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King of Kings: Human Rights Rhetoric and Regional Security in the Shah's Iran, 1968-1978

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KING OF KINGS:
HUMAN RIGHTS RHETORIC AND REGIONAL SECURITY
IN THE SHAH'S IRAN, 1968-1978

By

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B.A., University of Rochester, Rochester, NY, 2008

Thesis

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Abstract King of Kings

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In the spring of 1968, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's personal rule and Iran's domestic stability were at an all-time high. For five years, Iran had enjoyed the boons of the Shah's White Revolution. This program of economic and social reform had placed Iran on the path to becoming one of the most populous, prosperous, and powerful nations in the Middle East. In January 1968 the United Kingdom announced it would withdraw its military from the Persian Gulf. The Shah seized upon this opportunity and that provided by the promulgation of the Nixon Doctrine in 1969 to put Iran on the road to regional hegemony.

The Shah pursued a variety of security goals aimed at positioning Iran as the hegemon of the Persian Gulf and leader of the littoral Indian Ocean nations. He also embarked on a rhetorical campaign to reinforce the legitimacy of the Pahlavi dynasty and establish himself as the heir to the power and prestige of ancient Persian monarchs like Cyrus the Great. In addition to the power of Cyrus, the Shah connected himself to the legacy of the Cyrus Cylinder, which he claimed as the first code of human rights in the world.

To establish himself as the leader of the post-colonial Indian Ocean nations, the Shah not only pursued *realpolitik* security initiatives, he utilized the rhetoric of human rights. In 1968, Tehran hosted the first International Conference on Human Rights. At this conference and in a variety of other international theatres, the Shah's rhetoric emerged in force. His human rights rhetoric, however, was divided; he elevated socioeconomic rights and national development above, and as the path to, political agency and civil justice.

This thesis examines the ways in which the Shah's international human rights rhetoric had unintended consequences for Iran's domestic stability and the Shah's regional security goals. In dividing human rights in both rhetoric and practice, the Shah created conditions that collided with economic downturn and civil unrest to create revolution in 1978-1979. By exploring this level of discourse between the Shah's international rhetoric and domestic audience, this thesis demonstrates the necessity of considering human rights as indivisible and as an integral part of any security policy.

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Introduction

When Vice President Richard Nixon arrived in Tehran on December 9, 1953, the city was quiet. The silence belied the violence of just two days past and the simmering anger of a conflicted nation. On December 7, one hundred and sixty students had met in a University of Tehran classroom to plan a demonstration in response to the December 5 announcement that the Shah was reopening diplomatic ties with the United Kingdom.¹ The planned demonstration was to coincide with the vice president's visit in order to "inform him directly of the corrupted regime" of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. Upon hearing of the planned demonstration, "the Shah's forces" sent soldiers to the classroom; the results are perhaps predictable. The professor was held at gunpoint while two randomly selected students were taken out of the classroom to be "severely beaten."² First-hand accounts of the event vary on what happened next; students may have begun calling for help or shouting at the soldiers. One student recalls that, while the students attempted to flee, the soldiers fired on the crowd, killing three students. In a 1961 letter to Senator Hubert Humphrey on behalf of the Iranian Student Association of Northern California, this student reflected on the events of December 7 from the relative safety of Berkeley. He laments a December 8 *New York Times* article that described the students as "Communists who attacked the soldiers to get their guns." The article provides numbers that

¹ Sources vary on the intent of the demonstration. PressTV insists that it was to protest ties with the US while Chamran infers that it was a demonstration in response to the reopening of diplomatic ties with Britain.

² Letter from Mostafa Chamran to Senator Humphrey, 13 December 1961, Series 13, Box 41, Folder 5, Mike Mansfield Papers, Archives & Special Collections, Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library, The University of Montana-Missoula.

conflict with the student's account, claiming that the crowd of students numbered only thirty to forty and that only two students were fatally wounded.³ The student ended his letter with the sentiment that the American account of the event "saddens me greatly."⁴ The student was Mostafa Chamran, and, after a further decade of intimidation and threats of passport withdrawal, his emotions evolved from sadness and denial to anger and violence. Chamran remarked that the events of December 7 were "burned in my memory." In the 1970s he actively trained Islamic revolutionary guerillas in the Middle East and Africa, and after the Iranian revolution of 1979, he was named the Islamic Republic of Iran's first defense minister and commander of the Revolutionary Guard.⁵ A confluence of American and British foreign policy agendas sparked this incident and left an indelible mark on the psyche of Iranians like Chamran. It was not the first time the foreign policy of great powers altered the course of Iran's history; it would not be the last.

* * * * *

Iran's history throughout the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah (r. 1941-1979) is intricately tied with American and British policy in the Persian Gulf. The 1953 protest described by Chamran was in response to the Shah's decision to reopen diplomatic ties with the United Kingdom and Vice President Nixon's visit to Tehran. In 1968, the Shah embarked on a course of foreign and military policy designed to position Iran and himself as "policeman" of the Middle East.⁶ Iran's more aggressive foreign policy emerged because of several factors that provided the Shah with the means and opportunity to pursue his goals of making the Iranian state

³ Robert C. Doty, "2 Teheran Students Slain, 1 Hurt As Foes of Britain Fight Troops," *New York Times*, December 8, 1953.

⁴ Letter from Mostafa Chamran to Senator Humphrey, 13 December 1961

⁵ Gregory F. Rose, "The Post-Revolutionary Purge of Iran's Armed Forces: A Revisionist Assessment," *Iranian Studies*, 17.2/3 (Spring – Summer, 1984), 183.

⁶ Leslie M. Pryor, "Arms and the Shah," *Foreign Policy*, no. 31 (Summer, 1978), 61.

into a regional leader and world power. The Shah seized upon the opportunities created by his extensive program of socioeconomic reforms known as the White Revolution, which he announced and the Iranian government began implementing in 1963. This economic success and the fulfillment of several key security goals allowed the Shah to act on his international vision for Iran and aggressively pursue a foreign policy agenda designed to establish Iran as hegemon in the Persian Gulf and leader of the Indian Ocean Littoral Nations.

A hegemon is here defined as a state in an international system that has attained a level of capabilities that makes it the most powerful state in its system and that is so powerful that it has the ability to dominate all the other states in the system.⁷ Though hegemony in this context most often refers to global hegemons, such as the British Empire in the nineteenth century or the United States in the twenty-first, John Mearsheimer makes the important distinction that “system” does not necessarily indicate a global system; regional hegemons “dominate distinct geographical areas.”⁸ Mearsheimer defines a potential hegemon as a “great power with so much actual military capability and so much potential power that its stands a good chance of dominating and controlling all of the other great powers in its region of the world.”⁹ Forging Iran into such a power was the Shah’s ultimate goal; he believed that within a quarter century Iran would be a world power on par economically with West Germany.¹⁰ Utilizing his nation’s oil wealth, he was able to build a superior military that was the envy of the other Middle Eastern states.

⁷ See: John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 40; Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 29; and William C. Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions during the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 12-14.

⁸ Mearsheimer, 40.

⁹ Ibid, 45.

¹⁰ Special to The New York Times, “Shah Offers Plan for Indian Ocean,” *The New York Times*, September 29, 1974, accessed April 20, 2012,

<http://search.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/120043133/136371550F442999DDA/1?accountid=14593>

The Shah's military and geopolitical aspirations emerged at the same time that global power structures were beginning to change and that international conceptions of human rights were evolving. The Shah capitalized on these changes in his espousal of an international rhetoric of human rights that spoke to the desires of a developing world. The global enunciation of human rights norms that began in the 1940s introduced to the colonized nations of Africa and Asia western conceptions of human rights based in international law and agreements. These norms, evolving from the Enlightenment traditions of the eighteenth century and from liberal democratic agendas in the nineteenth century and with precedents in various historical religious and social traditions across the globe, were centered on the individual. However, calls from the wealthy nations of the global "North" for political and civil rights rang hollow in the ears of Third World autocratic modernizers; individual political participation seemed insignificant while their nations lived in poverty and their national security was threatened by a global cold war. Voices of challenge rose from the post-colonial world with the growing power of authoritarian leaders and the emergence of a sense of second-class international status to American and European nations. Mohammad Reza Shah was at the forefront of these modernizing autocrats.

Domestically, the Shah presented himself as the beneficent father figure of his nation; he attempted to position Iran as the policeman of the Middle East and guarantor of Gulf oil. Internationally, the Shah believed that Iran, and through Iran, himself, were the inheritors of ancient Persian might and were thus destined for dominance in the Persian Gulf as well as international recognition as a great power. Beginning in the 1960s, the Shah utilized human rights rhetoric to influence the perceptions of regional actors. During the 1970s, he combined this international rhetoric with regional security initiatives.

* * * * *

The existing scholarship on Iran during this period takes an almost teleological approach to the Iranian Revolution of 1979, attempting to show how the Shah's brutality made the rise of the Islamic Republic inevitable. Much of this scholarship focuses either on aspects of the Shah's foreign policy in a Cold War setting or on his repression of political opposition in Iran. Few studies have successfully addressed the fact that, because of an abundance of foreign media and the rising access of urban Iranians to these forms mass media, the Shah's international rhetoric collided with his domestic agendas. Further, the majority of Iranian scholarship on this period is concerned with either the Shah's repression of his people or with his security connections with America. While this project does not deny the brutality of the Shah's regime and its violations of human rights during the 1960s and 70s, it focuses instead on how the Shah used human rights to his own benefit abroad and how that undermined both his domestic security and the stability of the Persian Gulf.

The historiography of human rights in general, and in Iran specifically, is still emerging and a great deal of work lies ahead. In particular, the connections between human rights and international security need to be further explored by historians. Most scholarship addresses this theme either prescriptively or descriptively; however, detailed case studies of the regional security ramifications of human rights abuses or rhetorical devices remains largely untilled ground for historians.

A wave of scholarship over the past two decades has marked the relatively late entry of history as a discipline into the field of human rights. Despite this growing body of historical literature, few scholars have extensively examined the connections between human rights and regional security in the Middle East. While political science and law scholars have been

involved in the human rights discussion since its inception, few scholars in either discipline have seriously considered how actors have applied human rights within the Middle Eastern security complex. The questions surrounding the connection between security and human rights are particularly significant in Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's Iran. During the 1960s and 70s Iran began its rise to regional dominance while allegations of egregious human rights violations under the Shah's regime increased. In his public rhetoric, the Shah utilized a language of human rights that elevated national socioeconomic human rights – positive rights to education, healthcare, economic success, property, and social and gender equality – to forward his international agenda while ignoring the building discontent with the denial of individual political and civil rights in his own country.

The recent body of historical human rights scholarship has begun to question the inception of human rights; when and where did it begin and why has it emerged as a social norm in international affairs today?¹¹ Human rights scholars must also wrestle with the question of cultural relativism; are human rights merely a social construction of the West that are imposed on the rest of the world? Leaders in the West and elsewhere invoke human rights for seemingly self-indulgent aims; however, scholars point to the increasing relevance of individuals and non-state entities in human rights discourse over time.

¹¹ See: Elizabeth Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World: America's Vision for Human Rights* (London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 299; Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: Norton, 2007), 20-21, 34, 82; and Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 311-313. Hunt traces our modern understanding of rights to the 18th century French and American Revolutions. Borgwardt traces the emergence of contemporary human rights norms and ideas to post-war America. She examines America's role as international leader in the 1940s and its role in forwarding an agenda of rights and collective security. Moyn dates the emergence of the contemporary idea and practice of human rights to the 1970s. This date is in large part due to how Moyn defines human rights, and his particular focus on the current conception of rights norms as individual rights. He argues that it is the contemporary understanding of human rights as rights of the individual that transcend those of the "nation-state that accounts for the relevance of human rights in the last three decades."

Perhaps one of the most important debates in the history of human rights is the genesis and proper place of political and civil rights in relation to social and economic rights. The implications of the divisibility of human rights have far-reaching ramifications for international security. What are the consequences of emphasizing one type of human right while denying others? Neither the Iran-specific literature nor human rights scholarship in general has sufficiently addressed specific relationships between the articulation of certain forms of human rights rhetoric and regional security. Though many of the general human rights works consider the role of human rights rhetoric, practice, and how divisions between socioeconomic and political and civil rights interact with regional security in a general sense, they consider few specific case studies as a means to understanding these relationships.

This project rejects the idea that there is a distinction between socioeconomic and political and civil rights in particular cultures or geographies. To understand the relationship between conceptions of rights and their role in regional security requires first an understanding of the principles of the universality and indivisibility of human rights. If human rights are universal across cultures and time, then universal assumptions can be made in particular case studies. If rights are indivisible from each other and from *realpolitik* security concerns, then any case study or policy that considers one aspect should be prepared to deal with its relationship to the others. Paul Gordon Lauren and Micheline Ishay document the history of human rights from antiquity to the present.¹² Both authors see a particular continuity across time and cultures within the history of human rights.¹³ Paul Lauren's, *The Evolution of International Human*

¹² Lauren traces human rights norms to the "first charter of human rights" – the Cyrus Cylinder that the first Persian shah, Cyrus the Great, crafted 2500 years ago in Iran. Paul Gordon Lauren, *The Evolution of International Human Rights: Visions Seen*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) 12.

¹³ Lynn Hunt stands with those who criticize works like those by Lauren and Ishay as too teleological, arguing that they construct a history of human rights as an inevitable story of human progress. Samuel Moyn criticizes both Lauren's and Ishay's syntheses, which he claims "fall into teleology, tunnel vision, and triumphalism, focusing on the background or, at the latest, the 1940s."

Rights: Visions Seen and Ishay's *The History of Human Rights* stress the universal applicability of human rights and attempt to understand the consequences of dividing human rights in theory and in practice. Lauren makes the important distinction that, while all societies have not "always subscribed to the same basic beliefs and values... the moral worth of each person is a belief that no single civilization, or people, or nation, or geographical area, or even century can claim as uniquely its own."¹⁴ In addition to his rejection of the idea that human rights are a solely Western phenomenon, two of Lauren's most convincing arguments are his rejection of the idea that human rights in the West are concerned only with political and civil rights and his denial that the "'idealism' of rights and the 'realism' of security are complete opposites."¹⁵ Ishay argues that in addition to the test of renewing "universalist aspirations, bridging developed and developing world concerns and reasserting the inalienability and indivisibility of civil-political and socioeconomic rights," the human rights community must also connect global justice and human rights with "any [geopolitical] strategy that hopes to achieve long-term security."¹⁶ Ishay's prescription that any regional or global security strategy must take human rights into consideration is especially true in the Shah's Iran. Though he attempted to emphasize the socioeconomic dimensions of human rights that he believed were necessary for the people of Iran, the Shah's prolonged disregard for political and civil justice and freedoms had dire consequences for his international vision for Iran's rise to global power.

In examining the relationship between human rights and security policy, the present project speaks to the trend, begun by scholars like David Forsythe of arguing that national and international security concerns cannot be divorced from human rights in theory or in the

¹⁴ Lauren, 13.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 278.

¹⁶ Micheline R. Ishay, *The History of Human Rights: From Ancient Times to the Globalization Era* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 284.

formulation of effective national policy and international law. In his 1983 monograph, *Human Rights and World Politics*, Forsythe explains the principles behind human rights regarding its law, rhetoric and politics, and practice in reality. Like the current project, Forsythe connects international security and human rights; however, his focus is on American foreign policy. What Forsythe believes is necessary in a comprehensive foreign policy is “a combination of President Jimmy Carter’s willingness to look at the internal forces and conditions which determine much of politics, and Henry Kissinger’s ability to present an overall vision of the world.”¹⁷ This combination of ideology and geopolitics is an integral part of considering how the Shah’s international rhetoric and strategy interacted with “internal forces and conditions” in Iran. Forsythe claims that the goal of human rights is to “insist that the power, security, and economic well-being of states and their ruling elites be accompanied by concern for the average citizen and/or the least well-off in political and economic terms.”¹⁸ Forsythe argues that each type of right, be it political, civil, social, or economic, is dependent on and essential to the others. The Shah’s failure to understand the interconnections between different types of rights helps to explain in part the upheaval of the late 1970s.

The current project aspires to enter the debate over the relationship between socioeconomic rights and political/civil rights to help reveal a particular facet of this relationship and its impact on the Shah’s Iran. This project argues that human rights are indivisible from one another, and that historically, attempts to divide them in rhetoric or in practice have created a less pleasant and less secure world. This debate is perhaps the most important and consistent in the scholarship of human rights during the Cold War. In his 2010 history, *Indivisible Human Rights*, Daniel Whelan attempts to understand what is meant when international institutions describe

¹⁷ Forsythe, *Human Rights and World Politics*, 123.

¹⁸ Forsythe, 129.

human rights as “indivisible.” Whelan argues that during and after the decolonization movement, the developing world seized the idea of the indivisibility of rights to stress the importance of economic and social rights over political and civil rights. This movement was led in no small part by the Shah during the 1968 International Conference on Human Rights in Tehran. To these developing nations led by autocratic modernizers, the primary goal was equality in the international system with the white western nations. Whelan places particular emphasis on the 1968 Conference. At this conference, marking the twentieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration, the rights rhetoric of the developing world began to emerge in strength. He notes the disconnect at Tehran “between the strong rhetoric that the enjoyment of civil and political rights is *impossible* without the enjoyment of economic, social, and cultural rights, and any link of that principle to the broader call for development assistance.”¹⁹ The most important watershed moment for Whelan came in 1993 with the World Conference on Human Rights and the subsequent restoration of the concept of indivisibility of human rights after decades of Cold War-era division between socioeconomic and political rights.

In the specific case of the Shah’s Iran, this project agrees with Whelan’s assertion that these rights should be and were indivisible. The Iran of the 1960s and 70s lacked truly “modern political and economic institutions” upon which, as Whelan argues, “the indivisibility of civil, political, economic, and social rights” relies.²⁰ Despite the great deal of historical, political, and legal scholarship that exists on Iran during the period in question, few works have specifically addressed the connections between the Shah’s international rhetoric and regional security. F. Gregory Gause III’s *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf* combines constructivist and realist international relations theory to understand what he designates the “regional security

¹⁹ Daniel J. Whelan, *Indivisible Human Rights: A History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 151.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

complex” of the Persian Gulf. He identifies how social norms, traditional threats, and perceptions all interact with geopolitical strategy and Gulf oil. Though his short book is revelatory in this regard, there is not a single specific mention of human rights as a factor in regional security.

The present project attempts to avoid both ideological affiliation and the biting criticism of authors like James Bill in his book, *The Eagle and the Lion*. Bill is overtly hostile and critical of the Shah’s regime, which hampers a more comprehensive understanding of the Shah’s convictions and the intentions behind the rhetoric. In attempting to avoid this pitfall, this project seeks to speak to works like Ervand Abrahamian’s *Iran Between Two Revolutions* by adding an additional level of analysis. Abrahamian provides a detailed and sweeping analysis of the period between Iran’s 1906 and 1979 revolutions; however, because of its comprehensive nature, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* does not delve specifically into the connections between human rights and regional security.²¹

The current project is an attempt to expand on Abrahamian’s revelations about why the 1979 revolution took place and to explain how conceptions of human rights and the uneven way the Shah employed them in his rhetoric contributed to the instability inherent in what Abrahamian describes as the “politics of uneven development.”²² One of the more important analyses in his, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, is Abrahamian’s rejection of the reasons for the downfall of the Shah supplied by the monarch’s critics and his supporters. Supporters of the monarchy, says Abrahamian, claim that the Shah lost power because he modernized too quickly for his backward, semi-feudal populace still trapped in their traditions.²³ Critics of the Shah, on

²¹ James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988);

²² Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 426-427.

²³ The Shah echoes this in his *Answer to History*.

the other hand, claimed that he did not modernize quickly enough, and the outmoded political structures of Iran threw the country into the grasp of religious extremists. Abrahamian utilizes a pseudo-Marxist framework of analysis that blames the revolution not on under- or over-development but on uneven development. Abrahamian examines how changing class dynamics interacted with socioeconomic development and political repression to produce societal stress. This project is in dialogue with Abrahamian's extensive works and is an attempt to contribute a new level of understanding to the reasons for revolution in 1979; it examines how the Shah's rhetoric collided with the social, economic, and demographic pressures that Abrahamian elaborates.

* * * * *

Above all, this project is an attempt to understand the Shah's human rights rhetoric – what characterized his rhetoric, why did he utilize this rhetoric, and what were its implications for and impact on regional security? Personal identity and experience play a fundamental role in the individual convictions of all people; people and ideas matter. Religious, ethnic, national, geographic, political, and individual identities all play a role in the construction of social norms and individual beliefs. The existence of varying individual and international conceptions of human rights means that these rights are not abstractions; they are real factors that impact the ways in which individual actors and governments perceive the world. This project considers human rights and international security as indivisible and asserts that socioeconomic rights are indivisible from political and civil rights. This framework is an attempt to move away from defining these concepts separately in order to reveal the beliefs and motives of the historical actors under scrutiny. In the same way that rights should not be divorced from each other or

from security, they should not be separated from the long historical understanding that laid the foundation for their contemporary meaning.

In the pursuit of his regional security objectives, the Shah utilized a variety of rhetorical approaches, the most important of which was that of human rights. He connected his White Revolution to the international arena and Afro-Asian calls for decolonization, national development, and racial equality. The Shah's elevation of national, social, and economic rights came at the expense of the individual political and civil rights of Iranians. The use of this rhetoric interacted disastrously with the economic and demographic changes taking place in Iran caused by the Shah's program of reform. His division of human rights and the elevation of certain rights over others contributed in a very real way to destabilizing his regime, fomenting dissent and undermining Iran's geopolitical rise to world power status.

By exploring the connections and divisions between ideology, rhetoric, and policy in Iran, this study aims to reveal new levels of discourse between nation states, between regional actors, and between rulers and the ruled. Because of the dichotomy between the Shah's mercurial ascendancy and meteoric fall, these levels of discourse play a particularly important role in understanding the decades preceding the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Isolated in a rhetorical prison of his own making, the Shah failed to understand that these avenues of discourse existed and that they were in contact with each other. The Shah utilized specific reforms, policies, and rhetoric leading up to and after 1968 to create the perception in the international community that Iran and the Shah acted as regional leaders in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean; these foreign policies and rhetorical techniques in the international theatre created pressures in the Iranian domestic population that contributed to the eventual demise of the Iranian monarchy.

