’s resolve. During the Ford administration, the shah had purchased 160 F-16s, and in May 1977 the shah asked the Carter administration to deliver eight of these F-16s each month. The shah then requested another 140 F-16s and 10 Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS). While Carter blocked the request for the additional F-16s (as he viewed them unnecessary for the security of Iran) and limited the number of those delivered each month to four, he did approve the sale of seven AWACS.45

From the White House’s perspective, the sale of AWACS had three positive outcomes. First, it showed that the Carter administration was still willing to sell Iran advanced technology. Second, selling AWACS to the shah at full price would increase production which would lower the price. This lower price would encourage NATO nations (who had been put off by the price tag) to purchase AWACS. Third, AWACS provided a more practical way to monitor activity along Iran’s borders than proposed land-based RADAR system; AWACS were cheaper than RADAR and required fewer American advisors in Iran. Since one AWACS cost roughly $170 million, Congress, under the provisions of the Foreign Aid Authorization of 1974 had to approve the sale. Congressional members, such as Democratic Senator John Culver of Iowa, used this opportunity to debate the stability of the shah’s regime and call into question Iran’s human rights record. Opponents of the sale argued that the shah’s policies created instability in the country and the AWACS technology could fall into Soviet hands.46 This forced Carter to withdraw the AWACS request and resubmit it in September 1977. Even though the administration continued

Vance returned from Tehran in May. The purpose of Vance’s trip was to reassure the shah of the special relationship between Iran and the United States and was initially viewed as a success. This success was short lived, however, as Iran was not exempted from PD-13, even though NATO allies, Australia and Japan were.

45 Carter to the Shah, Letter, 15 July 1977, Plains File, Subject Files, Iran, 6/75-12/79, Box 23, JCL.
46 Vance, Hard Choices, 320.
to push for the sale, the shah threatened to purchase the British equivalent, the Hawker Siddeley Nimrod, and his doubts about Carter’s commitment to Iran continued to grow.  

VI. The United States, Iran, and Middle East Peace Talks

Carter’s Middle East policy was built on the unfinished work left by Henry Kissinger following the collapse of the 1973 Geneva conference. From 1967 to 1973, tension between Arab states, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and Israel had festered until October 1973, when Egypt with the support of other Arab states attacked Israel. The war lasted only twenty days before Egyptian President Anwar Sadat entered into peace talks with Israel. Sadat’s quick withdrawal from the war was seen as a break from Arab unity in the region, but it allowed Egypt the opportunity to begin talks with the United States. In December, the United States and the Soviet Union, under the aegis of the United Nations, invited Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Israel to attend a Middle East peace conference. Syria refused to attend, and the countries that did go were so divided by the issues of border security and a Palestinian state that the talks broke down. Even though Henry Kissinger successfully negotiated disarmament in Sinai and the Golan Heights between Egypt and Israel, no peace agreement was achieved. Jimmy Carter was determined to broker a peace treaty, motivated by a desire to prevent another war that could escalate into a global conflict and also cause another spike in the price of oil.

The attempt to reconvene the 1973 Geneva Peace Accords played a major role in Carter’s first year in office. The urgency for stability in the region is best described by Historian Nancy Mitchell when she wrote that during the 1973 war the United States learned “how quickly war in the Middle East could escalate into a superpower confrontation, and that the consequent oil

embargo had destabilized the global economy.” If the Geneva talks were successful, it would reduce the Soviet threat in the region, enhance the security of America’s ally, Israel, and make progress toward the establishment of a Palestinian homeland. In early February 1977, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance toured Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Syria to begin the peace talks and demonstrate the willingness of the United States to mediate them. After Vance’s trip, the Carter administration remained hopeful that a conference would take place by the end of 1977. However, in May 1977, Menachem Begin, who held a hard stance against the acceptance of a Palestinian nation, was elected Israel’s prime minister. While the Carter administration pushed to reconvene the Geneva talks, by late 1977 it appeared impossible. Then Sadat, in an unprecedented move, travelled to Jerusalem on 19 November, 1977, and met with Israeli Prime Minister Begin.

Sadat’s visit signaled to the Carter administration his desire to work towards peace with Israel, but it placed an enormous strain on the US relationship with Syria and Jordan. King Hussein of Jordan saw Sadat’s visit as a decisive break from Arab unity and blamed the administration for Sadat’s actions. Still, Carter did not give up on reconvening the Geneva talks and requested that the shah use his influence on Syria and Jordan. During his December 1977 travels, Carter met with Arab leaders from Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt to promote the idea of reconvening the Geneva talks.

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50 Mitchell, *Carter*, 263.
53 Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010) 137; Amman to State, 20 Nov 1977, NCL-16-41-4-35-7; White House Memorandum, 12 Dec 1977, NLC-1-4-7-12-6; Rubin, *Paved*, 140. After the 1973 War, Arab countries were frustrated with Iran’s lack of participation in the ‘73 oil embargo, however, with the new wealth, the shah attempted to strengthen Iran’s relations with countries in the region. He used his wealth to send countries medical supplies and logistic support. In addition, while Iran provided Israel with oil, the shah called for Israel to return the territories it occupied during the 1967 Six-Day War.
VII. The United States, Iran, and The Horn of Africa

Like the presidents before him, Jimmy Carter sought to contain the Soviet Union in regions around the world. One challenge during the Carter years was the Ogaden War. This war, which began July 1977 with the Somali invasion of Ethiopia, played an important role in shaping the shah’s opinion of President Carter prior to their meeting in November 1977. While much about the role of the shah in the Horn of Africa remains classified, it is clear that Iran helped the Carter administration pursue its policy during the war.54 Somali leader Siad Barre sought the assistance of the United States in his war against Soviet-backed Ethiopia.

To openly support Somalia presented its challenges to the administration. One challenge was that Siad’s attempt to annex the Ogaden was an act of blatant aggression. Moreover, to accede to Siad’s demands would be a clear departure from Carter’s campaign promise to limit US weapon sales around the world. However, to abandon Somalia to Soviet and Cuban backed Ethiopian forces would have been a very unfortunate failure of containment. The Administration’s answer to these challenges, Mitchell discovered, was the secret encouragement of Iran to supply Siad with weapons.55 Throughout the summer of 1977 Iran agreed to provide Somalia secretly with US weapons; the administration expressed its gratitude in a July 1977 report. In addition, the White House asked Iran to obtain information on Soviet activity in the Horn as well as about the combat readiness of Somalia. Interestingly though, at the end of the report, Vance warned that while the White House was grateful for the shah's assistance, weapons sent to Somalia were subjugated to the restrictions of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1976 and that the White House could not openly support Iran giving Somalia US manufactured weapons.56 Nevertheless, Iran proceeded, believing that it had the administration’s blessing. Conflict, 54 Mitchell, Carter, 7.
55 Ibid., 263-265, 273.
however, arose in October when Iran prepared to transport equipment as well as a small group of military advisors to Somalia only to be informed that the Carter administration had changed its mind. When US Ambassador to Iran William Sullivan learned of the reversal of policy, he was infuriated and reminded Washington that it had dragged Iran into the whole affair. Sullivan warned that Iran would view any reversal as White House incompetence. While the arrangement for Iran to supply Siad with arms on behalf of the United States could have been an opportunity to strengthen the relationship between the United States and Iran, the affair provided the shah more fodder to question his future relationship with Carter.

VIII. Conclusion

The shah’s arrival in Washington in November 1977 came with a wave of expectations. The relationship between Iran and the United States had weakened compared to what it had been eight years prior. Presidents Nixon and Ford had buffered the shah from Congress and the American media. With Carter in charge, the shah feared that this special relationship would disappear. Carter’s campaign rhetoric as well as the delay in delivering military equipment, had shaken the shah’s confidence of his standing with the new president. The new administration had failed to reassure the shah that it understood that Iran played a strategic role in the global petroleum market and in containing Soviet activities around the world, and thus was an important ally. This misunderstanding between governments was a primary reason why both parties felt the November meeting was necessary. For the shah, his foremost concern was to learn if he could rely on Carter for Iran’s future needs. The White House saw the meeting as an opportunity to urge the shah to cooperate on Middle East peace, the price of oil, and the Horn of Africa. A lot depended on the relationship that would develop between Carter and the shah following their meeting in November.
CHAPTER TWO: The Shah of Iran Arrives

After Carter’s inauguration in 1977, the position of US ambassador to Tehran remained vacant for six months. In addition to the routine slowness of bureaucracy, the vacancy indicated the incoming administration’s continuing attempt to develop a comprehensive Iranian policy. Believing that there was no looming crisis that would threaten the shah’s rule, the administration focused on the Middle East peace talks, the Panama Canal, Southern Africa, the energy crisis, and arms control with the Soviet Union. To reassure the shah that he had the president’s confidence, Vance visited Tehran in May 1977.

It took time for the Carter administration to figure out where the shah fit into the foreign policy puzzle. The administration worked to find the balance between encouraging the shah to liberalize his government and keeping him happy. From the shah’s perspective, the delay in filling the ambassador’s post was nothing less than insulting. The American ambassador served as his direct line to Washington.\(^{57}\) The previous ambassador to Tehran had been Richard Helms, who had served from 1973 to December 1976. Helms had been the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) from 1966 to 1973. James Bill, one of the foremost scholars of US-Iran relations, describes the Helms appointment in Tehran as “a blatant public admission” by the United States of Iran’s complicated history. Many of the shah’s political opponents had considered the appointment of Helms to be another example of the United States attempting to exert influence over the Iranian government, just like it had during the 1953 CIA coup.\(^{58}\) The relationship between the Shah of Iran and Washington grew stronger during Helms’ tenure as ambassador. Nixon and Ford valued the shah as a regional ally who protected American interests, and in return the shah received nearly every piece of military equipment that he

\(^{57}\) Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions*, 187.

\(^{58}\) Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 213.
requested.\textsuperscript{59} When Washington announced that Helms would leave the embassy in early 1977, the Iranian government closely watched to learn who would become the next American ambassador in Tehran. Would Carter’s choice signal that the United States would maintain the status quo, or would it signal that US policy toward Iran was going to change? To the shah’s frustration, the answer to these questions would not come for some time.

