

**Masked Resistance: The Iranian Student Movement in the
United States, 1977-1979**

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Dedication

Mom, Dad and Chris you have always been there for me and encouraged me to keep going. Thanks for all of the support and confidence you have had in me. Mike you have truly served as my rock during those 6 months of work, I could not have done this without you. And last, but not least, Daniella and Angie, my two bestest friends and editors in world. Thanks for everything.

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Glossary of Abbreviations

AIDI- Americans for Independence and Democracy in Iran

AFME- American Friends of the Middle East

FBI- Federal Bureau of Investigations

CIA- Central Intelligence Agency

CISNU- Confederation of Iranian Students National Union

ISA- Iranian Student Association

ISC- International Student Conference

IUS- International Union of Student

NATO- North Atlantic Treaty Organization

OIMS- Organization of Iranian Muslim Students

RIPEH- Review of Iranian Political and Economic History

SAVAK- Iranian National Intelligence and Security Organization

SDS- Students for a Democratic Society

YAF- Young Americans for Freedom

Introduction

On November 15 and 16, 1977 during the Shah's state visit to the United States, violent clashes broke out as thousands of demonstrators marched and rallied to denounce the repressive regime in Iran. The most militant demonstration in Washington D.C. since the Vietnam War, the protests on the first day left 96 demonstrators and 28 police officers injured. Well organized by Iranian students, demonstrations were staged throughout the country in order to publicize the "fascist" Shah and the nature of his visit, which was assumed to be to secure more arms and technical assistance from the United States.¹ With their serpentine lines and colorful banners, these demonstrators drew upon the mood and slogans of the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights protest era before them, chanting and calling for the end of oppression by neo-colonial governments. To quell the demonstrators, police fired tear gas into the crowd, which floated across the White House grounds just as the Shah and President Carter were exchanging greetings on the lawn. The image of these two men coughing and wiping their eyes while attempting to stay dignified was broadcast internationally. "The world knows of the Iranian students and their movement now," said one anti-shah demonstrator. "Across the U.S. the people know of the struggle. They see it on television..., in Europe too, and most important, in Iran they see us and know we fight on."²

¹ Nationwide demonstrations were organized in Boston, Baltimore, New York, Philadelphia, St. Louis, San Francisco and Atlanta between Nov 10th and 17th; see "Resistance Special Issue (November 1977)" in *Martin F. Herz Collection*, Georgetown Library, Special Collections Division, Washington, D.C.

² Stephen J. Lynton and Courtland Milloy, "Shah Violence Sporadic; Shah Demonstrators are Boisterous but Mostly Orderly; Groups Crisscross City," *Washington Post*, November 17, 1977, A1.

This clash reverberated from Washington to Europe and to Tehran itself. On November 17 and 18 on his trip back home, the Shah stopped in Paris. Upon arrival he was met with hostile crowds. Demonstrating their support for the Iranian student movement in the United States, similar demonstrations occurred in front of U.S. embassies in London, Rome, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Vienna and several German cities.³ In Iran, around 17,000 gathered in the capital's streets and universities, continuing this wave of democratic upsurge and backing of the larger student and resistance movements. Due to government repression, organizations within Iran were unable to effectually organize. As a result, students abroad often politicized and coordinated together, creating an important form of opposition to the Shah. Through vocal demonstrations and publications, Iranian students were able to undermine the Shah's international legitimacy and support, while, at the same time, they set an example of civil disobedience to their friends and family members at home.

Although the numbers are disputed by different sources there were about 54,000 Iranian students in the United States in 1978. By the late 1970s, Iran had more students studying abroad for higher education than any other country in the world, comprising slightly more than eight percent of the world's foreign student population.⁴ This was due to a combination of educational, economic and political factors. The failures of the White Revolution, growing unrest with the creation of the Rastakhiz, few job prospects, and inequitable distribution of wealth and opportunity created an environment where

³ Afshin Matin-asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah* (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishing, 2002), 159.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 131.

students left their homelands discontent and ready for change. Plagued by human rights abuses and relatively few freedoms, these students brought with them an aversion towards American politics and its capitalist society. As more and more Iranian youth began to study abroad, it became nearly impossible for the Shah to control student opposition.

Before 1978, Iran did not garner a high level of interest amongst the American public. A nation rarely mentioned in the news, Iran was conversely viewed by political and economic elites in Washington as the most important Third World country to the U.S. since World War II. Multinational oil companies, arms manufactures and government officials together placed emphasis on both the economic and geostrategic importance Iran had during the Cold War. A large nation strategically placed in the Middle East with an abundance of oil and natural resources, Iran remained essential for the United States even as U.S. interests shifted. Thus, a special relationship with the United States was formed, going back 25 years to the coup against Iran's popular Prime Minister Mohammad Mossaddeq; an event which placed the Shah securely on the throne and brought about an end to an animated phase of Iran's democratic history. The CIA helped to overthrow Mossaddeq in order to curb the tide of Iran's revolutionary nationalism, shifting the political orientation of the country from left to right.⁵

John Foran, an expert on historical sociology of revolutions, views the Iranian revolution as a challenge for social theory. The Third World social structure of Iran can be understood through what Foran labels 'dependent development.' This is when

⁵ Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 217.

“development occurs in the sense of industrialization...but is limited by the structure of the world-system and entails significant social cost” leading to a repressive state with foreign support as the “only functional form capable of keeping the lid on social unrest.”⁶ The U.S. stepped in to provide foreign support to better serve American interests; the U.S. allowed and assisted the Shah with arms, technology, and support in his brutal and dictatorial regime. As a consequence, over the years the United States became a central player in Iranian politics.

Throughout his reign, the Shah maintained a tight grip on his country, fearful of the nationalist, communist and religious sentiments held by a large proportion of his people. His authoritarian regime was sustained with the aid of the United States. SAVAK, the State Security and Intelligence Organization, is a good example of this relationship. Created and trained by the CIA, SAVAK was a known Gestapo-type organization that arrested and tortured dissidents of the Shah. Known as the Shah’s “eyes and ears,” this group was instituted to combat communist subversion and to ensure the Shah’s military grip over Iran shortly after the coup in 1953. These individuals were repeatedly sent to the U.S. for training and were present in both Europe and America in the years leading up to the Iranian Revolution.⁷ Over the years, the Shah had forbidden the formation of any political opposition and social critiques, making it punishable by death. By the early 1970s, SAVAK had dominated the internal political and security system of Iran. Not only did the US support the Shah in institution of this policy, but the American press minimized his authoritarian and corrupt rule. Following cues from

⁶ John Foran, “The Iranian Revolution of 1977-1979: A Challenge for Social Theory”, in ed. John Foran, *A Century of Revolution* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 165.

⁷ Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *Answer to History* (New York: Stein and Day, 1980), 149, 157.

Washington, the press promoted the Shah as a great liberalizing leader.⁸ In 1969, U.S. officials using the Nixon Doctrine secured Iran's dominance in the Persian Gulf through large sales of high-tech weapons. Sales reached more than 15 billion between 1970 and 1977.⁹ These armaments were not only used to combat communism, but they were also used by the Shah to suppress the Iranian population, allowing the Shah to secure his unpopular monarchy for almost another decade. Iran was one of the first countries to sign the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Over 20 years later Amnesty International counted Iran amongst the worse human rights abuses in the world.

President Carter rode into the White House in 1977 with an affirmed foreign policy based on respect for human rights, emphasizing the need for the U.S. to demand more human rights practices of Third World countries. Despite this fact, Carter and the Shah developed a personal rapport in the course of their repeated meetings and the special relations the two countries shared were never seriously questioned. The Carter administration did not put any significant pressure on the Iranian government and SAVAK to change their ways. Instead, Carter continued in the steps of his predecessors to supply Iran with anything from the Pentagon arsenal apart from nuclear weapons. Carter also managed to look in the other direction and make ill-timed public declarations praising the Shah for his "successes" and stability in the region. These events maintained the popular view held by numerous Third World nations of the United States as a foreign dominator, giving credence to the student opposition that believed the Shah and America were working together to benefit their own interests while undermining the chance of any

⁸James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 200.

⁹"The Shah's Americans: In Iran for Beaucoup Bucks," *Washington Post*, May 12, 1977, A10.

political opposition. Popular slogans emerged amongst Iranian students which drew upon this theory, such as “the Shah is Carter’s dog” and “the Shah is a puppet of U.S. imperialism.” As Gary Sick, a National Security Council expert of the Middle East and Africa, would point out later, “The president and his top advisers were far from concluding that the shah was doomed and they wished to avoid at all costs the appearance or reality of abandoning a close ally.”¹⁰ Up until his last days as monarch, the Carter administration never openly questioned the stability of Shah or the contempt that was felt towards the United States. This strategy would backfire, for when the U.S. realized there was no saving the Shah and they tried to create relations with the opposition in Iran, their pleas fell on deaf ears. On January 16, 1979 Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi quietly left Iran for the final time, departing for exile in Egypt. Seen as criminal by the new Islamic Republic, the Carter administration killed any chance of reconciliation with the new government when they allowed the Shah to come to the United States for cancer treatment at the Mayo Clinic on October 22, 1979. Thirteen days later, a group of Iranian student extremists took the U.S. embassy in response, beginning the Hostage Crisis in which over 50 US citizens were held for 444 days. The special relationship between the United States and Iran was dead.

The U.S. involvement in Mossaddeq’s coup, the fact that the CIA had trained SAVAK, the human rights abuses, and the thousands of American advisors in Iran were common knowledge amongst those in Washington and the press. Yet, much of this information would not be shared with the American public until the Iranian Student

¹⁰Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America’s Tragic Encounter with Iran* (Lincoln: iUniversity.com, 2001), 86-87.

Revolution hit the point of no return. And what was shared with the public was often shaded by the US government's interests and policies. In a study which looked at American press coverage on Iran between 1951 and 1978, William A. Dorman and Mansour Farhang found that American news media often "followed the cue of foreign policy makers" instead of "exercising independent judgment," and that the "journalists prove easily susceptible to ethnocentrism."¹¹ Since media determines one's perspective of the international world, the average American lacked the information needed to understand the events which led up to the Iranian Revolution and were unable to sympathize with the motives of those involved.¹² As Iranian students protested and attempted to bring solidarity between the average American and the Iranian cause, the mass media often portrayed Iranian students as fanatical and backwards rather than as justified revolutionaries.

The byproduct of the revolution, an Islamic Republic, has left Historians in this field to focus their analysis on the interaction between religion and politics in Iran; these historians, remain silent on other dissenting groups, left to fade away. Exclusive concentration between the Ulama and the Iranian state makes the formation of an Islamic Republic seem inevitable in retrospect. But this was not the case, as many different groups, including both secular and sectarian, became politically active against the Shah. An antimony, Iranian students who were mostly secular should have been a fan of the Shah's pro-Western regime; yet they turned out to be fierce ideological critics. Instead of

¹¹ William A. Dorman and Mansour Farhang, *The U.S. Press and Iran: Foreign Policy and the Journalism of Deference* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 2.