* * * * *

Samuel Moyn describes 1968 as a “global disruption.”²⁴ It was indeed a moment of remarkable transition for Iran, for the Shah’s regime, and for the international human rights movement. The Shah’s White Revolution, though not fully realized, gradually improved Iran’s economic situation and revolutionized the social structure of Iran. In the spring of 1968, the United Nations held its International Conference on Human Rights in Tehran on the twentieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That same year the British announced the withdrawal of their military assets from the Persian Gulf, creating a power vacuum.²⁵ In 1969 President Richard Nixon promulgated the Nixon Doctrine, which provided American allies with a veritable blank check to undertake regional security initiatives germane to US interests.

The three chapters that follow will be semi-chronological, but are mainly organized upon thematic lines. Chapter One begins well before 1968. It charts the development of the Shah’s model of rule and details the effects of European imperialism on Iran beginning in the eighteenth century. Iran’s collision with European pseudo-colonization during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had a definite impact on the Shah and contributed to his desire to make Iran an independent world power. His conviction that Iran was destined to regain the ancient power of the Persian Empire and his desire to craft a message of legitimacy for the Iranian monarchy under the Pahlavi dynasty led the Shah to embrace an image of power and history that connected himself with Cyrus the Great – the first Persian king.

The next chapter shifts the focus from the Shah’s domestic initiatives of the late 1960s and early 1970s to his foreign and military policies of the same period. Building on the evidence

²⁴ Moyn, 3.

²⁵ Faisal bin Salman al-Saud, *Iran, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf: Power Politics in Transition* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2003), vi-181.

in Chapter One that the Shah wanted to make Iran a world power and regional hegemon, Chapter Two explains the particular agendas and policies he implemented to achieve these goals. Among a host of real security concerns involving oil, radical subversion, and military build-up, the Shah also embraced a rhetoric of human rights that spoke to the emerging desires of Third World autocrats for equality with the West. The Shah aimed this rhetoric at an international audience as a way to increase their identification with Iran and in the hopes that the nations of the Indian Ocean would one day embrace him as their natural leader in the international arena.

The final chapter reflects on the implications of this international rhetoric in Iran's domestic population. Despite his intentions, the Shah's rhetoric reached not only the ears of regional rulers but was read and heard by a domestic population frustrated by uneven development and political repression. This chapter elaborates the collision of the Shah's foreign rhetoric with the variety of human rights violations in Iran before shifting to the existence of oppositional rhetoric and ideologies in Iran. In response to the Shah's international rhetoric and lack of political agency, oppositional rhetoric took the form of groups like the Tudeh Communist party, the liberal democrats of the National Front, and most importantly, the increasingly powerful Shia clergy. This project ends with a conclusion that is a brief look forward to the Shah's final days and to the implications of this Iranian case study on the larger issues of global human rights.

Chapter One

Constructing Destiny

The White Revolution and the Emergence of Imperial Rhetoric

*“Persia will trust in him and in his fame,
Her champions will rejoice to hear his name,
Throughout his life the monarchy will thrive,
In times to come this glory will survive;
Before his name, inscribed on every seal,
Persia and Rum and India will kneel.”*
Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh*¹

In 1925, a five-year-old boy named Mohammad Reza Pahlavi received two visions from God. The first came soon after his investiture as Crown Prince. Deathly ill with typhoid fever, the boy “hovered between life and death.” After weeks in this state, the boy was visited by a dream in which the “chief lieutenant of Mohammed,” Ali, came to him. Ali told the boy to drink from a bowl. When Mohammad Reza awoke the next day, his fever was gone. During the same year, the boy was riding a horse in the mountains surrounding Tehran when he was thrown from the saddle, fell, and was saved from smashing his head against a rock by the intervention of the Islamic saint Abbas. A year later he was visited by yet another revelation.² These visions were “apparitions” of “prophets.” More substantial than dreams, these visions had a profound effect

¹ Abolhasem Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*, trans. Dick Davis (New York: Penguin, 2006), 83.

² Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *Mission for My Country* (London 1961), 55; in Abbas Milani, *The Shah* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 38-39.

on the young boy, though no one, even his father – the great Reza Shah – believed him.³ These visions, whether reality or fantasy, played an important role in how the Shah presented an image of himself to the public. Even if the visions were not authentic but were merely an invention of a sickly child or a self-aggrandizing man later in life, they still reveal much about the man, his aspirations, and his dreams. During his life, the Shah spoke of these visions and utilized such stories of divine providence to invest his dynasty with a public legitimacy and sense of destiny that transcended mere political legitimacy. The Shah’s reign after 1963 was marked by public spectacles, imperial symbols, and history bordering on mythology and triumphalism; the Shah combined public spectacle with his rhetorical appeals to craft an image of a powerful and monolithic Iranian institution of monarchy upheld by its overwhelming international successes.⁴

The Shah later claimed that he believed these visions instilled in him a feeling that he had been “chosen by God to accomplish a mission.” This mission was to save Iran. In public, he consistently connected his campaign to modernize Iran with a sense of supernatural guidance.⁵ He maintained that he believed that his reign “saved the country... because God was beside” him. This was, he claimed, a statement of humility, for though he could take singular credit for all of “the great things” he had done for Iran, he wanted to acknowledge that he did not do these things alone. God helped. Though these two visions never returned, the Shah publicly embraced his “mysticism,” and he claimed to have prophetic dreams at regular intervals of one or two years. In a 1973 interview with the Italian journalist, Oriana Fallaci, he refused to divulge

³ Oriana Fallaci, *Interviews with History and Conversations with Power* (New York: Rizzoli International, 2011), 150-153.

⁴ For an account of how mythologies and public demonstrations play a role in reinforcing autocratic power, see: Richard S. Wortman *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy Volume I and II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995). The Shah’s use of myth and ceremony is remarkably similar to Wortman’s description of Peter I’s reign. Both monarchs were attempting to modernize and “westernize” their nations to bring them into the fold of Western societal norms, and both emphasized their military victories as a means to legitimize their regime. For a description of the role of ritual in Soviet Russia during the twentieth century, see: Christel Lane, *The Rites of Rulers: Ritual in Industrial Society – the Soviet Case* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

⁵ See also: Milani, *The Shah*, 38-39, 127.

the content of these dreams since they related to the domestic problems of Iran and “so should be considered state secrets.” Indeed, the Shah attributed his survival of an assassination attempt to divine intervention. As the Shah told the story, he reacted because of an instinct born of presentiment, and moved the fraction of a second needed before the assassin unloaded a revolver into the Shah’s heart, and the bullet hit his shoulder instead. This 1949 assassination attempt, though no doubt terrifying for the young Shah, provided excellent evidence in the creation of a divine mandate for the Shah’s regime. After the first shot, the head of the Shah’s security detail dived under his principal’s Rolls Royce. The first three of the assassin’s bullets only grazed the Shah’s hat; the fourth entered his cheek and exited through his upper lip; the fifth hit the acrobat Shah in the shoulder as described above; and the sixth lodged in the barrel of the would-be assassin’s revolver. The Shah claimed that his survival was “thanks to a miracle willed by God and the prophets.” The Shah embraced experiences like these to construct the public image that his life and his reign went forward “under the sign of destiny.” Whether or not his stories were genuine is irrelevant; the Shah’s persistent efforts to present himself to the world and Iran as the agent of God and driver of destiny played an important role in the way he utilized rhetorical approaches in his foreign and domestic policies.⁶

* * * * *

The weight of history lies heavy on the soil of Iran. Its complex 2500-year history has unique effects on the rulers of that territory. The austere and disapproving eyes of generations of Persian rulers from Cyrus the Great, Darius, Xerxes, and Abbas to the present look over the shoulder of any man proud enough to don the mantle of Shah. For Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, this title and the identity connected with it was the force that guided his life and career. A desire to live up to the strength of his father, to resurrect the prestige of Cyrus, and to secure his

⁶ Fallaci, 150-154.

family's place in the lineage of the Persian Empire dominated his domestic and foreign policies. Mohammad Reza Shah's understanding of his own destiny and of that of Iran, combined with a long history of foreign intervention, proved a substantial influence on his decision to establish Iran as an independent military and economic power with the ultimate goal of building the nation into a hegemonic power.

Global leaders of sufficient charisma often create images of themselves that coincide with their vision for the nation or group they lead; the Shah was not the only agent of social construction in the Middle East or in Iran. The "imagined" nature of Middle Eastern states creates a complex environment of constructed identities that has far-reaching effects on international relations in the region.⁷ These identities – constructed by historical experience and the public machinations of leaders – played an integral part in the process of diplomacy, economics, and war in the Middle East during the second half of the twentieth century. Alexander Wendt argues that the condition of self-help evolves from interactions "in which each party acts in ways that the other feels are threatening to the self, creating expectations that the other is not to be trusted. Competitive or egoistic identities are caused by such insecurity."⁸ For instance, the perpetuation of Arab-Persian mistrust and lingering ancestral feuds ensured that Iraqis and Iranians would each continue to identify the other as a threat to the constructed image of the self even after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Matthew Hoffman points to the ability of norm entrepreneurs – actors or leaders who "advocate different ideas about appropriate behavior from organizational platforms that give their ideas credence" – to "alter behavior and beliefs in accordance with the norm entrepreneur's ideas about how actors should behave and

⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

⁸ Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics," *International Organization* 46:2 (Spring 1992), 406.

think.”⁹ The interaction between the macro- and the micro-construction of norms leads to a fuller comprehension of how the Shah perceived his nation’s identity and role in the international system and explains in part his persistent attempts to manipulate Iranian public opinion during Iran’s rise to hegemony.

The Shah fits well with Hoffman’s definition of norm entrepreneur, and his rhetoric of the 1960s and 70s evidences a deep understanding of how social norms are created. Finnemore and Sikkink elaborate a “life cycle” of social norms. Their definition of the three stages of this life cycle look particularly at how and why groups of states adopt new normative standards; however, they also acknowledge that “domestic norms... are deeply entwined with the workings of international norms.”¹⁰ The Shah seems to have been acutely aware of this process, albeit unconsciously. The norm life cycle refers to three stages: emergence, cascade, and internalization. Emergence is the process by which a norm entrepreneur rises and forwards their new social norm. The cascade stage is the period during which the new norm reaches and is accepted by a broader audience. Finally, internalization is the process over time whereby people and states internalize the new norm as a normative standard.¹¹ During Iran’s rise to hegemonic status in the Persian Gulf – a process fueled by the Shah’s identity as heir and champion of ancient Persian power and prestige – the Shah acted as a norm entrepreneur in an effort to create the image in Iran that he was the beneficent father of the nation that provided to them the boons of modernity. Internationally, he worked to impose the image of Iran as the dominant power in the Persian Gulf and of himself as a leader of the formerly colonized African and Asian nations of the Indian Ocean.

⁹Matthew J. Hoffman, “Social (De)Construction: The Failure of a Multinational State,” in Jennifer Sterling-Folker, ed., *Making Sense of International Relations Theory* (Boulder, C.O.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), 124-125.

¹⁰Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change,” *International Organization*, 52.4 (Autumn, 1998), 893.

¹¹ Finnemore and Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change, 896-901.

The Shah believed that his duty and destiny was much more than regional policeman for the forces of America and the West. He perceived of himself as heir to the tradition of the great Persian monarchs of antiquity. The formation of the Pahlavi dynasty was far from creation by divine providence though. His father, Reza, was an officer in the Iranian army until he cut a deal with the British to overthrow the Qajar dynasty and establish a strong Iranian monarchy to mitigate the effects of Iran's constitutional revolution of 1906.¹² His son, in order to achieve the goal of establishing himself as the heir to Persian dominance, worked tirelessly to impose an idea of himself and through him, Iran, as the rightful heirs to the position of hegemon in the Persian Gulf.

To begin this process the Shah needed first to consolidate his hold on Iran and its people. In 1963 he launched the White Revolution, an aggressive top-down campaign of modernization and reform aimed at addressing social and economic disparities in Iran and saving the nation from economic crisis. The concept of an Iranian state was not created from thin air; however, the Pahlavis nonetheless attempted to impose a western image of nationalism on a population to whom the concept was either unfamiliar or still emerging. From the ashes of the 1906 constitutional revolution and the ineffectual rule of the Qajar dynasty, Reza Shah began a rapid process of modernization that only increased during his son's reign.

Efforts to modernize and secularize Iran began before the Shah's White Revolution, before his autocratic father's campaign, and before the meddling of European powers. The history of Iran's transformation into a modern nation is a story of traditional tribal, local, and religious identities in conflict with the concept of the sovereign nation state. In their attempts to forge a modern and secular Iran, modernizing intellectuals of the 19th century "ignored the multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious reality of the Iranian state. They

¹² Abrahamian, 99-135.

overlooked the fundamental fact that Iran was not Persia or Persian but rather a mosaic of diverse, ethnic, linguistic and religious groups.”¹³ This history of division was a significant impediment to twentieth-century attempts at reform and the creation of a unified national identity.

The Shah had to contend with a nation that was fundamentally divided along religious, ethnic, linguistic, and class lines. His vigorous campaign of positive nationalism was hindered by a “disunited and undisciplined” populace, “speaking a variety of languages and dialects and belonging to a number of different subcultures.”¹⁴ In the 1960s and 70s, US policymakers concluded that Iran was “a country of great social, ethnic and linguistic diversity” that had transitioned to modernity with great difficulty. Despite the “vague sense of ‘Persianness’” attributable to Iran’s strong literary tradition, a “strong sense of individualism... pervaded the society, with primary loyalties going to self and family.”¹⁵ To get Iranians to think in terms of a national identity that transcended the family, clan, or village, the Shah began to emphasize the Persian elements of the Iranian nation and culture. This he accomplished through social and educational reforms as well as a persistent government campaign connecting the Shah with the ancient Persian lineage of kings and presenting him as the king of the Iranian people.¹⁶

As a result of this national disunity and a history of foreign interference, Iran has had to deal with a variety of domestic strife. According to the US Department of State, during his reign, Mohammad Reza Shah had to contend with threats from “communist-led mobs and

¹³ Mehrdad Kia, “Persian Nationalism and the Campaign for Language Purification,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 34.2 (Apr., 1998), 9-10.

¹⁴ 1972 Update of: 1970 *Iran Handbook*, Central Intelligence Agency (April 1972), I-2 – I-3.

¹⁵ Reply from Robert McCloskey, Assistant Sec. for Congressional Relations, Dept of State to Donald M. Fraser, Chairman of the Subcommittee on International Organizations, August 11, 1975; Box 3 Entry A1 5510; Human Rights – Indonesia to Human Rights – South Africa; Human Rights Subject Files, 1975; Human Rights in Iran, 1975; General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59; National Archives Building, College Park, MD. and 1972 Update of: 1970 *Iran Handbook*, Central Intelligence Agency (April 1972), I-2 – I-3.

¹⁶ 1972 Update of: 1970 *Iran Handbook*, Central Intelligence Agency (April 1972), I-2 – I-3

rebellious tribes and with violent opposition to his large and progressive programs of economic and social reform by ultra-rightists and religious conservatives.”¹⁷ In the early 1960s Iran was still a nation emerging into modernity from a recent history of decadence and feudalism. This past and its vestiges were a significant hindrance to the Shah’s proposed reforms; a tradition of absolutism encouraged violent dissent. In Iran, there was little tradition of representative government and public debate, the US Department of State argued that these were “new to Iran; street riots, terrorism and assassination... often replaced reasoned debate as means of political expression in the post-war period.”¹⁸ This history of violence left an indelible mark on the beliefs and psyche of Iranian rulers responsible for maintaining stability and tranquility during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Wedged between the Arab nations of the Middle East, the Turkic peoples of Central Asia, and the turmoil of the Indian Subcontinent, Iran is “surrounded by peoples of different origins and cultures.” The CIA observed that, as a result, “the Persians believe they have no natural allies.”¹⁹ Iran had suffered at the hands of foreign powers since the dawn of the nineteenth century. Since the reign of Fath Ali Shah in the early nineteenth century, the shahs of Iran had been both victims and agents of foreign intervention and European imperialism. Mohammad Reza Shah was acutely aware of this history and of the manner in which his father, Reza Khan, had come to power and established the Pahlavi Dynasty. This history of foreign manipulation coincided with the Shah’s “mission” for his country to convince him that international great powers and economic underdevelopment were frustrating the realization of Iran’s great destiny.

¹⁷ Reply from Robert McCloskey, Assistant Sec. for Congressional Relations, Dept of State to Donald M. Fraser, Chairman of the Subcommittee on International Organizations, August 11, 1975; Box 3 Entry A1 5510; Human Rights – Indonesia to Human Rights – South Africa; Human Rights Subject Files, 1975; Human Rights in Iran, 1975; General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59; National Archives Building, College Park, MD.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Memorandum: *Iran’s Arab World Initiatives and their Implications*, Directorate of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency (14 January 1975), 4.

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The dynamic landscape that sits astride the expanse between the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf has been home to some of history's most celebrated and dominant empires. It has also played host to the ambitions of some of the great imperialistic powers; the Macedonian, Mongol, British, French, and Russian empires all made bids for control of this region at the height of their power. Iran's history is, like all other great and persistent world powers, marked by fluctuating power and territory. Zeniths and nadirs of power checker Iran's past from the Achaemenid Empire of Cyrus the Great, to those of Xerxes, Darius, Abbas, and Nader. Alongside the memory of these great Persian conquerors are the names of foreign invaders – Alexander, Julian, Valerian, Tamerlane, and Genghis Khan. Despite this foreign influence – or perhaps, because of it – the Iranian culture has persisted. In 1798, Iran became a new front on the periphery of the global conflict that was the Napoleonic Wars. These wars drew Iran under the Qajar dynasty into European affairs for the first time. The nineteenth century witnessed the beginning and rise of European influence in Iran. Wracked by a half-century of civil war, invasion and weakened by the decentralized rule of the Qajars, Iran became a focal point of British, French and Russian policy. The Iranians were not simply pawns of European masters; their statesmen were shrewd and their leaders were strong. A confluence of European imperialism, Iranian pride and vacillating alliances created intractable problems for the Qajar state and opened the doors to European ascendancy in Iranian affairs. Mohammad Reza Shah, when establishing his mission for Iran, classified the Qajars as the “weakest of the major Persian dynasties. They did little to resist foreign infiltration, and even encouraged outside interference in [Iran's] internal affairs by their indecisive policies.”²⁰ The Shah was distinctly aware of the

²⁰ Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. “Mission for My Country,” in *Iran, Philosophy Behind the Revolution*, (London: Orient Commerce Establishment, 1971), 25.

succession of defeats and humiliations visited upon Iran by the Qajars' acquiescence to foreign powers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Two men were responsible for opening Iran to a level of foreign domination unparalleled since the Mongol conquests. The stories of Napoleon Bonaparte and Fath Ali Shah are among the great ironies of history. Their policies created the opening for British and Russian dominance in Iran, which was exactly the opposite of their intent. Napoleon opened the eyes of the great powers to the potential of this once powerful state. Fath Ali Shah's intransigence and irredentism were the downfall of his reign and his nation's independence. In attempting to attain the success of Nader Shah and Cyrus the Great, he ensured his own defeat at the hands of the Russians. This unfortunate monarch set the stage for a century and a half of foreign domination by the British and Russian Empires. Fath Ali Shah's failings ushered in a period of humiliation for Iran and its people. His Qajar successors, in varying degrees of greed and ineptitude perpetuated a system of colonial exploitation that held Iran – one of the most populous nations in the Middle East and a former center of great learning and culture – back from modernity at a time when the great powers of Europe were experiencing unprecedented gains in technology, industry, economics, and military capability.²¹

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, Europe was torn apart by the Napoleonic Wars. Iran, already host to French, Dutch, and English diplomats and merchants because of its proximity to India, did not emerge unscathed from the grand designs of Napoleon. His plans for a land route to India through Iran initiated a string of diplomatic efforts from the French and

²¹ For a detailed account of Napoleon's relations with Fath Ali Shah drawn from French, British, Russian, and Persian primary documents, see: Iradj Amini, *Napoleon and Persia: Franco-Persian relations under the First Empire* (Washington, DC: Mage, 1999). For an account of British and Russian dominance in Iran during the latter half of the nineteenth century, see: Firuz Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1864-1914* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968). For an account of Iran's foreign policy and Fath Ali Shah's irredentism, see: Rouhollah K. Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran: A Developing Nation in World Affairs 1500-1941* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1966), 38-46.

British to gain the support of Fath Ali through promises of military aid and training. Iran's military was large but not equipped or trained to fight a war with a modern European force. During two wars with Russia, which also had designs on a land route to India and on Iran's Caucasian border region, the professional imperial forces of Tzar Alexander I decimated Fath Ali's numerically superior forces. In both wars, European allies abandoned Iran in its hour of need. The British and the French discarded or ignored treaties with Iran as a result of changes in a European conflict a continent away.

The Battle of Aslanduz forced Fath Ali Shah to sign the Treaty of Gulistan in October of 1813, a disastrous and humiliating settlement which ceded control of Georgia to the Russians and provided that only a Russian navy was allowed on the Caspian Sea. Perhaps most harmful, the treaty forced free trade on Iranian markets, allowing the industrialized Russia to sell its cheaper manufactured goods in the bazaar.²² The Treaty of Turkmanchai was signed in February 1828 and was even more humiliating than Gulistan; the Shah was forced to cede more territory to Russia, Iranian officials could not enter the residence of a Russian in Iran without consent, and the Shah was forced to make massive reparations payments. To compound the humiliation, Iran had once more been betrayed by a European ally. The British, as they had in 1804, and as the French had in 1807, refused to provide the military aid promised in their 1814 treaty, on the grounds that Iran had acted as aggressor.