I. Ambassador William Sullivan and The Tehran Embassy

In late 1977, Carter picked William Sullivan to serve as his top diplomat in Tehran. Sullivan was a career foreign service officer who had served in both Laos and the Philippines, but he had little experience in Iran or in its area of the world. In his autobiography, \textit{Mission to Iran}, Sullivan wrote that although he understood the strategic importance of Iran, Carter’s decision to send him there did not make him “jump for joy.”\textsuperscript{60} Why then did Carter choose Sullivan, and what did the Sullivan appointment signal about the future of Iran’s relationship with the United States? Javier Guerrero and Richard Cottam provide two interpretations of Sullivan’s appointment. In Javier Guerrero’s \textit{The Carter Administration}, he argues that Sullivan’s appointment demonstrated the demotion of Iran as an ally in the upcoming administration. “The Shah was accustomed to dealing with high-profile American ambassadors who were close to the White House…Yet, Carter opted for a career diplomat close to retirement.”\textsuperscript{61} While Sullivan’s appointment did worry the shah, Guerrero’s interpretation is inaccurate.

A more correct interpretation is highlighted by political scientist Richard Cottam, who described the choice of Sullivan as a symbolic gesture to reduce the shah's suspicions of the new administration. "Because of [Sullivan’s] two previous posts, he was seen as another in a long line

\textsuperscript{61} Guerrero, \textit{The Carter Administration}, 31.
of American ambassadors who saw their role as giving unequivocal support of the Shah.”

Sullivan’s support, Cottam cites, was made clear when the ambassador applied little political pressure on the shah on human rights and supported the AWACS sale to Iran. Additional evidence to support Cottam’s interpretation can be found in Sullivan’s first meeting with Carter when the president highlighted several key points. First, it was Sullivan’s responsibility to foster a strong relationship between the United States and Iran - one that encouraged the regulation of petroleum prices and assisted Iran with the acquisition of US military equipment approved by the administration. Second, Sullivan should continue discussions about selling Iran nuclear-power technology and other forms of alternative energy. Third, while Carter wanted Sullivan to support a liberalization process that would promote positive human rights policies, he knew that the valuable relationship with Iran should not be jeopardized. Therefore, Carter emphasized that the most important role for Sullivan and the embassy was to aid the shah in his role of regional peacekeeper and the container of Soviet expansion.

Vance’s memoir reiterates this stance: “The shah’s concerns [about the Carter administration] were based on a misunderstanding of our views about U.S.-Iranian relations. We decided early on that it was in our national interest to support the shah so he could continue to play a constructive role in regional affairs…Neither the president nor I, however, believed that the maintenance of a stable relationship with Iran precluded encouragement of improvement in its human rights policy.” Still, Sullivan was encouraged by the administration to reassess the policy of the selling Iran almost any arms the shah desired. To achieve this, the ambassador tasked the embassy to establish relationships with members of the Iranian opposition and review the arms transfer policy. While the administration hoped that the arrival of Ambassador Sullivan would allay the shah’s doubts.

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62 Cottam, Iran and the United States, 160.
63 Sullivan, Mission to Iran, 16-23.
64 Vance, Hard Choices, 316-317.
about Carter’s commitment to the alliance, the delay in the AWACS shipments caused by Congress and the increased probability of not being able to purchase additional F-16s convinced the shah in early July, 1977 that an official visit to Washington was required. As he wrote to President Carter, Iran needed to know “what it can expect to obtain from the United States of America with regard to her requirements.” With the appointment of Sullivan, the State Department was clear that the embassy’s role was to maintain a strong relationship with the shah. The administration needed an experienced ambassador who had dealt with “authoritarian governments and with leaders who were forceful personalities,” one who could maintain a healthy relationship with Tehran and gently encourage the shah towards liberalization.  

II. The Arrival of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi

In May 1977, Secretary Vance toured the Middle East to assess the prospects of reconvening the Geneva peace talks that had broken down after the 1973 Yom Kippur War. During his trip, Vance visited Tehran where he extended a personal invitation from Carter for the shah to visit Washington that year. Carter hoped that the visit would help remove any misconception about the new administration’s commitment to Iran. The shah’s visit to America would be his twelfth visit. What made it different was that the shah expected to encounter resistance from both Congress and the Executive. Ambassador Sullivan advised the shah that he would likely face questions on the issues of oil, arms sales, nuclear energy, and the Middle East peace process. In his memoir, Sullivan recalled a memo he prepared for Washington. He informed the president that the shah’s objectives were to receive support for the purchase of military equipment, confirm that American nuclear power equipment would indeed be exported to Iran, and understand America’s policy toward Soviet activity in both the Horn of Africa and in

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65 Shah to Carter, Letter, 20 July 1977, Plains Files, Iran, 6/75-12/79, Box 23, JCL.
66 Sullivan, Mission to Iran, 16.
India. As Sullivan wrote, the shah left for Washington to “size up the new administration, to understand the new president, and to assess how significant the obvious political differences we had in domestic [i.e. human rights] terms would be for the strategic alliance that he felt was essential for the well-being of both Iran and the United States.”

To prepare for the shah’s arrival, the State Department prepared a memo for Carter. Vance wrote that Carter’s primary objective for the visit should be the establishment of a close relationship based on shared responsibilities that will “provide a solid foundation to withstand and overshadow the frustrations which are likely to arise between us on one issue or another.” Additional goals were to reaffirm US commitment to the region, to obtain the shah’s support for an oil price freeze for 1978, to open discussions on future arms deals, and to discuss the potential of nuclear energy in Iran. Vance conveyed Sullivan’s assessment that the shah’s goals were likewise to develop a close personal relationship with the president, to gain access to military equipment, to receive “explicit” and “implicit” support of Iran’s ambition to dominate the Persian Gulf region, to obtain full briefings on America’s role in the Middle East, and to be briefed on the current state of US-Soviet relationship.

The shah and his wife, the Shahbanou Farah Pahlavi of Iran, arrived in Washington on 15 November 1977. Welcomed on the White House lawn, both leaders exchanged opening remarks; however, what followed became one of the iconic moments of the Carter administration. Roughly three thousand Iranians, both for and against the shah, had sojourned to Washington to mark the shah’s arrival. To prevent any conflict, the D.C. police placed a barrier between the two groups, but after the 21-gun salute, the barrier was broken and the opposing sides clashed, causing the police to resort to using tear gas. Although the scuffle was over within minutes, the

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67 Sullivan, Mission to Iran, 123-124.
68 Vance to Carter, Memo, 10 November 1977, Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor, NSA-15, Box 20, JCL.
wind blew the gas onto the White House lawn. Sullivan, who was present at the ceremony, described the moment vividly: “The world was treated to the spectacle of the President of the United States and the Shah of Iran dabbing at their eyes with their handkerchiefs, tears streaming down their cheeks as they made their formal presentations of respect. The rest of us did our best to contain our tears and coughs.”

Even though the media portrayed the ceremony as a disaster, Vance and Sullivan recalled in their memoirs that the remainder of the visit went extremely well. Over the two day stay, the leaders discussed oil prices, Soviet expansion, the shah’s desire to purchase U.S. weapons and nuclear power plant equipment, and the prospects of peace in the Middle East. While no transcripts of the private conversations between the president and the shah have been released, one can infer many aspects of their conversation by using available meeting notes, the State Department’s memos after the visit, and the actions taken by both sides.

III. Oil

The impact of rising oil prices caused by the Iranian policies had been one of Carter’s main complaints about of the shah during his presidential campaign, and the issue was discussed during their meeting in November. Carter’s objective was clear and concise: at the upcoming December OPEC meeting in Caracas, Venezuela, the shah should agree to an oil price freeze through 1978. Convincing the shah to do this would be a difficult challenge as the shah’s desire for another price increase was well documented. The shah had used the fear of future oil depletion to justify his price increases since 1973, and he had ridiculed the Western world for

70 Sullivan, Mission to Iran, 128; Jimmy Carter, White House Diary, 135.
71 Vance, Hard Choices, 322; Sullivan, Mission to Iran, 128.
72 Vance to Carter, Memo, 10 November 1977. Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor, NSA-15, Box 20, JCL.
being wasteful. To encourage the shah to support a freeze, Carter addressed three of his main concerns. First, the shah believed that Iranian petroleum would run out by the turn of the century and thus he feared that the West’s thirst for oil would ultimately destroy Iran.\textsuperscript{74} To address this concern, Carter began their discussion by stressing his administration’s commitment to reducing US dependence on imported oil. Secondly, the shah believed the US media’s portrayal of him (which frequently included descriptions of SAVAK’s brutal methods) undermined his public image in the United States. To address this issue, Carter argued that Iran’s support of a price freeze would help change the image of Iran in the minds of the American people. Thirdly, the shah justified the rising price of oil with reference to his need for funds to pay for his advanced weapons requests. These weapons served as a safeguard against Soviet expansion in the region and discouraged the possibility of a communist uprising in Iran. Carter countered this concern with the argument that another hike in petroleum cost would create havoc in the free world.\textsuperscript{75} Carter hoped that this discussion would persuade the shah to reevaluate Iran’s petroleum strategy and support a price freeze.

IV. **Arms Sales**

The conversation around Iran’s desire for US military equipment predated all the topics discussed at the November meeting. Since Carter’s inauguration, the shah had been in contact with the president expressing his desires to purchase equipment. By November, neither leader had changed their position on the issue. Presidential Directive 13 demonstrated Carter’s resolve to limit of the number of sophisticated weapons sold around the world, while the shah remained adamant that Iran’s needs were met. Over the summer, the White House and Congress wrestled over the approval of AWACS. The administration’s inability to persuade Congress to approve

\textsuperscript{74} Zonis, *Majestic Failure*, 20-22.

\textsuperscript{75} Vance to Carter, Memo, 10 November 1977, Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor, NSA-15, Box 20, JCL.
the AWACS sale only furthered the shah’s belief that Iran could no longer rely on the United States with Carter in office. To demonstrate the administration’s commitment to Iran, the White House resubmitted the AWACS request in September 1977. This submission addressed Congress’ concerns about American equipment falling into Soviet hands by affirming that the AWACS shipped to Iran would not contain any “sensitive code gear.” The White House also reaffirmed Iran’s commitment of using the AWACS for defensive purposes only. However, Congress argued that there was little merit in Iran’s promise of using the AWACS exclusively for defensive purposes and noted that other sensitive material besides “code gear” could fall into Soviet hands. This debate continued and meant that the AWACS were not approved before the shah’s arrival.

The shah arrived in Washington seeking to purchase more than one hundred F-16s fighter jets. Carter reassured the shah of his commitment to selling non-lethal technology, but would not approve the purchase of the fighter jets. To avoid any future misunderstandings, Carter suggested that Iran submit a tentative list of military items the shah wished to purchase. The White House would then be able to tell Iran which items it believed Congress would or would not approve. This might prevent Iran from experiencing unnecessary frustration, and it would help the administration accommodate Iran while also upholding its policies such as PD-13. Nevertheless, the topic of arms sales continued to be a divisive factor between the two leaders.