¹² David Detmer, "Covering Up Iran: Why Vital Information Is Routinely Excluded for U.S. Mass Media News Accounts", in ed. Yahya R. Kamalipour, *The U.S. Media and Middle East* (Westport: Praeger, 1997), 92.

embracing the vision of a pro-U.S. secular modernity that the Shah represented, these students denounced American modernization in the Third World terms as oppressive and destructive. These students kept alive Mossaddeq's legacy for an independent and constitutional Iran. Few have acknowledged the impact secular nationalists and leftists had on the Revolution; Islam was not an independent variable. By analyzing different perspectives and focusing on Iranians students in America, it becomes apparent that multiple ideologies brought about the Iranian Revolutions, ones that were influenced by Third World Marxism, anti-imperialist nativist nationalism and Marxist-populist interpretations of Shi'ism.¹³ What was perceived by those in Washington and the press as a Cold War (East-West) struggle, Iranian students saw through the lens of a Third World (North-South) fight. The Iranian revolution was more than an uprising of religious extremists against modernization; it was also a revolution in favor of all the political and social freedoms democracy and modernization should have delivered. As Dorman and Farhang note, "To dismiss the aspirations of Iranians as mere fanaticism is to prepare the way for future, equally serious, failures to understanding forces in the Third World."¹⁴

This study attempts to contribute to literature on the Iranian Revolution by analyzing the Iranian student movement within the United States between 1977 and 1979. As part of the Third World social movement, Iranian students encouraged open resistance both within the United States and at home. Although their main goal was to oust the Shah, they also aligned their struggle with those of other oppressed Third World peoples. At foreign universities, Iranians found themselves amongst other restless student

¹³ Matin-asgari, *Student Opposition*, 3-4.

¹⁴ Dorman, *U.S. Press and Iran*, 4.

populations, which provided a more accepting and encouraging environment for Iranian student organizations to grow. They also were motivated by events in other Third World countries, often aligning their struggle with the fervor of revolutionary movements in such countries as China, Vietnam, Cuba, Algeria and Palestine, which also added to its support base and its radicalization.¹⁵ The Third World movement embraced the Iranian cause, too. The alternative press, especially those with Marxist elements, reported in detail the growth of malaise and discontent amongst the Iranian population. Both the Iranian students and the alternative press presented facts to the American public describing circumstances in Iran.¹⁶ But their efforts were often overshadowed by the mainstream press which, intentionally or not, helped to suffocate the voices of these dissenting students.

By the late 1970s, Iranian students had factionalized into multiple groups. Originally all part of the Confederation of Iranian students, National Union (CISNU); these students became more political as new ideologies emerged, creating different sects and organizations. In the 1960s, Marxist groups were the strongest and most influential amongst such students. At first, most of the students aligned themselves with pro-Tudeh factions or National Front groups who wanted a more democratic or constitutional government. But as the Cold War progressed and the Chinese Cultural Revolution took hold, most of these students aligned themselves along Third World lines and adopted Maoist ideologies. Small groups even aligned themselves with Guerilla organizations in

¹⁵ Afshin Matin-asgari, "Confederation of Iranian Students, National Union," Encyclopedia Iranica [article on-line]; available from <http://www.iranica.com/newsite/articles/v6f2/v6f2a003.html>, accessed February 3, 2008.

¹⁶ Detmer, "Covering Up Iran," 93.

Iran, embracing the views of those like Che Guevara and other likeminded Marxist revolutionaries. The Confederation was itself a democratic society, one which was composed of local units which meet annually for world conferences. Over the years, the federation took a more radical tone, reflecting the changing balances amongst students in the movement.¹⁷ Despite the deteriorating power of the CISNU, these groups' common history brought about a sort of familiarity and cohesiveness amongst politicized students as a whole. Even though their solutions to the problems differed, the initial problems remained the same: the Shah was still in power and US was still backing him up 100 percent. Iranians did not blame the American public in general or their lifestyle as Islamic fundamentalists would later do. Rather, they were unhappy with U.S. policy. As they saw it, America had put the Shah in power, continued to support him politically and sell the Shah non-nuclear weapons. With all of this influence and power, the U.S. could not morally deny liability for the Shah's misdeeds.¹⁸

A note on methodology. Iranian students, especially those abroad during the Iranian Revolution, have often been put off to the periphery. The only secondary source which focuses solely on Iranian students and their active politicization is Afshin Matin-asgari's book Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah. Focusing on the international level, Matin-asgari viewed the student movement as the most active and persistent voice against the Pahlavi regime in the 1960s and 1970s. An important piece of work on the subject, Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah focuses solely on the Confederation of Iranian Students National Union (CISNU) and the students on the Left. Even though the CISNU

¹⁷ Matin-asgari, "Confederation of Iranian Students".

¹⁸ American Embassy in Tehran, *Comments of Jamshid Hormoz, Former President of Iranian Students Federation in Austria*, Digitized National Security Archive: Iran 1977-1980, no. IR01990, 1-2.

was most active in Europe, and thus his research tends to focus on that region, a majority of all Iranian students who studied abroad went to the United States. In addition, as these groups factionalized, other voices become active and originally Marxist oriented groups began to take on more religious and sectarian interests. Much of the information I have gathered about these students has been obtained through primary sources. Groups like the Iranian Student Association (ISA), Organization of Iranian Muslim Students (OIMS) and other academic student organizations published a number of materials, such as newsletters, pamphlets and other works in English. I will be expanding upon Matin-Asgari's book by looking at the whole Iranian student movement in the United States. Although they worked together, all hoping to achieve a Shah-free Iran, they were each influenced by different principles and philosophies. Building off of Matin-Asgari, this paper will demonstrate the role non-state actors have on international policy. By looking at these non-state actors, a group often marginalized in the historiography of the U.S. literature, we learn more about the Revolution, what it could have been and what became of it. This is a history of students in a quasi-political exile. They have left their repressive homeland to study in a nation which has thrived off of their nation's natural resources without benefit to themselves. Still, they embraced the freedoms America had to offer and openly denounced the regime in Iran to support a decaying international Third World Movement at the end of the 1970s.

In the spring of 1979, a number of dissident Iranian students packed their bags and returned home with anticipation. As editors of the *Review of Iranian Political and Economic History* reported, many Iranian students had become "convinced that the post-revolutionary leadership [would] bring about qualitative changes in the political,

economic, social and cultural conditions in Iran.”¹⁹ This was the moment so many had been waiting for. Even as the Revolution took on a strongly religious tone, there was wide belief that an independent and democratic government would rise up under the leadership of Khomeini. It was not yet apparent how bittersweet their victory of the Shah would be. Despite its populists claim, the Islamic Republic which was to come did not expand basic freedoms or improve the well being of the average Iranian. It proved, instead, to be merely another repressive regime.

Chapter 1 gives a brief historical background of the Iranian student movement. By 1978, Iranians studying in the United States were the largest group of foreign students in the country. With about 10 percent of these students politically active, their numbers were equal to the size of the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) in its heyday between 1966 and 1967.²⁰ This section will focus specifically on the radicalization and growth of the ISA and OIMS, demonstrating the changing dynamics of these students as the late 1970s emerged. It will also explain who these students were and why they were studying in the United States. Seeing themselves as part of a “global contestation,” many Iranian students embraced socialist, communist and later more Islamic ideologies, finding solidarity with the worldwide movement against imperialism.²¹ Their united hatred for the Shah encouraged them to overcome a good deal of their differences and allowed them to become “a cohesive community of expatriates and sojourners that proved a shared

¹⁹ “Editorial” *Review of Iranian Political and Economic History (RIPEH)*, Vol. 3 No. 1 (Spring 1979): pg i.

²⁰ Matin-asgari, *Student Opposition*, 131, 164.

²¹ *Ibid*, 96.

identity, moral purpose and mutual help to thousands of Iranians living in foreign environments.”²²

By the mid 1970s, it became hard for the American mass media and public to ignore the human rights abuses which were being perpetrated within Iran. Organizations, such as Amnesty International, had produced reliable reports which had documented SAVAK’s use of torture and terror as government policy. These reports came out in the midst of growing human rights activism in the United States. Yet Carter, who actively condemned such activity on the world stage, continued to sell massive arms to the Pahlavi Regime. Chapter 2 will address how Iranian students read American policy and their criticism of it. With as many as 100,000 political prisoners held within the Shah’s prisons by the late 1970s and a repressive state which actively spied on students abroad, there is no wonder these students felt violated by the United States.

Chapter 3 analyzes the role Iranian students played as a vanguard of protest in opposition against the Shah. Even though Iranian students had been vocal in their criticism of the Shah and U.S. policy in Iran since the 1960s, the years 1977-1979 saw an increased amount [for volumes] level of activism. Through demonstrations, publications, hunger strikes, conferences and other forms of resistance, students brought the Iranian struggle to the American public. On Nov. 15, as the Shah arrived at the White House, over 4000 individuals marched on Washington in the most militant demonstrations in relation to other political protests of the 1970s. Student opposition, throughout the United States brought about extensive coverage by the media, helping to bring about the

²² Ibid, 164.

Shahs downfall both abroad and at home. This event also contributed to the ISA, OIMS and other Iranian student groups becoming more visible amongst the public.

As opposition to the Shah amplified, the news media generally referred to anyone who opposed the Pahlavi Rule as “Muslim fanatics” and “radicals.”²³ As Dorman and Farhang reveal, the Shah and his brutal and dictatorial regime were rarely mentioned in the American press. A strong ally of Washington, the Shah was instead portrayed as a modernizer in a backwards country. Viewing these revolutionaries through an “ignorant” and “ethnocentric lens”, many Americans saw these students anti-American sentiment as proof of the nations “simple barbarism” and “naked malevolence.”²⁴ In addition, U.S. involvement in helping to perpetuate this repressive rule was often hushed up in the media, even though popular news sources were aware of such events. As Hamid Naficy notes, “the denial of the Iranian Revolution was extended to a denial of Iran itself.”²⁵ This chapter addresses how the American mass media and the Alternative media viewed the Revolution and Iranian student activism within America and how Iranian student organizations reacted.

Chapter 5 brings this study to a conclusion by focusing on the relative collapse of the movement once the Shah was overthrown. Towards the end of 1978 and early 1979 many student activists returned home, enthusiastic to aid the Revolutionary process. The student movement contributed to the populist and anti-Imperialist ideology, along with the nationalist themes, that the Islamic Republic would draw upon and adopt for its own

²³ Hamid Naficy, “American Pop Culture Representation” in *US Media in the Middle East: Image and Perception*, edited by Yahya R. Kamalipour (Westport: Praeger, 1995), 29.

²⁴ David Detmer, “Covering up Iran,” 92.

²⁵ Naficy, “American Pop Culture,” 29.

ends.²⁶ A sort of paradox, it was the combination of modern and traditional beliefs which finally brought down the Pahlavi regime. The focus on Islam tends to overshadow the influence and memory of these students who risked everything to openly oppose the Shah. The Revolution, followed soon after by the Hostage situation, many Americans cemented their view that Iranians were overly zealous. By discrediting the popular anti-western revolution in Iran, the media perpetuated a negative and stereotypical view of Iranians which still persists today.

²⁶ Matin-asgari, *Student Opposition*, 164-165.