The Treaties of Gulistan and Turkmanchai set the stage for ruinous levels of foreign influence in the form of Russian commercial interests. After another military defeat years later, England would be granted the same rights as Russia. Napoleon's ambitions and Fath Ali Shah's irredentist policies were the impetus for a long chain of events that brought about over a century

²² J.C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East: A Documentary Record: 1535-1914* (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1956), 84-85.

of foreign influence in Iran. This chain ended with the partitioning of the majority of Iranian territory at the end of the nineteenth century between British and Russian spheres of influence. Then, in 1941, the Soviets and British again occupied Iranian territory when Reza Shah Pahlavi, the new modernizing monarch lifted to power by the British, supported the Axis powers in the Second World War. Though the British withdrew at the end of the war, the Soviet Union only did so when faced with threats from the United States. Mohammad Reza's ascent to the throne only transpired at the sufferance of the British and Americans, who believed he would be far more malleable than his father.²³

This disastrous and repeated history helped form the Shah's perception that the greatest existential threat to Iran and the perseverance of his rule was the Soviet Union. The traditional Persian sentiment in this regard is perhaps best summarized by Fath Ali Shah: "as long as one square inch of Persian soil remains in the possession of the Russian empire, we shall be enemies."²⁴ While Fath Ali Shah's failings kept Iran always one step behind the protean alliance systems of the European powers that continued to betray and exploit his trust, Mohammad Reza Shah was competent and committed; he navigated diplomatic and geopolitical situations with alacrity and positioned Iran as a nation with great potential power and influence.

The Shah's attentions, until the 1970 death of Nasser, were divided between Soviet and Arab threats. Both constituted what he considered to be existential threats to the continuation of Iranian dominance and sovereignty in the Persian Gulf. One of the constants in Iranian foreign policy during the 1970s was a "deep seated mistrust of Moscow;" the Shah was certain that the

²³ Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2008), 63-82.

²⁴ Heribert Busse, *History of Persia Under Qajar Rule, Translated from the Persian of Hasan-e Fasa'i's Farsnama-ye Naseri*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 120.

Kremlin's ultimate goal was an extension of its hegemony into the Persian Gulf.²⁵ The USSR had the capability to wipe Iran off the map, while Egypt, under the radical regime of Nasser, might galvanize the Arab world against the pro-West, conservative, Persian Shah. Iran's Khuzestan province in Southwest Iran was home to a majority Arab population, and the Shah maintained a constant fear of radical Arab subversion in the region. Once the Shah's fears of Soviet invasion shifted to the threat of a united Arab force, he realized that Iran needed to be militarily independent from the United States. The Shah was convinced that, in their underestimation of the threat posed by Nasser, the Americans would not support him should Nasser's rhetorical campaign lead to actual hostilities. These fears were reinforced during the Indo-Pakistani conflict of 1965; the Shah watched despondently as the United States withheld arms from Pakistan.²⁶ From 1965 to 1968, the Shah engineered closer ties with the USSR to ensure a variety of arms sources in the event of wavering support from Washington.

Iran's rapprochement with the Soviets was to be short lived. In 1968 the USSR began supporting the aggressive and radical Ba'ath regime under Hassan Al-Bakr and Saddam Hussein in Iraq while Baghdad began permitting the Soviet navy to utilize Iraqi harbors on the Persian Gulf. Their support for Baghdad, coupled with their aggressive moves in Afghanistan, the Indian Subcontinent, and Arab Peninsula reawakened the deep-seated mistrust of Moscow in Tehran. Though radicalism in the form of Communism and Pan-Arabism presented the greatest existential threat to his nation and regime, by the early 1970s, the Shah identified Iran's worst neighbor as Iraq. Iran had relations both diplomatic and economic with the Soviet Union; however, as the Shah told Fallaci, Moscow's manipulation of and support for the Ba'ath government smacked of a persistent "Russian imperialism," made all the more dangerous by

²⁵ Briefing Paper, *Iran's Foreign Policy*, Central Intelligence Agency (28 April 1976), 13.

²⁶ Intelligence Memorandum, *The Shah of Iran and His Policies*, Directorate of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency (5 June 1967), 2.

linkage with a “Communist dogma.” Iran was the “last bastion for the defense” of Persian civilization against the “pincer movement” of the Soviets to fulfill their “dream of reaching the Indian Ocean.”²⁷ Not only was Iran and its civilization threatened by the Soviet push to the Indian Ocean, the Shah argued that the Persian Gulf was much more likely to be the spark that ignited the Third World War. To reach the world, oil did not go through the Mediterranean, he argued; it went through the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. Iran in the early 1970s had little hope of resisting a Soviet invasion for long, and the Shah believed that “the noncommunist world would hardly sit there with their hands folded,” nor could they accept the disappearance of Iran, because to lose Iran was “to lose everything.” The Shah wanted to establish Iran’s place in the West’s security plans and to continue addressing its vulnerability through military expansion, extension of its influence into the Indian Ocean, and the achievement of a monopoly of force over the Persian Gulf.²⁸

Though the Shah viewed the Soviet Union as the greatest threat to his hegemonic aspirations, he was also heavily influenced by his persistent mistrust of Iran’s British and American allies. The Shah’s two immediate predecessors, his father and the last Qajar shah, were both cast down from their thrones by foreign powers. The Shah understood that his ascension to the throne, his continued reign after 1953, and the legitimacy of the dynasty founded by his father all rested on a history of American and British intervention. In 1953, when the nationalism of Mohammad Mossadeq threatened their oil interests, the British intervened, engineering a CIA orchestrated coup to remove the prime minister from office and place the Iranian destiny once again in the hands of a Pahlavi: the young Shah.²⁹

²⁷ Fallaci, 163-164.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ A synthesis account of the coup and Iran’s history leading up to it can be found in: Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah’s Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2008).

Because of his path to power, the Shah was very concerned with the apparent legitimacy of his regime as well as its security. In his speeches and writings of the 1960s, he highlighted the roots of the name Pahlavi, which he said was “called after the name of an ancient form of our Persian language.”³⁰ In truth, the Pahlavi dynastic nomenclature was far less grand. In 1923, before declaring himself Shah, Reza Khan adopted the Pahlavi name because, in order to hold the post of prime minister, he needed to have a surname.³¹ By co-opting the surname, Reza was able to connect his dynasty to something grander than his humble lineage as army officer with roots in the peasantry. He thus added a layer to Pahlavi legitimacy that was maintained through the force and power of his personal authority. Mohammad Reza Shah’s keen awareness of his regime’s dynastic origins and his concern for its continued legitimacy and security is evidenced by his vigorous pursuit of greatness and his persistent campaign to establish identities for himself that would cement him – both in the eyes of his people and those of foreign powers – as an indispensable and dominant component of the Iranian state.

Though the United States was a crucial ally for Iran after 1953, the Shah did not grant complete trust to his friends in Washington. If they had disposed of Mossadeq when his goals departed with American interests, they could do the same to the Shah. He maintained close relationships with American presidents, especially with Eisenhower and Nixon, the latter of whom visited Iran on several occasions and corresponded regularly with the Shah. Despite this continued amiable relationship, the Shah remained uncertain of the resolution and commitment of his American allies; he was determined to prevent the visitation of further deprivations upon Iranian national sovereignty. To this end, the Shah set out to make Iran a nation state with a

³⁰ Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. “Mission for My Country,” in *Iran, Philosophy Behind the Revolution*, (London: Orient Commerce Establishment, 1971), 26.

³¹ Abrahamian, 132.

formidable military and with its fist clenched about the artery that pumped the lifeblood of modern civilization – the oil of the Persian Gulf.

The Shah feared that the United States would abstain or withdraw assistance to Iran in the event of a regional war not involving the Soviet Union. In addition to these fears, the Nixon Doctrine, which declared that “in cases involving [non-nuclear] aggression, [the United States] shall furnish military and economic assistance when requested in accordance with our treaty commitments. But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense,” meant that Iran must create its own security to survive and remain useful to its largest benefactor.³² In the mind of a ruler whose own legitimacy was questionable, who wanted to protect his nation from the whims of the great powers, and who saw his people surrounded by a sea of hostile or unstable neighbors, military dominance was the best way to ensure Iranian security and make Iran the master of its own destiny. The Shah was heeding, albeit unwittingly, the advice of Napoleon to Fath Ali Shah over a hundred and fifty years earlier: “when your subjects know how to manufacture arms, when your soldiers have been taught how to split up and reassemble in a series of rapid and well-ordered movements...when your frontiers are secured by numerous fortresses and the Caspian Sea has the flags of a Persian flotilla fluttering on its waves, you will have an unassailable empire and invincible subjects.”³³

The Shah whole-heartedly believed that Iran had the potential to stand among the giants of world politics. With his sweeping economic reforms and the wealth accumulated due to soaring oil prices, he knew Iran would eventually “rank among the five greatest and most

³² Richard Nixon, “The Silent Majority,” *Watergate.info*, November 3, 1969, accessed February 17, 2012. <http://watergate.info/nixon/silent-majority-speech-1969.shtml>

³³ Iradj Amini, *Napoleon and Persia: Franco-Persian relations under the First Empire* (Washington DC: Mage, 1999), 63.

powerful countries in the world.” As the Shah predicted to Fallaci, Iran could, within three decades of 1973, “find itself at the same level as the United States, the Soviet Union, Japan, and France.”³⁴ As the economically and militarily dominant nation in the Middle East, Iran could impose order and stability on a volatile region; however, the Shah would first need to establish the conditions under which the other regional powers could – perhaps grudgingly – accept the idea of Iran as hegemon and world power. To this end, the Shah used public statements, symbols, and bold actions to link himself to the model of Persian kingship of the past and to that model of Neo-Patriarchy pioneered by his domineering father, Reza Khan.

* * * * *

There is a traditional Iranian proverb that “politics has no mother or father,” warning leaders against the mistaken belief that they can control with absolute certainty the vicissitudes of political life in their nation. Mohammad Reza Shah, the second Pahlavi Shah, realized the full meaning of these words after ignoring their inherent wisdom in his implementation of neo-patriarchal modes of governance that had been pioneered by his father in the 1930s. The Pahlavi shahs positioned themselves, in a cross between monarchy and autocracy, as the fathers of Iranian politics. The Shah believed that the best means by which to legitimate his dynasty and secure the inviolability of Iranian soil was to create a state that was economically powerful and independent, politically and domestically stable, and militarily dominant.

The Shah’s model of kingship did not allow for the laggardly extravagance of the Qajars; it called for him to take “this king business,” as he called it, seriously. The Iranian government argued that “to the people of Iran, the institution of monarchy is not a mode of government but is

³⁴ Fallaci, 166.

rather a way of life which has become an essential part of the nation's very existence."³⁵ The Shah believed that he could run the country better than any other person or group and so adopted a hands-on approach to dealing with the substance of his nation's economic problems and reforms. The CIA remarked in 1973 that "the Shah's relationship with his people is a one-sided affair. He tells them what he thinks is best for them... it is... a paternalistic system."³⁶ He jealously guarded his power and demanded personal influence in even relatively minor matters of state and economy. In the Shah's own words, "monarchy is the only possible way of governing Iran." For him, as monarch, to succeed in his mission to better Iran, he needed power. To keep that power, the shah argued, meant not having "to ask permission or advice from anybody."³⁷ The Shah believed that he had been chosen to guide Iran on a path to its great destiny.

The primary philosophy behind the model of Pahlavi kingship was neopatriarchy.³⁸ Mohammad Reza Pahlavi has been called a "modernizing monarch," "royal revolutionary," and "King of Kings." Through an aggressive campaign of development, social equality, secularization, and Persianization, Reza Shah, and to an even greater extent, his son, provided increased standards of living for the Iranian people. This was a top-down reform program, imposed as a gift upon a nation that was expected to be grateful and politically submissive in return. The Shah utilized his power to deal with very real issues confronting his nation. In order to "provide" reforms in healthcare, land use, labor, education, and gender equality to a nation

³⁵ Memorandum: *Nothing Succeeds Like a Successful Shah*, Office of National Estimates, Central Intelligence Agency (Confidential, 8 October 1971), 1.

³⁶ Weekly Summary Special Report: *Shah of Iran: Royal Revolutionary*, Directorate of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency (Secret, 26 January 1973), 7.

³⁷ Fallaci, 151.

³⁸ Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). According to Sharabi, neopatriarchy is a form of modernized patriarchy combined with development brought to the region by European imperialism. The condition is a result of native political structures ineffectively combining with regime dependency on foreign powers to create a society that lacks both traditional structures and genuine modernity.

shackled by a 75% illiteracy rate, he believed that only the “strictest authoritarianism could prove effective.”³⁹ The language the Shah used in speaking of reforms is emblematic of the Pahlavi patriarchal model; he did not implement or enact reform, he “provided” them to a nation he felt should be thankful. This was not a process of negotiation and participatory governance; it was a finished product of reform imposed from above.

A key portion of the Shah’s domestic reform was the elevation of Iran’s Persian identity over its Arab-Islamic counterpart. Cyrus and the *Avesta* – the Zoroastrian holy book – replaced Muhammad and the Quran as national treasures. Though Islam remained the religion of Iran and of the Shah himself, his campaign of positive nationalism and secularization demanded that faith be downplayed in the public sphere and that Iran find suitable replacements for the distinctly foreign elements introduced to Persia courtesy of the Arab invasions of the seventh century, particularly the importation of Islam. In his writings, which were published first in English, the Shah took pains to explain that the “Persians did not completely surrender [their identity in religious matters] but adopted a new branch of the Muslim faith known as ‘Shiism.’”⁴⁰ This new branch of Islam, he explained, is distinct and separate from the Arab Sunni faith.

Much of his regime’s failings were unknown to the Shah. Living in the isolation of his court, he was seldom provided with important criticisms of his policies. Few of his ministers or members of the Majlis were willing to offer opinions that dissented from what they knew to be the Shah’s desire. His temper was reported to have caused even foreign ambassadors to “cringe” before his response to displeasing presentations.⁴¹ In 1971, the CIA determined that the

³⁹ Fallaci, 158-159.

⁴⁰ Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. “Mission For My Country,” in *Iran, Philosophy Behind the Revolution*, (London: Orient Commerce Establishment, 1971), 22. Portions of “Mission for My Country” were republished in Iranian newspapers for domestic consumption.

⁴¹ *Nothing Succeeds Like a Successful Shah*, 6.

“fundamental vulnerability” for Iran was the “unique concentration of power in the hands of the shah.”⁴² He systematically removed political leaders who developed a base of power independent from his own and jealously guarded his role as the final arbiter of policy decisions. He secured his domestic stability by instituting social and economic reforms demanded by the democrats of the National Front, the liberal-nationalist party founded by Mossadeq. The Shah did not allow the members of the National Front a say in the planning or a hand in the implementation of reforms.

During his reforms of the 1960s, the Shah not only “took the steam out” of the liberal opposition, he also weakened the Communist Tudeh party by normalizing relations with the Soviet Union and instituting extensive socio-economic reforms.⁴³ The traditional social base of power for the Pahlavi dynasty had been the clergy and the landlords of the one thousand families – the aristocratic feudal landlords of traditional Iranian society. In the Fall of 1963, the Shah implemented his White Revolution, which imposed land reforms and curbed the power and prestige of the Shia clergy. The Shah gradually eroded the foundations of his power; he relied instead on the masses of peasants and on an emerging middle class that was invested in Western capitalist modes and beliefs. Despite the opposition to his reforms, the Shah apparently reveled in the adoration of the masses. As he traveled through Iran following the announcement of his reforms, the Shah was greeted “with wild acclaim” by the peasantry. *The New York Times* observed that “the sour opposition of the landlords and mullahs and Teheran skeptics has not spoiled his enjoyment of his new friendship with the mass of his countrymen.”⁴⁴ Despite the

⁴² *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴³ *The Shah of Iran and His Policies*, 5.

⁴⁴ Jay Walz, “Iran’s Shah Leads a ‘White Revolution,’” *The New York Times*, October 27, 1963, accessed April 15, 2012, <http://search.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/116357922/1363653C8B17EB72A1F/1?accountid=14593>

adoration of the masses he liberated from a semi-feudal existence, the Shah's conscious manipulation of his power base in the 1960s, combined with his growing isolation and ignorance of their emerging dreams and desires, had dire repercussions for the stability of his regime during the 1970s.

The Shah had, by 1971, succeeded in building a military establishment "capable of overawing Iran's Western and Southern Arab neighbors."⁴⁵ At 255 thousand, Iran's armed forces had 150 thousand more soldiers than Iraq and 190 thousand more than Saudi Arabia.⁴⁶ Despite its dominance, that military absorbed over ten percent of the GNP and continued to demand more. The expansion of this already enormous military budget was funded by the oil revolution of the mid 1970s. Because he believed that the military was indispensable to his regime's stability, the success of the White Revolution, and the expansion of Iranian gains on the world stage, the Shah treated his soldiers especially well. He provided the military with the most advanced equipment and training available and ensured that their pay and perquisites were generous.⁴⁷ The loyalty of his well-trained and well-funded military was a cornerstone of the Shah's domestic, regional, and international policy.

In addition to his growing economic and military power, the Shah also began a committed rhetorical campaign in his nation and in the international arena designed to accomplish the task of connecting himself in the minds of his people and the world with the Persian legacy of power and dominance in the Persian Gulf. In *Mission for My Country*, published in 1961, the Shah devoted a sizeable portion of the text to Iran's grand history. In writing of Cyrus the Great, who had founded the Persian Empire 2500 years earlier, the Shah

⁴⁵ *Nothing Succeeds Like a Successful Shah*, 9.

⁴⁶ U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1969-1978).

⁴⁷ *Shah of Iran: Royal Revolutionary*, 6.

claimed that Cyrus “united all of modern Iran under his own rule... [and] established one of the world’s first nation-states.”⁴⁸ The Shah then explains how Cyrus went on to create the empire that became the greatest the world had ever seen. This account of Cyrus does more than repeat ancient history; it establishes the precedent for an ancient nation-state – a European concept that did not emerge until 1648 – in the same geographical location of the modern Iranian-Pahlavi nation-state. The Shah’s account of Cyrus mirrors his own plans for Iran in the twentieth century. Like a latter-day Cyrus the Great, the Shah aimed to first unite the Iranian people under a strong, modern, and secular nation-state, then to work aggressively to expand his power internationally.

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi’s rhetoric during the 1970s was filled with attempts to connect himself to this inheritance, particularly to the memory of Cyrus the Great. He presented himself as heir not only to the power and prestige of Cyrus the Great but to the idea and mythology of the man. The Shah’s inheritance from Cyrus included more than Persia’s regional dominance. In *Mission for My Country*, the Shah explains that “the empire of Cyrus the Great was not based on territorial acquisition alone, but also on international tolerance and understanding. The rights of all the subject nations were upheld, and their laws and customs respected. Indeed, I see in our first empire something of the spirit of the United Nations of nearly 2500 years later.”⁴⁹ This inheritance included the memory of the Cyrus Cylinder, an artifact that is perhaps the first code of human rights. The memory of this code, created by the founder and hero of Persian might, persisted throughout the Middle East and certainly in the mind of the Shah. In the words of the

⁴⁸ Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. “Mission for My Country,” (originally published in 1961) reproduced in *Iran, Philosophy Behind the Revolution*, (London: Orient Commerce Establishment, 1971), 19.

⁴⁹ Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. “Mission For My Country,” in *Iran, Philosophy Behind the Revolution*, (London: Orient Commerce Establishment, 1971), 19.

poet Sultan Farrukh Hablul Matin, Cyrus “launched an Empire based not on physical might, / But on the vision of a family of nations / Linked by bands of Humanity, truth, and right.”⁵⁰

The Shah’s government continuously connected the Pahlavi dynasty with the ancestral line of Cyrus the Great. The official line from Tehran was that Mohammad Reza Pahlavi “revolutionized the face of the nation. The dormant Persian genius was once again manifest. The sons of Cyrus had come into their own – in the 20th Century.”⁵¹ The connection between ancient grandeur and present potential did more than simply link dynasties and establish legitimacy; it suggested that Mohammad Reza Shah alone could usher in a return to Persian success and prosperity on the world stage. Out of the ashes of colonialism, failure, and humiliation a new shah had risen, and he had a plan for Iran.

On October 27, 1967, following in the footsteps of Napoleon, whom he greatly admired, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi crowned himself Shah of Iran twenty six years after his accession to the throne. His self-coronation symbolized the Shah’s transformation from a young constitutional monarch, placed on his throne and kept there through the muscle of foreign powers, into an absolutist monarch stable on a throne he had built for himself. The Shah used the domestic power base he created with successful social and economic reforms to launch an activist foreign policy beginning in the late 1960s aimed at extending Iranian influence globally.⁵²

Once the Shah had determined that the principal threats to his regime were the vulnerability of Iran’s economy to foreign interference and the danger of radical subversion that this created, he began his White Revolution. The revolution was “white” rather than “red”

⁵⁰ Paul Gordon Lauren, *The Evolution of International Human Rights: Visions Seen* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Philadelphia Press, 2011), 12.

⁵¹ *Nothing Succeeds Like a Successful Shah*, 2. The CIA document cites official Iranian government language.

⁵² *Iran’s Arab World Initiatives and their Implications*, 1.

because the Shah argued that Iran did not need a communist revolution from below. In Iran, the paternalistic shah provided his people with a revolution of his own design. This distinction is slightly strange, considering that, many of the thirteen points of the Shah's White Revolution "can be found almost word for word in the Communist Manifesto of 1848."⁵³ The Revolution of the Shah and People, as the White Revolution was also known, brought real social and economic reform to Iran. Though he made overtures to political and electoral reform, the revolution's obvious focus was on the socioeconomic rights that the Soviet Union argued for on the international stage. The revolution did not bring political equality and true freedom of speech to Iran; however, its reforms should not be so easily discarded. The revolution brought relief to a nation and economy that sorely needed it. The Shah implemented programs that brought Iran out of a traditional society dominated by landowners known as The Thousand Families. By 1975, "over 12 million persons...had become owners of land, where before they were actually living in bondage and in feudal servitude to landowners who lived in Tehran."⁵⁴ This first program of land reform was perhaps the most important in the Shah's effort to advance Iranian society into the modern world. Beyond economic and social reforms, the Shah enfranchised women in Iran. Beginning in 1963, women were given full franchise rights. Reza Shah removed their veils in 1935, and his son encouraged their participation in government and education. Female students increased from 506,000 to well over a million between 1963 and 1978. Further, the number of women in higher education rose from 3,839 in 1962 to 28,869 in 1972.⁵⁵ The White Revolution heralded the Shah's ambitious plans for his burgeoning nation both at home and abroad.

⁵³ House Committee on International Relations, *Human Rights in Iran: Hearing before the Subcommittee on International Organizations*, 94th Cong., 2nd sess., August 3 and September 8, 1976, 4.