V. Human Rights Violations

The delicate issue of human rights was an unavoidable topic during the shah’s Washington visit. Carter’s emphasis on human rights during the campaign meant that the American people expected him to address the issue of human rights with the shah. Amnesty

77 “Notes from Meeting with Shah of Iran November 15-16, 1977,” Plains File, Subject Files, Box 23, JCL.
International Secretary General Martin Ennals, for example, wrote to President Carter appealing to his “close attention to human rights throughout the world” and pleading Carter to bring up the issue of human rights in his meeting with the shah.\textsuperscript{78} At the end of the two-day meeting, Carter approached the shah privately to discuss the issue. Vance advised Carter to approach the issue sensitively while highlighting the positive actions taken by the Iranian government.\textsuperscript{79} Sullivan suggested the president avoid discussing the issue altogether. The State Department advised that any official statements from the White House should avoid criticism and encourage the shah towards liberalization.\textsuperscript{80}

While the official briefing papers did not include a time for the discussion of human rights, Carter decided to offer a "spontaneous" invitation for the shah to join him in his private office.\textsuperscript{81} Their encounter was recorded later by Carter in his diary, where he mentioned his rehearsed speech about his concerns with the shah’s illiberal policies and expressed unhappiness with the international community’s perception of the shah’s oppressive government. Carter articulated that this poor global perception of Iran reflected poorly on the United States. He informed the shah that the use of military courts for civilians and the conditions in Iranian prisons as well as the reported practices of the SAVAK did not align with the White House’s standards of human rights. Carter noted that the shah was receptive to his points and agreed to introduce reforms in his government.\textsuperscript{82}

Carter’s determination to not publicly criticize the shah placed him in an awkward position. Behind closed doors, the administration kept its campaign promise to address the issue, but publicly it remained almost silent in order to maintain its relationship with a valuable ally.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{79} Vance to Carter, Memo, 10 November 1977, Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor, NSA-15, Box 20, JCL.
\textsuperscript{80} Miklos, Tehran 09970, 19 November 1977, NA-AAD.
\textsuperscript{81} Stuckey, \textit{Jimmy Carter}, 120-122.
\textsuperscript{82} Carter, \textit{White House Diary}, 137.
This meant that the shah left Washington with the knowledge that, while the new administration desired change, it also wanted to convey an image of a united alliance. Carter might have gotten away with not offering any public criticism of the shah, but, as the shah departed Washington, the US press reported that several Tehran University students protesting had been “indiscriminately” beaten by the Iranian police. This caused some Americans, who lacked information about Carter’s private criticism of human rights in Iran to complain that the administration was not fulfilling its campaign promises. Therefore, the human rights issue did not go away.

VI. Assessment of Meeting

Despite the opening tear gas incident, the remainder of the shah’s visit went as scheduled and the primary goal of publicly affirming the strength of the US-Iranian relationship was achieved. The shah left with the reassurance that the United States would remain committed to Iran, and the issue of human rights played a relatively minor role in the meetings. The shah agreed to “give Western nations a break” and to publicly announce his support of a price freeze for 1978 at the upcoming OPEC meeting. At the Caracas OPEC meeting, the shah did as he had promised and called for an oil price freeze. Carter wrote to thank him, saying that his actions helped maintain the world economy on a “positive course towards stability and growth.” In response to Carter's letter, the shah praised the president for his commitment to sustainable energy and stated that he hoped other nations would follow America’s example. One interesting point that came from the November meeting was the shah’s idea to develop an alternative energy

83 Memorandum for National Security Council, “Human Rights in Iran,” White House Central Files, Exec. 11/21/77 - 12/31/78, CO-71, JCL.
84 “Notes from Meeting with Shah of Iran November 15-16, 1977,” Plains File, Subject Files, Box 23, JCL; “Oil Prices Too Low OPEC Founder Says,” Chicago Tribune, 12 December 1977, 16.
85 Vance, State 306483, 23 December 1977, NA-AAD.
86 Letter, Shah to Carter, 25 December 1977, Plains Files, Subject Files, Box 23, JCL.
fund called the International Energy Bond (IEB). The details for the IEB were vague and President Carter ordered Sullivan to continue the conversation back in Iran. The premise of the IEB, Iranian Prime Minister Jamshid Amouzegar explained in a memo to Ambassador Sullivan, rested on the idea that oil would run out by the end of the century and that the developed world needed to begin preparing for this future. Amouzegar argued that it was logical for oil producing nations to obtain as much oil revenue as possible but acknowledged that this could create worldwide inflation. Amouzegar claimed that the shah would lead other oil producing countries such as Venezuela, Nigeria, Algeria, and Indonesia to help prevent this global inflation crisis.

Amouzegar predicted that the IEB would have four immediate impacts. First, it would encourage petroleum producing countries not to mass produce, which would avoid saturating the world market. Second, with extra revenue in the IEB, petroleum producing countries would have a safeguard against future market inflation. Third, petroleum exporting countries would be investing in the future of their respective nations. Finally, the main purpose of the IEB would be for oil producing countries to help finance development of alternative sources of energy. The investment into alternative energy would help the Western world to become less dependent on oil, which aligned with the desires of both leaders.

Despite the promising nature of the IEB, Amouzegar failed to provide any information on how Iran would create the energy bond and Sullivan advised the president to revisit the topic with the shah in future conversations. The idea of the IEB suggests that the shah felt the pressure of the Carter administration to change Iran’s petroleum practices. However, it is possible that the shah floated the idea simply to appease Carter. The issue of military arms sales was more contentious. Following the shah’s return to Iran, Prime Minister Amouzegar publicly threatened

87 “Notes from Meeting with Shah of Iran November 15-16, 1977,” Plains File, Subject Files, Box 23, JCL.
88 Sullivan, Tehran 11413, 27 December 1977, NA-AAD.
that if the United States refused to meet Iran’s needs, then Iran would turn to other nations such as the United Kingdom, France, or West Germany to obtain military equipment. Despite these “threats,” on 13 December 1977, the government of Iran submitted a weapons request that contained a list of non-lethal equipment to be reviewed by the White House. Notable items requested were the long-range surveillance radars, radar planes, non-lethal vehicles, and cargo planes. The shah’s wish list would not be approved by the end of December and the embassy was tasked with informing the president that the topic would be brought up by the shah during his visit in December.

VII. An Extended Invitation

Soon after his departure from Washington, the shah extended a formal invitation to Carter to visit Iran.89 Neither party would have guessed that this invitation would be accepted in less than a month. Prior to the shah’s visit, the scheduling team for Carter’s expansive foreign trip anticipated that Carter would visit Western and Eastern Europe, India, and South America.90 Appointments Secretary Phil Wise designed the trip to boost Carter’s international standing. The destinations were selected, in part, according to their potential for a successful crowd event and positive news coverage. Wise noted that while Iran would be a “cooperative and simple” destination, it would be overshadowed by the other locations and offered the “least potential for exciting events.” Therefore, Wise proposed that the trip focus on Venezuela, Nigeria, India, France, and Poland for maximum effect. Each of these countries, Wise argued, offered unique opportunities. Carter’s visit to Nigeria, a country that had gained its independence in 1960, would make him the first US president to make a state visit to sub-Saharan Africa, and India offered the greatest opportunity to discuss limiting nuclear proliferation, while the visit to the

89 “Shah to Carter, 17 Nov 1977,” Plains Files, Subject Files, Box 23, JCL; Vance, State 289014, 2 December 1977, NA-AAD.
90 Phil Wise to Carter, Memo, 11 November 1977, Phillip Wise Papers, International Trip 11/22/77-1/6/78, Box 108, JCL.
Warsaw Ghetto in Poland offered great publicity. Venezuela was removed from the itinerary, and to help the traveling party adjust to the time changes, Saudi Arabia and Iran were added. Wise suggested that, to thank these two countries for their hospitality, the leader would receive a one hour bilateral meeting with the president. While recovering from jetlag was the official reason for the inclusion of both nations, there were also substantive reasons to visit them. In Iran, Carter could discuss petroleum prices and Middle East peace talks without the expectation of a major announcement. Downplaying these meetings publicly removed unnecessary pressure on the trip.

After weeks of negotiating the details with the shah’s officials, the US embassy finalized Carter’s schedule in Tehran. It originally did not have the Carters visiting Iran on New Year’s Eve; however, the shah insisted that the Carters visit for the holiday. The festivities around the holiday offered the perfect opportunity for the shah to arrange for the leaders of Jordan and Syria to meet with the president. The goal for this informal meeting was to give Carter the chance to persuade the Arab leaders to rejoin the peace talks. The White House agreed, but requested that the meeting would be on the night of their arrival and that the Carters would be in bed by 11pm.

On 28 December, Carter addressed the press on the southern lawn of the White House, “Today I depart on a journey that reflects both the diversity of the world we live in and our own Nation’s ability and desire to deal creatively and constructively with that diversity.” Carter described his Tehran trip as an opportunity to “discuss key economic relationships and press for a continuation of the dramatic progress that is being made in bringing peace to the Middle

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91 Tim Kraft to Carter, Memo, 11 November 1977, Susan Clough Files, Schedule Proposals for President’s Foreign Travel, 11/11/77, Box 38, JCL.
92 Vance, State 284063, 27 November 1977, NA-AAD.
East.” Carter then departed for Poland prior to his arrival in Tehran on New Year’s Eve. The administration wanted the tour to be the signal of a new and inclusive approach to global issues. The US press, however, had already expressed skepticism and described the tour as a cosmetic educational experience for the new president. It was even referred to as a modern version of Jules Verne’s Around the World in Eighty Days with a hint of former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s shuttle diplomacy. Despite the criticism, the administration remained optimistic about the potential impacts of the trip.

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93 “Remarks of The President Upon Departing the White House for Overseas Trip,” 29 December 1977, Plains File, President’s Daily Diary, 10/3-16/77 through 1/23/78-2/5/78, Box 8, JCL.
CHAPTER THREE: Carter in Tehran and the Cycle of (De)Liberalization

With the advantage of hindsight, we can see that President Carter’s visit to Tehran occurred at a pivotal moment in Iranian history. The shah had introduced a period of significant liberalization in May 1976. This is often attributed to the presidential election; however, since the beginning of his reign, the Shah of Iran’s domestic policy followed a similar pattern: The shah’s oppressive policies would gain unfavorable international attention, and the US government would urge him to relax these policies; the shah would comply, and the US would ease the pressures it placed on him. This pattern was evident immediately before and during the Carter administration. Prior to Carter’s election, the shah had begun to introduce reforms to relieve the growing social and political pressure within the country.\(^95\) By the end of 1976, the government had released more political prisoners than in previous years, and in 1977 civilians who were brought before a military tribunal were for the first time represented by lawyers. Once it became clear that the government had loosened the tight restrictions on censorship demands for social change arrived quickly.