Chapter 1

On Friday, May 28, 1977, about 80 Iranian students staged a demonstration in Corsicana, Texas to protest a series of restrictive measures imposed upon foreign students already accepted to Navarro College. Secondary entrance exams, increased tuition and subjective interviews of students by the college's counselors were viewed by Iranian students as a prime example of the Shah's influence amongst American universities to suppress his opposition. The Shah had been known to donate large amounts of money to American universities in exchange for favors like honorary degrees or information on students. Kenneth Walker, the College President, contended there were "too many" foreign students on his campus, and with Iranians making up the largest segment of this population and the most politically active, they would be the first to go. To the local press, Walker stated, "they just don't have any right to come here and create a disturbance of this education process" rather they are just "political activist trying to stir up problems."²⁷ Yet Iranian students insisted that they were just invoking their First Amendment rights as they peacefully assembled "chanting slogans and singing militant patriotic songs exposing 'the domination of Iran by foreign powers through their puppet Shah and the exploitation of the country as a result of this.'"²⁸ Walker responded by calling up officials from the Corsicana Police Department, Navarro Country Sheriff's Department and the Texas Department of Public Safety who all came in and arrested the

²⁷ *Corsicana Daily Sun*, 27 May 1977. Cited in "Navarro College and Mr. Walker's Hospitality," *Resistance* Vol. 4, Supplement 3 (May 1977):1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

group of demonstrators. The Iranian Student Association noted the similarities between the College President's response to student protests and the Shah's dealing with similar situations in Iranian schools, yet "each of these instances, far from intimidating Iranian students, has given a fresh boost to the awareness [and resistance] of Iranian students."²⁹

Most Iranians in the United States in the late 1970s were either students themselves, or had immigrated to the United States for school and stayed in the country on completion of their education. The pro-Western Shah had promoted a society dependent upon growing modernization, declaring that he would make Iran a world power by the end of the 20th century. This, along with economic stagnation, put pressure on many Iranians to get a higher education so that they could secure a livelihood for their future. The problem was that Iran did not have the facilities to educate its growing population. In 1977, only 60,000 of 290,000 applicants were accepted into Iranian universities.³⁰ With limited universities spots available, many Iranians looked abroad for their schooling and of these most came to the United States. That same year they represented the largest contingent of foreign students in American, numbering over 54,000.³¹ Discontent with the Shah's reform policies, the Iranian Student Association (ISA) criticized the massive influx of Iranian students into the United States and European countries as "indicative of the [Iranian] regime's inability to provide even the most basic needs of Iran's 33 million people."³² Most students came to the U.S. for its educational opportunities, but once in the U.S., Iranians began to embrace the greater

²⁹ Ibid., 3.

³⁰ Fred Halliday, *Iran Dictatorship and Development* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 222.

³¹ Matin-asgari, *Student Opposition*, 131.

³² "Navarro College and Mr. Walker's *Hospitality*," 3.

political freedoms available. As their numbers grew, Iranian students built closely knit communities which often revolved around student and leftist movements rather than a religious or cultural cohesiveness.³³ Despite their differences, Iranian students abroad shared a universal criticism of the Iranian monarch and his autocratic regime. In the late 1970s, Iranian students joined together to actively denounce the Shah and his supporters, bringing about the end of the Pahlavi regime.

Higher education, following the Western model, had been encouraged under the Shah as a means to help modernize Iran. Throughout his reign the monarch's primary educational concern focused on university education demonstrating the "Shah's eagerness, bordering on impatience, to produce as fast as possible a highly trained cadre of competent civil servants and army officers who would carry out the ambitious task of transforming the country into a modern state."³⁴ The corrupt government of the Shah's acceptance of American and foreign trained workers, a limited access to Iranian institutions, a stagnant labor market and a growing population made access to higher education crucial.³⁵ Most Iranian who studied abroad came from a middle class background and depended upon a higher education to procure a job once they returned home. To maintain his oppressive regime, the Shah put most of the nation's oil wealth into purchasing arms rather than giving it back to the Iranian people through social reforms. In the 1970s, Iran's economy and populace were left to suffer. This was done

³³ Stephan Thernstrom, ed. *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1980), 522.

³⁴ Wilhelm Eilers, "Education and Cultural Development in Iran during the Pahlavi Era," in George Lenczowski, ed., *Iran Under the Pahlavi's*. (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), 306.

³⁵ Harold Mehner, "Development and Planning in Iran after World War II," in *Ibid.*, 164.

under the guise of modernization, and most students left Iran with critiques of the new order, citing more negative than positive aspects.

In particular, the Shah promoted the study of the technology and the sciences amongst important specialties needed by Iranians. Some of the educational departments added to new universities in the Iran in the 1970s were architecture, medicine, engineering, natural science, chemistry, pharmacology, electro mechanic, astrophysics and nursing.³⁶ Similar disciplines can be found amongst Iranian students who studied abroad. Even though Iran during this period experienced a brain drain amongst its students, most Iranians who left originally had the intention of returning home. This contradicts the assumption which would be later played out in the press that these students and Iranians in general were a backwards people who longed for a more archaic then industrialized and modernized society. Contrary to the Shah, most Iranians wanted change which would benefit their nation in the long run. To such Iranians this involved ending western domination and dependence, not western technology and science.

As the insurgency and riots in Iran increased, more and more students began to look towards foreign schools as opposed to the more prestigious Iranian universities for their stability and security. Some did not even bother for college acceptance; instead they took “vacations” to the United States and planned on enrolling in schools once there. The most studied subjects by Iranian studying in the U.S., in order of numbers, were: Engineering, Mathematics, Physics, Geology, and Economics.³⁷ The late 1970s saw such

³⁶Eilers, “Education and Cultural Development in Iran,” in *Ibid.*, 307-308.

³⁷ William H. Sullivan, *Iranian Transfer Students* (November, 27 1978), Digitized National Security Archive: Iran 1977-1980, no. IR01805, 3.

a large influx of Iranian students that universities in the United States began to take their studies and interest to heart. For instance, the University of San Diego did not even have an Engineering Program until it began to receive large numbers of applications from Iranian transfer students.³⁸ Well read and educated, many of these students had been introduced to influential western, leftist and Third World thinkers from an early age. In retaliation to such critiques of his regime, the Shah had banned books he thought would inspire opposition and resistance to his regime. This only hurt his cause more, for making such books illegal only increased interest in them and they became more sought after, fostering a sense of rebellion amongst Iranian intellectuals from an early age. Hamid Dasbashi, a prominent Iranian-American historian and cultural critic states that “literature for us was the material metaphor on which we based our historical agency- who we were, what we were up to, and what constituted our moral and normative principles.”³⁹ A prime example of this can be found in the book The Little Black Fish, written by Samad Behrangi in 1968 and banned by the Shah’s regime. It is a tale of a self-sacrificing young fish that leaves the safety of its little stream and encounters savage acts of injustice amongst the larger creatures of the sea. In the end, the little black fish dies at the hand of an oppressive heron, i.e. the Shah. Influenced by the Russian literary tradition of socialist realism, Mao’s Cultural Revolution in China and the guerilla revolutions of Third World revolutions in Latin America, Behrangi wrote this children’s book as a political allegory of the state sponsored repression in Iran.⁴⁰ Books and writings, such as this, allowed students to understand the state of Iran within a North/South dynamic. They began to see

³⁸ Ibid., 2.

³⁹ Hamid Dabashi, *Iran: A People Interrupted* (New York and London: The New Press, 2007), 108.

⁴⁰ Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 46.

themselves as part of a larger world movement which disowned traditionally Western interpretations of modernization. Most of all, this literature demonstrated to students the paradox, familiar to colonial modernity, that Third World modernization had not given Iranians any greater freedoms, instead it instilled only more repression.

As Iranians came to the United States, they often joined student organizations which fostered a greater sense of community. Like most new ethnic groups in a foreign land, Iranians sought out their own, often going to institutions where Iranians had already been. Iranians were a relatively new addition to the United States. In 1952, there were only about 800 Iranians total; 25 years later their numbers would be over 80,000. By 1979, more than half of the Iranian community was comprised of students. This is confirmed by the fact that the distribution of the Iranian resident population reflected the location of institutions of higher learning attended by Iranian students. The largest group of students resided in California, which housed a third of the total Iranian population in the country.⁴¹ With such concentrations of Iranians already set in place thousands of Iranians joined opposition organizations. The ISA, the largest Iranian student organization in the United States was most active in California, housing a number of different chapters and hundreds of protests a year. Aside from California, students often found themselves in the Northeast and the Midwest of the country where there were already Iranian established communities.

Ties of kinship played a dominant role in Iranians choosing where in the United States to study. Coming from a society which valued strong family ties, Iranian students

⁴¹ Thernstrom, ed. *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, 522-523.

often chose universities or regions which already had a set Iranian community in which they could feel comfortable. This was one of the reasons why there was a distinct regionalization of Iranians and fractionalization of different student organizations in the United States. The most obvious example of this can be found amongst the Iranian Muslim student body in the United States. Although most Iranians have ties to Islam, many Iranian students in the U.S. considered themselves in a sort of limbo state when it came to religion. As Dabashi notes, they often considered themselves “neither Islamist nor anti-Islamist.” He recalled, “Our mothers prayed five times a day, but our fathers enjoyed Russian vodka, and never knew which way the Qibla was.”⁴² Coming from more middle class backgrounds many Iranian students did not grow up in an environment which stressed Islam or fundamentalism. The Shah’s modernization project had attempted to limit the role of religion in Iranian society and culture. Nonetheless, the 1970s saw a resurgence of Islam amongst the Iranian population, a result of the dissatisfaction of the forces of modernization policies and practices put in place by the secular Shah. This led to a more devout Iranian student body. Following the steps of other religious students, most Muslim Iranians found themselves in the Midwest where there was already a Muslim community. This can be observed by looking at the distribution of different student groups and publications throughout the country. More devout Iranian students could be found in states like Texas, and Illinois, while the more Marxist-progressives students were located along the coasts usually in California, New York and Washington D.C.

⁴² Dabashi, *Iran*, 134.

Various other factors, such as politics and the Iranian economy, led to this exodus of Iranian students to the United States. The political climate of Iran since the mid 1950s was repressive, and within the country the Shah had been viewed by the student community as a dictator who would not allow any form of opposition, leading some outside Iran to demand more liberties and political freedoms. After the Civil Rights movement, the United States was seen as an environment with generally more civil liberties and rights than they experienced at home. Invoking their First Amendment rights Iranian student activists chose to protest and demonstrate against injustices they had encountered at home. Defending their right protests against Navarro College in May 1977, and denouncing college President Walker's comments about them stirring up trouble, the ISA maintained the stance that they had not broken any laws. "This sort of thinking was constantly peddled in the early stages of the Civil Rights movement in the U.S. when racist and reactionaries tried to hide their crimes against Blacks and other minorities" they stated, "by claiming that it is not the people's suffering that moves them to fight injustice but rather some 'outsider.'"⁴³ Economic incentives also were important. Some saw a more secure future for themselves in the United States than in Iran, which had growing inflation and a weak job market. Students were aware of the future job opportunities available to them in the United States and some decided to take their chances in U.S. because their prospects were better. In the late 1970s as both the student movements and the leftist movements in the U.S. began to lose support and strong organization, the Iranian student movement found its voice coming together to demonstrate that these movements were not yet dead.