⁵⁴ House Committee on International Relations, *Human Rights in Iran: Hearing before the Subcommittee on International Organizations*, 94th Cong., 2nd sess., August 3 and September 8, 1976, 4.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

This revolution also had an international component. In his international speeches and university addresses abroad, the Shah pointed to the continued disparity between the rich and poor countries. He pointed to the fact that though living standards in a poor nation and a rich one may be “centuries apart,” traveling time between the two had decreased to a matter of hours. During the 1960s international development resulted in a “greater awakening and restlessness among the deprived people of the world.”⁵⁶ As early as 1964, the Shah was utilizing the rhetoric of national development and socio-economic rights to connect his nation’s domestic struggle with the international struggle of the Third World, Post-Colonial nations to achieve parity with the global North.

Not only did the newly confident monarch increase Iran’s ties to Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan, he inserted himself in East African politics through economic deals and, beginning in 1967, the Shah visited various non-aligned and Western-oriented countries, expounding the virtues of his reform and development programs as part of a plan to expand his regional influence.⁵⁷ In January 1968, the Shah set out on a tour of Southeast Asia where he gave several speeches at universities and legislatures. In these speeches, he did two things. First, he drew clear connections between the heritage of the host nation and that of Iran to highlight similarities and minimize difference. The Shah began his speech to the Malaysian legislature with the sentiment that his visit to the country was “a continuation of the ties” that linked the two nations “over the last thousand years.” The Shah told the legislature that the message he brought was a message “from a friend of long standing.”⁵⁸ At the University of Bangkok he remarked that it was a source of pleasure to “recall that the bonds of cultural and social relationship between our

⁵⁶ Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. “Speech to University of California, Los Angeles, 12 June 1964,” in *Iran, Philosophy Behind the Revolution*, (London: Orient Commerce Establishment, 1971), 198.

⁵⁷ 1972 Update of: 1970 *Iran Handbook*, Central Intelligence Agency (April 1972), VII-2.

⁵⁸ Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. “Speech to the Malaysian Houses of Legislature, Kuala Lumpur, 17 January 1968,” in *Iran, Philosophy Behind the Revolution*, (London: Orient Commerce Establishment, 1971), 211.

two nations date much further back than the present bonds... three centuries ago, diplomatic and cultural missions were exchanged between Iran and Thailand... thousands of Iranians lived in the capital of Thailand, and enjoyed the confidence and regard of the King and the people.” The Shah recalled the names of two Thai-born Iranians that had served as Chief Minister of Thailand. He told the audience that he was merely recalling these anecdotes to point out that theirs was a “deep relationship of very long standing, one which naturally prepares the ground for an even more extensive and useful relationship.”⁵⁹ Second, he vigorously promoted the ideals of economic and social rights – especially the right to national development – that he had pioneered domestically during the White Revolution. This is a fascinating moment. The Shah was exporting the ideas of his revolution internationally at the very time that the African and Asian nations, which had proliferated during decolonization, were turning towards authoritarian modes of governance and finding their voice and power on the world stage of the United Nations.

When the first International Conference on Human Rights was held in Tehran during the same year, the Shah found himself hosting a group of leaders, the majority of whom shared Iran’s model of government and a similar history of Western imperialism. It was the opportunity of a lifetime. In his address at the opening of the conference, the Shah remarked that he believed the location of the conference in Tehran was appropriate, since “the ancestor of the documents recognizing the rights of man was promulgated in this very country by Cyrus the Great about two thousand years ago.”⁶⁰

The Shah believed that Iran had a right to regional superiority in the Persian Gulf, but he also wanted to lead the nations of the Indian Ocean into a new global era. The CIA claimed that

⁵⁹ Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. “Speech to the University of Bangkok, Thailand, 23 January 1968,” in *Iran, Philosophy Behind the Revolution*, (London: Orient Commerce Establishment, 1971), 218.

⁶⁰ *Final Act of the International Conference on Human Rights*, Teheran, 22 April to 13 May 1968 (New York: United Nations, 2011) http://untreaty.un.org/cod/avl/pdf/ha/fatchr/Final_Act_of_TehranConf.pdf.

“the Shah naturally expects that Iran will lead any grouping of littoral states” because of his overwhelming military, economic, demographic capabilities and recent progress.⁶¹ In his desire to provide an authoritative international voice for the Middle East and the Indian Ocean, the Shah advocated a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East and a “zone of peace” in the Indian Ocean. During the 1970s, the Shah advanced an agenda aimed at creating a common market and security cooperation among the littoral states of the Indian Ocean. He went on what the CIA labeled a “lending binge,” making international financial commitments that totaled six billion dollars to seventeen different countries in 1974 alone.⁶²

Then, in October of 1971, the Shahanshah – the “king of kings” – of Iran held a 2,500-year anniversary celebration of Persian monarchy.⁶³ He invited hundreds of the most powerful individuals in the world to Persepolis, the location of Cyrus the Great’s seat of power and his tomb. The Shah had much to celebrate; in 1971 Iran’s per capita income had risen to \$350, showing an annual growth rate of ten percent, and he had redistributed most of the land owned by the aristocracy to peasants and national preserves while still ensuring that the aristocrats could build wealth through investment in Iran’s booming industries. Beginning in the mid-1960s and into the early 1970s, Iran’s economy enjoyed an annual growth rate of ten percent; Iran’s industrial center was growing at an average rate of fourteen percent a year. Thanks to the Shah’s literacy and health corps, education and healthcare were improving swiftly and infant mortality

⁶¹ *Iran’s Arab World Initiatives and their Implications*, 6.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶³ Reza Shah Pahlavi revived the traditional title of Shahanshah. This was in keeping with the first Pahlavi monarch’s efforts to turn away from Qajar titles and back to ancient Persian terminology. In addition to the literal translation “king of kings,” the title may also be interpreted as “king over kings,” “king among kings,” or more the visceral and enigmatic “spiritual, philosophical, symbolic...[and] sentimental” definitions with which Reza Shah characterized the word in the original Persian. He claimed that, though it had rational and fixed meanings, it also embodied the national unity and identity of Iran. Ali M. Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921: The Pahlavis and After* (Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2003), 61, 190, 193.

rates began to plummet.⁶⁴ The United Nations too recognized the importance of such a celebration; a 1960 UNESCO General Conference had “decided on a universal tribute to Iranian culture, regarded as inseparable from the culture and civilization of all mankind.”⁶⁵ From this UNESCO resolution a decade before grew the elaborate festival of Iranian history and celebration of the Shah’s success. For the whirlwind few days of the lavish party, Persepolis would be the “centre of gravity of the world,” and the Shah would celebrate his success and glory in his destiny.⁶⁶ The celebrations at Persepolis were purposefully removed from the “tumult of Tehran,” where enemies of the regime might disrupt the ceremonies. More importantly, Persepolis was chosen because it was the capital of Cyrus’ empire and the final resting place of his tomb.⁶⁷ While the guest list included such dignitaries as Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia, King Hussain ibn Talal of Jordan, President Tito of Yugoslavia, and the Soviet President Nikolai Podgorny, few of Iran’s citizens were invited.⁶⁸

In addition to his public rhetoric and aggressive reforms, the Shah was adept at utilizing imagery and cultural symbols to manipulate public perceptions at home and abroad. *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines described the event as “one of the biggest bashes in all history” and the “bash of bashes.”⁶⁹ A commemorative almanac published by the Iranian government boasted that the emblem of the celebration was “composed of a circle in blue, the colour of the Iranian Imperial House, enclosing the famous Cyrus tablet, surmounted by the Imperial arms and ringed by 25 flower-symbols identical to those on the bas-reliefs at Persepolis and each representing a

⁶⁴ *Nothing Succeeds Like a Successful Shah*, 3-5.

⁶⁵ *Iran Almanac and Book of Facts, 1971*, 4/5.

⁶⁶ *Nothing Succeeds Like a Successful Shah.*, 12.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁹ James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 183. and *Nothing Succeeds Like a Successful Shah*, 2.

century of Iran's history."⁷⁰ The use of the Cyrus cylinder was subtler than other, more overt imagery of the celebration. The government produced commemorative coins for the occasion. The gold coins featured the Cyrus cylinder emblem of the celebration on one side, while the other bore the profile of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Shah of Iran, juxtaposed alongside the visage of Cyrus the Great. The script surrounding this stark image reads "Year of the Great Cyrus."⁷¹ The Shah utilized this celebration to actively connect himself with the legitimacy and majesty of the legendary Cyrus the Great.

At the opening of the celebration, the Shah again evoked the long-dead emperor. Resting his hand on the tomb of Cyrus during the first speech of the celebration, the Shah repeatedly reminded Cyrus, the "Great King of Kings," that he could "Rest in Peace, for we are awake, and we will always stay awake."⁷² He promised to forever preserve the "traditions of humanism and goodwill... traditions which made our people be the carrier of message transmitted everywhere, professing fraternity and truth."⁷³

As a CIA intelligence report from the eve of Iran's celebration of Persian Kingship said: "nothing succeeds like a successful Shah."⁷⁴ As the economic success of the 1960s began to translate into military might in the 1970s and oil profits continued to soar, the Shah's confidence and megalomania began to increase. He built a foundation of perceptions for his domestic and international agenda that rested upon the idea of ancient Persian identity and a bitter historical memory of domination by foreign powers. The Shah was committed to making Iran a world power and preventing it from ever submitting to the domination of a foreign power again. When

⁷⁰ Echo of Iran, *Iran Almanac and Book of Facts, 1971* (Tehran: Echoprint, 1971), 4/4.

⁷¹ Iran Collection: *Commemorative of the 2500th Anniversary of the Persian Empire* <http://irancollection.alborzi.com/2500/index.htm> (accessed April 1, 2012).

⁷² Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 184.

⁷³ Homage to Cyrus the Great: <http://badraie.com/cyrus.htm> (accessed December 5, 2011).

⁷⁴ *Nothing Succeeds Like a Successful Shah*, title page.

the Shah considered the West and their supposed superiority, he was quick to remind them that whatever they had, Iran “taught [them] three thousand years ago.”⁷⁵

During the decade after the celebration at Persepolis, the Shah would build upon the foundations he laid during the 1960s. He had stabilized the Iranian domestic situation and built an economy that could compete on the world scale. He had begun to utilize an international rhetoric of national human rights that would provide his regime support from a variety of Afro-Asian nations. Finally, he forged Iran into a credible regional military and political power that was less dependent on foreign support and less vulnerable to foreign manipulation. This was not, however, enough to sate the desires of a man that had embraced a history of destiny and power in his mission for Iran. During the 1970s the Shah built upon the momentum of the White Revolution and pushed Iran further down the road toward regional dominance and world power status. This momentum carried his regime too far. In his efforts to realize his global dream for Iran, he became more authoritarian and further isolated. He would soon realize the truth of the saying that politics has no mother or father. Iran’s international success of the 1970s was unable to contain a nation frustrated by the machinations of their would-be father, Mohammad Reza Shah.

⁷⁵ Fallaci, 171.

Chapter Two

“Nothing Succeeds Like a Successful Shah”¹

Human Rights Rhetoric in Iran’s Bid for Hegemony

“To be first in the Middle East is not enough. We must raise ourselves to the level of a great world power.”
Mohammad Reza Pahlavi²

In the spring of 1968, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi’s personal rule and Iran’s domestic stability were at an all-time high. This security, as US officials observed, was largely a result of his “conscious avowal of nationalistic policies” since the beginning of his White Revolution.³ Utilizing his form of positive nationalism, the Shah was able to shore up his domestic base through economic successes, construct an image of himself as father of Iran, and present himself as a modernizer to foreign nations. He was able to co-opt the nationalism of Iranian liberals and turn the pursuit of material wealth into a national mission that would distract from his growing authoritarianism and megalomania. At this key moment of economic success and mounting national confidence, Tehran hosted the International Conference on Human Rights and the United Kingdom announced it would withdraw its military resources and personnel from the Persian Gulf. The removal of this great power presence in Iran’s immediate region was followed,

¹ Memorandum: *Nothing Succeeds Like a Successful Shah*, Office of National Estimates, Central Intelligence Agency (Confidential, 8 October 1971).

² Michael Hunt, *Crises in U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 397.

³ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968. Vol. XXIV: Iran* (Washington, DC: GPO, 199), 491.

in January 1969, with the announcement of the Nixon Doctrine by the United States, which promised military and economic assistance to American allies but implied that those allies would be responsible for their own defense.

By the time the new Conservative government in London carried out British military withdrawal in 1971, the Shah had begun taking full advantage of the promises of the Nixon Doctrine. These opportunities and the Shah's readiness to exploit them left Iran as one of the most populous, wealthy, and powerful nations in the Middle East. The Shah was able to begin to achieve key security objectives and emerge as a rhetorical juggernaut on the world stage. Among the Shah's security objectives were the revival of the traditional Persian dominance of the Persian Gulf and the elevation of Iran to the international status of a great power. To achieve these goals, the Shah pursued four foreign policy goals: counter the threat of radical movements and ideologies in the Persian Gulf, secure the production and transportation of Iranian oil resources, challenge the primacy of both superpowers in the Persian Gulf, and emerge as an international advocate for human rights.

* * * * *

Opportunity as well as the Shah's convictions and goals set Iran on the course to regional hegemony in the Persian Gulf and leadership in the Middle East and Indian Ocean. The traditional sense of Persian isolation in their immediate region, a result of the surrounding and often hostile Arab neighbors, contributed to the Shah's imperative that Iran dominate a Persian Gulf with limited influence from foreign powers. As a subscriber to a classic *realpolitik* approach to international affairs and a believer in the long-term balance of power, the Shah took measures to establish Iran as the policeman of the Middle East. For the Shah, the maintenance of a balance of power required that every major power should have its own zone of influence. For

Iran, this was the Persian Gulf.⁴ The Shah's immediate foreign policy goal was dominance over the Persian Gulf; this was Iran's surest means to obtaining and guaranteeing security in a region surrounded by enemies, alternative ideologies, and transnational identities.

Economic, political, and military dominance over its immediate region was not the Shah's ultimate goal; Iran had suffered at the hands of great powers since the early nineteenth century; the Shah wanted to transform Iran into a great world power on par with the United States and the Soviet Union but beholden to neither. The Shah hoped to utilize his newfound power and opportunity to extend Iranian leadership and dominance into the Indian Ocean. The announcement of the withdrawal of British military forces from the Persian Gulf and the publication of the Nixon Doctrine removed the constraint of a great power military presence in the region while providing America's allies a blank check to undertake regional initiatives germane to US interests. The Shah, his White Revolution of the 1960s having saved the country from financial crisis, eagerly stepped into the power vacuum left by British withdrawal.⁵ In his efforts to establish Iran as the regional hegemon and a world power, the Shah undertook a variety of strategic foreign policy initiatives and utilized a rhetorical campaign aimed at making the emerging norm of Iranian leadership both conceivable and possible. This was his opportunity to establish Iranian hegemony in the Middle East and to reestablish the Peacock Throne's traditional dominance of the Persian Gulf.

Mohammad Reza Shah began utilizing a rhetorical lexicon of nationalistic development and glorifying Iran's rich history; however, the Shah was a practitioner of *realpolitik*, and real security concerns lay in the path of Iran's rise to regional and global power. The early 1970s were a period of incredible opportunity for the Shah and his mission of making Iran into a power

⁴ CIA, Briefing Paper, April 28, 1976, "Iran's Foreign Policy," 1.

⁵ Faisal bin Salman al-Saud, *Iran, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf: Power Politics in Transition* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2003), vi-181.

player on the world stage and fulfilling the destiny he saw for his nation. Though it had decreased since the end of the Second World War, the British military presence in the Persian Gulf had “in effect prevented Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia from competing openly for influence in the area.”⁶ Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman – all former British protectorates – gained their independence with British withdrawal in 1971.⁷ Once the British withdrew, Iran “took a more active role in the Gulf, relying on its own capabilities and indirect support from the United States.”⁸ Iran saw the British announcement as an opportunity to “assert its dominance in the Gulf and immediately revived the historical Persian claim to sovereignty” over several Gulf islands, including Bahrain.⁹ Iran occupied three strategic islands in the Persian Gulf and abrogated the 1937 London Treaty with Iraq, which imposed unfavorable border restrictions on the Shatt al-Arab river for Iran.¹⁰ The Shatt al-Arab waterway – the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers – is “arguably the most strategic delta in the world.”¹¹ The aggressive actions and rhetoric of the Iraqi government under the Soviet-supported Ba’ath regime in Iraq, combined with the traditional enmity over this strategic river and shared border, made open conflict between Iraq and Iran seem inevitable. During the 1960s, Iran “balanced against emerging regional threats by forging cooperative ties with Israel, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Oman.”¹²

⁶ F. Gregory Gause, III, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 16.

⁷ Ibid, 1.

⁸ Stephen M. Walt, “Testing Theories of Alliance Formation: The Case of Southwest Asia,” *International Organization*, 42:2 (Spring, 1988), 292.

⁹ Gause, 19.

¹⁰ Jerome Donovan, *The Iran-Iraq War: Antecedents and Conflict Escalation* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 48. and J.C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East; a Documentary Record* (Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand, 1956).

¹¹ Robert Baer, *The Devil We Know: Dealing with the New Iranian Superpower* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2008), 98. Baer identifies the occupation of this strategic delta as one of Saddam Hussein’s primary reasons for invading Iran in 1980.

¹² Walt, 292.

The Shah's rhetoric during Iran's rise to regional power status reveals that, in both public statements and private conversations, the Shah exhibited a pride in his nation and a belief that Iran's natural place in the world was as a great power and hegemon. Though Iran needed the United States for military and economic aid, as well as a balance against the Soviet threat, the Shah desired a Persian Gulf free of superpower influence. In a 1974 conversation the Iranian Minister of Court, Asadollah Alam, remarked that the Shah was "unrivaled amongst Middle Eastern statesmen." The Shah responded that he had "so many more aspirations... To be first in the Middle East is not enough. We must raise ourselves to the level of a great world power. Such a goal is by no means unattainable."¹³ In 1968, before the withdrawal of the British forces, before the implementation of the Nixon Doctrine, and before Iran began its program of militarization and expansion, the Shah spoke before the United Nations. He bemoaned the fact that "defense budgets, a decimal part of which could free humanity from hunger, disease, illiteracy, and poverty, instead of decreasing, have grown. And the power-seeking policies of the strong are hampering the execution of United Nations' ideals."¹⁴ After eight years of enjoying a free hand in its Persian Gulf affairs and sustained economic and military growth, the Shah addressed his nation in March 1976; his rhetoric was manifestly more aggressive. In his 1976 New Year's address, the Shah referred to the "glorious path" of Iranian power: "this golden epic of modern Iran will be carried on to complete victory, and... no power on earth shall ever be able to stand against the bond of steel between the Shah and the nation."¹⁵ He concluded his speech with the sentiment that "we know well and so do all other nations of the world that Iran today is

¹³ Michael Hunt, 397.

¹⁴ Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, "The Shah's Message on the occasion of the 23rd Anniversary of the Foundation of the United Nations, October 24, 1968" (accessed December 5, 2011): <http://members.cybertrails.com/~pahlavi/un-1.html>

¹⁵ Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, "Message of the Shahanshah of Iran, Now Rouz, 1976," (accessed December 5, 2011) <http://members.cybertrails.com/~pahlavi/speech1.html>.

a powerful state whose economic, political and military might is increasing daily and which enjoys unprecedented international prestige.”¹⁶ The Shah’s rhetoric and Iran’s growing military capability and regional assurance point to a proclivity for hegemony.¹⁷

The Shah was developing the military and economic capability to forge Iran into a geopolitical hegemon. The Shah’s actions and rhetoric during Iran’s rise to power clearly illustrate his desire and intent to put Iran on the path to regional hegemony. The context of the Cold War ensured that Iran’s American allies would support the Shah in the event of a confrontation with the Soviet Union, but the Shah was unwilling to rely solely on the hope that his ally would do the same in the event of a war with a regional power. As such, he set out to develop for Iran a military and economy that would ensure that Iran gained the military and economic capability to dominate any encounter with another Middle Eastern state.

In order to move Iran beyond the limited role of hegemon in the Persian Gulf to the more global role of leading the Indian Ocean littoral nations, the Shah needed to convince the leaders of those nations that Iran was strong and committed enough to lead the charge as they advanced their agenda on an international scale. In order to establish his ability to lead, the Shah needed to do four things. His first goal, and one that remained a dominant theme for the next decade, was to neutralize radical elements in the Middle East generally in order to prevent fringe movements from gaining popularity in Iran domestically. Oil revenues were critical to the continued wealth and power of the Iranian nation; therefore, the Shah’s second obsession during the early 1970s was securing Iran’s oil resources and production. Iran’s path to power would need to be paved with oil revenue; if Iranian shipping routes or refineries were threatened, the Shah’s power was not secure. Third, the Shah had to successfully challenge superpower domination in Iran’s

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Mearsheimer, 40,45.

immediate region. Though he still needed American military, economic, and diplomatic support, the Shah needed to establish that he was not the puppet of Washington before Islamabad and New Delhi could accept the idea of Iran as a dominant regional force and potential leader in the Post-Colonial World. In order to weaken the looming threat of Soviet interference and invasion, the Shah needed to successfully frustrate Soviet regional initiatives. Finally, and perhaps unexpectedly, to establish the reality of Iranian leadership in the Indian Ocean, the Shah portrayed himself as a champion of economic and social nationalistic human rights on an international scale. If the Shah could successfully demonstrate his power while appealing on an international stage to the desires of post-colonial and authoritarian regimes in Africa and Asia for economic independence and social equality with the West, the Shah could begin to establish himself as a leader of the region and offer an alternative to reliance on the Soviet Union and the United States.

During the 1970s, Iran possessed a preponderance of both actual and latent relative military capabilities; it certainly had the potential to dominate the Persian Gulf states, especially given the sustained growth of these capabilities from 1969-1976. Kenneth Waltz determines power status on the basis of a combination of elements: the “size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability, and competence.”¹⁸ Iran possessed an overwhelming superiority in each of these categories in comparison to other nations of the Persian Gulf and the Middle East in general. Iran’s defense budget comprised 4.9 percent of its GNP in 1966; in 1968 this rose to 7.6 percent; and by 1971 had reached 9.8 percent.¹⁹ Of the Middle Eastern powers, only Saudi Arabia came anywhere near the total military expenditures of Iran. In 1976 – the year after the signing of the Algiers

¹⁸ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979), 131.