Both Richard Cottam and James Bill were present in Iran during this period. James Bill recalled, the “liberalization process struck a responsive chord in Iran. As the regime slowly lifted its lid on society, pent-up political pressures escaped immediately and explosively.”\(^96\) In February 1977, Iranian author Ali Asghar Hajj-Seyed-Javadi penned an open 200-page critique of the state’s social and economic policies that quickly circulated throughout Iran. In the same month, forty writers and poets signed a letter demanding freedom of expression. The government did not suppress these letters. Old supporters of Mosaddeq became increasingly active in the political sphere. Organizations such as the Writers’ Associations, the Group for Free Books and

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\(^{96}\) Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 225.
Free Thought, and the Iranian Committee for the Defense of Freedom and Human Rights were established. The Iranian government granted permission for international organizations such as the International Red Cross, Amnesty International, and the International Commission of Jurists observe Iranian prisons. In July, the government even went so far as to release almost 600 Iranians in honor of the shah’s birthday. The greatest example of the opposition testing the waters occurred when sixty-four lawyers and judges called for the return of “rule of law” with a signed declaration in May 1977. They followed up their declaration with another letter in June that demanded the reinstatement of the Persia Constitution of 1906 which limited the monarchy and created the Majilis, the Iranian Parliament. They then sent a letter to United Nations Secretary General Kurt Waldheim calling for the shah to be held accountable for his human rights violations.

In December 1977, the shah returned from Washington and slammed the window of liberalization that he had opened in May 1976. His new anti-liberalization policies targeted students, academics, and the religious community. In late November, the White House encouraged the embassy to remind the shah that any reversal in liberalization could damage Iran’s image abroad, as well as its relationship with the United States. Nevertheless, on 7 December police units attacked students at an anti-shah gathering at local universities. The Iranian government continued to crack down on students and threatened to shut down Tehran University if students did not attend classes. A day after the incident, Sullivan met with Prime Minister Amouzegar to encourage the Iranian government to allow "dissidents to continue to feel they had some means to give vent to their views." Amouzegar claimed that the government wanted to avoid any escalation but admitted that the government monitored telephone calls,

97 Gasiorowski, U.S. Foreign Policy, 215; Abrahamian, Iran Between Two Revolutions, 501-505.
encouraged the “silent majority” to stage counter protests, and alluded that protestors were receiving their orders from Reza Baraheni, an Iranian poet exiled in New York. Sullivan had encountered this practice of blaming Iranians living in America days before his meeting with Amouzegar when he had met with Foreign Minister Khalatbary on 30 November. Khalatbary inquired about why the administration permitted Iranian students who protested the shah’s regime to stay in the country even though the Iranian government viewed such students as “convicted felons.” Following these meetings, Sullivan expressed his fears to the White House that if the protests became increasingly violent the government would resort to “releasing the goon squads.” These reversals of the Iranian government’s “forward-looking actions over recent months” alarmed the Carter administration and the progress made during the previous months towards a more liberal regime was lost. Government censorship was reinstated and those who had signed declarations, or wrote letters, or anti-government poems were now subjected to the SAVAK’s oppressive tactics. The government even banned any fortieth day observance for the death of Mostafa Khomeini, the son of Ayatollah Khomeini who had died in mysterious circumstances in October 1977. It will never be clear why the shah reversed his policies; however, his actions coincided with his visit to Washington to meet President Carter.

Days before Carter’s departure for Tehran, the signatories made the White House aware of the UN letter and expressed the hoped that the administration would apply pressure on the shah to accept a return to a constitutional monarchy that tolerated both free debate and elections. This letter is described by Cottam as “arguably the last opportunity the United States had for exercising any serious influence over the course of the Iranian revolution.” With the

99 Christopher, State 294128, 9 December 1977, NA-AAD; Sullivan, Tehran 10827, 8 December 1977, NA-AAD; Sullivan, Tehran 10549, 30 November 1977, NA-AAD.
100 Fischer, Iran, 194.
101 Cottam, Iran and the United States, 162-164.
president’s arrival coinciding with this period of liberalization, Iranian opponents of the shah paid close attention to Carter’s every move.

I. The Carters Arrive

To prepare for Carter’s arrival, the Iranian police monitored the streets in Tehran and concluded that additional forces were required. The police justified the increase for two reasons. First, on 22 December, a student-held demonstration against the government occurred in Tehran. The US embassy reported on the event and indicated that local students inspired by Carter’s arrival attempted to stage a protest similar to the demonstration that had been held during the shah’s arrival in Washington the previous November. Second, on 28 December, a bomb exploded in Tehran, and while no deaths were reported, it caused SAVAK to increase its presence in the city. The Iranian government blamed the opposition for the bomb yet no evidence surfaced in support of this claim. Based on the lack of motive and evidence, the US embassy surmised that the government could have set off the explosion to justify the increased security.

Prior to Carter’s arrival, British Ambassador Anthony Parsons noted that the situation in Tehran felt like a “calm before a storm” with the opposition being eerily silent. “State violence appeared to have done its work,” Parsons noted “I feared that the wave of political activity might coalesce with the widespread social discontent.”

The Shah and Shahbanou of Iran and Ambassador Sullivan greeted Mr. and Mrs. Carter, Secretary of State Vance, National Security Advisor Brzezinski, and nearly 500 White House staff and reporters at the Tehran Mehrabad Airport at 4:35 p.m. on 31 December. After their arrival both leaders exchanged welcoming remarks and listened to their respective national

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102 Sullivan, Tehran 11383, 26 December 1977, NA-AAD.
103 Sullivan, Tehran 11469, 29 December 1977, NA-AAD.
anthems. As White House aide Phil Wise had emphasized in his report, local television and American media outlets documented the arrival of the president. In his welcoming speech, the shah seized the opportunity to publicly reaffirm the two countries’ relationship, calling Carter’s arrival an example of the “unshakeable bonds and the best relations” between the two nations. In turn, Carter acknowledged the benefits of having such a great and wise friend with whom he could discuss global issues. He informed the press that while in Tehran, he would seek the shah’s advice with regard to the Middle East peace process and global economic stability. Carter concluded; “The interests of our nations are built on the interests of individuals. And in all of our discussions, both public and private, we emphasize guaranteeing our citizens the fullest economic and political human rights.” After each leader exchanged their ceremonial niceties, the Carters were escorted to the Saadabad Palace where Iranian ambassador to the United States Ardeshir Zahedi and Minister of State for Women’s Affairs Mahnaz Afkhami awaited their arrival. The shah and the president then proceeded to the dining room where Secretary Vance, Ambassador Sullivan and National Security Advisor Brzezinski waited for bilateral talks with their Iranian counterparts. Mrs. Carter and the shahbanou departed for their scheduled events.

II. Negotiations for Peace in Tehran

As soon as it had become clear that Carter would visit Tehran, the US embassy sprang into action rushing to try to arrange for Carter to meet with the leaders of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. The likelihood of convincing all these Arab leaders to sit down together in Tehran, however, was low. After Sadat’s trip in Jerusalem, King Hussein of Jordan had confided to the American ambassador to Jordan, Thomas Pickering, his frustration. After the 1973 war,
Hussein had been personally involved in getting Sadat and Syrian President Hafez al Assad to work together to create a unified Arab front in the Middle East peace negotiations. Hussein described Sadat’s gambit as a “bombshell to the Arab community” and accused the United States of encouraging Sadat to visit Israel in order to divide the Arabs.\textsuperscript{107} Ambassador Pickering denied Hussein’s accusations and admitted that Washington had been caught off guard by the visit as well. Sadat’s trip to Jerusalem, according to Hussein, gave the Israeli government leverage in the peace processes, and was a betrayal of the Palestinian efforts for state autonomy.\textsuperscript{108} Hussein feared that after Sadat’s visit, any peaceful settlement for the Palestinian people would be unattainable. Following the announcement of Carter’s visit to Tehran, Hussein asked the shah to arrange a meeting between the president, himself, and Syrian President Assad to discuss next steps to resolve the Palestinian crisis.\textsuperscript{109}

Carter arrived in Tehran at a delicate moment in the Middle East peace talks. Sadat’s trip to Israel had reenergized the belief in Washington that the Geneva talks were possible. However, the lack of progress made during meetings between Sadat and Begin in Cairo and Ismailia after the Egyptian president’s surprise initiative made the administration’s attempt to reconvene the Geneva talks seem futile. Carter, however, refused to give up on a comprehensive peace settlement.\textsuperscript{110} In December, prior to Carter’s trip, Vance had toured the Middle East capitals of Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. Vance’s goal had been to gather a clearer understanding of each country’s attitude towards the Palestinian issue. When Vance met with Begin on 10 December, 1977, the Israeli Prime Minster had asked to meet with the President to discuss the peace process further. Carter had agreed and Begin had flown to

\textsuperscript{107} Christopher, State 278259, 20 November 1977, NA-AAD.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{109} Miklos, Tehran 11089, 15 December 1977, NA-AAD.
\textsuperscript{110} Vance, \textit{Hard Choices}, 200-201.
Washington on 16 December. Meanwhile, Vance traveled to Syria and met with Assad who bemoaned what he saw as the “divisiveness in the Arab world” created by President Carter’s policies. Vance assured Assad that disunity was the last thing Carter desired and that the administration wanted Syria to participate in negotiations. Vance also reaffirmed America’s commitment to a comprehensive settlement for Palestine.