⁴³ ""Navarro College and Mr. Walker's *Hospitality*," 1.

BRIEF HISTORY OF OPPRESSION:

Most of the Iranian students, being in the late teens and twenties, came to the United States having lived their entire life under the regime of the Shah. A corrupt and unpopular monarch amongst his own people, the Shah ruled Iran through a net of repression and terror. Iran's location on the northern edge of the Persian Gulf, sharing a border with the Soviet Union and its rich natural resources consisting of mainly oil but also copper and uranium deposits, gave the Shah leverage in his relations with foreign powers. The U.S. maintained the strongest and most beneficial relationship with Iran due to its hegemony and involvement in helping to bring about the Shah's reinstatement to the Peacock Throne in 1953. After ousting a popular and nationalistic leader in a coup, the Shah felt brutal measures were necessary to maintain his hold on power. Fearful that he would be denounced on the world stage for his actions against his own people he kept the full extent of his repressive tactics secret from even his closest allies. Despite all the measures taken by the Shah to suppress growing opposition to his rule increased student populations abroad, economic unrest, media coverage human rights abuses, Third World ideologies, Islamic revivals, and globalization lead to the toppling of the Shah in 1979.

Iranian students abroad found that foreign nations, especially the United States and Western states in Europe, would grant them the freedoms they had never experienced, including such basic rights as freedom of speech and right to assemble. But this too came with a catch, for the Shah's megalomania and influence were so dynamic that, even within the U.S., Iranian students were constantly being watched for signs or

examples of dissidence. Students felt they could never be free until the Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi was no longer the “Shahnashah,” or king of kings. As a result, they used their new found freedoms outside Iran to bring the Shah’s oppressive state to the world’s attention.

The main instrument of repression used by the Shah was the Iranian National Intelligence and Security Organization, known by the acronym SAVAK. Founded in 1957, SAVAK was active in identifying and punishing all those who opposed the Shah after all of the main opposition has been crushed. They were known for their brutal and repressive tactics, which were carried out against hundreds of thousands of Iranians and their loved ones. Both in Iran and abroad, SAVAK promoted hostility amongst dissidents, leaving Iranian individuals suspicious of all Iranians around them.⁴⁴ Some knowledgeable western observers claimed that SAVAK maintained greater control over Iranian citizens than the KGB did in the Soviet Union.⁴⁵ This was not paranoia; as Newsweek noted in 1974, “up to 3 million Iranians had acted in some way or other as SAVAK informers.”⁴⁶ With a population of roughly 35 million, these odds were not worth testing for a number of Iranians within the country.

Those abroad originally felt more secure in being outspoken against the regime, but this quickly ended as students realized they were followed and watched even outside Iran. In the 1970s, SAVAK agents became especially active in the pursuit of Iranian dissidents abroad. As Ron Jacob, an American active in the Iranian student movement

⁴⁴ Halliday, *Iran*, 83.

⁴⁵ Gregory F. Rose, “The Shah’s Secret Police are Here,” *New York Magazine*, September 18, 1978, 45.

⁴⁶ “The Master Builder of Iran” *Newsweek*, October 14, 1974, 55-61.

remembered, SAVAK agents were openly active within the U.S., “attacking demonstrations of Iranian students and their supporters, kidnapping Iranian activists, and testifying at INS deportation hearings, where Iranian activists were sent back to almost certain torture and death in Iran’s gulags.”⁴⁷ Reports from Washington and the American embassy in Iran confirm that the United States was aware of SAVAKs involvement in on their soil. In 1978 a State Department spokesman confirmed “175 SAVAK [agents were] currently undergoing training at the CIA’s McLean, Virginia location. This was down from the last 5 years average of 400.”⁴⁸ Iranians believed those in Washington made allowances, and at times even aided SAVAK agents, in their pursuit of Iranian dissidents and was allowed to continue due to the special relationship Washington shared with the Shah. Iranian opposition assumed, with good reason, that that Shah adjusted oil prices and in return, the U.S. guaranteed advanced arms supplies, diplomatic and international support, and condoned the blatant human rights violations.⁴⁹ The U.S. played an important role in maintaining support for the repressive apparatus in Iran for their own interests. As a result many Iranian students feared participating in anti-Shah activism afraid of the consequences they and their families would face. Iranian student organizations claimed that SAVAK agents always had been protected and helped by the CIA, FBI, local police and government officials. The ISA noted many examples of peaceful demonstrations, what they call “exercises in democracy,” which ended in violent

⁴⁷ Ron Jacobs, "A Matter of Perspective: The United States and Iran." Counterpunch [article on-line]; available from <http://www.counterpunch.org/jacobsiran.html>, accessed April 14, 2008.

⁴⁸ Rose, “The Shah’s Secret Police are Here,” 45.

⁴⁹ Nikki R. Keddie, *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 235.

arrests.⁵⁰ Iranian activist and vocal students quickly became aware of that they were not exactly “free” to voice their opinion in the United States, a contradiction which was not overlooked. Yet, instead of backing down, these students continued to organize and demonstrate, only they now had to conceal their identity. Whenever they protested in public, Iranian students, no matter their organization affiliation, wore paper bag masks over their heads to protect their identity and symbolize the oppression they felt even when outside of Iran.

THIRD WORLD MOVEMENT AND ITS INFLUENCE ON IRANIAN STUDENTS:

Gerard Chaliand, a contemporary French political scientist who spent years living amongst guerilla groups, asserted “the Middle East was late in finding a place in revolutionary Third World mythology.”⁵¹ Even so, Iranian students found inspiration in the words and ideologies of Third World revolutionaries to explain their exploitation by foreign nations at home, particularly the United States. The term Third World referred to nations and people who were dominated by developed countries in an international system. Although Iran was never officially a colony, Iranian students still believed their country had been under the authority of foreign powers and thus in a way shared the colonial experience. Describing this belief, the OIMS stated, “Iran has been under political and economic aggression of the colonialist and has lost its political and economic independence.”⁵² Originally the ‘imperialist’ were seen to be Britain and the

⁵⁰ “Mobile, Alabama- S.D. Bishop State Junior College,” *Resistance* vol. 4, no. 3 (May 1977): 5.

⁵¹ Gerard Chaliand, *Revolution in the Third World* (New York: Penguin, 1989), 23.

⁵² “Iranian World Affairs,” *The Rise* Vol. 1, no. 1(July 1977): 6.

USSR, but in the later part of the century the United States became the Shah's new "imperialist master." American Marxist, communist, social democrats and radical liberals supported the student's view that colonialism overseas and class exploitation at home helped the United States to sustain its hegemonic power. John Isbister, an economics professor at University of California Santa Cruz, notes that the term Third World "carries with it the promise of change, the promise that those who are currently oppressed will eventually overcome their oppression and enjoy vastly better lives."⁵³ This analysis maintains that global resource-depleted nations, such as the United States, depended on Third World nations to maintain their authority throughout the world. They did so by exploiting the masses of the Third World while propping up military dictators to retain their influence.⁵⁴ The Shah was not the only Third World dictator to benefit from U.S. support; examples from this same period could be found in individuals like Suharto of Indonesia and Pinochet of Chile. Iranian student criticism was shaped largely by their experiences in Iran which went hand in hand with ideologies of other Third World conflicts occurring in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Carter, and his predecessors, dealing with the Shah's regime were seen by Iranian students as a prime example of how U.S. foreign policy was "revealing of the Big Lie about the so called 'humanization' and 'morality' of U.S. imperialism around the world."⁵⁵

The Third World movement was a backlash against the situation of colonial rule. National liberation against the political, economic, social, and cultural objectives

⁵³ John Isbister, *Promises Not Kept: The Betrayal of Social Change in the Third World* (West Hartford: Kumarian Press, 1998), 16.

⁵⁴ Edwards Walter, *The Rise and Fall of Leftist Radicalism in America* (Westport: Praeger, 1992), 2.

⁵⁵ "Mr. 'Human Rights' Meets King Torture," *Resistance* Vol. 5, no 1 (December 1977): 2.

borrowed from Western sources began to define the Iranian student movement. S. Neil MacFarlane, a professor of International Relations, notes three objectives integral to the idea of national liberation: economic independence, political independence and a commitment to profound social change.⁵⁶ The existence of a democratically progressive government was seen as a threat to imperialist ventures. A prime example of this, and the one constantly embraced by the student movement was the coup of Mohammad Mossaddeq in 1953. Once Prime Minister Mossaddeq nationalized oil in 1951, the United States and England felt threatened in their economic and regional security in the Middle East and decided a coup was necessary. Within his two years as Prime Minister, Mossaddeq, head of the democratically elected National Front government, had upset the imperialist order by bluntly telling Iranians the time had come for Iranians to control their natural resources and not be dominated by foreign nations. Mossaddeq stressed the need for liberty and social justice attracting the loyalties of certain intelligentsia. National liberation was more than just political independence, but encompassed economic and social liberation as well. This all created a synthesis between nationalism and socialism within the Third World revolutionary movement.⁵⁷ Seeing themselves as part of this larger movement, the Iranian student members of October League in 1975 noted, “The Shah is the main defender of the U.S. interests and hegemony in opposition to primarily the mounting wave of national liberations movements.”⁵⁸ The following decades saw an increased challenge to Western hegemony throughout the Third World.

⁵⁶ S. Neil MacFarlane, *Superpower Rivalry and 3rd World Radicalism: The Idea of National Liberation*, (London : Croom Helm, 1985), 48.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 42-48.

⁵⁸ Iranian Student Association of America, *On the Alliance of the October League (M-L) with the Shah of Iran*. (Texas?: ISAUS, 1975), University of Davis California State Library, 36.

Unhappy with the affects of Western imposed modernity; Iranians looked towards other progressive leaders for inspiration. As the Shah spoke of Iran industrializing and becoming a world power itself, Iranians began to take to the streets and protest the failures of the regime. In the March 1978 issue of *Resistance*, the ISA described the economic crisis in Iran, finding fault with Iran's economic and political dependence on the United States. Although the GNP was higher than ever, they stated "destitution of the working class and the peasantry has become worse than ever." For example, there were severe food shortages and malnutrition throughout the country. Inflation had led to food, rent and electricity prices going through the roof. As an Iran newspaper revealed "many families spend 80-90% of their salaries on housing alone." There were not enough doctors or dentists in Iran to care for general populace, with government statistics placing the national average for doctors at 1 for every 4450 and dentists at 1 to every 23, 222. The ISA went on to find fault with Iran's education systems, stating that 72% of all children 7 and older were illiterate. These statistics demonstrate that the Shah's modernization project had left a great deal of the Iranian public wanting more. They felt systematically exploited and abused; as they saw it under the Shah and his "modernization" program the masses of Iran remained poor while state bureaucracy and foreign investors profited. Aligning with other Third World revolutionaries, students listened to and read the writings the likes of Gamal Abdel Nasser, Jawaharlal Nuhru, Joseph Tito, Fidel Castro, Salvador Allende, Patrice Lumumba, Aime Cesaire and Ahmad Ben Bella. Students, such as Dabashi, noted how many of his peers found solidarity with "friends, comrades and heroes around the world from Ho Chi Minh to Che

Guevara, from Ghandi to Malcolm X, from Franz Fanon to Jean- Paul Sartre.”⁵⁹

Building off of the views of such revolutionaries, Iranian activist and students interpreted the world along the lines of a North-South conflict, colonizer vs. colonized.