¹⁹ 1972 Update of: *1970 Iran Handbook*, Central Intelligence Agency (April 1972), VI-2.

Accord, and the year before the Shah began to face serious internal domestic instability – Iran spent \$10.1 billion on its military, Saudi Arabia spent \$9.8 billion and the next highest spender was Israel at \$4.7 billion. For its part, Iraq’s military expenditures totaled only \$1,944,000,000. Only Egypt and Turkey could compete with Iran in terms of population and size of armed forces, but Iran’s GNP far exceeded any other nation in the Middle East, almost doubling that of the next highest, Saudi Arabia.²⁰ Iran’s latent military power as the third most populous and the wealthiest state in the Middle East points to the potential for hegemony.²¹

As early as 1960, the Shah’s concern with the growth of Iraqi power inspired by the Soviet supply of arms was evident. He complained that “Iraq has only about a quarter of [Iran’s] population and a fifth of our land area, yet her air force is more powerful than ours.”²² From 1965-1970, “Iranian arms imports averaged \$146.5 million per year... by contrast, arms imports for... 1971-77 were almost eight times greater, averaging \$1.15 billion per year.”²³ In 1972, President Richard Nixon “endorsed the Shah’s imperial ambitions during his visit to Tehran... Iran now enjoyed unrestricted access to U.S. weaponry, and the Shah began taking direct action against the radical forces that he saw as the main threat to his rule.”²⁴ His actions were a result of a desire to create a stable region in the Persian Gulf, from which Iran could emerge as a more powerful player in global affairs.

²⁰ U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1969-1978). Estimates in USD at constant 1977 dollar value.

²¹ U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1969-1978). Turkey and Egypt, respectively, were the first and second most populous Middle Eastern Nations, with Turkey at 40 million, Egypt at 39.3 million, and Iran at 33.3 million.
http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/peo_pop-people-population&date=1975 (Accessed December 10, 2011).

²² Alvin J Cottrell, “Iran’s Armed Forces under the Pahlavi Dynasty,” in George Lenczowski, ed., *Iran Under the Pahlavis* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), 416.

²³ Walt, 291.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 291.

Iran in 1968 was situated between two volatile regions prone to Soviet influence and radical politics. To the west, President Nasser of Egypt had, for over a decade, utilized a rhetorical campaign of opposition to the West and of Arab nationalism in the form of the United Arab Republic. These two ideological stances were at odds with and threatening to the Shah's own goals and beliefs. To the east, the Indian subcontinent roiled in uncertainty and conflict. After the removal of British military presence and the end of London's mandate treaties with the Gulf Arabs, the Persian Gulf too became a volatile region at risk of instability and conflict. The combination of weak militaries, archaic political structures, and great oil wealth made newly independent Gulf Arab states like Bahrain and Oman prone to great power interference, regional conflict, and domestic unrest. The Shah was particularly concerned about communist "adventurism" in the weak states of the Persian Gulf and so acted decisively in Iraq, Oman, and in several small Gulf islands when communist incursion threatened.²⁵ Moscow initiated several friendship pacts with nations in the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent, signing treaties of friendship with Egypt, Syria, and India in 1971. Then, in 1972, the USSR concluded a similar agreement with Iraqi president Hassan al-Bakr. The Shah viewed these friendship pacts with deep suspicion. He considered the pacts, Soviet manipulation of the Afghan government, and support for the fragmentation of Pakistan as a "giant pincer movement" designed by Moscow, that would surround Iran with hostile powers.²⁶

Though the Shah's most intense efforts were in the Persian Gulf, his interests were global. The West is predisposed to consider Iran as the eastern flank of the Middle East and

²⁵ CIA, Briefing Paper, April 28, 1976, "Iran's Foreign Policy," 3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

deem it natural that Iran would seek hegemony over the states to its west.²⁷ In reality, as evidenced by his shifting security initiatives and military spending, the Shah desired hegemony, first in the Persian Gulf, and then to the East, in the Indian Ocean. Iran's foreign policy initiatives during the mid-1970s seem much more invested in carving out a leadership role in the community of littoral Indian Ocean nations. In 1973 the Shah began a concerted effort to begin building a powerful navy and air force in order to project Iran's power beyond its borders.²⁸ In addition, the Shah expressed dissatisfaction with the superpower rivalry in the Indian Ocean as early as 1972. In 1972, Iran backed a resolution in the UN General Assembly that declared the "defence and security of the Indian Ocean would be the responsibility of the littoral countries alone; and calling for an end to the presence of big power navies and bases." In September 1974, the Shah embarked on his most extensive tour of the states to his east. During his visits to Indian, Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, and Singapore the Shah called for closer collaboration between the littoral Indian Ocean powers for "collective security and economic development," presumably under Iranian leadership.²⁹ Iranian newspapers, which "usually echo[ed] the Shah's views on world affairs," heralded this tour as the "start of a new era in Iran's diplomatic history."³⁰ According to *The New York Times*, American diplomats viewed the tour as an effort by the Shah to "enhance his image as the leader of an increasingly powerful nation that is ready to broaden its sphere of influence."³¹ While in Australia, the Shah "advanced a proposal for eventual achievement of a 'military understanding' by countries of the Indian Ocean

²⁷ William E. Griffith, "Iran's Foreign Policy in the Pahlavi Era," in George Lenczowski, ed., *Iran Under the Pahlavis* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), 382-383.

²⁸ Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of State, "Memorandum for the President's File," July 24, 1973; National Archives Building College Park MD.

²⁹ Echo of Iran, *Iran Almanac and Book of Facts, 1975* (Tehran: Echoprint, 1975), 191.

³⁰ James F. Clarity, "Shah Leaves on Eastern Tour," *The New York Times*, September, 19, 1974, accessed April 18, 2012,

<http://search.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/120006509/136366FAAC734DF5ED9/12?accountid=14593>.

³¹ Ibid.

area, including Australia and Iran.” The aim of this security proposal was part of a larger effort to “persuade the United States and the Soviet Union to remove their naval forces from the Indian Ocean.”³² This concept had great appeal to the nations of the Indian Ocean. The Shah’s increasing forays into the politics of East Asian and Pacific nations and his rhetoric of an Indian Ocean free of superpower competition is a clear indication of his strategy “for making his country an increasingly dominant force in the Middle East and southern Asia.”³³

Though Moscow was the greatest threat to Iran’s security, the Shah saw India as “basically aggressive, expansionist, and ultimately Iran’s principal competitor in the region.”³⁴ As part of his efforts to offer regional alternatives to alliance with the Soviet Union, the Shah began in the 1970s to improve relations with New Delhi and undertake campaigns to increase regional economic cooperation under the Regional Cooperation for Development framework. The CIA understood that the Shah wanted “Iran to be the leading, if not the dominant power in the Indian Ocean.”³⁵ In order for Iran to reach this status, it would eventually have to contend with the reality of superpower presence in the region. The Shah’s rhetoric and actions illustrate his desire for the eventual removal of both Soviet and American military presence in the Indian Ocean. He began arms and armament purchases aimed at making the Iranian navy the most powerful in the Persian Gulf and at creating a deep-water navy that could project force in the Indian Ocean. Despite Iran’s efforts at creating a naval force, the Shah wanted a strong US naval presence in the Indian Ocean as well as the expansion of the American naval presence at their

³² Ibid.

³³ James F. Clarity, “Shah Seeks Dominance in Region for Iran: Shah and People Mixing Politics and Oil,” May 19, 1974, accessed April 14, 2012, <http://search.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/120173176/136366FAAC734DF5ED9/5?accountid=14593>.

³⁴ Briefing Paper: *Iran’s Foreign Policy*, Central Intelligence Agency (28 April, 1976), 11-12.

³⁵ Briefing Paper: *Iran’s Foreign Policy*, Central Intelligence Agency (28 April, 1976), 12.

Diego Garcia base in order to keep Moscow from filling any power vacuum while the Iranian navy developed.³⁶

The Shah's concerns about foreign radical movements and their implications for Iranian security are perhaps best illustrated by the Iran-Iraq conflict from 1968 to 1975. Iran's actions clearly point to the Shah's concern about the intentions of Soviet-supported Iraq in the Gulf. The Shah feared Iraq would offer an alternative narrative to an Iranian dominated Gulf through an "extension of Iraqi support for subversive activities." His actions belie a growing concern over "Iraqi territorial ambitions in Kuwait and Iraq's general drive to be a major rival power in the Gulf."³⁷ The border disputes between Iran and Iraq were apparently initiated by Iraq's assertion of its rights to the Shatt al-Arab waterway. Of the ten disputes in which Iran was a party from the announcement of British withdrawal in 1968 to the beginning of Iran's revolution in 1978, eight were with Iraq.³⁸ Following the formalization of the Algiers Accord on March 13, 1975, no disputes occurred between Iran and Iraq until the Iranian regime change in 1979. In fact, the period from 1975-1978 marked a high point in the bilateral relations between Iran and Iraq.³⁹

The Shah was ready and willing to deploy Iranian forces across the Gulf to forestall forces of radical subversion that he felt threatened regional security.⁴⁰ Since the 1960s, the Shah harbored Iraqi Kurds in Iran and by the late 1960s was, along with Israel and the CIA, arming Iraqi Kurd rebel groups to destabilize the radical Ba'athist regime in Baghdad. In March 1975,

³⁶ Ibid, 12-13.

³⁷ Hussein Sirriyeh, "Development of the Iraqi-Iranian Dispute, 1874-1975," *Journal of Contemporary History* 21:1 (Jul., 1985), 485.

³⁸ [Daniel M. Jones, Stuart A. Bremer and J. David Singer \(1996\). " Militarized Interstate Disputes, 1816-1992: Rationale, Coding Rules, and Empirical Patterns." *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 15\(2\): 163:213.](#)

³⁹ Ghosn, Faten, Glenn Palmer, and Stuart Bremer. 2004. "The MID3 Data Set, 1993–2001: Procedures, Coding Rules, and Description." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 21:133-154. Because the Correlates of War dataset does not recognize militarized interstate disputes that involve a non-state actor, or when the government of the targeted nation invited intervention from the aggressor state, Iran's military interventions in Abu Musa, the Tunbs, and Oman are not included.

⁴⁰ CIA, Briefing Paper, April 28, 1976, "Iran's Foreign Policy," 3.

Iran and Iraq concluded the Algiers Accord to cease hostilities. Iraq submitted to Iranian demands regarding shipping rights on the Shatt al-Arab River and Iran agreed to stop aiding the Kurdish rebellion in Iraq. When the Shah withdrew his support of the Kurdish resistance, the movement was swiftly crushed and the Ba'ath regime slaughtered those remaining in Iraq. Iran's own Kurdish minority was a constant threat hanging over the head of the Shah's regime in Northwestern Iran.

In 1973 the Shah believed he had the power to “destroy Iraq in a few hours.”⁴¹ If he did have this power, it is perhaps puzzling that Iran did not utilize its overwhelming strength to destroy the rival regime in Baghdad. Given the continued threat that Iraq posed to Iranian security – as evidenced by the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s – and the Shah's mistrust of revisionist regimes, it seems more likely that Iran would have continued its aggression in an attempt to affect regime change. Instead, the two nations ceased hostilities in an apparent attempt at regional cooperation; there is a simple explanation for the Shah's willingness to sign a peace accord with Saddam Hussein in 1975. Iran's aggressive actions in Iraq and their cessation indicate that the Shah's belligerence was an attempt to mitigate Soviet and radical ties to Iraq. The accord with Iraq established a favorable peace that secured Iran's western flank and allowed the Shah to focus his diplomatic efforts and military resources on the eastward expansion of his influence.⁴²

Iran's foreign policy initiatives regarding Iraq also evidence a paramount concern with securing Iran's oil production and shipping capabilities. Iran's largest oil refinery was located on the Shatt al-Arab waterway; it was already “within reach of artillery and mortar fire from Iraqi

⁴¹ Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of State, “Memorandum for the President's File,” July 24, 1973; National Archives Building, College Park, MD. The Shah notes that he had conveyed this fact to Alexei Kosygin.

⁴² Walt, 292, 416.

territory.”⁴³ Iraq’s *de facto* abrogation of the 1937 treaty and its assertion of Iraqi territorial rights over the whole of the Shatt al-Arab presented an unacceptable level of insecurity for Iran.⁴⁴ In addition, Iran’s seizure of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb in the Straights of Hormuz was more strategic than expansionist. The islands’ strategic location at this narrow point of the Persian Gulf meant that, if a rival power were to take control of the islands, Iranian oil shipments from the Gulf to the Indian Ocean could be severely impeded. Iran occupied the islands on November 30, 1971, the day before Britain’s protectorate treaties were terminated and the islands would become vulnerable to outside subversion.⁴⁵ Once again, the Shah intervened in Oman, which is located in the same strategic area of the Gulf. The Dhofar rebels in Oman were supported both by Iraq and the Soviets. Since Iran had seized Abu Musa and the Tunbs, the rebellion in Oman represented the greatest threat to Iranian shipping lanes.

Iran’s sudden shift from a net borrower to “the Middle East’s largest lender” is further evidence of the Shah’s international priorities.⁴⁶ In 1974, the Shah committed \$6.3 billion in foreign investment, loans, and a small amount of grants to seventeen different nations. Of that figure, \$2.73 billion was invested in Indian Ocean nations or Iran’s Middle Eastern neighbors. In addition to promoting Iran’s own industrialization through increased ties with Western suppliers, these loans were geared toward “cultivating markets for Iran’s non-oil exports, promoting stability in neighboring countries, improving political ties with old adversaries, and promoting Iran’s influence and the Shah’s image as a world leader.”⁴⁷ The largest non-Western recipient of

⁴³ Walt, 414.

⁴⁴ Hussein Sirriyeh, “Development of the Iraqi-Iranian Dispute, 1874-1975,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 21:1 (Jul., 1985), 485.

⁴⁵ Gause, 23.

⁴⁶ Intelligence Memorandum: *Iran: The Shah’s Lending Binge*, Central Intelligence Agency (December 1974), 1.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, iii.

Iran's economic investment was India. Iran purchased \$200 million in IBRD bonds and offered New Delhi \$1 billion in credits.⁴⁸

The Shah utilized his new lending program as a means to augment his political-economic strategies, and he withheld the ultimate decision-making power for himself. The Shah's loans to Egypt secured access to a Mediterranean port, while his offers to India were contingent on the opening of oil and industrial markets for Iran. By hinting at the prospect of huge credits to Afghanistan, the Shah hoped to weaken the influence of the USSR and gain a say in Afghan-Pakistani border disputes. The loans not only gave him influence and helped limit Soviet expansion, they helped prevent regional unrest and radical subversion. Iran's loans to Pakistan were aimed at improving economic conditions in the volatile Baluchistan province. The loans allowed the Shah to influence regional perceptions as well. His aid to Sadat's Egypt, Syria, and Jordan helped minimize those nations' anger at Iran's connections to Israel and maximize their acceptance of Iran's growing regional dominance.⁴⁹ Finally, his largesse to New Delhi helped alleviate historical tensions with India and extend the Shah's "influence in the Indian ocean area." The Shah was "anxious to be portrayed as a responsible world leader." His loans to developing nations were in character for the modernizing autocrat bent on national development and regional dominance; they cemented his image as a regional leader.⁵⁰

Iran's conflicts with Iraq appear to be a result not only of concern for the security of the Ābādān oil refinery and fear of radical subversion; the Shah's fear of encirclement by the Soviet Union was perhaps his largest reason for confronting Baghdad. In a 1973 conversation with President Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, the Shah expressed his regional

⁴⁸ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁹ For Iran's connections to Israel during this period, see Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the U.S.* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 19-28.

⁵⁰ Intelligence Memorandum: *Iran: The Shah's Lending Binge*, Central Intelligence Agency (December 1974), 1,4,5.

concerns and provided an insight into the intent of his aggressive actions. He asserted that Iran was “preventing a coalition of the Baaths, the Kurds, and the Communists.” He claimed that the Soviet involvement in the recent Afghanistan coup was an attempt to “push to the Indian Ocean.”⁵¹ He saw the same problem in Soviet friendship with Iraq and interference in the Sultanate of Oman. In a 1975 conversation with President Ford and Secretary Kissinger, the Shah again stressed his concern over Soviet influence in the Persian Gulf, stating that “the Soviets are a real problem in this area. [They] are talking détente, but never [has] their military been stronger.”⁵²

Iran’s military targets coincided directly with the security of their oil assets and with their fear of an extension of Soviet influence into the Persian Gulf. Internally, Iran balanced the evolving military situation through a proportional increase in military capabilities in relation to Iraq. Iran rectified regional imbalance between itself and Soviet allies by strengthening cooperation with the United States on the basis of the threat of Communist incursion into the Persian Gulf.⁵³ Iran also appears to have balanced externally by weakening the Soviet coalition in the Gulf. Reflecting in 1977, the Shah expressed his pleasure with the Algiers Accord; after an attempt on Saddam Hussein’s life, the Shah agreed that his death would have been a “grave disappointment” and that, “but for him, there’d have been no compromise over the Shatt al-Arab.”⁵⁴ In 1975, the Shah indicated that he “wouldn’t be surprised if our agreement with Hussein proves permanent. Baghdad may well opt for a closer relationship with [Iran] and shake

⁵¹ Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of State, “Memorandum for the President’s File,” July 24, 1973; National Archives Building College Park MD.

⁵² Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of State, “Memorandum of Conversation,” May 15, 1975; Gerald R. Ford Library: <http://www.geraldrfordfoundation.org/wp-content/memcons/1553079.pdf>. (Accessed December 5, 2011).

⁵³ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 118-121. Waltz argues that to ensure their survival, states undertake two types of balancing efforts – internal and external – by which they strengthen themselves in the self-help system. Internally, states may take such steps as strengthening their military and economy; externally, states may strengthen their own alliance or weaken that of an enemy

⁵⁴ Asadollah Alam, *The Shah and I: The Confidential Diary of Iran’s Royal Court, 1969-1977* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 550.

off foreign, particularly Soviet, influence.”⁵⁵ This statement is potentially illuminating; both Iran’s decision to begin hostilities and to end them seems to have been motivated by a desire to maintain the balance of power by preventing Iran’s encirclement by Soviet powers.

In his 1975 conversation with Ford and Kissinger, the Shah claimed that the Soviets were unhappy with Iran’s rapprochement with Iraq. He states that Sadat, Hussein, and Boudemiene urged him to allow Iraq a chance to “cut loose from the Soviet Union and adopt a more independent policy.” At Algiers, the Shah was able to settle the border dispute and open “the way for Iraq to be more independent of the Soviet Union.”⁵⁶ The Algiers Accord was the Shah’s attempt to weaken the rival Iraqi-Soviet coalition. Through his aggressive policies toward Iraq from 1969-1975, the Shah was able to weaken the Iraqi regime and limit the threat posed to Iranian security. By offering an end to his support of the Kurdish rebellion, the Shah gained increased security for the refinery at Ābādān while at the same time removing the threat of Soviet encirclement. Iran-Iraq relations maintained a cordial tone and conflict was avoided from 1975 until after Iran’s revolution.

In addition to frustrating the designs of Moscow in the Persian Gulf, the Shah also successfully distanced his regime from Washington. Beyond the Shah’s calls for the removal of American and Soviet power from the Indian Ocean, the oil revolution of the 1970s provided Iran an opportunity to challenge Washington. Iran was able to assert its independence through America’s increased dependence on Iranian oil. Oil production had peaked in America by 1970; unlike in the 1950s, there were not a variety and abundance of oil sources in the world, and Iran’s oil was far more valuable. Working in concert with the other nations in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Iran increased its share of oil company profits, and in

⁵⁵ Ibid, 418.

⁵⁶ Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of State, “Memorandum of Conversation,” May 15, 1975; Gerald R. Ford Library: <http://www.geraldrfordfoundation.org/wp-content/memcons/1553079.pdf>. (Accessed December 5, 2011).

1970, nationalized the operation and control of Iranian oil fields. The OPEC nations utilized price hikes to pressure the United States and Israel to end the war in the Middle East. These developments, combined with huge price increases, led to “unprecedented tensions... in US relations with Iran.”⁵⁷ The crisis was averted by an increase in economic ties between the two nations. Iran was able to assert its independence from Washington on an international scale while at the same time recycling its enormous oil profits back through the American economy in the form of arms imports, which totaled \$16.2 billion from 1972-1977.⁵⁸ Iran, Saudi Arabia and Iraq accounted for more than one quarter of the arms imports in the Third World.⁵⁹

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As established above, one of the Shah’s primary foreign policy goals was the elevation of Iran to great power status and the establishment of Iranian hegemony in the Persian Gulf and eventually over the Indian Ocean. His actions and rhetoric point to a desire for the removal of superpower competition in the Indian Ocean and the emergence of a collective security cooperative of the littoral nations of the Indian Ocean with Iran at its helm. In the 1960s and 70s every single littoral nation of the Indian Ocean was either a former European colony, was still a European colony, or had, like Iran and Saudi Arabia, endured sustained and significant foreign intervention, occupation, or pseudo-colonization. To the nations of Africa and Asia emerging from the repression of empire, the most important international goal was establishing their post-colonial regimes as the equals of the white Western nations. This was the region the Shah wanted to lead and position Iran to eventually dominate as regional hegemon.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Gause, 31.

⁵⁸ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook 1980*, Table 3.7. As cited in *Gause, International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, 33.

⁵⁹ Gause, 24-34.

⁶⁰ For shifting international power structures resulting from the process of decolonization, see: Paul Gordon Lauren, *Power and Prejudice: The Politics and Diplomacy of Racial Discrimination*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).

The Shah worked consistently throughout the late 1960s and 70s to make Iran a dominant force in world affairs, both in reality and in the minds of regional actors. As he embarked on this process, he consciously promoted the nationalistic goals of the Third World through his human rights rhetoric. In the international arena, the Shah utilized a variety of human rights rhetorical tools and concepts in order to increase Iran's identification with the African, Asian, and Arab nations emerging from decolonization. He positioned himself as a champion of nationalistic social and economic human rights that appealed so much to the authoritarian governments of the former African and Asian colonies while at the same time denying the claims of those in the US and in nongovernmental organizations like Amnesty International that his regime was guilty of torture and gross violations of political and civil rights.