While Vance did not travel to Iran, the White House saw an opportunity to strengthen its relationship with the shah by sharing the details of his wide-ranging trip. Vance believed that the talks between Sadat and Begin were not a conclusion to the peace discussion, but rather opened up the opportunity for negotiations in Geneva. To seize this opportunity, Vance requested assistance from the Iranian government to organize for President Assad and King Hussein to meet with Carter in Tehran.\(^\text{111}\) The shah quickly invited Assad and Hussein to Tehran.\(^\text{112}\) For a moment, it appeared that the shah might facilitate a major Middle East conference in Tehran, but the moment was fleeting. Since Egypt was not included in the president’s tour, the administration sought to avoid any possible aggravations. The White House did not want to antagonize Sadat by holding a one-on-one meeting with Assad. For this reason, shortly after the shah’s invitations to regional leaders, the administration put an end to any meeting with Assad as it sought to avoid the appearance of a “mini-summit” that excluded Sadat.\(^\text{113}\) Ambassador Pickering informed Assad that Carter could not see him in Tehran but was open to meet with him at a different location on the trip, potentially Paris, should Assad wish to do so.\(^\text{114}\)

\(^{113}\) Vance, State 302567, 20 December 1977, NA-AAD.
\(^{114}\) Vance to Pickering, Memo, 20 December 1977, NLC-16-1-110-3-14-4; Pickering, Amman 09636, 28 December 1977, NA-AAD; Sullivan, Tehran 11409, 27 December 1977, NA-AAD.
King Hussein was less prickly, and the shah personally invited him to Tehran to meet with Carter.\textsuperscript{115} On 24 December 1977, the Carter administration announced that the president would be the meeting Hussein and gave the Iranian government credit for facilitating the encounter.\textsuperscript{116} While the official schedule contained only one meeting between Hussein and Carter on 1 January, Sullivan and Carter both recorded in their memoirs that Hussein also met with the shah and the president on 31 December.\textsuperscript{117} During their meeting, both the shah and Carter attempted to persuade King Hussein to join the negotiations towards Middle East peace; however, Hussein demurred in solidarity with the Palestinians. While Hussein opted out of immediate peace talks, all agreed that future talks were required. In addition, both Hussein and the shah agreed to meet separately with Sadat and King Khalid of Saudi Arabia in the upcoming months to encourage each nation to continue its participation in the peace process.\textsuperscript{118}

\textbf{III. AWACS, Nuclear Energy, and Africa in Tehran}

As Carter’s visit to Tehran occurred only six weeks after the shah’s visit to Washington, there had been little change in the issues that preoccupied the two leaders. During the ride from the airport, President Carter and the shah came to a verbal agreement for a nuclear non-proliferation agreement that would allow the sale of US nuclear power plants to Iran. Gary Sick, who served on the National Security Council, recalled that this agreement, which failed to materialize due to the revolution, served as the foundation for the future non-proliferation agreement with Egypt. At the request of Carter, the two leaders also discussed Iran’s military needs. Carter again suggested that the shah create a tentative list of Iran’s requirements over the

\textsuperscript{115} Miklos, Tehran 11271, 21 December 1977, NA-AAD.
\textsuperscript{116} Vance to Brzezinski, Memo, 26 December 1977, NLC-16-110-4-19-6.
\textsuperscript{117} Sullivan, \textit{Mission to Iran}, 133; Carter, \textit{White House Diary}, 156; Christopher, State 309686, 29 December 1977, NA-AAD.
\textsuperscript{118} Carter, \textit{White House Diary}, 159. While Carter was in Poland, Sadat gave an interview expressing his frustration with the delays for a peace conference. He raised doubts about Israel’s commitment to the process and questioned the Carter administration’s ability to organize any future peace talks. See Dusko Doder, "Carter Remarks Spark Confusion, Dismay Sadat," The Washington Post, 29 December 1977.
next five years. This list would remove unpredictability and allow both nations to create a comprehensive plan for Iranian security. The Horn of Africa was also discussed during the brief visit. A day before Carter arrived, Somalia’s Siad Barre had visited Tehran and asked the shah to press Carter for increased assistance. The shah emphasized his concern about Soviet activity in the region and claimed that Iran would come to Siad’s aid if Ethiopia attacked Somalia. Carter sympathized with Somalia but maintained his stance that his administration would not openly support Siad. Carter’s brief stay in Tehran offered the opportunity for the two leaders to continue their talks begun in November while achieving the goal of stabilizing the US-Iranian relationship.

IV. Rosalynn Carter in Tehran

Rosalynn Carter’s activities in Tehran are a glaring lacuna in the historiography of the visit. As First Lady, Rosalynn Carter focused on improving mental healthcare and advocating support for caregivers around the world. During the president’s international trip, Mrs. Carter focused on gerontology, the status of women, and mental health in the countries she visited. On the first stop in Warsaw, Poland she discussed mental health, and in New Delhi, India, the third stop, she discussed the issues of healthcare coverage for women and children. Only in Tehran did Mrs. Carter hold a small, television interview.

Originally, the State Department planned for Mrs. Carter to experience the culture of Tehran with the shahbanou while their husbands met. During the shah’s visit to Washington, Mrs. Carter had suggested that a branch for the Friendship Force International, the non-profit

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119 Gary Sick, All Fall Down: America’s Tragic Encounter With Iran (Random House, 1985) 29 and 344.
120 Mitchell, Carter, 364-365.
121 Hartman, Paris 36647, 15 December 1977, NA-AAD.
123 Ioannides, America’s Iran, 26.
organization created by the Carters, to be located in Iran.\textsuperscript{124} Mrs. Carter had expressed her desire to meet the Iranian director of the Friendship Force while in Tehran, but no one had been appointed in time. The shahbanou recommended that Mrs. Carter visit the Center for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults instead.\textsuperscript{125} Unfortunately, when traffic and the official schedule were taken into account, it was clear that this visit would require a helicopter in order to return in time for dinner, and the State Department therefore rejected this proposal. In the last purposed schedule before the Carter’s arrived, Mrs. Carter and the shahbanou were to begin a tour of the Reza Abbasi Art and Cultural Centreat 5:45 pm and return to Saadabad Palace by 6:30 pm for a press interview at 6:40pm. However, no evidence indicates that she visited the center and no reason was provided as to why she did not travel with the shahbanou. According to the final detailed schedule provided by the State Department, Rosalynn Carter gave interviews for Iranian television from the lounge of the Saadabad Palace while her husband was in his meetings. The State Department prepared her to answer questions about her role as the First Lady, the progress of women’s rights both in the United States and in Iran, and her impressions of Iran. Once Mr. and Mrs. Carter finished their respective meetings, both prepared for dinner at the Niavaran Palace.\textsuperscript{126}

Rosalynn Carter was an active first lady, and her scheduled events during her brief stay in Tehran are a prime example of the role she envisioned for herself. Therefore, her dearth of

\textsuperscript{124} The Friendship Force, which was officially inaugurated in March 1977, is an international cultural exchange organization founded by the Carters and Reverend Wayne Smith. The purpose of the organization is to encourage the acquisition of different languages, history, and culture through the exchanging of participants. An announcement of a branch in Iran allowed the opportunity to promote human rights while avoiding any tension to the US-Iranian relationship. See Vance, State 286267, 12 December 1977, NA-AAD; Sullivan, Tehran 10779, 6 December 1977, NA-AAD.

\textsuperscript{125} This center was operated by the Queen’s bureau and offered a positive view of royal family interaction with the Iranian people. The center had 28 branches; however, the Tehran location was the largest with a library of over 10,000 books, roughly 3,500 members, and was the film and drama center. See Sullivan, Tehran 10779, 6 December 1977, NA-AAD.

\textsuperscript{126} For information about additional proposed locations, such as the Negarestan Museum the Abbassi Art and Cultural Center, Farah Pahlavi Social Education Society center see Christopher, State 293694, 9 December 1977, NA-AAD; Miklos, Tehran 11085, 15 December 1977, NA-AAD; Sullivan, Tehran 10779, 6 December 1977, NA-AAD; Christopher, State 309686, 29 December 1977, NA-AAD.
activities in Tehran is surprising. While it may have an entirely innocent explanation, it also might indicate that the administration, at the last moment, drew back from using Mrs. Carter as an instrument of soft diplomacy. Her original schedule suggested that she might use the announcement of the Freedom Force chapter to allude to the topic of human rights, bringing up an issue that the president preferred not to discuss openly. Might this have mollified the opponents of the shah? Or might it have antagonized the shah? The unfulfilled potential of Mrs. Carter’s visit raises questions that may be unanswerable.

V. Toasts for Respected and Distinguished Guests

On the evening of 31 December 1977, the Shah and Shahbanou of Iran and other Iranian officials welcomed the Carters, the Sullivans, the Vances, and Dr. Brzezinski to the Niavaran Palace for the dinner. After dinner, the shah rose and gave a toast that was recorded by the press and broadcast by local television. “It gives the Shahbanou and myself great pleasure to welcome you to our country,” the shah began, before recapping the long relationship Iran had enjoyed with the United States. He noted that this relationship dated back to the 1800s when American missionaries established Iran's first public school. He lauded Carter’s arrival as a positive sign of US-Iranian friendship and asserted that each country’s commitment towards trust, goodwill, humanitarianism, and liberty was what bonded these two nations. During his toast, the shah announced the recent economic agreement between the two countries which included a $10 billion military shopping list. He cited both leaders’ desire to find an alternative to the finite resource of oil while also praising Carter’s commitment to stability in the Middle East. The shah highlighted Carter’s goal of promoting human rights while on the trip and then

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127 A notable absence from the dinner was King Hussein who was in Tehran to visit Carter. According to Iranian protocol, had the king attended the dinner, he would be required to sit closer than President Carter to the shah as monarchs ranked higher than government leaders. Therefore, to avoid displacing Carter, the king willingly did not attend the state dinner.

128 Jimmy Carter: “Tehran, Iran Toasts of the President and the Shah at a State Dinner,” 31 December 1977, APP.
claimed that the ancient culture of Iran shared the ideas of justice and human value that had made the United States into a great nation. He cited the story of American teacher Howard Baskerville, who had died fighting for Iranian freedom in Tabriz during the 1905 constitutional revolution. The shah wished Carter success on his world tour that promoted “peace, security, and welfare for human society.” As he concluded his toast, the shah proclaimed Carter a leader who valued the goal of justice for all people.

As the shah sat down, Carter rose and began with his toast. In Sullivan’s memoir, he recalled that the embassy created a simple “anodyne toast” meant to avoid any problematic topics. Sullivan was surprised when Carter began with an alternative text that discussed the issue of human rights. The author of the altered version has never been revealed, but one possible explanation is found in Gary Sick’s memoir who noted that this alternative text was created during the flight from Warsaw to Tehran in the “forward cabin of Air Force One.” This new toast was structured around the lasting friendship between Iran and the United States. Carter opened by saying that the shah's visit to Washington had been so enjoyable that when he asked Rosalynn with whom she wanted to spend New Year’s Eve, she replied: “Above all others, I think, with the Shah and Empress Farah.” Carter praised the shah for his friendship and acknowledged that his wisdom had been an invaluable gift during his first year in office.