Despite the fact that the Shah had outlawed opposition texts, Iranians began to compose copious amounts of resistance literature. This stemmed from a long history of resistance against oppression and strong heritage and respect for the arts. As the Shah’s regime became more tyrannical, the underground literature movement grew, educating and uniting the Iranian opposition to the Shah. Jamal Al-e Ahmad’s, a famous Iranian author and outspoken critique of the Shah was best known for his book *Gharabzadegi*. Translated into “Occidentosis”, Al-e Ahmad’s critique of the West is a prime example of the influence of the Third World Movement amongst the Iranian masses. He saw the world in a binary, composed of the haves and the have nots. Simply put, he portrayed the Shah’s actions as selling out his own people for power and wealth. Ahmad believed the Shah was encouraged by Western nations which saw Iranians, like all other imperialized/colonized people, as inferior, and, as a result, their culture and history did not matter. Although this was not an original thought, it resonated with the masses nonetheless.⁶⁰ The West was seen as a disease, which spread its contagious culture while destroying all else. Many Iranian students came to the United States with these beliefs already in place, and their experience in America only heightened their criticism.

⁵⁹ Dabashi, *Iran*, 134.

⁶⁰ Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 80-83.

FRACTIONALIZATION OF IRANIAN STUDENTS:

The Iranians Student Association (ISA), the first and largest Iranian Student organization within the United States, was founded in 1952 in collaboration with the Persian Embassy and American Friends of the Middle East (AFME) in Madison, Wisconsin. The AFME had been founded one year earlier and was a front funded by the CIA's International Organizations Division with the aim of improving relations between the United States and Middle Eastern countries to compete with the Soviet Union's influence in the region amongst labor unions and student groups. Just as the CIA was preparing the coup which overthrow Mossaddeq in 1953, the AFME set up its first office in Tehran. Throughout the rest of the 1950s, the AFME placed a great deal of its energy upon Iranian students over others in the Middle East. Not only were they involved in supporting organizations such as the Iran-American Society and the Tehran Boy Scouts, but they were active in financing and directing ISA activist to support the Shah.⁶¹ Their efforts were successful for the first few years, but students began to openly oppose the Shah for his involvement in ousting of Mossaddeq. Opposition to the Shah amongst members of the ISA began to grow. In 1960, the AFME decided to no longer fund the ISA for its newfound political, independent ideology. According to an article in *Ramparts*, Kermit Roosevelt, head of the CIA operations during the 1953 coup in Iran, was also head of the AFME when it decided to cut off financial support for ISA's newly adopted anti-shah position.⁶²

⁶¹ Mark Gasiorowshi, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Shah: Building a Client State in Iran* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 128-129.

⁶² "How the CIA Turns Foreign Students into Traitors," *Ramparts* Vol. 5, no. 10 (April 1967): 23-24.

After the AFME withdrew its funding, opposition student activists were able to gain the upper hand and worked to politicize the ISA. During the 8th annual ISA convention held from August 29 to September 2, 1960 in Ypsilanti, Michigan, members voted in an actively politicized leadership who set out to revise the ISA constitution. As Afshin Martin-asgari described in her book Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah, the resolutions of the Ypsilanti Congress declared

...in recent years the government's general policy, both domestic and foreign, had brought irreparable damages to the Iranian nation," they went on to call for the "establishment of a national government based on democracy" cancellation of the rigged Majles elections, and the release of those arrested in connection with election protests...In addition, the 1960 ISA Congress called for a foreign policy of "positive non-alignment," on the basis of "similar conditions that tie us with Asian and African states and members of the Bandung Conference."⁶³

The Iranian Embassy became concerned such open antagonism to the Shah's regime. Confrontations emerged between embassy officials and members of the newly elected ISA leadership, resulting in the denial of passport renewals for two high level ISA officials. This only helped to strengthen the ISA's support amongst other Iranian students in Europe and Tehran. The U.S. Students Association, a member of the International Student Conference (ISC) was so struck by the injustice that they too offered to help.⁶⁴ In 1960 the ISA had found its voice and, as Iranian students continued to come to the United States in growing numbers, it got louder.

In January 1962, Iranian student organizations throughout Europe and the United States met to create a cohesive organization known as the Confederation of Iranian

⁶³ Martin-asgari, *Student Opposition*, 38-39.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

Students, National Union (CISNU). This union was the first universal Iranian student organization and was strongly influenced by leftist and Tudeh party ideologies. Over the years, this organization gradually became more politically active against the Shah's increasing oppressive regime. Embracing democratic and constitutional models, the CISNU was originally composed to act as a type of cultural and political representative for Iranian students through an elected board of their peers.⁶⁵ They increased their militancy over the years as their radicalization grew, reflecting the growing views of the Third World Leftist movement. During the 1960s, the CISNU aligned itself with other student movements and began their propaganda campaign against the dictatorship of Shah. In 1962, the ISC sent an official delegation to Iran to report upon the oppressive situation placed upon students, the results were compiled and printed in multiple languages. This method of pressuring the Shah's regime with the help of other international organizations was thus adopted and carried out until he was overthrown.⁶⁶

In the mid 1960s the Shah had lost his backing from the entire Iranian student community abroad which was upset by his increasingly autocratic rule. Because of this and successful guerilla attacks by militant students in Iran, the Shah outlawed membership into the CISNU in 1971.⁶⁷ By then the Tudeh Party's influence had waned, as most students aligned themselves closer with Maoist ideologies during the Sino-Soviet split. This alignment did not last long either; in the 1970s, the Peoples Republic of China drew up trade and diplomatic agreements with the Shah, upsetting student activist and

⁶⁵ Matin-asgari, "Confederation of Iranian Students."

⁶⁶ Martin-asgari, *Student Opposition*, 59.

⁶⁷ Keddie, *Roots of a Revolution*, 237.

turning many against Maoist principles.⁶⁸ Reflecting the same events happening in other Third World movements throughout the world, Iranian student splintered off into more than a dozen student organizations with different ideologies and religious convictions.

By the 1970s the ISA had chapters all throughout the U.S. in over 50 cities, publishing a number of newsletters and leaflets in both Farsi and English to foster partnerships with liberal American and other radical groups. The ISA, as well as its parent organization the CISNU proudly declared that they were an “Independent anti-imperialists, anti-reactionary organizations of the Iranian student movement and while uniting with all progressive and revolutionary forces in common struggle, we have always taken our independent stand on all questions.”⁶⁹ The most active organization of Iranian students, the ISA sponsored approximately 700 demonstrations with over 240,000 participants in 1978 alone. They also published a monthly newsletter in English, titled *Resistance* which analyzed the events of the Iranian Revolution, its history in detail and events in the Iranian student movement. Over 5 million copies were distributed in one year alone by the ISA.⁷⁰ A member of the CISNU, Iranian Student Association’s structural strength, membership and shock-and-awe aspects were comparable to other contemporary student organizations such as Young Americans for Freedom (YAF).

Unlike other international student movements which the CISNU were members of, such as the ISC and the International Union of Student (IUS), the ISA refused to

⁶⁸ Ibid, 236.

⁶⁹Iranian Student Association in America, *Alliance of the October League*, 43.

⁷⁰ “The 26th Annual Convention of ISAU.S.,” *Resistance Vol. 6, no. 2 (February 1979)*: 8.

accept funds from any political or private organization.⁷¹ Iranian student organizations wanted to affirm their independence from outside influence. These groups before them had demonstrated how the dependency on outside forces for support led to concessions to the organizations political and social causes, leading to even more fractionalization and latter the disbanding of such groups. Although most of their member held communist and socialist ties, the ISA made it explicitly clear that the Iranian Revolutionary movement would not rely on the Soviet Union, or any other global power for support. If anything, their writing and speeches prove above all else, they wanted a democratically elected government which would represent the people of Iran, not foreign or more specifically American big business. Iranian student organizations were financed by their members, Americans and foreign students sympathetic to their cause and most of all rich Iranian exiles and businessmen who were sympathetic with the revolution.⁷²

Even though they were a privately operated organization of students, the ISA was well organized and resourceful with their funds. Aside from mass publications and thousand of demonstrations, the ISA was able to finance their own personal lawyers. This legal representation was often present for public demonstrations to secure the student rights. In addition the ISA also funded a number of deportation and legal cases of Iranian students within the United States who could not afford the fees. As the Revolution escalated, so too did the number of students who found themselves in trouble with the law. In December of 1977, as mentioned in a *Resistance* article, the ISA had

⁷¹ Philip G. Altbach, "The International Student Movement," *Journal of Contemporary History* vol. 5, no. 1 (1970), 169.

⁷² Christopher Dickey, "Demonstrations Break Out Here Just Like Spring; Suddenly, Protesters Again Abound at White House, on Hill," *Washington Post*, December 11, 1978, C1.

about 100 cases of Iranians who had deportation and legal charges placed against them.⁷³ Within six months, the number of cases more than doubled.⁷⁴ The ISA spent hundreds of thousands of dollars, if not more, in securing the rights of Iranians within the United States.

Both inside and outside of Iran, a number of Iranian leftist groups contented that the Iranian Revolution was a democratic people's movement and in a sense was non-ideological. Student Iranian religious communities originally gravitated towards Marxism for its analysis of class struggle and oppression. Marxist and Islamic critiques of the Shah's Iran were not ideologically compatible, but they do share certain characteristics. Both place strong importance to an end of corruption and imperialist intervention and an equal distribution of wealth. In 1976, a number of Muslim students decided to split ways with the ISA. Muslim students felt there was too much bickering about which form of Marxism to adapt in Iran rather than discussion which concerned solving the problems of those still in Iran.⁷⁵ They would break off and form the Organization of Iranian Muslim Students (OIMS) which continued to separate and grow from Marxist student factions after 1976. The OIMS declared that vague slogans concerning the need for "independence, democracy and freedom" were purposely used to hide the ideological struggle of the Iranian people's movement. Drawing upon a strong Islamic history, Muslim students felt that the revolution "reflect[ed] a common historical

⁷³ "ISA Needs Your Support," *Resistance* vol. 5, no. 1 (December 1977):15.

⁷⁴ "ISA Needs Your Support," *Resistance* vol. 5, no. 4 (July 1978): 2.

⁷⁵ *The Rise (English Defense Publication) and Leaflets in English Volume 5* (OIMS, April 1979): 9.

background and a common sociocultural and ideological development that have been deeply influenced by and molded on the basis of Islam and its exalted values.”⁷⁶

By 1977 there were about a dozen more Iranian student organizations beside the ISA and OIMS, such as the Federation of Iranians students and the October League, but these groups were much smaller and thus less influential in their endeavors. Still they were active in joining protests and demonstrations put on by the ISA, OIMS and other Third World student movements. Although they professed to have different solutions to the problems of Iran, such as a constitutional model, Islamic model or Marxist model, in the end these students unified to bring down the Shah. During protests they would all wear paper masks, in solidarity of their cause; yet to keep their distinctions known, they were known to wear different colored bags, each color representing its own organization.⁷⁷ Influenced by Third World revolutionaries and the Civil Rights era before them, Iranians took the streets in a type of civil disobedience in opposition to the Shah’s regime and U.S. Imperialism. In response to the wave of killings and arrests of 18 Iranian Patriots by the Shah, in late 1976, a group of Iranian and American students seized and chained themselves to the Statue of Liberty after having hung large banners from her crown which said “down with the Shah.”⁷⁸ (See Figure 1) This is just one of many examples which will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

⁷⁶ “Shah’s Regime Collapses,” *The Rise* Vol.1, no.6 (February 20, 1979): 10.