In the spring of 1968, Tehran hosted the International Conference of Human Rights, commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. At this conference the Shah led the charge among Third World nations to challenge the global North in rhetorical message as well as geopolitical strategy. The Shah proclaimed a doctrine of national socio-economic rights that was at once removed from the concept of individual liberty in the West while also rejecting manipulation and domination by the Soviet bloc.

The Charter of the United Nations illustrates the strain between national sovereignty and human rights. Article II of the treaty guarantees that the UN will not interfere in any matter "essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any" state. Article I of the Charter states the necessity of "respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion."⁶¹ The same document guarantees self-determination of peoples. The Charter, with all its language of domestic jurisdiction, was very clear on the

⁶¹ Charter of the United Nations: Chapter I: Purposes and Principles: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter1.shtml> (accessed March 20, 2011).

principle of self-determination, and it made no distinction between colonized and non-colonized peoples. During the 1960s colonized peoples in Asia, Africa, and other parts of the world cast off the fetters of their British, French, Portuguese, and Belgian masters by means both peaceful and violent. The new found independence of these former colonies created non-white nation states and drastically altered the geographic power balance of the United Nations.

The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* that emerged from San Francisco in 1948 was not a binding treaty of international law; it was, however, a solemn pledge by member states to “protect human rights and universal freedoms.” The declaration, which begins with the recognition that “inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,” served as a testament of equality. It was a document that validated the humanity of hundreds of millions of colonized peoples in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. By 1968, however, the decolonized populations had become disenchanted with the Western interpretation of human rights centered on the well-being of the individual. The International Conference was a clear indication of the shifting balance of power in the United Nations General Assembly away from the European nations. The conference was “the culmination of a shift from the Western-inflected concept of individual human rights... to a model that emphasized economic development and the collective rights of the nation.”⁶²

In his address at the opening of the conference, His Imperial Majesty the Shahinshah Aryamehr of Iran led the charge. He maintained that “while we still revere the principles laid down in the Universal Declaration, it is nevertheless necessary to adjust them to the requirements of our time...the very notion of human right should consequently be regarded in a new light.”

⁶² Roland Burke, “From Individual Rights to National Development: The First UN International Conference on Human Rights, Tehran, 1968,” *Journal of World History*, 19.3 (September 2008), 276.

The Shah argued that human rights no longer entailed the primacy of “the political and juridical equality of individuals.” The twenty years since 1948 had proven that “political rights without social rights, justice under law without social justice, and political democracy without economic democracy no longer have any true meaning.”⁶³ The Shah stressed in his speech that “the gap which is constantly widening between the developing nations and the more privileged ones is one of the most powerful brakes hampering the full realization of human rights.”⁶⁴ The Shah’s rhetoric at Tehran appealed to the nations of the Third World; if they were ever to be free of the new economic imperialism, they would need to challenge the primacy of the West and establish norms of economic democracy and social equality. By utilizing the West’s incomplete lexicon of human rights and manipulating it to appeal to a Third World audience, the Shah hoped to lead the nations of the Indian Ocean into a new global era.

It is perhaps simple to compare the Shah’s rhetoric at the Tehran conference to the political repression that followed in the Iran of the 1970s and interpret his speech as a cynical attempt to influence the opinions of international actors and the perceptions they maintained about the Shah’s regime. While this is perhaps true, it is only a part of the truth. The Shah’s conception of human rights was influenced by the rhetoric of the Third World bloc against the imposition of so-called “Western” concepts of human rights on developing countries. During the 1960s and 70s the Third World and unaligned nations in Africa and Asia challenged what they understood as the remnants of the old colonialism. In the United Nations they railed against apartheid in South Africa, US support for Israel, and the war in Vietnam. The tone of the conference in 1968 and of the resolutions that emerged reflect the Shah’s own understanding that it was the denial of economic and social rights which were the true impediment to human

⁶³ *Final Act of the International Conference on Human Rights*, 34

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

freedom. During the 1960s, the Shah imposed social and economic rights on a nation in crisis. With the human rights rhetoric he employed at the conference in 1968, the Shah justified his White Revolution and set the stage for its natural successor – the emergence of Iran as a true power in world affairs. The Iran of the 1970s was to control its own destiny and guide the grateful nations within its sphere of influence; or so the Shah hoped.

* * * * *

The opportunities presented in 1968 precipitated a decade that was a fascinating transitional moment for Iran and the Shah but one that was also tragically flawed. British and American foreign policy opened the door for Iranian expansion internationally at the very moment that Iran was making economic and social reforms domestically. Iran's unique position allowed the Shah to act on his constructed identity as the rightful heir to the ancient might of the Persian Empire. The Shah's very real gains in military power and geopolitical security were accompanied by his conscious espousal of human rights rhetoric in an attempt to proliferate an image of himself as leader and of Iran as hegemon and world power.

At the same time its monarch was championing Third World nationalistic human rights as a means to make the Western concept of full political and civil rights for the individual viable, Iran's economic, cultural, and educational ties to the West increased exponentially. In March 1975, the U.S. and Iran signed an economic accord in which Iran committed to spending \$15 billion on American goods and services from 1975-1980.⁶⁵ Tens of thousands of Iranian students began attending American universities during the Shah's reign.⁶⁶ Removed from the iron grip of the National Intelligence and Security Organization (SAVAK) – the Shah's secret

⁶⁵ James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 204.

⁶⁶ Gause, 32.

police – students joined Iranian student organizations.⁶⁷ They produced newsletters and publications denouncing the repressive Iranian regime. Despite SAVAK’s monitoring efforts within the United States, these students held public demonstrations in front of the Iranian embassy and wrote prolifically to American politicians and officials, angered at American arm sales and increasing interdependence with the Shah’s Iran. Young people in Iran began to turn back to the traditional authority of Islam in the late 1970s; they found solace and liberation in the oppositional rhetoric of figures like Ayatollah Khomeini.⁶⁸ The Shah’s rhetoric in 1968 expressed that “the effective realization of justice under law, of civic rights and of political democracy... constitutes in our time not only the national duty of every State but also the most precious gift which any Government can offer to the community of man and to international peace.”⁶⁹ His denial of this tacit promise to his people made ashes of the platform of international supremacy upon which the Shah hoped to build his claim to regional dominance.

⁶⁸ Bill, 218.

⁶⁹ *Final Act of the International Conference on Human Rights*, 34.

Chapter Three

Deferred Dreams

Human Rights, International Rhetoric, and a Domestic Explosion

*“If thou hast no sympathy for the trouble of others
Thou art unworthy to be called by the name of man.”¹
Mohammad Reza Shah, quoting Saadi at Harvard University*

On June 13, 1968, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi gave a commencement address to the graduating class of Harvard University. In this speech, the Shah continued in the vein of his addresses in Southeast Asia and at the International Conference in Tehran. He stressed the global need for economic advancement and social equality, specifically blaming many of the evils of the world on poverty, ignorance, hunger, and illiteracy. To address what he called a growing “gulf” between the prosperous and poor nations of the world, the Shah proposed that the United Nations create a Welfare Legion to give individuals an opportunity to “devote a part of their lives to the service of mankind.”² Though this was a powerful speech, its tone is typical of the Shah’s other 1968 addresses; he sought to connect Iran’s economic success with a plan for a global movement to rectify the social, racial, and economic inequalities left behind by European imperialism.

¹ The Persian poet Saadi quoted in Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. “Address to Harvard University, U.S.A., 13 June 1968,” in *Iran, Philosophy Behind the Revolution*, (London: Orient Commerce Establishment, 1971), 229.

² Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. “Address to Harvard University, U.S.A., 13 June 1968,” in *Iran, Philosophy Behind the Revolution*, (London: Orient Commerce Establishment, 1971), 229.

Though this speech was given in America, and was intended, as were most of his foreign speeches, for an international and Western audience, it had reverberations in Iran as well. On June 12, 1977 – almost nine years to the day after the Shah’s Harvard speech – three men wrote an open letter to Mohammad Reza Shah. This letter “was the first strong open criticism in Iran since 1963.”³ The letter was sent directly to the Shah, but 20,000 other copies were privately circulated throughout Iran. The authors of the letter were Dr. Karim Sanjabi, Dr. Shapour Bakhtiar, and Darioush Forouhar. All three men were leaders of the National Front movement, and all three had university educations. Sanjabi and Bakhtiar had advanced degrees from the Sorbonne in France. Forouhar was educated at Tehran University. Each of these men, like the thousands of other university-educated Iranians, had ready access to and knowledge of the Shah’s international addresses. Though the rhetoric the Shah employed in Cambridge, Massachusetts was designed for an audience of Americans and the United Nations, it was heard in Iran. Students like these three men were perfectly capable of disseminating the content of the Shah’s rhetoric within Iran to less-connected members of the society.

In their letter to “His Imperial Majesty,” the three men explained their criticisms in no uncertain terms. They reminded the Shah that no one in the government was capable of listening to their criticisms “since [government officials] possess no authority or responsibility, but merely observe the Royal Will.” The Shah was responsible for the ills of the nation and was the only person to whom the three could appeal because all of Iran’s affairs were “discharged through Imperial writs.”⁴ They complained of the growing economic crisis of the late 1970s in Iran and of the Shah’s exploitation of the nation’s oil revenues. But worst of all, they argued, “human rights and individual freedoms [were] being disregarded. The principles of the Constitution and

³ Karim Sanjabi, Shapour Bakhtiar, and Darioush Forouhar, “Appendix B: Open Letter to Mohammed Reza Shah, June 12, 1977,” in Robert Graham, *Iran: The Illusion of Power* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979), 257.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 255.

the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [had] been violated on an unprecedented scale.”⁵

This state of affairs, they said, was accompanied by “endless promises and claims, exaggerations and propaganda, imposed celebrations and shows” that belied the “general disaffection and despair” of the nation.⁶ The letter warned the Shah of a younger Iranian generation that was “more than willing to embark upon actions labeled by the ruling apparatus as terrorism and treason which lead to prison, torture and death because they consider such acts as heroism and self-sacrifice.”⁷ Not only was the situation in Iran getting worse, the Shah had created a new generation that was willing to sacrifice itself on the altar of political dissent.

The letter did more than decry the Shah’s failures and deprivations as violations of the Iranian Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; it pointed to the hypocrisy evident in the Shah’s own rhetoric. The Shah had been playing with fire in 1968. His speeches elevated socioeconomic rights, racial equality, and national development; however, they also acknowledged the existence and importance of individual political and civil rights. Sanjabi, Bakhtiar, and Forouhar addressed their letter to “a person [the Shah] who some years ago uttered these words at Harvard University: ‘the violation of individual freedoms and disrespect of man’s spiritual needs lead to frustration, and frustrated individuals are liable to follow negative paths.’” The three men reminded the Shah that he had declared that the only way to combat these types of frustrations was to respect individual human rights and to “operate on the principle that people are not servants of the government but the government the servant of the people.”⁸

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 256. The quote in this letter is a paraphrase of the Shah’s June 13, 1968 address at Harvard University, not an exact quote.

The letter concluded that the only way to redress the problems in Iranian society was to end the Shah's authoritarian rule, restore the primacy of the constitution, revive individual rights, permit freedom of speech and of the press, allow broad political participation, and respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

This letter is the result of a decade of uneven development and uneven rhetoric. The Shah utilized speeches like that at Harvard University to advance, as we saw in Chapter Two, his agenda of regional leadership on the world stage. His calls for the Welfare Legion, like his rhetoric at the International Conference on Human Rights in Tehran during the same year, was an attempt to influence the opinion of nations in the Third World, particularly those in the Indian Ocean. The Shah's words though, as evidenced by this letter from foreign educated liberals, did not stop at the ears of foreign officials. Iranians heard these words, and during the 1970s they wondered why only half of the Shah's international message was being fulfilled in Iran. Within a decade the frustration referenced by Sanjabi, Bakhtiar, and Forouhar had exploded into a revolution. The Shah's messages abroad had come home.

* * * * *

The international success of Mohammad Reza Shah's foreign policy during the 1960s and 70s is evident in Iran's economic achievements, diplomatic victories, and rising international prestige and influence. In 1960, Iran was in the midst of political uncertainty and economic crisis. In his efforts to make Iran a world power and hegemon, both in reality and in the minds of international leaders, the Shah achieved domestic stability and instituted sweeping social and economic reforms that made his regime one of the most powerful in the Middle East by the 1970s. He worked tirelessly both in Iran and throughout the Persian Gulf to counter radical ideologies like communism and Pan-Arabism; his successes in Iraq, Oman, and elsewhere helped

a more moderate, right wing climate to emerge in Middle Eastern politics. He successfully secured Iran's means of oil production and transport while acting as a leader in OPEC to both raise the price of oil and prevent an embargo against his allies in the United States. In his role as an oil leader and anti-imperialist, he successfully challenged the expansion of superpower influence in the Persian Gulf and emerged to fill the military vacuum left by the withdrawal of the British in 1971. Finally, he led the charge among the autocratic African, Asian, and Arab nations to challenge the individualistic political and civil concept of human rights with a language that stressed the positive national rights to economic, social, and racial equality in a global context. By any measure, the Shah's early domestic and later foreign policies were a broad success. He set the nation of Iran on a course economically, militarily, and diplomatically to achieve his goal of hegemony in the Indian Ocean.

While his international policies led to a stronger Iran, they also fed internal dissent and contributed to the Shah's growing isolation and megalomania. The reforms of the White Revolution in the 1960s weakened his critics in the more moderate liberal factions of the National Front and Tudeh parties and made religious radicals the next most viable alternative for anyone seeking a voice in the face of repression. In his campaigns to counter radical forces in the Persian Gulf, the Shah utilized the heavy-handed SAVAK in a brutal international and domestic campaign against what he called "terrorists" but whom opponents and international observers termed "political prisoners."⁹ Though skyrocketing oil prices and Iran's defiance of superpower pressure increased revenue and prestige, it also focused international attention on Iran that included pointed interest from human rights NGOs like Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ). The Shah's espousal of a human rights rhetoric that elevated nationalistic economic and social rights as the path to full political and civil rights

⁹ Oriana Fallaci, *Interviews with History and Conversations with Power* (New York: Rizzoli International, 2011).

collided in unexpected ways with the new social and demographic conditions caused by the White Revolution. The collision of the Shah's unrealized human rights rhetoric and demographic pressures contributed to the growing unrest caused by economic downturn in the late 1970s. When the Iranian economy stumbled, Iranians, emboldened by their embrace of oppositional ideologies like Islam, Tudeh, and the National Front, used the Shah's own rhetoric against the regime.

In 1961 the Shah, when asked why he was not a constitutional monarch, replied that "when Iranians learn to behave like Swedes, I will behave like the King of Sweden."¹⁰ Though he recognized political and civil rights at the 1968 conference, the Shah's obvious emphasis was on the primacy of economic and social rights. The rhetoric he used suggested that these types of rights were the basis for an appreciation of full human rights. The expectation of Iranians like the leaders of the National Front was that, once the Shah's positive nationalism produced economic and social rights in the wake of his White Revolution, political and civil rights should naturally follow. In reality, the Shah continued to deny the full realization of the political and civil rights in favor of his revolution and the international agenda of his increasingly authoritarian regime. The Shah's rhetoric in 1968 expressed that "the effective realization of justice under law, of civic rights and of political democracy... constitutes in our time not only the national duty of every State but also the most precious gift which any Government can offer to the community of man and to international peace."¹¹ By the 1970s, however, political and civil rights remained, in the eyes of the Shah, an unnecessary extravagance for his people, who should have been thankful for the boons their beneficent father figure handed them. The division

¹⁰ Tony Smith, *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 255.

¹¹ *Final Act of the International Conference on Human Rights*, Teheran, 22 April to 13 May 1968 (New York: United Nations, 2011), 34.

in the Shah's international rhetoric between socioeconomic and political-civil human rights created expectations within the Iranian domestic population that were ultimately unfulfilled; the frustration this caused contributed to political dissent and undermined Iran's rise to world power status.

* * * * *

The impetus for the Shah's emerging rhetoric of national development coupled with socioeconomic human rights was the rapidly changing composition of the international community in the second half of the 20th century. By 1968, the Shah's use of this rhetoric was in full force. At the International Conference of Human Rights, held on the twentieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Shah spoke to a fundamentally altered world. In the twenty years since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, African and Asian participation in the United Nations increased exponentially. At a 1955 Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, twenty-four nations – only six of which were African – participated and gave birth to the non-aligned movement and the idea of the Third World. By 1968 the Afro-Asian bloc had reached seventy. This new composition of a United Nations now dominated by the formerly colonized states of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East changed the emphasis of human rights rhetoric in the General Assembly and at the Tehran Conference. This new UN was more concerned with national rights – with making their young countries the economic and political equals of their former masters – than with the individualistic rights championed in the Universal Declaration. These nations focused on racial inequality, apartheid, and the plight of the Palestinians as vestiges of a colonial past and examples of why their

nationalistic version of human rights was the only path to the full realization of complete human rights.¹²

This shift in priorities was not, however, simply due to a geographic shift in power. A political shift that was particularly evident in the Third World also forced a change in priorities. At the 1968 conference in Tehran, “more than two-thirds of the eighty three countries... were undemocratic.”¹³ The authoritarian leaders that dominated the conference were, like the Shah, far more interested in national improvement and modernization than with free speech and political expression. Indeed, such rights could prove a serious impediment to the realization of their nationalistic goals. To these Afro-Asian autocrats bent on ruling modern and powerful states, the policies and rhetoric of the world’s foremost modernizing monarch – Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi – were exceptionally appealing.

The language that emerged from the conference evidenced the predominance of the autocratic Afro-Asian bloc’s agenda. Of the twenty-nine resolutions adopted in the Final Act of the Conference, seven specifically referenced racial discrimination. In addition to such racial concerns, the majority of the adopted resolutions were echoes of the calls for national self-determination, economic development, and social reform that the Shah made during his tour of Southeast Asia and in his opening address at the Conference. These resolutions essentially called for the global exportation of the Shah’s White Revolution.

Resolution VIII of the Tehran Conference acknowledged the “importance of the universal realization of the rights of peoples to self-determination” and called for granting independence to

¹² Roland Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 13, 95.

¹³ Burke, 97.

colonial countries.¹⁴ Along with a strong anti-colonial message, other resolutions connected economic development with human rights and the realization of economic, social, and cultural rights. Resolution XVII declared that “the enjoyment of economic and social rights is inherently linked with any meaningful enjoyment of civil and political rights,” and recognized “a profound interconnexion between the realization of human rights and economic development.”¹⁵ The resolution goes on to criticize the poverty of the “vast majority” of humanity and the widening gap between the developed and the developing nations. It then called upon the developed nations to provide aid and resources to developing nations and for developing nations to “continue to make every effort to raise the standard of living of their people,” using all available resources and to reduce economic disparity in their own nations.¹⁶

Resolution XXI further connected civil and political rights with the realization of economic, social, and cultural rights and recognized the two types of rights as “closely interconnected and interdependent” – but not indivisible.¹⁷ In addition to these rights to economic development and equality, the Final Act included specific programs of development and reform already pioneered in Iran’s White Revolution. The Final Act included resolutions eliminating illiteracy, the promotion of women’s rights, youth education, and children’s rights. The conference produced a document that emphasized national socio-economic rights, but it was conspicuous for what it lacked. The only resolutions specifically relating to the improvement of political and civil rights not connected to racial discrimination were two articles which pertained to legal aid and the rights of detained persons. The latter was co-authored by Iran.

¹⁴ *Final Act of the International Conference on Human Rights*, Teheran, 22 April to 13 May 1968 (New York: United Nations), 9.

¹⁵ *Final Act of the International Conference on Human Rights*, 14.

¹⁶ *Final Act of the International Conference on Human Rights*, 14.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

By the early 1970s, Iran had become a model for the Third World. A 1971 UNESCO article proclaimed Iran's return to international power status and lauded its positive influence in world affairs. The article argued that in the United Nations, Iran "set the pace for other developing countries" and acted as a "centre where ideas and techniques may be pooled, to meet the problems of the less technologically advanced Orient with the experience and skills of the more technologically advanced Occident, Iran acting as the catalyst."¹⁸ When several regional heads of state addressed the conference in Tehran, they were quick to acknowledge the leadership and fellowship they saw in Iran and Mohammad Reza Shah. The President of Pakistan, Ayub Khan, noted that it was "particularly gratifying" that the "fraternal" nation of Iran was hosting the conference.¹⁹ The Prime Minister of Afghanistan remarked on the significance of a conference in the "brotherly country of Iran."²⁰ A few nations at least seem to have begun to accept the message of unity the Shah spoke of in his addresses throughout the Indian Ocean.

According to Roland Burke, the Shah's willingness to "bear the [financial] costs" of the human rights conference played a determining role in the eventual selection of Tehran over European nations or more liberal, but poorer, African and Asian states.²¹ The Shah's readiness to pay for the conference perhaps illustrates the importance he placed on the event as a part of his foreign policy. Hosting a UN human rights conference in Iran granted the Shah the attention of the newly independent and autocratic Afro-Asian bloc of the Third World nations he hoped to lead. He could connect Iran and himself with a vision for human rights that appealed to these leaders. Hosting the Conference in Iran rather than in Vienna or Nice further emphasized the shifting focus of the geographical power that the Shah wanted to establish. The Third World was

¹⁸ Burke, 181.

¹⁹ *Final Act of the International Conference on Human Rights*, 41.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

²¹ Burke, 180.

not limited to a choice between America and the Soviet Union; the Shah's example showed that one of their own could rise to take a lead not only in economic and military ventures but in the enunciation of moral and ethical principles as well. The attendees at Tehran were lavished with the best accommodations, a marked difference with Bandung in 1955, when the availability of sufficient toilets was a concern. The representatives at Tehran in 1968 were reminded of Iran's new wealth and power, of its ancient history, and of the Shah's success in transforming his nation, as they wished to change theirs.²² Though by the early 1970s the White Revolution evidenced great success in reforming and changing the Iranian economy and society, these changes were not without significant and unexpected consequences for the stability of the Peacock Throne.