Following his opening remarks, Carter highlighted the shah’s leadership in Iran. The shah’s advocacy for industrial and economic advancement in his country had made Iran into a regional leader. Carter continued that Iran’s activity in the peace process in both the Middle East and in the Horn of Africa was only possible because the shah had transformed Iran into “an

129 Vance, Hard Choices, 323.
130 Sullivan, Mission to Iran, 134; Sick, All Fall Down, 344.
island of stability.”131 This “stability,” said Carter, was evident in the relationship between the two nations for the last twenty years. He praised the shah for his ability to help contain Soviet activity in the region, for the role Iran played in supplying the United States and its allies with petroleum, for benefiting the US economy with his military purchases, and for participating in the Middle East peace process. Nevertheless, “island of stability” is the only line remembered from this toast. It is highlighted in the historiography of the Iranian revolution as the prime example of the US government having little understanding of the reality of the Iranian people. There was, in fact, a more consequential line in Carter’s toast.

Towards his conclusion, Carter turned again, cautiously, to the topic of human rights. Carter had the opportunity to publicly exert US influence on the shah and call for a transformation in laws that violated human rights, but instead he highlighted human rights as a bond between the two countries. He quoted the Iranian poet Saadi - "Human beings are like parts of a body, created from the same essence. When one part is hurt and in pain, others cannot remain in peace and quiet. If the misery of others leaves you indifferent and with no feeling of sorrow, then you cannot be called a human being.” Carter explained that this passage illustrated that all human beings suffer when anyone suffers, and as leaders, it was the shah’s and Carter’s duty to help end suffering. “The cause of human rights,” Carter stated, “is shared deeply by our people and by the leaders of our two nations.” Carter deliberately chose to speak softly and obliquely. He avoided calling for reforms. He did not mention the shah’s human rights violations or condemn the harsh practices of the SAVAK. Instead, he praised the shah for his leadership in the region. Carter’s motivations are understandable. It would have been rude to have antagonized his host when a guest at his table. A gentle approach might have been more effective than a

131 Jimmy Carter: “Tehran, Iran Toasts of the President and the Shah at a State Dinner,” 31 December 1977, APP.
sledgehammer. But the studied vagueness of Carter’s public remarks on human rights left room for the shah to be emboldened and the opposition to despair.

After the dinner toasts, Sullivan recalled the excited energy that circulated throughout the dinner crowd once the news of a brief stop in Aswan, Egypt had been added to the president’s trip. The possibility of persuading Israel and Egypt to participate in a peace accord had convinced Carter to make an impromptu stop to visit Sadat while en route to Paris. Perhaps because of this, the shahbanou successfully persuaded the Carters to linger, and an impromptu New Year’s Eve party occurred in the Palace. King Hussein rejoined the party and after dancing and welcoming the New Year, the Carters returned to their rooms at one in the morning. The following morning, Carter met with King Hussein to persuade the king to join the peace talks; however, Hussein remained adamantly opposed. Following their meeting, the shah escorted the presidential party to the airport. After their departure, the shah, whom Sullivan described as being “in a festive mood,” shook hands with the Americans who were there to see Carter depart, posed for pictures, and confided in Sullivan, “You Americans are really nice people.” From both governments’ perspectives, the visit to Tehran was a success. Carter reassured the shah of the US commitment to his government and continued the discussions on regional issues that were important to both countries. The shah was convinced that he had the support of the Carter Administration. This support was on display no sooner than one week after the American president’s departure from Tehran when the administration remained silent after the shah’s police force fired on a student protest in the religious city of Qom.

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CHAPTER FOUR: Ettela’at, Qom, and Silence

There were two immediate results of Carter’s visit to Tehran. The first was that the shah’s opponents no longer believed the American president would encourage the shah to liberalize. While the evidence of Iranians reaction to Carter’s visit is still being discovered, some opposition leaders have spoken. One example comes from Ayatullah Husayn Muntaziri who recalled, “We didn’t expect Carter to defend the shah, for he is a religious man who has raised the slogan of defending human rights. How can Carter, the devout Christian, defend the shah?”

Marvin Zonis noted that after the president’s visit, “only the opposition felt betrayed. Where they had anticipated a year of fundamental changes in the distribution of power in Iran, they saw the changes of 1977 as entirely the gift of the Shah, made under duress of American pressure. With the exuberant toast of the U.S. president, they imagined that it would be back to business as usual.”

The second impact of Carter’s visit was that the shah was reassured: his anxieties about the future of US-Iranian relations had been put to rest. Following the visit, it was clear that Carter would only cautiously, and not publicly, pressure the shah on human rights violations. Carter had clearly prioritized fostering a relationship with Iran over his human rights policy. The administration continued to rely on the shah’s relationships with Arab leaders to promote peace talks, and Washington still relied on Iran for regional support in the Horn of Africa. Iran also provided essential intelligence gathering on the Soviet Union, and the US dollar continued to stabilize due to Iran’s purchases of US military and nuclear equipment. The New Year’s Eve visit made it clear that the early expectations of the Carter administration to apply pressure on the

134 Zonis, Majestic Failure, 242.
shah to liberalize his government would not occur. Having the confidence of the president, the shah accelerated reversal of policies that were implemented the year before.

I. The City of Qom

The city of Qom is no stranger to resistance and struggle against oppression. While there is evidence of a city existing in pre-Islamic history, it is during the Safavid dynasty that Qom earned its reputation as a Shia safe haven against Sunni foreign oppressors. As the city grew, it became a holy city for Shia Muslims, the center for religious teachings, and the home for the cultural identity of Shia Iranians. This explains why Qom became a city of resistance under Reza Shah (1924-1941) who attempted to mimic the success of Turkish President Ataturk’s anti-clerical laws. Reza Shah passed laws to westernize Iran’s education system, modes of transportation, economy, and culture. These reforms backfired and generated organized protests. Religious leaders in Qom criticized the government’s inability to provide adequate hospitals, libraries, and other public welfare systems, and they stood against Reza Shah’s policies that encouraged men to shave, women not to wear head coverings, and for cinemas and wine shops to open.136 These struggles between the government and Qom died down after Reza Shah was forced to abdicate his throne to his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, in 1941. This is most likely because, in the early stages of his reign, the young shah was a ruler in name only and had little control over his government; however, that changed with the 1953 CIA coup. After the Americans, British, and pro-shah Iranians deposed Prime Minister Mosaddegh the shah assumed complete control of his country, helped by SAVAK, which tortured or killed those who criticized the shah’s policies. Religious leaders in Qom were vocal in their opposition to the shah, which created tension between the government of Iran and the religious community.

In 1963, there was a protest in Qom against the shah’s liberalization policy known as the White Revolution. The White Revolution’s goal was to thrust Iran into the global market so that it could become a world economic leader. One portion of the plan was the shah’s extensive land reform that sought to remove remnants of feudalism from Iran. The shah claimed that he wanted Iran to become an egalitarian society where equality and wealth would smother any Marxist threat to the country; however, religious leaders, who controlled much of the land in Qom, protested against the land reform.\(^{137}\) They also objected to the shah’s plan to give suffrage to women. In early 1963, a religious leader named Ruhollah Khomeini publicly criticized the shah’s attempts to westernize Iran, and in June 1963, after he delivered a sermon denouncing both the shah and the United States, protests broke out in Qom and Tehran which led to the arrest of the Ayatollah. Khomeini’s role in the protest elevated him as the leader of the opposition, and by 1964 the shah exiled him. He spent his time in both Iraq and Paris where he wrote critiques of the shah. Many of his sermons were smuggled into Iran. In 1975, on the anniversary of the 1963 Qom protest, students gathered at Fayziyah Seminary in Qom to show support for the exiled Ayatollah. Tensions rose when students barricaded themselves inside the seminary and security forces arrived to prevent the protest from spreading outside of the university. As the struggle continued, residents shut down the city in solidarity with the protest and the shah sent the military to restore order. Although there is no official account of the number of deaths, rumors that five to as many as 45 students were killed by the shah’s forces quickly circulated throughout the country.\(^{138}\) The shah claimed that the protesters were communist sympathizers, and he shut down the Fayziyah Seminary. After the university was shut down, Khomeini condemned the shah as America’s puppet. This attack by Khomeini, and each attack thereafter, raised his


\(^{138}\) Kurzman, "The Qom Protests," 289.
popularity within the anti-shah religious and collegiate communities. For the next three years, the city of Qom was relatively quiet until a news article that scurrilously attacked Khomeini was published one week after Jimmy Carter visited Tehran. People gathered in Qom to protest the publication of the article and again the shah’s police brutally silenced the protests, but this time, the people of Iran rose up and challenged the shah.

II.  

_Ettela’at and the 1978 Qom Uprising_

Six days after President Carter left Tehran, the state sponsored newspaper _Ettela’at_ [The News] published an article titled “Iran and Red and Black Imperialism.” The focus of this article was to attack the character of the religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini, calling him a foreign agent working on behalf of British oil interests.\(^\text{139}\) It is still unknown who in the Iranian government ordered the publication of the article. James Bill claims Farhad Nikukhah, a low-level propagandist in the ministry, most likely wrote the article while historian Javier Gil Guerrero believes that Court Minister Hoveyda could have written it. The British Ambassador, Anthony Parsons, acknowledged that the shah could have given the final approval for its publication. There is no definitive evidence as to who wrote or approved the publication; however, the accepted belief, held by scholars such as Barry Rubin, is that the Minister of Information Daryoush Homayoun penned the article. Nevertheless, after calling the Ayatollah a medieval reactionary it was clear to the people of Iran that the goal of the article was to discredit the authority of Khomeini.\(^\text{140}\) James Bill described the article as a failed tactic that “put Khomeini’s finger on this double-barreled political shotgun.”\(^\text{141}\) In his study of Khomeini’s rise

\(^{139}\) I was unable to locate a completed copy of the _Ettela’at_ article; therefore, the information on this section has been compiled using the information found in the following works: Abrahamian, _Iran Between Two Revolutions_, 505; Bill, _The Eagle and the Lion_, 233-236; Guerrero, _The Carter Administration_, 59-69; Kurzman, _The Unthinkable Revolution_, 33-49; Parsons, _The Pride and the Fall_, 60-63; Rubin, _Paved with Good Intentions_, 206-207.

\(^{140}\) Fischer, _Iran_, 194.

\(^{141}\) Bill, _The Eagle and the Lion_, 234.
to power, Said Arjomand went so far as to claim that had it not been for the article, “the collapse of the monarchical regime would not have happened so soon.”