⁷⁷ Paul W. Valentine, “Causes Vary, Demonstrations Go On; Causes Change Over the Years, but Demonstrations Go On,” August 21, 1978, A1.

⁷⁸ “Iranian and American Students Seize Statue of Liberty in Support of 18 Iranian Patriots,” *Resistance* vol. 4, supplement 2 (February 1977): 1.

No matter what difference they had, all Iranian student organizations professed the hope that, once the Shah was gone, Iranians would be able to democratically pick their own form of government.⁷⁹ Most Third World states fundamentally accepting of the idea of democracy, even if it was not practiced. Vijay Prashad, an international studies expert, asserts, “the claim of cultural backwardness justified colonial rule, so national movements typically argued for self-rule on the grounds of cultural maturity.”⁸⁰

People became more motivated than ever in campaigning for social justice. They found solidarity with organizations such as Palestinian movements, Americans for Independence and Democracy in Iran (AIDI), Communist Youth Brigade and over 70 other Third World and student movements.⁸¹

Each organization had the same core goals which they hoped to accomplish with their activism. Aside from the ultimate goal of overthrowing the Shah, Iranian students hoped to help other Third World and student organizations to end “puppet regimes.” Students did this in the context of defending other progressive anti-colonial and anti-



⁷⁹ “Protests at Home Pose Troubling Questions for Iranians in US,” *Washington Post*, November 12, 1978, A28.

⁸⁰ Prashad, *Darker Nations*, 89.

⁸¹ “Support the Iranian People’s Struggle against the Shah and his U.S. Backers! ISA & RCYB,” poster (November 7, 1978), Vizeer Papers at Kent State Library Special Collections.

exploitation movements. More specifically, Iranian students wanted to end U.S. imperialism in Iran. Reflecting their North/South view of world relations, students and some in academia were disappointed by the extent that U.S. policy had exploited the Iranian masses and supported the Shah's repressive regime. Through publications and conferences Iranians students were able to expose both the autocracy of the Shah and the human rights abuses conducted by SAVAK. In particular they wanted to end the mistreatment of political prisoners who were tortured, not given a fair trial and not allowed to see family members because they had opposed the Shah's rule. In addition to these goals, the OIMS worked with other Muslims in the United States to educate Americans about Islam and supported Islamic movements like those in Palestine. Although they did not reach all of the American public they were successful in reaching some individuals, especially fellow students and leftist and religious sympathizers. As one student noted, "Unlike what has been reflected in the American media, a great many American people support our cause, because it is a search for truth and justice. The American people on the whole are a freedom and justice loving people. The[y] believe in the adage, 'The truth will out.'"⁸²

Friends, scholars and students sympathetic to the Iranian struggle created an academic journal titled *The Review of Iranian Political Economy and History (RIPEH)*. Within each journal there are academic articles by American and Iranian professors of history, political science and economics, commentary from students, firsthand accounts from Iran, contemporary Iranian poetry, Iranian book reviews and photographs. Most of the Iranian contributors used pseudonyms for fear of repercussions from the SAVAK.

⁸² Iranian Embassy, *Campaign of Intimidation and Victimization of Iranians in the U.S.* (14 December 1979), Digitized National Security Archive: Iran 1977-1980, no. IR03557, 3.

This journal which was published at Georgetown University ran for 5 years, from 1976 to 1981, as a means to educate and culture its readers about the events and history of Iran. Like other publications to come out of the Iranian student movement, *RIPEH* introduced its readers to the situation within Iran. In December of 1977, the editors wishing to add to the “new wave of struggle for freedom and democracy in Iran” explained their purpose was to review “recent events outside and inside of Iran [which] manifests the broad based dimensions of this upsurge.”⁸³ One of the main goals of the student movement was to oust the Shah through public and international pressure brought about their portrayal of the actual events in Iran.

Iranians student’s organizations relied upon the support of other people and organizations to accomplish their aims. Acknowledging this, all of the organizations were openly and repeatedly thankful for all of the help both American and progressive foreign student gave. In Nov 15, 1977 in San Francisco the ISA organized one of many protests in opposition to the Shah’s visit to Washington. With over a thousand participants, this demonstration included a coalition of representatives from more than 25 non-Iranian progressive and revolutionary organizations. Similar signs of support and solidarity with the Iranian struggle were repeatedly mentioned by students. For example, “a cab driver refused to accept money some ISA members who had caught a ride, explaining that the demonstrations had taught him about the Shah and U.S. involvement in Iran” and “other students reported that restaurant owners had treated them to some

⁸³ “Editorial,” *RIPEH* vol. 2, no 1 (December 1977): i.

food” after learning of their involvement in the protests.⁸⁴ This support was greatly appreciated and encouraged by all members of the Iranian student movement. They saw themselves as but one part of the larger Third World movement and depended on the support of others within the community. This worked both ways, as Iranian students were active participants in other revolutionary and leftist organizations events. In January of 1977, a State Department report assessing the Future of Iran found that, “student unrest is endemic--and growing...the newer generation of aspiring elite[s] is not likely to accept permanent exclusion from the decision making process.”⁸⁵

CONCLUSION:

Khosrow Golsorkhi, a Persian poet, was known for his portrayal of the anguish and despair Iranians felt under the imperialized reign of the Shah. The following poem demonstrates how fed up Iranians had become with U.S. imperialism and promotes a national uprising against the then current state. It is a sort of war cry, one which demands liberation and change in the future.

⁸⁴ U.S. Department of State Bureau of Intelligence and Research, *The Future of Iran: The Implications for the U.S.* (January 28, 1977), Digitized National Security Archive: Iran 1977-1980, no. IR01144, 12.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Poem without Name

Upon your chest lay
The deep scar of your enemy
But,
 O, unswerving Cyprus, you never fall
It is your way to die while standing.

In you the ballads of the sword and blood
In you the migrant birds
In you the song of victory
Never have your eyes been so bright

With your blood
 Topkhaneh Square⁸⁶
 Stirs to life
 In the wrath of the masses.

People
From the side of Topkhaneh will takeover this side,
Bread and Hunger will be shared equitably.
 O, unswerving Cyprus!
It is your death that nourishes all this.

The enemy creates walls
These decent and oppressed who pass by you,
Do not yet know your name
And this is a pity, but
One day when the masses know you
 Every drop of your blood will be honored
The people will sing
Your great name in every patriotic song.

Your name the banner of Iran
The Caspian thrives on your name.⁸⁷
 - Khosrow Golsorkhi

This is typical of the type of poems and literature which circulated in Iran in the 1970s. It is also indicative of the works which the Shah made illegal due to the fact it promoted opposition. Iranian students included poems such as this in their publications

⁸⁶ Topkhaneh Square in Tehran was known as a place of uprisings in Iranian history.

⁸⁷ Khosrow Golsorkhi, "Poem without Name" *RIPEH* vol.1, no. 1 (December 1976): 2.

to humanize their cause. Within Iran, one of the first open calls of resistance came from poetry reading in Universities. As Hamid Dabashi, recalled from his years as a student, “For us the world was squarely divided into two opposing parts: those who ruled it and those who resisted this tyranny and rose against it, either in arms or else with a pen, a pencil, a brush, or a camera.”⁸⁸ Whereas Golsorkhi choose to write, Iranian students in the United States used all of the above means to bring about resistance. These students would supply the most vocal opposition to the Shah’s regime abroad, while providing support to the revolutionary movement within Iran.

Iranian students comprised the only large and influential movement against the Shah in the United States for the more than quarter of a century the Shah was in power. As more and more students came to the United States to study abroad, Iranian student organizations saw an increase in enrollment and participation. Even though religious and ideological views splintered the Iranian student movement into different factions, as the late 1970s progressed the students came together to protest and denounce the Shah and U.S. policy in Iran. They drew strength together to openly oppose the Shah as the social and political unrest increased in Iran. Their activism would lead to greater autonomy throughout the Iranian community within the United States and inspiration to their fellow community at home in Iran.

⁸⁸ Dabashi, *Iran*, 134.

CHAPTER 2

With confidence and faith in America's future, President Carter raised his glass to make a New Year's toast to the Shah while on a short visit to Tehran in 1978. Reinforcing his support for the Pahlavi regime, Carter declared that Iran, under Mohammad Reza Shah's leadership, had become "an island of stability" amongst the wavering Middle East and surrounding regions.⁸⁹ Despite its well documented human rights abuses and lack of open political systems, Carter had adopted the belief held by his predecessors that no other Third World country was of more importance to U.S. interests than Iran. After running an aggressive election campaign centered on his morality and strong support for human rights, Iranians hoped that he would help to persuade their monarch to liberalize and reform their country. Unfortunately, Carter and his administration continued massive arms sales to Iran, marginalized the Shah's human rights abuses, and rhetorically supported the Shah's regime, which were all due to the nation's strong geo-political and economic importance to the United States. This 'absolute' support signaled to the Shah that he could continue his repressive policies and autonomy without any repercussions from his principal ally. Iranian students abroad, along with many of their counterparts at home, found American policy increasingly more hypocritical.⁹⁰ The Iranian student movement possessed strong criticisms of President Carter and his administration whose politics helped to undermine efforts of the Iranian opposition. Although Carter was not the first U.S. president to quietly condone the

⁸⁹ Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *Answer to History* (New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1980), 153.

⁹⁰ James A. Bill. *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 234-235.

Shah's repressive politics, his strong moral rhetoric led to higher expectations among Iranians both in the country and studying abroad. His actions, or lack thereof, spoke louder than his words and fueled the growing resentment amongst Iranian students of U.S. policy in Iran and the Third World.

U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War tended to favor stronger right-wing Third World regimes over more radical and democratic movements due to their stability and protection of American interests. Upon taking office, President Jimmy Carter sought to create a post-Cold War foreign policy which promised to place the nature of American relations with the Third World in a new directions favoring human rights and viewing the world through a larger prism of global change.⁹¹ On May 22, 1977 during a commencement speech at the University of Notre Dame, Carter defended his ideological change with the status quo by stating that the United States should promote a foreign policy "that is democratic, that is based on fundamental values, and that US's power and influence...for humane purposes. We can also have a foreign policy that the American people both support, and for a change, know about and understand."⁹² Carter ran on a platform which supported a foreign policy influenced by human rights, self-determination and nonintervention. Due to this, people in Iran originally liked Carter and watched the U.S. election coverage with the prospect that they could be witnessing history and a change in the special relationship shared by the United States and Iran. As Richard Eiden, an American international observer sent to Iran by ISA reported in July 1978, "

⁹¹ David F Schmitz and Vanessa Walker, "Jimmy Carter and the Foreign Policy of Human Rights: The Development of a Post-Cold War Foreign Policy" *Diplomatic History* vol. 28, no. 1(January 2004): 113.