Under the Shah's aggressive social reforms and public health initiatives, Iran experienced rapid demographic shifts. At an annual growth rate of 2.9 percent, the Iranian population grew from 25,323,064 in 1966 to 29,912,000 in early 1972.²³ This number increased to over 32 million by 1975. Contributing to this rapid population growth was a marked increase in life expectancy from 45 years in 1950 to 53 in 1976.²⁴ In addition to healthcare advances, the educational and literacy initiatives were among the most successful programs in the White Revolution. At 30 percent, the literate population of Iran had doubled between 1956 and 1972.²⁵

The dramatic rise in Iran's oil revenues and industrial investment interacted with the population boom of the 60s and 70s in ways the paternalistic shah had not expected.

Industrialization and population pressures forced rural workers to migrate to Iran's urban centers

²² Ibid.

²³ 1972 Update of: 1970 *Iran Handbook*, Central Intelligence Agency (April 1972), I-1.

²⁴ 1972 Update of: 1970 *Iran Handbook*, Central Intelligence Agency (April 1972), I-1. and House Committee on International Relations, *Human Rights in Iran: Hearing before the Subcommittee on International Organizations*, 94th Cong., 2nd sess., August 3 and September 8, 1976, 5.

²⁵ 1972 Update of: 1970 *Iran Handbook*, Central Intelligence Agency (April 1972), I-3.

in search of employment opportunities. Tehran especially was confronted with rising unemployment and underemployment. Though the government insisted that the unemployment rate was only 4 percent, 11-12 percent was a more realistic estimate, especially in urban areas. Nationwide, the CIA estimated that about one fifth of the entire labor force of Iran was either under- or unemployed in 1972. The sustained increase in economic investment in industrial capital-intensive projects created few new jobs and did little to alleviate rising unemployment.²⁶ The migrating rural workers arrived in cities and were unable to find consistent and meaningful work; meanwhile, they watched as Iran's economy continued to flourish with rising oil revenues, and they wondered why their poverty persisted and the aspirations created by the White Revolution remained unfulfilled.²⁷

When the demographic and social changes created by the White Revolution came to fruition, the Shah had not only created a prosperous middle class and thriving capital economy but created a new urban population that would play a key role in the domestic failures of his regime. Tehran was unable to accommodate the influx of former peasants, who were now more populous and more educated thanks to the Shah's battle against illiteracy and infant mortality, to urban areas. This population shift created a large and increasingly frustrated, poor, urban working class. While the years continued to pass without these workers receiving the socio-economic benefits the Shah had promised and which they saw the educated middle class enjoying, they increasingly turned away from his promises and began to seek solace in religion,

²⁶ Weekly Summary: *Iran: Clouds on the Horizon*, Directorate of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency (3 November, 1972), 18.

²⁷ Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 435-445.

in their traditional rural values and institutions, and in oppositional ideologies like the Tudeh and National Front movements.²⁸

In one particular demographic shift, the White Revolution was far too successful for the Shah's own good. In 1963 at the inception of the revolution, there were a million students in Iran's schools. A decade later that number had more than tripled.²⁹ The increasingly educated and frustrated population of Tehran included university-educated students. The Shah had intensified his father's policy of sending Iranian students to Western universities in order to produce the population to support a technocratic class.³⁰ Abbas Milani points to one Iranian student, Parviz Nikkhah, who was sent to Europe for education and returned to Iran "filled with the promethean fire of a revolutionary." Before long, he was imprisoned for complicity in a 1965 assassination plot against the Shah.³¹

The two assassination attempts on the Shah's life are good examples of his increasing paranoia toward the ideological left and illustrate how he inadvertently made the religious community one of the only viable ideological alternatives. Both attempts originated from religious forces, but his regime and SAVAK continued to insist that the assassins were the product of a leftist agenda. This is illuminating in that it illustrates the regime's belief that the largest threat to the Shah's rule came from the left and moderate democratic forces that were influenced and controlled by foreign powers.³² The Shah believed these threats emanated from the Soviet Union, which opposed his regional strength and defiance, and from those ideologues in the West that rejected his vision of Third World equality and nationalistic rights. Meanwhile,

²⁸ For demographic and social shifts in Iran and their consequences, see Abrahamian, 426-449; for oppositional movements, see: Abrahamian, 450-495.

²⁹ Fallaci, 161.

³⁰ Abbas Milani, *The Shah* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 25.

³¹ Abbas Milani, *Eminent Persians: The Men and Women Who Made Modern Iran, 1941-1979* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 25.

³² Milani, *Eminent Persians*, 25-26.

the clergy, the internal threat distinctly not influenced by foreign agendas, were given a free hand that was denied Iranian liberals.

In 1973 yet another attempt was made on the Shah's life. This time, twelve "conspirators" were arrested. Former CIA director and then-Ambassador to Iran, Richard Helms claimed that the assassins were "no wild-eyed radical leftists; some are very much solid members of the establishment... The upper class/intellectual links of the... twelve people arrested" speaks to the fundamental difference between what was considered a conspiracy in Iran and in the West. According to a journalist from Tehran's *Kayhan* newspaper, it was "a crime in Iran to even think about killing the Shah... the evidence required to support a conviction of conspiracy is far less" than in the West.³³

In his testimony before congress on September 8, 1976, William Butcher of the International Commission of Jurists reported on the human rights situation in Iran based on his observations in the country the year before. Though he gave a glowing report of the advancement of socioeconomic rights and the enfranchisement of women, he asserted that "the Iranian Government has not implemented the basic and fundamental...civil and political rights of its citizens."³⁴ The Iranian constitution of 1906, which was still in effect in 1976, provided equal rights under the law to all Iranian citizens. These rights "are subject to the proviso 'except in conformity with the law.' This is a clause which has come to mean 'except when the Shah determines otherwise.'"³⁵ The 1906 constitution provided for an independent judiciary, a tripartite system, and for two political parties. In reality, SAVAK had control over the entire

³³ Richard Helms, American Ambassador to Iran, to Jack C. Miklos, Department of State (NEA/IRN), October 17, 1973; Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, 5644 Box 9, POL 23-9; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

³⁴ House Committee on International Relations, *Human Rights in Iran: Hearing before the Subcommittee on International Organizations*, 94th Cong., 2nd sess., August 3 and September 8, 1976, 6.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

judicial process in the case of crimes against the state, the Shah kept tight control over the legislature, and in 1975, he eradicated the two party system. In Butcher's view, the Shah gave the Iranian people a stark choice: "A person who does not enter the new political party...will only have two choices. He is either an individual who belongs to an illegal organization...in other words is a traitor...or if he desires, he can leave the country tomorrow...he is not an Iranian and he has no nation."³⁶ This increasing political repression collided with continued economic prosperity to create a situation where, were the economic prosperity to falter, the politically silenced would turn in force against the government.

Despite his development of modern economic and social institutions and governmental efforts to counter corruption, the Shah had never created political institutions that allowed Iranians a hand in the decision-making process of Iran. The Shah felt the Iranian nation was not ready for this step; "the Shah firmly believed, even in the 1970s, that social and economic development must be achieved before he [could] permit the development of political parties in the Western sense."³⁷ The political parties the Shah did allow were little more than mouthpieces for the government. The most powerful political party in Iran during the 1970s, the New Iran Party, lacked genuine public support because of its reputation as a puppet of the government. Lacking other viable political parties and facing an electoral system that was little more than a farce, the majority of Iranians exhibited a sense of apathy and cynicism. Most Iranians felt participation in elections was little more than a pointless gesture. The CIA noted in 1971 that the Iranian government used elections as a tool for "improving [its] democratic image" and for "giving the people a feeling of participation in the governing process rather than... allowing the

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ 1972 Update of: 1970 *Iran Handbook*, Central Intelligence Agency (April 1972), III-3.

free expression of opinion.”³⁸ It was this feeling of apathy engendered by the Shah’s policies that was most significant in his loss of public support. Though specific abuses of political prisoners, SAVAK’s brutality, and incidents of military and police indiscretion harmed the regime’s credibility, it was people’s feeling of helplessness and their lack of agency in the political process and national discourse that caused revolution. The division in Iran between social and economic rights and political and civil rights reproduced individual frustrations on a national scale.

The unfulfilled promises of the Shah’s international human rights rhetoric and the frustrated ambitions of growing segments of Tehran’s urban population combined with an increasingly dire economic crisis to foment political dissent in 1977-78. The years from 1975 to 1977 witnessed the emergence and growth of significant economic problems for Iran. Despite his efforts at top-down state economic intervention, the Shah could not counteract Iran’s rising inflation. As a result, industrial and capital investment severely decreased. The regime’s efforts to stem the bleeding only created more enemies of the Shah in the Bazaar. The nation’s healthy “surplus of \$2 billion in 1974 was turned into a whopping deficit of \$7.3 billion” by 1977.³⁹ The Shah’s struggling attempts to maintain his revolution produced pressures on almost all segments of the population; “new taxes on the salaried class, forced price reductions for the entrepreneurial class, and the traditional hardships of the urban poor in transitional economies interacted with the more liberal policies adopted by the Shah to create a growing movement of discontent.”⁴⁰ Though he misidentified its source, the Shah understood there was a problem and began considering how to counteract it.

³⁸ Ibid, III-3-4.

³⁹ Milani, *Eminent Persians*, 28.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 28-29.

During the late 1970s the Shah considered real political reform. He went so far as to task Mehdi Samii, a respected Iranian politician, with creating a new reformist party. The plan was abandoned in its infancy, as an influx of oil money convinced the Shah he could find an economic, rather than a political solution to Iran's growing problems of unrest and dissent. He went further, though, and rather than creating a new reform party, disbanded all political parties and reinstated a one-party system.⁴¹ This frustration of true reform seems at first in keeping with the Shah's international rhetoric that social and economic progress were the most important human right. In reality, the Shah broke the tacit promises he began making in the 1960s. He had repeatedly and publicly proclaimed that social equality and economic security were the rights upon which political, civil, and legal justice was founded. Perhaps he did not portray the two types of rights as indivisible, but he did make the implicit promise that once Iran, and nations like Iran, had achieved international parity their citizens would then be able to enjoy a full realization of human rights. Iran had experienced, until the inflation of the late 1970s, unprecedented improvements in the socio-economic conditions of its citizens. Yet, the regime's political repression and the absolute power of the Shah had only increased. It was not until 1977 that the Shah began making hesitant concessions, and by that time, compromise only encouraged further and more radical demands.

The Shah continued to misunderstand sources of dissent in the younger generations. When his Minister of Court and trusted friend Asadollah Alam tactfully attempted to suggest that increased political participation – if only at the local level – might help mitigate unrest, the Shah countered instead that it was wage disparities between the younger generation and the established professionals that was the sole cause of discontent.⁴² When Alam pressed the point

⁴¹ Ibid, 27.

⁴² Michael Hunt, *Crises in U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 396.

in April 1972 and asked what harm could come from allowing a free hand in local elections, the Shah exploded, “What are you talking about? Of course it would be harmful...they’d begin moaning about inflation or some such rot.”⁴³

The Shah not only fell back on his socio-economic arguments for the unrest, he also continued his refrain that it was the agents of foreign powers who were to blame. In the context of widespread student uprisings across Iran, the Shah claimed, “Moscow is behind it all.” Alam meanwhile nursed the belief that it was the Iranian government that was behaving “like the conqueror of a vanquished land” in Iran. The Shah and the university authorities flatly refused any sort of dialogue with the student protesters.⁴⁴ The reality that organic internal religious dissent existed in Iran seemed to continue to elude the Shah well into 1977. He claimed the religious opposition groups were in reality “Islamic Marxists, mere Soviet Puppets.”⁴⁵ He seems to have found it inconceivable that his people would revolt of their own will; their father, the Shah of Iran, gave them all that they could possibly want. If there was dissent, it must have been the product of foreign meddling.

During his modernization campaign, the Shah had formed a tacit contract with his people – that full human rights would follow the expansion of economic and social nationalistic rights. Because of the Shah’s desire to make Iran a world power and because of balance of power politics, Iran embarked in the early 1970s on a path to become the guarantor of Persian Gulf security and stability. This evolution of purpose from domestic to regional stability and security meant a postponement of the rights the Shah tacitly promised in 1968. Full human rights took a back seat, first to national economic development, then to the expansion of Iran’s regional initiatives.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 397.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 399.

Reports of political rights and rule of law in Iran by the US State Department and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) paint a grim picture of political, civil, and religious rights in Iran during the late 1970s. Determining the exact and true extent of human rights violations in Iran during the period of its rise to regional power status is a tricky business for several reasons. First, most NGOs undertaking studies of the human rights situation in Iran had to rely on expatriate and academic sources rather than detailed studies and first hand accounts of Iranian facilities. Second, NGOs such as Amnesty International and the Association of Democratic Lawyers presented cases of egregious violations that were dismissed by the regime as spurious and foreign attempts to weaken the international image and internal stability of Iran. As a result, access to Iranian facilities and approval of visas for groups conducting studies within Iran was often denied. In the United States, the State Department in 1975 was cognizant “of the many accusations of the use of torture or brutality by Iranian authorities”; however, they had not “found any significant evidence to corroborate those accusations or to define the scope of such practices.” The department also believed that due process was mostly followed within Iran, but that there were significant violations, “particularly if there is suspicion of terrorism, subversion or plotting the assassination of the head of state or other official.”⁴⁶ On an interview with *Meet the Press* the Shah claimed that there were only about 3,000 political prisoners in Iran. He went on to refute the notion that these were in fact political prisoners; rather, they were terrorists guilty of practicing violence.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Reply by Mr. McCloskey to Hon. Fraser, August 11, 1975

⁴⁷ Reply by Mr. McCloskey to Hon. Fraser dated August 11, 1975. *and* Letter from Donald M. Fraser, Chairman of the Subcommittee on International Organizations to Robert McCloskey, Assistant Sec. for Congressional Relations, Dept of State to June 26, 1975; Box 3 Entry A1 5510; Human Rights – Indonesia to Human Rights – South Africa; Human Rights Subject Files, 1975; Human Rights in Iran, 1975; General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59; National Archives Building, College Park, MD. Letter claims rumors alleged as many as 45,000 political prisoners were held in Iran.

In 1975 William Butler and George Levasseur of the ICJ were granted visas to tour Iranian facilities and conduct a study regarding the allegations “of a consistent pattern of gross violations of human rights.” In September of 1975 as the two men began their visit to Iran, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger wrote to the American embassy in Tehran. He expressed the department’s view that, though their studies were primarily in non-Communist nations, the ICJ’s reports were generally “non-ideological and objective.”⁴⁸ As a result, their reports enjoyed a greater level of credibility in the United States than those of other NGOs. The Secretary’s telegram advocated cooperation with the ICJ team and suggested the embassy should point out to the government of Iran that cooperation would provide a chance to educate the ICJ on real advances in human rights made under the Shah’s revolution, specifically in the areas of land reform, improvements in the lives of peasants and workers, women’s rights, and the development of the judicial system. The report produced by the ICJ was largely a consideration of the Iranian judicial system and was published in 1976. By 1977 the Shah had begun to experience unrest in his domestic population and so responded through limited juridical reforms to the recommendations of Butler’s report. The ICJ report came alongside similar reports from Amnesty and the International Red Cross; however, it was the ICJ’s report which the Shah took most seriously.⁴⁹

Even with reports like that from the ICJ, it is difficult to know exact numbers and extent of political terror utilized by the regime. The Iranian legal system under the Shah’s regime was based on the Napoleonic Code and retained elements of its Islamic and Persian past. For instance, habeas corpus was not recognized and SAVAK could detain suspects for extended

⁴⁸ Telegram Sep. 1975 from SECSTATE to AMEMBASSY TEHRAN; Box 3 Entry A1 5510; Human Rights – Indonesia to Human Rights – South Africa; Human Rights Subject Files, 1975; Human Rights in Iran, 1975; General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59; National Archives Building, College Park, MD.

⁴⁹ James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 223.

periods during its investigations. Though allegations of torture in practice were prevalent, the Iranian Penal Code contained strong penalties for ordering or practicing torture.⁵⁰ SAVAK was “bound in law by Article 131 of the Penal Code, which forbids any government employee to apply or order the infliction of bodily harm to any accused person for the purpose of procuring a confession.”⁵¹ A conviction on these grounds could cost the perpetrator three to six years in prison and if the victim died, the perpetrator would be tried for murder. Despite these provisions for the protection of state prisoners, the State Department noted in 1975 that no SAVAK agent had yet been indicted on charges, and Article 131 did not specifically apply to SAVAK.⁵²

It is also important, in measuring the level of violations in Iran, to note that the Iranian Constitution did not specifically guarantee freedom of opinion and expression in the press. Though publications were nominally free and censorship was mostly forbidden, journalists still had to follow the Press Law, which “establishes criteria for licensing publishers of periodicals and prohibits publication of articles against religion or the Iranian monarchy, of military secrets and incitement to resist Government troops, and of pornography.” The penalty for the “use of offensive terms in public in speaking of the Chief of State” was two to six months’ imprisonment. However, foreign press, even that critical of the Shah, was widely available in Iran.⁵³

The judicial and political systems of Iran were frequent targets of foreign criticism. In 1975 the Shah decided to dispose of the two party system – popularly known as the “yes” and “of course” parties – with a single National Resurgence movement party in order to “develop

⁵⁰ Reply by Mr. McCloskey to Hon. Fraser dated August 11, 1975.

⁵¹ Record Group 59 National Archives “Iran: Trial Procedures for Political Prisoners” sent to Charles Runyon from John H. McNeill June 10, 1975. A State – A.I.D. – USIA routing slip; Box 3 Entry A1 5510; Human Rights – Indonesia to Human Rights – South Africa; Human Rights Subject Files, 1975; Human Rights in Iran, 1975; General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59; National Archives Building, College Park, MD.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Reply by Mr. McCloskey to Hon. Fraser dated August 11, 1975.

mass interest in the political process” and encourage debate between the factions within the party.⁵⁴ All charges of political crime were tried before military tribunals; both defense and prosecution representation were military counsel. SAVAK had complete control over investigation and in building a case from arrest to trial; any hope of clemency rested ultimately in the hands of the Shah.⁵⁵ Iran’s judicial process of the mid-1970s is in sharp contrast with the resolution, adopted at the Tehran conference with the endorsement of Iran, on the rights of detained persons, which recommends that member states, in accordance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, “review their laws and practices relating to the detention of persons and take all possible steps to insure that persons are not detained in prison for prolonged periods without charge and that the detention of persons awaiting trial is not unduly prolonged.”⁵⁶ A June 1975 State Department paper on trial procedures in Iran made the pointed statement that, “the repudiation by its domestic practice of the principles of human rights publicly espoused by Iran is unfortunately manifest.”⁵⁷

Despite its knowledge of Iran’s juridical failings, the United States continued its economic and military support of the regime. In a June 1975 letter to the State Department, Representative Donald Fraser inquired as to the state of human rights in Iran in light of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1974, which contains an amendment on security assistance and human rights (Section 502B). That amendment calls for a substantial reduction or termination of military assistance – including sales – to governments committing “a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights.” The Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations responded that, although the Department carefully considered the

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ “Iran: Trial Procedures for Political Prisoners.”

⁵⁶ *Final Act of the International Conference on Human Rights* and “Iran: Trial Procedures for Political Prisoners.”

⁵⁷ “Iran: Trial Procedures for Political Prisoners.”

allegations against Iran, its conclusion was that, while the Government of Iran “investigates ‘political crimes’ and that there may have been incidents of harsh treatment of individuals and lapses of due process, there is insufficient reliable evidence to show that a consistent pattern of gross violations of human rights exist in Iran,” and thus Section 502B did not apply.

* * * * *

The Shah’s White Revolution and the reforms it imposed drew heated rhetorical opposition as well. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini emerged as a voice of rhetorical opposition to the Shah in June 1963 in the holy city of Qum. He offered a religious challenge to the rhetoric of the Revolution of the Shah and the People. In his 1963 sermon, the Ayatollah established what would be the two guiding principles of his opposition to the regime: a hatred of colonial powers and a criticism of the Pahlavi model of monarchy. He continuously criticized the influences of foreign powers on the Shah’s government and utilized a rhetoric of human rights that decried the absolutist king. He recalled that though “the Soviet Union, Britain, and America invaded Iran and occupied your country [in World War II]...God knows everyone was happy because the Pahlavi had gone!”⁵⁸ He warned the Shah that if he continued on his current path, which was against the teachings of Islam and hostile to the clergy, he would turn out like his father. Khomeini spoke with little obfuscation: “you miserable wretch...isn’t it time for you to think and reflect a little, to ponder about where all this is leading you, to learn a lesson from the experience of your father?”⁵⁹ Though the Shah’s aggressive reform had quieted opposition from the liberal left, the hard-line clergy was emerging at this early point as a vigorous source of oppositional rhetoric.

⁵⁸ Hunt, 392.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

In October 1964 Khomeini again spoke in the city of Qum. In his attack, he decried the interference of foreign powers in Iran's domestic politics and the Shah's complicity in their exploitation of the Iranian people. He took special offense at a new law that essentially gave American military advisers, their staffs, and families legal immunity from prosecution in Iran. Khomeini claimed the Shah only supported the law to procure a \$200 million loan from the US. The law must have brought bitter memories of the historical concessions of the Qajar monarchs to the Russian and British empires. Ayatollah Khomeini claimed that this in fact made America the "masters" of the Iranian people and "reduced the Iranian people to a level lower than that of an American dog." He concluded that Iran had sold itself, and its independence, reducing it to "the level of a colony." Khomeini purposefully portrayed the Shah as having embarrassed Iran on the world stage – a clear counter argument to the Shah's own goals of making Iran a respected world power.⁶⁰ The Shah exiled Khomeini not long after the Ayatollah gave this sermon.

The Ayatollah's exile did not end his opposition to the Shah and the regime's policies. Indeed, his exile enhanced his rhetoric. In a lecture given in 1970, at the same time that the Shah was connecting his rule to that of Cyrus the Great and attempting to replace Iran's Islamic identity with a Persian identity, Khomeini began calling for an Islamic government in Iran and connecting Islam with human rights. Utilizing the memory of Persian history, he claimed that "at a time when the West was a realm of darkness and obscurity...and the two vast empires of Iran and Byzantium were under the rule of Tyranny, class privilege, and discrimination, and the powerful dominated all without any trace of law or popular government, God...[through Muhammad] sent laws to astound us with their magnitude."⁶¹ The Ayatollah, like the Shah, recalled an ancient past that existed far before Western dominance; however, this was a dark past

⁶⁰ Hunt, 393.