To attack the Ayatollah’s character, the article focused on the “foreign meddling” tactic that was often used during the shah’s reign. Simply put, this tactic blamed foreign nations for the troubles Iran faced, which was an effective way to shift responsibility from his failed policies. This tactic is seen in the title of the *Ettela’at* article. Historically, the term “red imperialism” referred to both British colonialism in Iran and the external threat of the Soviet Union. The term “black imperialism” was associated with radical religious groups that opposed the Westernization policies of Pahlavi’s rule. The history and implications of the title would not have been lost on the Iranian people.

The article sought to attack Khomeini’s character in several ways. One example was its claim that he was born in India, not in Iran. This claim preyed on the underlying prejudice against Indians that existed among lower-class Iranians. The tension between Indians and Iranians developed during the era of British oil investment in Iran. Companies believed that it was more profitable to bring Indian engineers and workers to operate oil refineries in Iran than to train locals. The result was that while the British overseers, the Iranian royal family, and foreign workers became wealthy, the local Iranians often lived in poverty. The article went on to claim that Khomeini had acted as a British spy in his youth: “In order to acquire name and fame, Ruhollah Khomeini became a tool for the red and black colonialists who have sought to discredit the revolution of the shah and the people…He lived in India for a time where he was in touch

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with British colonial circles.”¹⁴⁴ The evidence of his work on behalf of the British, the article argued, was demonstrated in the 1963 Qom uprising. Motivated to discredit the shah’s White Revolution, Khomeini’s sermons that stirred up protests were not inspired by his love for Iran, but rather to entice riots. This claim not only justified the shah’s decision to exile Khomeini, it also made Khomeini responsible for the deaths of the protesters in the 1963 Qom uprising. In addition to Khomeini’s character, the article also sought to discredit his religious credentials. It asserted that in his younger days, he was not the devoted student of Islam that he claimed to be, but rather the author of erotic Sufi poetry.

While the article was intended to encourage people to challenge Khomeini’s influence, it had the opposite effect. The article not only unified the opposition against the shah, but it became the kindling for the revolution. Charles Kurzman noted that a participant in the revolution told him, “I believe the author of the article wanted to see what the people’s reaction would be, and if we don’t mobilize, it will mean the regime wins.”¹⁴⁵ Outraged, the students of the religious universities and the citizens of Qom took to the streets on 7 January 1978 to protest the article and demand the return of the exiled Ayatollah. The involvement of the larger religious community made this demonstration unusual: since previous uprisings had often been led by the intelligentsia and the middle class and included only a small portion of the population.¹⁴⁶ In Qom, however, to show solidarity with the protesters, local bazaars closed on the 8th and the growing crowd became too much for the local police force to contain. Local students organized a sit-in where they read twelve demands they wished to see the government address. Some of the demands were the separation of governmental branches, the dissolution of the government’s single Rastakhiz party, the reopening of Tehran University (which had been shut down for its

¹⁴⁴ Bill, The Eagle and the Lion, 234-235.
poetry readings), the end of violence against students, and the return of Ayatollah Khomeini.\textsuperscript{147} There is no evidence that these demands reached the shah; however, on 9 January, Iranian troops were ordered to suppress the protest. Sadly, upon their arrival, the troops opened fire and, for the first time since the 1963 protest, several Iranians were killed in Qom. The following day Khomeini, from exile in Paris, called for forty-days of mourning. British Ambassador Parsons described this event as the most serious threat to the shah’s regime since 1963.\textsuperscript{148} In his recollection of the revolution, US embassy employee John Stempel recalled the killings in Qom as the first moment that the viability of the shah’s regime was fully challenged.\textsuperscript{149} The tallies of deaths following the event were so inconsistent that the American embassy had difficulty determining the number. The first embassy report noted that only five demonstrators were killed and nine injured.\textsuperscript{150} A few days later however, the embassy reported that twelve, not five, protestors were killed. The embassy also noted that the Iranian government cited only nine deaths. These numbers were significantly less than the 100 deaths claimed by the opposition.\textsuperscript{151} However when the embassy conducted a survey a week later, it found that as the news spread throughout Iran, the accepted number of deaths by Iranians swelled to nearly 500. This was one of the earliest sign in the US cables that the shah’s hold over in his country was weakening, as more Iranians were willing to trust the opposition’s numbers than the official government report.\textsuperscript{152} The official number of deaths remain unknown. The most widely accepted number comes from Charles Kurzman, whose research discovered that only five death certificates were issued during the protest.\textsuperscript{153}

\textsuperscript{147} Fischer, \textit{Iran}, 194.
\textsuperscript{148} Parsons, \textit{The Pride and Fall}, 61.
\textsuperscript{150} Sullivan, Tehran 00289, 11 January 1978, NA-AAD.
\textsuperscript{151} Abrahamian, \textit{Iran between Two Revolutions}, 505.
\textsuperscript{152} Stempel, \textit{Inside the Iranian Revolution}, 91.
\textsuperscript{153} Kurzman, \textit{Unthinkable}, 37.
While Qom, with hindsight, is seen as a turning point in the historiography of the revolution, Washington did not view it as such. Carter had just returned from his international tour, and the events in Qom appeared to the administration to be a fairly typical protest. The US embassy duly reported the protest, but the shah had survived uprisings before, and this was the third protest in Qom under the shah’s regime. Therefore, the US embassy assured Washington that there was no need to issue a comment on the disturbances, and the White House heeded the advice.\footnote{Miklos, Tehran 00548 16 January 1978, NA-AAD.} The consequences of the Etela’at article were unseen by both the Iranian and United States governments. Published roughly two months after the death of the Ayatollah’s son, frustration against the government had been inflamed prior to the article’s publication. The subsequent protest and violent oppression by the government only encouraged more Iranians to join the demonstrations. The US embassy reported that following Qom, there was an increase in both protesters and counter-protesters throughout Iran. For each protest in Tabriz, Tehran, and Isfahan, the Rastakhiz party organized counter-protests filled with “thousands” of the “silent-majority” in Iran who supported the shah.\footnote{Sullivan, Tehran 00665, 18 January 1978, NA-AAD.} The embassy concluded that this tumult posed no threat to the Iranian government.

While the embassy perceived the protests as non-threatening to the Iranian government, they feared that the shah would use them as an excuse to crack down. Referring to “local sources,” Ambassador Sullivan sought to determine who had been responsible for the protests and why they had occurred. In its first report, dated 11 January, the embassy noted that the uprising occurred on the anniversary of the 1963 White Revolution land reform policy and on the 42nd anniversary of Reza Shah’s law abolishing the use of veils by women. Therefore, the embassy initially interpreted the events as another anti-liberalization protest. It cited protestors
destroying parts of the Rastakhiz Party’s headquarters and attempting to take over the local police station. This protest occurred, the report concluded, due to the government’s “lack of effective reaction to student demonstrations” which “encouraged more violent demonstrations.” The report noted that it was only after the police station was attacked that the police fired into the crowd, killing five and injuring nine.156

While the US embassy investigated the Qom incident, it seemed to overlook a report that was right under its nose. On 8 January, 1978, (the day after the Ettela’at article was published) the American Embassy in Tehran cabled Washington to express its concern over the recent talks within the shah’s government. The report noted that on 4 January 1978, at a one-day Congress meeting, the government’s official political party, the Rastakhiz Party, openly attacked what it deemed the “Red and Black Colonialists who try to subvert students and thus destroy Iran’s national independence.”157 Leaders of the party claimed that enemies of the shah had adopted radical tactics to disrupt the government. Although not mentioned in the report, on 28 December 1977, a bomb exploded at the Iran-American Society Student Center, injuring one guard and damaging the first floor. Perhaps this was “radical” approach the Resurgence Party was referencing.159 The embassy report noted that the concept of “Black colonialism” was a new phrase to them but acknowledged that it might refer to the “East-West” axis, and that “Black Colonialism” was a direct reference to Islamic leaders.158 The parallel use of language between the Congressional meeting and the article offers evidence of a connection between the Ettela’at article and the Iranian government. Therefore, the embassy had its answer as to why the Qom

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156 Sullivan, Tehran 00389, 11 January 1978, NA-AAD; Miklos, Tehran 00548 16 January 1978, NA-AAD. For information on the student demonstration report, see Sullivan, Tehran 10827, 8 December 1977, NA-AAD.
157 Sullivan, Tehran 00205, 8 January 1978, NA-AAD.
158 Sullivan, Tehran 00054, 2 January 1978, NA-AAD.
159 Sullivan, Tehran 00205, 8 January 1978, NA-AAD.
incident occurred; however, there is no evidence that anyone within the State Department or White House connected the dots.

III. The Carter Administration’s Response

The White House remained silent on the events in Qom. When Ambassador Sullivan later reflected on the Iranian government’s oppressive actions, he wrote, “We felt that the shah was in trouble, we thought that his economic plan and his forced industrialization were wrenching his society in ways that could cause political difficulties, but we did not see the beginnings of a revolution.”\textsuperscript{159} John Dumbbell later described Qom as the last opportunity for the Carter Administration to engage with both the opposition and the shah. Richard Cottam described the moment as the “last period in which the revolution could have been avoided.”\textsuperscript{160} These analyses imply that the Carter administration had the opportunity to influence the shah and avoid or delay the revolution. This is a contested and unprovable counterfactual and is beside the point because the State Department misunderstood what was happening in Iran. The administration’s lack of response to Qom was consistent with the its philosophy of \textit{realpolitik}.\textsuperscript{161} US foreign policy during the Cold War divided the world in two distinct categories: areas that needed American intervention and regions viewed as “stable” that did not require direct involvement. During its four years in office, the Carter administration showed its willingness to assert US influence in foreign affairs; two specific instances can be seen in Nicaragua and Rhodesia. In both of these countries, the administration referred to the local government’s violation of human rights to justify its intervention. Iran, however, was seen as both vital to US national interests and stable.

The United States, through multiple presidencies, had supported the shah in part because of its fear of the unknown. Despite all the frustrations the shah caused for each president, he

\textsuperscript{159} Sullivan, \textit{Mission to Iran}, 142.
\textsuperscript{160} Dumbrell, \textit{Carter Presidency}, 164; Cottham, \textit{Iran and the United States}, 169.
\textsuperscript{161} Dumbrell, \textit{Carter Presidency}, 113-115.
remained an indispensable pro-American ally in the region. There was no guarantee that a different leader would be as supportive as the shah or that the new leader would be able to maintain stability. The reasons why the shah remained vital to the United States were recycled through each administration and each reason helps to explain why Jimmy Carter continued to support him. First, the economic ties between the two countries were indispensable. By 1978, there were nearly three thousand Americans living in Iran. Investments between the two countries had developed into a multi-billion-dollar relationship. The second reason focused on the shah’s nuclear ambitions. It was well known that the shah planned to transform Iran into a global superpower. To achieve this status, the shah required nuclear capabilities. The Iranian government had already begun this process by purchasing nuclear equipment from America, France, and Israel. While each president, starting with Eisenhower, sold non-lethal nuclear equipment to Tehran, they all kept a watchful eye on Iran to ensure that any requests that could lead to the development of nuclear weaponry remained unfulfilled. As long as the shah remained in power, the United States believed it understood Iran’s nuclear desires. Throughout the Carter administration, it was clear that the shah remained determined to acquire nuclear power capabilities but not to develop nuclear weapons, therefore, during the state visit in December, both leaders reached an agreement on the sale of American-made nuclear energy equipment. The administration believed that an agreement to sell eight nuclear power reactors positioned the White House in a role to influence Iran's future nuclear programs. This agreement helped maintain the close relationship with a pro-Western leader in a volatile region who would be committed to a global nonproliferation policy.