⁹² Jimmy Carter, "University of Notre Dame: Address at Commencement Exercise and University" May 22,1977, *Public Papers: Carter, 1977*, 954-962. Quoted in *Ibid*, 120.

despite people's knowledge of the connection between the Shah and U.S. imperialism, some people (the liberals) were fooled by Jimmy Carter....people were by their televisions when the elections were held and in may placed they cheered when Carter won."⁹³

The 1970s saw increased U.S. influence in Iran. As James Bill notes, its "levels were highly reminiscent of the direct interventions of Britain and Russia during the heyday of colonialism."⁹⁴ Iran was the second largest oil exporter, with 10 percent of the world's known petroleum reserves. As a result, the United States depended on its special relationship to combat the increased oil prices which spiked in the 1973. Throughout the oil embargo and the rest of the decade, the Shah continued to sell oil to the United States to demonstrate his allegiance to his American ally. The Shah assured the export of oil, combated Soviet influence in the Middle East and acted as a modernizing and westernizing force in the Islamic world. In return, the United States supported its ally with the sales of high tech armaments, international support and the unspoken agreement that the Shah could continue his repressive and unpopular regime.⁹⁵ This special relationship had been in place since 1953, and with too much on the line for U.S. interests to lose, Carter was left with little opportunity to implement his new foreign policy aims in Iran.

⁹³ Richard Eiden, "Delegation of Observers Visit Iran" *Resistance* vol. 5, no. 7 (October 1978): 10.

⁹⁴ Bill, *Eagle and the Lion*, 5.

⁹⁵ David Farber, *Taken Hostage: The Iran Hostage Crisis and America's First Encounter with Radical Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 70-71.

IDENTIFICATION WITH THIRD WORLD AND THE THREAT OF A NEW VIETNAM:

Many of the economic developments that would plague Iran, especially in the late 1970s, were caused by problems commonly associated with neocolonial modernity. In 1963, under the advice of President Kennedy the Shah put forth a number of reforms known as the White Revolution. Through a series of social and economic reforms, the Shah hoped to modernize Iran both economically and industrially into a global power. Yet the transformation was plagued by corruption, class divides and growing discontent. In fact it was the White Revolution and its policies of secular education, women's rights and land reform which made Ayatollah Khomeini politically active. Openly denouncing the Shah as a U.S. puppet, Khomeini became an influential symbol of opposition to the Shah, resulting in his exile from Iran in 1964.⁹⁶ As Iran's economy expanded and relied more upon the global market, its economy shifted away from agriculture and manufactured goods and towards the role of producing oil.⁹⁷ Iranian students were angered by the fact that their government had devoted its resources towards the oil industry at the expense of the average Iranian citizen. Many opponents of the Shah claimed all social and welfare reforms were fraudulent, and although the nations GNP did increase between 1962 and 1977, the growth benefited the rich and no structural changes emerged. As Nikki Keddie, a distinguished Iranian historian notes, "this period may be seen as contributing to a capitalist type of agriculture and of industrial growth, with a natural emphasis on state capitalism, given the autocratic nature of the regime and its

⁹⁶ Little, *American Orientalism*, 220-221.

⁹⁷ Dabashi, *Iran*, 115.

monopoly control of the ever-growing oil income.”⁹⁸ Iranians became dissatisfied with their country’s growing dependence of the world market. Students repeatedly blamed Iranians associated this new world order with U.S. imperialism. Hamid Dabashi states that this role “made the wobbly Iranian bourgeoisie almost entirely compradorial, the Iranian labor class systematically weak, and the whole economy subject to the whims of global capitalism.”⁹⁹

The fact that Iran became an oil-based economy meant that the nation was not able to maintain a class formation which focused on domestic economic interests. Instead the Shah, dependent on foreign economic interests to stay in power, felt it necessary to maintain an authoritarian regime. Fearful of democratic institutions and opposition to his rule, the Shah cracked down on all forms of resistance by making it illegal to be a member of any political party besides the one-party state Rastakhiz Party. In the Shah’s own words, anyone who did not join was “either an individual who belongs to an illegal organization, or [was] related to the outlawed Tudeh Party, or in other words a traitor. Such an individual belong[ed] in an Iranian prison...and his activities [were] illegal and punishable according to the law.”¹⁰⁰ As a result, it was near impossible for Iranians within the country to openly critique the Shah or change the system from within. This is one of the underlying reasons why many Iranians felt the need to veer away from western modernity, not only had it exploited the Iranian populace but its influential advocates had openly supported the Shah’s regime. Some basic grievances held by students revolved around the poor living conditions of the average Iranian, including:

⁹⁸ Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, 160.

⁹⁹ Dabashi, *Iran*, 115.

¹⁰⁰ *Kayhan International* (Tehran), March 3, 1975, 2. Cited in Bill, *Eagle and the Lion*, 196.

crowded homes, lack of electricity and water, little to no health care or sanitation, inflation and child labor.¹⁰¹ The economic and social problems Iran was faced were increasingly more and more identified with the state sponsored modernization projects of the Shah. It was not so much that these students opposed Iran's advancement, but rather as one student wrote in a letter to Carter criticizing his policy towards Iran, they were "against the absolute dictatorship installed by his predecessors in order to plunder Iran."¹⁰²

Influenced by Third World theory, Iranian students saw neo-colonialism as one of the main ways the United States was able to retain its hegemony. They believed that Carter was knowingly maintaining a relationship built upon massive militarization, increased commercial sales and an ever-burgeoning American population in Iran. They were constantly discouraged by the fact the mass news media rarely had anything to say on the subject. And when they did, the American press often supplied the same information sent out from the White House and/or State Department, mainly that "the Shah is our man."¹⁰³ These students compared U.S. support for the Shah with other Third World repressive nations such as: Brazil, South Africa, South Korea, Zaire, Argentina, Saudi Arabia, Chile, Taiwan, Mexico, Portugal and Puerto Rico.¹⁰⁴ Having felt a sense of comradeship with citizens of these nations, Iranian students saw themselves as part of a larger battle- one against U.S. imperialism. Iran was just one more nation with an

¹⁰¹ Iranian Students Association of America, *U.S. Government-Backed Dictatorial Regime of Iran Steps up Repression: 13 Striking Iranian Workers Murdered by Shah's Troops* (San Francisco: ISA, 1971), University of Michigan, Labadie Collection, 4.

¹⁰² *Open Letter from Members of the Faculty of Pahlavi University in Shiraz to President Carter and the United States of America* (November 1, 1978), Digitized National Security Archive: Iran 1977-1980, 1.

¹⁰³ "Editorial," *Wall Street Journal*, November 3, 1978.

¹⁰⁴ "Shah's U.S. Visit: Newest Plot Against Iranian People," *Resistance* Vol. 4, no. 8 (September 1977): 4.

authoritarian dictator which was being backed up by the U.S. government to help the United States maintain its global dominance.¹⁰⁵

Iranian students came to the United States to better their chances for the future. Iran had become a country stuck in the midst of a botched modernization project. Like many other Third World dictators of the day, the Shah was dependent upon those in United States to continue his expansive and repressive aims. To Iranian students the Shah was public enemy number one, and anti-Americanism amongst them spread as the United States continued to openly support the Shah. According to the ISA, the United States, or more specifically American “corporate bosses” had made it so that “Iran has become big business.”¹⁰⁶ Between 1972 and 1975, non-oil U.S. - Iranian trade more than quintupled from 400 million dollars to more than 2 billion. The growing population and limited social mobility which brought these students to the United States were supposed to be part of the Shahs grand plan to modernize Iran. Yet, instead of praising the Shah and America for aiding them in their endeavors, these students found fault with their new residence for maintaining the status quo. Since the 1950s, as Douglas Little, an American diplomatic historian, asserts, “America’s National Security managers believed that by combining Yankee ingenuity with Middle East petrodollars” the United States could make revolutionary change in Iran impossible.¹⁰⁷ This would not be the case, and, instead, Iranians began to blame the U.S. and western imposed modernity for their problems. Within an article of *The Rise*, the OIMS stated that Iran was repeatedly getting plundered by foreign powers, which had “major control over the whole economy.” Since

¹⁰⁵ Walters, *Leftist Radicalism in America*, 2.

¹⁰⁶ “Shah’s U.S. Visit: Newest Plot Against Iranian People,” 2.

¹⁰⁷ Little, *American Orientalism*, 193.

oil prices had hiked in 1973, the Iranian economy saw inflation rise nearly 30% every year. In addition, a generation earlier, Iran had been an agriculturally based society which was able to support its own population, yet by 1977 Iran had to import billions of dollars worth of foodstuff. Iranian students contended, “in this ‘earthly paradise’ of foreign capitalist and their indigenous collaborators, millions of Iranian toiling masses suffered from lack of food, shelter, education, health, etc.”¹⁰⁸ Unable to grasp the hostility and anger many Iranians had towards the United States, Carter would be shocked when a year later his “island of stability” would crumble into a state of revolution.

Between 1953 and 1979, Iranian students saw U.S. intervention as an imperial extension, one which steadily transformed Iran into a military base for the United States, “facilitating its containment” of the Soviet Union and “supporting its drive for global domination.”¹⁰⁹ Students watched the United States develop a war in Vietnam during the mid 1960s to early 1970s along the lines of containment. Throughout American intervention, Iran served as a logistical base and provided fuel which allowed American machinery to run.¹¹⁰ Cold War tension did make Iran an important ally for the United States due to its geographic location and the Shah’s pro-western orientation. Students saw the events in Vietnam as a situation in which the United States would support a government whose repressive government lacked a mass base. Viewing themselves as kindred Third World spirits with Vietnamese revolutionaries, many students feared that Iran could easily become the next Vietnam.

¹⁰⁸ “Expose the Shah’s Puppet Dictatorial Regime,” *The Rise* Vol. 1, no. 1 (July 1977): 10.

¹⁰⁹ Dabashi, *Iran*, 123.

¹¹⁰ “Political Repression in Iran,” *The Rise* Vol. 1, no 1 (July 1977): 6.

Iranian students in the U.S. repeatedly drew parallels with Vietnam to suggest that the substantial U.S. corporate and military presence was a precursor to possible armed intervention. This fear was voiced repeatedly in publications and leaflets throughout different student organizations dating back to 1977.¹¹¹ Drawing immediate connections between themselves and the Vietnamese, Iranian students asked themselves why there were so many U.S. advisors already in Iran. They also felt that, since Iran already possessed more U.S. armaments than any other country outside NATO, the increasing number of weapons made it obvious that Iran was preparing to quell the revolutionary struggle by force.¹¹²

In addition to the possibility that the Shah would use American made arms to quell the revolutionary movement, a fear persisted that the American military might invade Iran on a pretense similar to that used to enter Vietnam. By the end of 1963 there were roughly 16,000 U.S. military advisors in Vietnam.¹¹³ This number is overshadowed by the 67,000 American “military advisors” present in Iran before the Shah left in 1979, many of whom were former generals and colonels from the Vietnam war.¹¹⁴ Fearing the possibility of U.S. forces entering Iran to quell the growing unrest in the streets in the name of overriding nation interests, the ISA stated it was “not too long ago when 50,000 U.S. soldiers died in Indochina under the same pretext! American people will believe Carter’s

¹¹¹ “Navarro College and Mr. Walker’s Hospitality,” 7.