⁶¹ Ibid., 394.

that was haunted by oppression until the advent of Islam. He warned that it was the “imposition of foreign laws” on Iran’s Islamic society that caused the nation’s problems. The Shah was the symbol of these foreign laws and was apparently trying to bring Iran back to that pre-Islam period of tyranny. Khomeini even evidenced the violations of Iran’s legal system, in which a person brought up on charges “may have to spend a whole lifetime trying to prove his case.”⁶² In order to redress the violations committed by the tyrannical Shah, the Ayatollah offered the solution of Islamic law and institutions.

The allegations of political repression and legal abuse drew harsh criticism from foreign powers as well. Like Khomeini, the Shah disparaged international manipulation in Iran, though for far different reasons. When confronted with allegations of political oppression in Iran, the Shah remarked that “in many ways Iran is more democratic than...countries in Europe.”⁶³ He pointed out peasant ownership of land, worker participation in management, and the local organization and nature of elections. The fact that he only allowed two political parties was not an issue of concern, because parties unwilling to accept the twelve points of the White Revolution had no place in Iran. He linked the outlawing of the Communist Tudeh party with foreign intervention by noting, “they only want to destroy, destroy, destroy and they swear their allegiance to others instead of to their country and king. They’re traitors and I’d be crazy to let them exist.”⁶⁴ Such traitors to their nation did not deserve a fair trial because they were attempting to subvert the White Revolution and drag Iran backward, away from modernity, toward a return to domination by foreign powers.

The Shah found it inconceivable that his citizenry would be unhappy with him or his government. In an interview he scoffed at the notion, saying, “what would you criticize or attack

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Fallaci, 159.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

me for? For my foreign policy? For allowing workers to share in profits...For fighting illiteracy and disease? For having brought progress to a country where there was little or none?”⁶⁵ The Shah’s reactions to foreign criticisms of his regime on the grounds of repression were often quite fierce. He consistently grew agitated in his denials that there was any problem in his nation. When speaking to Alam in October, 1973, he referred to a BBC broadcast and expressed his disgust at Western liberal bias: “The bastards have the audacity to state that the chances of a revolution in Iran have receded, since our army will be able to crush any rising...What the hell do they mean ‘the chances of a revolution’? Our farmers and workers are far too happy ever to contemplate becoming revolutionaries.”⁶⁶ The Shah was often unable to comprehend political unrest in his nation and accept that it was a result of his people’s own initiatives and not the machinations of some foreign government.

Beginning in 1976, the Shah and his government launched a counterattack against international critics of his regime’s human rights record. The Shah, his wife, the Empress Farah Diba, and his twin sister, Princess Ashraf, all responded personally to the accusations of foreign human rights critics in a variety of media.⁶⁷ The government’s standard line of defense, echoing the Shah’s own words, was that the worldwide campaign against Iran was motivated by political opponents of the Shah’s oil policies.⁶⁸ The government coupled its vigorous counterattack with a public relations campaign aimed at proving Iran’s good record on human rights. In 1976 and in February 1977, the government opened its prisons to a British television team and to a Belgian journalist, respectively. The British embassy in Tehran reported that the television crew found prison conditions reasonable and had even found a prisoner that Amnesty International had

⁶⁵ Ibid., 160-161.

⁶⁶ Hunt, 397.

⁶⁷ National Intelligence Daily Cable: *Iran: Human Rights Reform*, Central Intelligence Agency (25 June, 1977), 3.

⁶⁸ National Intelligence Daily Cable: *Iran: Human Rights*, Central Intelligence Agency (7 March, 1977), 10.

alleged had been “tortured and crippled.” The crew observed the prisoner alive and walking normally. The crew’s report was never published in the UK. Likewise, the Belgian journalist, who was allowed to interview eight prisoners that Amnesty claimed had been mistreated, reported the prison’s conditions and the health of the prisoners as “reasonably good.”⁶⁹ Reports of this nature, however, did little to dampen international critics, and as international criticism and domestic unrest intensified, the regime stepped up its campaign. In April 1977, in the spirit of transparency, the government tried eleven accused terrorists in a public trial open to foreign observers. This was in direct contradiction of the standard practices in the trial of individuals accused of crimes against the state, which were normally held before a military tribunal in closed session.⁷⁰

One of the most pervasive human rights criticisms against Iran was the regime’s policy of detaining political prisoners. Amnesty International alleged that Iran’s prisons were so full of these prisoners that the government had to send many to army camps. The Shah rejected this particular criticism primarily because he had a particular definition of political prisoner. For instance, communists who were arrested were not political prisoners but common criminals in his mind because being a communist was forbidden by Iranian Law. Though he claimed to have pardoned those who tried to kill him, he showed “no mercy... for traitors to the country...they’re people to be eliminated.”⁷¹ Moreover, when such people were executed, it was not because they were communists, it was because they were terrorists. Regarding the death penalty, the Shah invoked cultural relativism: “here it’s right and necessary to shoot certain people. Pietism is absurd here.”⁷² Just as he argued that absolute monarchy was the only way Iran could be

⁶⁹ Ibid., 10.

⁷⁰ National Intelligence Daily Cable: *Iran: Human Rights Issue*, Central Intelligence Agency (15 April, 1977), 5.

⁷¹ Fallaci, 161.

⁷² Ibid.

governed, the Shah believed his people did not yet warrant the access to a full realization of human rights and would need to be led to that point by his resolute hand.

In his campaign to silence international critics, the Shah had to walk a fine line between real reform and the appearance that he was capitulating to foreign powers – a tendency he categorically rejected in his own nationalistic self-determination rhetoric. In June 1977, months before revolution, the government submitted a bill calling for reform of the penal codes governing the detention and trial of terrorists. The bill included provisions that required the release of detainees within twenty-four hours, the appointment of a qualified civilian defense lawyer, and an open trial.⁷³

Nearing the end of his reign on November 23, 1978, the Shah expressed his frustration with international criticism of Iran's human rights record to Iranian academic Ehsan Naraghi. He accused those critical nations of manipulating a rhetoric of human rights "as a shield to hide their real objectives – of which exploitative contracts are only one example." These nations in actuality wanted to "establish their hegemony throughout the world." The Shah believed that the tactic of human rights criticism was merely a way to "bring those countries into line which have not submitted to their policies and which have tried to maintain their independence."⁷⁴ The Shah was convinced his international successes had drawn the ire of jealous and vengeful governments eager to redress the losses his victories had forced upon him.

The advocacy of human rights by America's new President-Elect, Jimmy Carter, further emboldened critics of the Shah in Iran. Small democratic protests evolved into larger and more radical demonstrations.⁷⁵ In the same way that the shattered promises of the Shah's human rights rhetoric sparked dissent, the frustration caused by the hypocrisy of President Carter, as a human

⁷³ National Intelligence Daily Cable: *Iran: Human Rights Reform*, Central Intelligence Agency (25 June, 1977), 3-4.

⁷⁴ Burke, 180.

⁷⁵ Milani, *Eminent Persians*, 28.

rights advocate, further fed the flames of revolution. Despite the president's focus on international human rights norms, in a 1977 dinner toast in Tehran Carter praised the Shah, the love his people felt for him, and that "the cause of human rights is one that...is shared deeply by our people and by the leaders of our two nations."⁷⁶ The strategic necessity of Iran in America's foreign policy forced even Jimmy Carter to overlook the Shah's humanitarian failings in a desperate attempt to keep the man in power.

Ayatollah Khomeini, speaking from exile in Najaf, Iraq, in February 1978, was quick to seize on international hypocrisy regarding the Shah: "All the miseries that we have suffered, still suffer, and are about to suffer soon are caused by the heads of those countries that have signed the Declaration of Human Rights, but that at all times have denied man his freedom."⁷⁷ The Ayatollah decried the miseries visited upon Iran by the "imperialists" first by Britain and then by the Soviet Union and the United States. He specifically referenced President Carter as "the head of a government that has signed the declaration of human rights [who] says, 'we have military bases in Iran; we can't talk about human rights there.'"⁷⁸

In October of 1978, President Carter and Ayatollah Khomeini were in direct dialogue concerning the Shah's belated efforts at reform. The president argued in a press conference that the Shah "had moved aggressively to establish democratic principles in Iran and to have a progressive attitude toward social questions."⁷⁹ Carter claimed that this reform was the source of opposition to the Shah. The following day, from his new place of exile in Paris, Ayatollah Khomeini declared his scorn for "the way Carter thinks." He dismissed what Carter called "efforts to establish democracy and find progressive solutions to social problems" as "crimes,

⁷⁶ Hunt, 400.

⁷⁷ Hunt, 401.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 402.

savagery, and repression.” He scoffed at the notion that “all the strikes and protest movements taking place all over Iran were an attempt to evade freedom!”⁸⁰

The Shah’s fundamental misunderstanding of the grievances of his people is evident in his regime’s attempts at judicial reform. Simply reforming the manner in which terrorists were tried would not cure the dissent that was spreading across all segments of the Iranian body politic. Political prisoners accounted for a very small percent of the population, after all. In reality, it was the inability of people to control their own destiny that fomented widespread frustration and dissent. The Shah, in the early 1960s, had set out on a commendable path aimed at bettering the lives of his citizens and forging an Iran that could act independently on the world stage. To this end, he chose to focus his energies on a rhetoric of national development and socioeconomic reforms. This approach won him broad international appeal and a temporary respite from political dissenters in Iran. However, his tacit promises of political and civil justice for Iranians went unfulfilled for too long. People in Iran had a higher standard of living and enjoyed social reforms perhaps unrivaled in the so-called Third World, but the regime’s withholding of any sort of agency in the political development of their rising nation quickly dampened enthusiasm. Particularly, the belief that America and the West held more sway over the fate of Iran than did Iranians worked to counteract the power of the Shah’s nationalistic message.

On November 6, 1978, an embattled shah addressed his nation, pleading for peace, order, and a second chance. He attempted to co-opt Khomeini’s religious message, connecting “the national unity and the Shi’ite religion.” He pledged to once again repeat his oath and to “make up” for “past mistakes, unlawful acts, oppression and corruption.” At this late hour the ailing monarch promised free elections and the fulfillment of his tacit promise of a decade previous to

⁸⁰ Ibid., 402-403.

fully implement the Iranian constitution and establish fundamental freedoms. He promised to divorce the government from tyranny and oppression and to run it “on the basis of the constitution and social justice.”⁸¹ His words came too late and fell on the deaf ears of a population that had for too long been denied a voice, had been frustrated by poverty in the face of national success, and had embraced political and religious alternatives to the Shah’s modernizing authoritarianism.

* * * * *

If human rights are, as David Whelan argues, indivisible, then the price of willfully withholding one type in favor of the other can be dreadfully high. This was surely the case for the Shah. He failed to understand the pulse of his nation. He did not see the impatience in his own people, whom he continued to treat as children despite the rapid advances of the 1960s and 70s. The Shah’s downfall was his insistence that Iranians could only be allowed a free hand in political and civil engagement once they had achieved the status of peoples like the Swedes and that they could only achieve this status through economic development and social equality. He sought to bring his people into a modern and global age, but in so doing he gave them the educational, economic, and social tools to pursue political agency. When this pursuit was met by the steel wall of SAVAK and the Shah’s own intransigence, dissident Iranians were forced to seek out alternative avenues of expression. These alternatives abounded in Iran, though they had been repressed by the reforms of the White Revolution and the authoritarianism of the regime. Tudeh communists, National Front liberals, foreign educated students, and the Shia clergy all developed appealing alternatives to the Shah’s top-down authoritarian government. These disparate groups found common ground in their quest for a voice in Iran’s future. By the late

⁸¹ Memorandum for Deputy Director for National Foreign Assessment: *Strategy for the Shah*, The Director of Central Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency (6 November, 1978).

1970s, Iran's population, particularly in urban centers had been exposed for long enough to the message of the White Revolution and the Shah's development rhetoric that they stopped believing it would ever come to fruition for them. They abandoned the Shah, and Iran erupted in the turmoil of revolution that created the world's first Islamic Republic.

Conclusion

Answer to History?

The Tragedy of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi

*"I turn to right and left, in all the earth
I see no signs of justice, sense or worth:
A man does evil deeds, and all his days
Are filled with luck and universal praise;
Another's good in all he does - he dies
A wretched, broken man whom all despise."
- Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh*¹*

From exile in Anwar Sadat's Egypt, a dying man, once a king, wrote his *Answer to History*. The once-great monarch of the Middle East's most prosperous nation wrote his last words to history; instead of the resounding answer he intended, the ailing shah came across as "angry, bewildered, [and] confused."² The Shah still seemed astounded, even at this late moment in his life, that his nation, his children had rejected him.

In typical fashion, the Shah enumerates his foreign policy achievements and the close and lasting friendships he fostered with the nations of the world. He points out that even in his regime's darkest hours before the fall of the monarchy, he enjoyed broad international support. This is perhaps emblematic of the Shah's misunderstanding of his nation, his people, and the sociopolitical conditions he created. As later supporters who waxed nostalgic for the Shah's Iran would echo, the Shah claimed that he had modernized too fast for the Iranian people. He

¹ Abollasem Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*, trans. Dick Davis (New York: Penguin, 2006).

² Richard Cottam, "Review of *Answer to History* by Mohammad Reza Pahlavi," (*The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 75, No. 3 (September, 1981), 812-813, accessed April 21, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1961042>).

believed they were too entrenched in traditional modalities and a feudal past to truly appreciate the economic boons and social equalities he lavished upon them. He believed this was why he enjoyed international support from developed and developing nations of the world but eventually lost the support of his own people.

In truth, the Shah enjoyed the support of international regimes because he was an adept diplomat and strategist whose regime helped ensure stability in a volatile region home to the world's most precious commodity. Ervand Abrahamian argues that "the revolution took place neither because of overdevelopment nor because of underdevelopment but because of uneven development." The Shah lost the support of his people because he brought rapid socioeconomic advances to Iran that created radical social, economic, and demographic shifts. These shifts destabilized the monarchy's traditional base while creating a propertied middle class jealous of their material wealth and status. The expectations of the White Revolution interacted with societal shifts to frustrate a population that was denied the realization of their political ambitions and a voice in the destiny of Iran. Abrahamian's analysis is adept, and is perhaps the most comprehensive history of twentieth century Iran available; however, there is more to this story than class dynamics, economic development, and material wealth. Human rights here constituted more than a vague ethereal concept. The realization and denial in practice of rights enumerated in rhetoric played an integral role in contributing to economic pressures and class conflict to destabilize the Iranian monarchy and loosen the Shah's iron grip on his nation. There is convincing evidence in the case of the Shah's Iran that human rights need to be considered in developing any security strategy. Especially in the age of mass communications, the manipulation of international opinion and norms has the ability to influence domestic opinion. The Shah's international rhetoric collided with social, economic, and demographic shifts and the

political muzzling of his people to create a violent reaction against a regime and a shah that had broken a tacit promise to the Iranian people.

The Shah acknowledged the role of human rights in his downfall but he blamed “human rights champions in the state department” and the Carter administration for hastening his demise.³ He failed to understand the connections between his international rhetoric and domestic pressures. Though they were the primary audience, the leaders of foreign nations were not the only audience that heard the Shah’s words. Iranian students in the United States, Europe, and even in Tehran heard these words; the residents of a rapidly expanding and developing Tehran heard them. In a semi-feudal society, political repression may have a larger viability; however, when the Shah instituted his reforms, he developed a population that either experienced, or had the expectation that they would one day experience, economic independence and social mobility. As the Shah went about his rhetorical crusade to place himself in the minds of his own people and regional actors as a world leader and of Iran as a hegemon, he put the existing pressures in the developing society under further strain.

In his efforts to develop Iran into an industrial power and global player in international affairs, the Shah utilized a vigorous public relations campaign in the implementation of his White Revolution. This campaign was coupled with an international promotion of the Pahlavi dynasty through governmental publications, rhetoric, and spectacles like the Shah’s 1967 coronation and 1970 celebration of the Persian monarchy. By 1968 the White Revolution, though it had not succeeded in completing all of the Shah’s goals, had clearly averted economic disaster and placed Iran on the road to success. The Shah capitalized on his domestic success and turned to his international agenda, successfully connecting the two. By adopting the

³ R.K. Ramazani, “Review of *Answer to History* by Mohammed Reza Pahlavi,” (*Middle East Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 1, *Egypt Today* (Winter, 1981), 86, accessed April 21, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4326174>).

socioeconomic rhetoric of human rights embraced by Third World autocrats, Mohammad Reza Shah was essentially attempting to export the ideals of his White Revolution to an international community emerging from a recent history of colonialism in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. He challenged the prevailing paradigm of western individual human rights with the values of national development, sovereignty, racial equality, and decolonization that prevailed in the value system of the Afro-Asian bloc of the United Nations.

The Shah made this challenge because he desired to forge Iran into a dominant force in the Persian Gulf, impose an image of himself as a leader in the Indian Ocean, and of Iran as a true world power able to defy the United States and contain the Soviet Union. This was consistent with the image of Persian prestige and monarchical power the Shah began to cultivate at home and abroad during the 1960s. He continued to cultivate this image while undertaking a variety of strategic initiatives that were closely linked with his campaign founded on the principles of positive nationalism and global equality.

In his international rhetoric, the Shah elevated socioeconomic human rights, but he also argued that they were the foundation upon which the full realization of political and civil rights rested. This constituted a tacit promise that once a people had achieved a level of social and economic advancement, they should be granted the political and civil rights guaranteed by the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in 1948. In Iran, however, the continued denial of true political agency was manifest. This denial of agency to a society that had been led to believe political freedom would follow economic success destroyed the plan for regional security so carefully crafted by the Shah and his allies in the United States. This case study of the role of human rights in rhetoric and practice in the Shah's Iran is in part an answer to the calls of authors like Lauren and Ishay to incorporate a consideration of human rights into the study or

formulation of security initiatives. It is also an answer to scholars like Forsythe and Whelan who argue that economic, social, political, civil, and juridical rights are all interrelated and dependent on one another; the removal of one undermines the benefits provided by the realization of the others. Though the Shah wanted to and believed that he was providing for his people, he failed to understand this connection. He elevated the right of a collective people embodied in the nation to sovereignty and national development at the cost of individual rights to political agency and justice.

The Shah did not understand the indivisibility of rights, and he fundamentally failed to recognize the levels of connection and discourse between international rhetoric and domestic policies. The examples of Mostafa Chamran, Dr. Sanjabi, Dr. Bakhtiar, and Darioush Forouhar are among a host of other untold stories of leaders and citizens, students and dissidents, scholars and clergy who heard the Shah's foreign rhetoric, watched Iran's economic rise, and waited in vain for political enfranchisement.

The Shah, his isolation and rising megalomania blinding him to the truth on the ground, failed to understand the dynamics of political unrest in his nation. He believed radical leftists and foreign powers were behind any internal unrest in Iran while ignoring the mainstream and religious critics of his regime. Even when he attempted to rectify the mistakes of his regime he continued to reference his social and economic reforms and focus on judicial reform. However, unrest did not increase because the majority of dissidents were unhappy with his rapid reforms – though the Shia clergy condemned them on several levels – nor were specific judicial procedures the cause of strife – though this was where international critics focused their condemnation of the regime. The Shah did not understand that the fundamental cause of widespread dissent in Iran during the 1970s was the fact that millions of Iranians watched as the nation progressed without

their participation. So when economic crisis struck after 1975 or when large swaths of the working poor population failed to realize the economic promises of the White Revolution, they could not focus their anger on any sort of political outlet. Instead, the dispossessed were forced to turn to religious or ideological alternatives and violence to express their frustration.

The revolution that began in 1977 and continued until 1979 had dramatic impacts on the regional security of the Persian Gulf, Middle East, Indian Ocean, and the world at large. Further, it completely upset the balance and stability the Shah had so adeptly crafted during his reign. The effects of the Shah's failure are still felt in the twenty first century as the Islamic regime in Iran continues as a main point of concern to the international community. Meanwhile, the international community's understanding of the indivisibility of human rights has improved, at least within the halls of the United Nations, though autocratic rulers continue to elevate national development over political agency, not understanding that the two are fundamentally connected in any long-term pursuit of development and social change.

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While the narrative of this project is centered on the formative character of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, it acknowledges that the story does not in truth begin and end with the Shah. A historical approach that considers the global economic connections of this story to the world-systems of the Cold War would add a great deal to its narrative, though this is beyond the scope of the current project. A deeper examination of individual/citizen-actors in Iran would also add a great deal to the discussion of the reception that the Shah's rhetoric received domestically.

The conclusions in this project suggest areas for further investigation regarding human rights more generally and in other specific case studies in the Middle East and Indian Ocean. In Iran itself, this type of rhetorical analysis could be applied to Ayatollah Khomeini's own uses of

human rights rhetoric in criticizing the Shah and in his efforts to assert the Islamic Republic's rights on an international scale. This type of analysis should be paired with the gross violations of human rights still occurring in the Iran of the Ayatollahs. How did the current regime's international rhetoric at the United Nations, in the United States, and in regional nations collide with the existing domestic pressures to help create the 2009 Green Revolution in Tehran? More broadly, this type of analysis would be useful in analyzing the progression of the so-called "Arab Awakening" of 2011. In these nations, secular autocrats were overthrown as a result of a combination of political repression and socioeconomic pressures. What role did the leaders' international rhetoric play in galvanizing anti-regime support in these nations? If a constant trend emerges across this region in similar political movements, what does this suggest about the universality and indivisibility of human rights?

This project is an attempt to explore how geopolitical concerns interact with human rights norms in their socioeconomic and political/civil dimensions. It is an attempt to argue in part that there is a fundamental connection between the security of individuals and the security of vast geostrategic regions. When national leaders and political actors invoke rhetorical devices of human rights, they must understand that these are not merely words that can be manipulated without cost. They are real concepts that have tangible effects on their audiences, both intended and otherwise, and should therefore be employed with care and with a full understanding of their connections to each other and the situation at hand. As the story of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi bears witness, demagogues cannot, in the modern world of vast and near-instantaneous communications, utilize a specific rhetorical approach in a message and expect that message to reach only the ears of their intended audience.

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