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162 For information on the financial assistance given by the US government, see “Table 5” found in Gasiorowski, U.S. Foreign Policy, 102-103. For information on Americans living in Iran, see Bill, The Eagle and the Lion, 319-425.

The administration also supported the shah because he played a central role in Carter’s foreign policy. He was committed to containing Soviet expansion, including in the Horn of Africa. Lastly, the shah’s role in facilitating peace talks in the Middle East should not be underestimated. During its first year, the administration worked tirelessly to reinvigorate the 1973 Geneva Peace Accords. The administration did not know in early 1978 that these talks would lay the foundation for the successful Camp David Accords. What it did know is that any future peace settlement would be facilitated with the shah’s aid, and that the success of any accord would be fostered by the shah’s relationships with Arab leaders. As demonstrated when Carter visited Tehran, the administration viewed the shah’s personal relationship with regional leaders as irreplaceable.164

These four reasons help explain why the Carter administration supported the shah’s rule of Iran. This did not mean Carter endorsed every aspect of the shah’s methods of governing; however, maintaining a relationship with the shah benefited the United States and no alternative to the shah seemed preferable. Therefore, when the Qom uprising occurred, the administration chose not to speak publicly about the event. The shah had survived uprisings before: it was not a great leap of faith to assume that he would quell this protest quickly and reinstate stability in his country. The reason the shah’s government decided to publish the Ettela’at article is not known, but the widely accepted explanation is best summed up by Ali Ansari: “With Carter’s effusive praise lingering in the Shah’s ears, he decided to deal with the turbulent priest who had been causing him periodic trouble since 1963.”165 After two successful state visits, the shah no longer feared backlash from Carter. The back-to-back state visits convinced to the shah that he had the

164 Rubin, Paved with Good Intentions, 208.
165 Ansari, Confronting Iran, 77.
support of White House.\textsuperscript{166} Following the protest in Qom and the government’s response, Sullivan asked the embassy to write a report on the religious communities in Iran. The embassy hoped to determine if there was a connection between the religious community and the widespread protests. This report was the first to use the word “revolution” to describe the situation in Iran, but it did not predict a revolution. Iranians, on the other hand, were beginning to hope that the collapse of the shah’s regime was a real possibility.\textsuperscript{167}

The Carter administration approached the shah very much like the administrations before it. As Zonis explained: “The guiding principles of the US-Iranian relationship were in place and as a result, the US believed that the Shah was more than capable of handling any opposition.”\textsuperscript{168}

This was an error that has cast a large shadow over Carter’s presidency.

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
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\bibitem{note3} Zonis, \textit{Majestic Failure}, 244.
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CONCLUSION

During its first year, the Carter administration pursued a very active foreign policy. High-ranking cabinet members visited many countries while the president welcomed world leaders to the White House. One particular ally who sought reassurance from Carter was the Shah of Iran. The 1976 presidential campaign had unnerved the shah. The campaign rhetoric about human rights, and curbing arms sales made the shah cautious about the incoming president. Nevertheless, Carter never questioned the strategic importance of a strong US ally in the region and sought to reassure the shah of his administration’s commitment to Iran. The meetings between Jimmy Carter and the Shah of Iran that took place in November and December 1977 were designed to meet this objective.

Most studies of the US diplomatic relationship with Iran during the Carter years pay scant attention to the first year and a half of the administration. They might mention the shah’s visit to the United States and president’s visit to Tehran, but focus on the colorful incidents such as the tear gas incident outside the White House and Carter’s “island of stability” statement rather than delve into an analysis of the deeper meaning of these events. The same is true of the uprising at Qom: it is mentioned in passing. This leaves readers with an incomplete understanding of the early tremors of the revolution. The November meeting offered Carter the opportunity to address important issues with the shah, while also providing Iran with the assurance of US commitment to the region. While many topics were discussed, there are three important points that need to be highlighted. The first is the agreement to a petroleum price freeze for 1978. This freeze, the administration hoped, would help stabilize both the US and the world economy. Second, during the November visit, Carter convinced the shah of his desire to limit the amount of lethal arms the United States sold around the world while still being committed to containing Soviet expansion.
And finally, this meeting gave Carter the opportunity to privately express the administration’s complaints about human rights violations in Iran. This “spontaneous” private meeting has played a vital role in the perception of Jimmy Carter. For those who knew of the meeting, it was clear that Carter remained committed to his stance human rights; however, those unaware of the private meeting interpreted Carter’s public silence about Iran’s human rights violations as a lack of conviction for the principles he claimed to hold dear. Just as the November meeting benefited Carter and helped the administration achieve its goals, the shah also greatly profited from Carter’s Tehran visit in December.

The optics of Iran hosting the president of the United States was, without a doubt, political win for the shah. Since the 1976 election, the shah had remained cautious of Carter, but having the president and his entourage as guests in Tehran was a great opportunity to display the continuing friendship between the two nations. Even though there was not a major political announcement during the visit, there are three important outcomes that have shaped US diplomatic history. First, Carter was given another opportunity to publicly distance his administration from Iran’s human rights violations, and his failure to do so forthrightly emboldened the shah, and invigorated the opposition. Secondly, the December visit offered the opportunity to continue the November discussions regarding the purchase of nuclear equipment and military arms, the Horn of Africa, and the price of oil. These brief discussions demonstrated Carter’s commitment to maintaining its relationship with Iran as a valuable US ally in the region. Finally, during this visit Carter, with the shah’s help, made some progress in the Middle East peace talks, helping to lay the foundations upon which the Camp David Accords would be built.

These two meetings are pivotal for understanding the US relationship with the Shah of Iran during the Carter Administration. Until official Iranian documents are available, studying
the US analysis of these visits offers the most concrete examples of how the US government planned to work with Iran prior to the revolution. As more sources become available, our understanding of these topics will deepen. Subjects ranging from Iran’s involvement in Africa in the 1970s, to the Iranian objectives in the Middle East, and the shah’s influence on the Camp David Accords will be clarified. One important issue that will benefit from future research is Iran’s nuclear ambition, as it has become one of the most potent topics in today’s politics. In the 1970s, the American presidents cautiously encouraged Iran’s nuclear goals; today, in 2018, the United States and its allies stand in the way of any form of Iranian nuclear capability; a deeper understanding of the history behind this complex issue will benefit all parties involved.

One lesson that I took away from this research is that no matter what a presidential candidate might promise, our allies expect the US foreign policy to be fundamentally consistent, and this is important for global stability. Countries expect that agreements signed with one administration will be honored by the next, even if it is a different political party. Changes in policy place our allies in a precarious position. For example, when Carter broke away from the Nixon-era policies of weapons sales and added a focus on human rights, the shah was uneasy and the relationship between Iran and the United States grew strained. This break is also evident in the current political climate when we consider the circumstances surrounding the withdrawal of the United States from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, also known as the Iran Deal. Created during the Obama Administration, there was an expectation that the deal would be maintained despite presidential candidate Trump’s open remarks against it. When the Trump administration withdrew from the agreement in 2018, there was hesitation yet again within the international community. The ability for administrations to stay faithful to international agreements throughout an array of presidencies is one of the key characteristics that allow the
United States government to remain a superpower, and when this attribute is taken for granted, the influence of the United States slowly weakens.

This thesis began as a personal inquiry into my wife’s family history. Her family, who migrated to the United States after the revolution, were shah supporters. As I learned more about Iran, my focus turned to Carter and his visit to Tehran. In the beginning stages of my research, I approached this topic hoping to find a “smoking gun” that proved a link between President Carter’s trip to Tehran and the uprising in Qom. While I personally believe there is some circumstantial evidence of a connection, my research has shown that it cannot be proven based on the available sources. However, in the process of my research, I was frustrated by the absence of importance placed on the visits to Washington and Tehran. It felt as though a portion of the foundation for this historiography was missing, and I believe this work provides some clues in that regard. More importantly, this research has complicated the conclusion previously accepted about Carter’s trip to Tehran. No longer should the visit be reduced to the “island of stability” remark. The more interesting part of his toast was his reference to human rights: it exemplifies both the weaknesses and the strengths of his presidency. Motivated to promote human rights, Carter did not shy from the topic, but he was too oblique. His desire to address human rights was curtailed by Iran’s important role in US global interests. It is my hope that future scholars will use this work to understand more thoroughly the complex relationship between Jimmy Carter and the Shah of Iran. Furthermore, I hope that this thesis provides a better understanding of the roots of the current relationship between the United States and not just Iran, but also other countries. By reevaluating the forgotten history between the nations of Iran and the United States, I hope that this work will play a role in furthering the understanding of the relationship between the two governments as each country progresses through the twenty-first century.
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Figure 1: Jimmy Carter and the Shah of Iran, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library

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Figure 2: The Shah of Iran and Shahbanou of Iran present Jimmy Carter and Rosalynn Carter with a tapestry of George Washington, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library

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Figure 3: President Carter waves from Air Force One on his arrival in Tehran, Iran, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library NLC-WHSP-C-03785-19A.
Figure 4: Arrival ceremony for Jimmy Carter and Rosalynn Carter in Tehran, Iran, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library NLC-WHSP-C-03804-10.
Figure 5: Jimmy Carter and US officials meet with the Shah of Iran and Iranian officials, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library NLC-WHSP-C-03790-29.
Figure 6: Jimmy Carter with King Hussein of Jordan, the Shah of Iran and Shahbanou of Iran, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library NLC-WHSP-C-03788-09.
Figure 7: Jimmy Carter and the Shah toast at a State Dinner hosted by the Shah of Iran, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library NLC-WHSP-C-03789-09.
Figure 8: Jimmy Carter and King Hussein of Jordan in Tehran, Iran, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library NLC-WHSP-C-03819-13.