¹¹² “Is another Vietnam in the making?” *Resistance* Vol. 5, no. 4 (July 1978): 2.

¹¹³ *World and Its People: Eastern and Southeast Asia, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos*, (New York: Marshall Cavendish Reference, 2007), 820.

¹¹⁴ M. Arasi, *Nationalist Government and the Pseudo Leftists'* (ISAUS, 1979), Frostburg State University Special Collections, 6.

fairy tales about ‘Human Rights’ as much as they would believe Nixon is (or was) an honorable man.”¹¹⁵

In particular, Iranian students were concerned over the U.S. appointments of Richard Helms in 1973 and William Sullivan in 1977 as ambassadors to Iran. Both were viewed by students as two of America’s “top spies,” only furthering their claims that the United States was interfering in Iranian domestic affairs and aware of growing opposition against the Shah. Seen by Iranian opposition as top engineers of counter-revolutions, espionage and repression, the fact that both Helms and Sullivan were picked to serve in Iran proved to Iranian students that the United States felt it necessary to secure dominance in Iran. As the ISA stated, “ These appointments reflect the rapidly intensifying importance of Iran to U.S. strategic needs in the Persian Gulf, not only for the critical supplies of oil that have a profound impact on the U.S., European and Japanese economic crises, but increasingly for U.S. war preparations.”¹¹⁶

Both men had previously served America in countries that had dictatorial regimes supporting U.S. interests. Helms had worked in Chile as the CIA director in that country at Nixon’s bequest to help suppress Salvador Allende’s regime. Allende had been democratically elected, and wanted to nationalize industry, so the US spent over 8 million dollars to stop him from keeping power. Allende was used by Nixon as an object lesson to other democratic countries in the region; in 1973 Allende was ousted in a coup brought about by economic pressure.¹¹⁷ Sullivan on the other hand had served four years as

¹¹⁵ *Resistance*, Special Issue no. 5 (Nov. 1977), Georgetown Library Special Collections, Herz Papers.

¹¹⁶ “U.S. Appoints Top Spies as Ambassadors to Iran,” *Resistance* Vol 5, no.1, (December 1977): 6.

¹¹⁷ David Schmitz, *The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships*, (Cambridge.:Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1994-1999.

ambassador to the Philippines. He then served as ambassador to Laos and Vietnam during the thick of the Vietnam War, and was rumored to have been in charge of a number of US intelligence operations during the war.¹¹⁸

Once in Iran, Helms worked on securing business interests in Iran for U.S. companies and was thus deemed a thief and a “blood sucker” of the Iranian people by students. He was replaced by Sullivan who had many well known connections to Vietnam. Active in the early campaigns in Vietnam, the appointment of Sullivan was considered indicative of the seriousness in which “U.S. strategists view[ed] their relationship and continuing power hold over the Shah.”¹¹⁹ The successes of revolutionaries in Cuba, Algeria and Vietnam persuaded many radical members that the only way to combat a repressive police state is through guerilla warfare.¹²⁰

The events in Vietnam also crushed the illusion of many in Iran that the United States was a truly democratic and just nation. To them the war quickly showed its true face, and they feared the U.S. government would use the excuse of communist expansion to justify intervention in Iran if more revolutionary tendencies emerged. Students in Iran noted that, despite the pro-American propaganda spread throughout Iran, it became obvious that “the Vietnamese were fighting for their simplest rights of survival and freedom from a corrupt and ruthless government that was strongly supported by [the U.S.] in their own land.”¹²¹ In the true spirit of the anti-war movement before them, these

¹¹⁸ Bill, *Eagle and the Lion*, 246-247.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 7.

¹²⁰ Ervand Abrahamian, “Iran in Revolution: The Opposition Forces.” *MERIP Reports*, no. 75/76 (March-Apr. 1979): 6.

¹²¹ American Embassy in Tehran, *Letters to President* (December 14, 1978), *Digitized National Security Archives: Iran 1977-1980*, no. IR01920, 3.

students wanted a nation whose sovereignty came about through the process of self determination.

Iranian students were not willing to accept Walt Whitman Rostow's theories of development and modernization. Recruited by Henry Kissinger in the late 1950s for the Rockefeller project, Rostow, an economist and political theorist, believed extensively in free enterprise economics in developing countries as an alternative to communism. In 1956 the Rockefeller project had set out to assess the domestic and foreign policy problems the US would face in the future. It concluded that the biggest challenge to the US foreign policy would be the rising expectations of Third World countries and the harm that those expectations could do to the existing world political and social order.¹²²

Many Iranian students were quick to question western modernity in their own way, whether it be through the ideologies of socialism or of Islam. They were tired of being exploited by the United States and other western nations. Iranian students believed the Shah had not brought progress to the people of Iran, but rather brought autocracy and oppression. The Pahlavi monarchy became identified with particularly strong emotions amongst the collective memory of Iranians. According to Dabashi these are fear and ecstasy – “fear of the tyranny that ruled a people with systemic mendacity, and the ecstasy of dreaming what was possible beyond it.”¹²³

On the Marxist left and the religious right, Iranian student opposition had carried explicit anti-American overtones. Both sides seemed convinced that the United States government held substantial influence and power within Iran and could open up political

¹²² Little, *American Orientalism*, 195.

¹²³ Dabashi, *Iran*, 112.

systems in the country if they wanted.¹²⁴ However, it appeared as though the Carter administration was satisfied with the system in place. Drawing upon the American language of democracy and self-determination, Iranian students were perplexed as to how a nation with such egalitarian values could be so disingenuous. Instead Iranian students claimed Americans had plundered Iran for their own capitalist ventures which were “hardly befitting [of] the heirs of Jeffersons and Lincolns.”¹²⁵ Despite Carter’s words, his administration’s deeds continued to show students that the U.S. had become a supporter of dictatorial regimes.

SAVAK AND THE CIA:

In January 1977, the State Department commissioned a report to assess the future for Iran and its implications for the United States. Despite growing unrest in the country, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research concluded that Iran would remain stable under the Shah for years to come. With the military and SAVAK behind him, the document claimed, the United States should not have feared a change in the status quo. Even though SAVAK was known to have violated many human rights, it had appeared as though they had succeeded in driving the political opposition underground. Washington defended its acceptance of such abuses by stating that, since the Shah has deemed his opposition to be terrorists, they have no rights. To defend this view, the U.S. government asserted “Persians have experienced authoritarian rule for millennia, and the Shah’s

¹²⁴ William H. Sullivan, “*The Iranian Opposition*” (February 1, 1978), *Digitized National Security Archive: Iran 1977-1980*, no. IR01296, 8.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

tactics have not exceeded traditional bounds.”¹²⁶ Both the United States and the Shah were convinced that a strong monarchy was the only way to guarantee stability and rapid economic development. SAVAK was seen as the main tool to keep this repressive system in check.

Rather than publically admit that they were aware of SAVAK’s abuses, American officials were quick to sidestep issues of human rights. James Bill notes a number of different tactics that were used by those in Washington to divert attention away from the numerous human rights violations. First, they tried to draw their attention to the successes of the White Revolution such as increased economic and technical advancement within Iran. Whether it be to reporters or Congress itself high-ranking members in Washington, such as Assistant Secretary of State Alfred Atherton and Director of Iranian Affairs Charles Naas, many political and economic elite did all they could to veer conversations away from human rights violations in Iran and towards the progress and reforms put in place by the Shah. One such tactic was to portray Rastakhiz, the Iranian political party, as a type of democratic organization. The only problem was that this party was not democratic at all; with mandatory membership, this “all-encompassing party” held a monopoly on all political activity in Iran. Acquainted with the school of developmental politics, the Shah and Iranian scholars stressed the importance of institutionalization within their country. Influenced strongly by American thinkers like Samuel Huntington, American trained social scientists within Iran helped to

¹²⁶ U.S. Department of State Bureau of Intelligence and Research, “The Future of Iran: The Implications for the U.S.” (January 28, 1977), *Digitized National Security Archive: Iran 1977-1980*, no. IR01144, 5-6.

promote the need for a strong centralized authority.¹²⁷ These views had been critiqued by the student and leftist movements since the 1960s and were held in contempt by Iranians who wanted a more democratic and open society.¹²⁸ Iranian students considered SAVAK the main obstacle within Iran for, without them, the Shah would not be able to maintain such a suppressive regime.

Within Iran, it was common knowledge that SAVAK was established in 1956 with the help of the CIA. Originally organized to quell the remainder of Mossaddeq sympathizers, SAVAK had grown into an establishment which gathered any and all information on opposition to the Shah's regime. Depending on the type of subversive activity found, SAVAK agents were allowed to respond as they saw fit, leading to a number of assassinations and executions. Iranian students declared that SAVAK's torture techniques were even taught by U.S. agents. The Organization of Iranian Muslim Students alleged "high ranking SAVAK agents...are trained in the United States in special institutions which develop new scientific methods of physical and psychological tortures." It was believed, by such students, that the CIA continued to be an active voice within SAVAK, maintaining supervisory power until the fall of the Shah in 1979.¹²⁹

By 1975 there were over 70,000 full time SAVAK agents and a number of part time informers located in factories, universities, school, offices and the countryside in Iran. SAVAK agents were known for their oppressive and torturous techniques, and many Iranians lived in a state of constant fear. "The government of Iran's surveillance of

¹²⁷ Bill, *Eagle and the Lion*, 221-222.

¹²⁸ Walter. *Leftist Radicalism in America*, 102.

¹²⁹ Political Repression in Iran," 3.

its students is truly abysmal, really insidious,” stated an Iranian student at the University of Chicago. “The reputation of SAVAK is so chilling that nothing really even needs to happen in order for that reputation to begin to work.”¹³⁰ This can be demonstrated by the amount of attention Iranian students paid towards this organization. Within their publications these students not only noted the intense presence of SAVAK, but they emphasize that SAVAK was trained, protected and aided by the CIA, FBI, local police and government officials.¹³¹ This continued involvement of the U.S. in SAVAK’s activities was viewed as one more example of how the United States was asserting its imperialist control into Iranian domestic affairs.

Iranian students reported there were almost 100,000 political prisoners being held by SAVAK agents in Iran by the late 1970s. With an almost unlimited power to arrest, detain and torture individuals, SAVAK agents used whatever means necessary to intimidate anyone who voiced a critique of the Shah’s regime. Adding insult to injury, individuals detained by SAVAK agents were charged in a private military tribunal, one in which they were often unaware of the day, time or charges brought against them. Iranian students focused on the abuses of SAVAK agents to demonstrate the totalitarianism of the Shah’s regime. There is hardly a newsletter, pamphlet or poster put out by students which did not make reference to these circumstances at home. Yves Bandelot, a member of the International Association of Democratic Jurist reported that SAVAK agents frequently practiced: “scourging with a metallic whip, metallic table heated white-hot on which the prisoner is extended, burns from cigarettes, electric charge to the sex organs,

¹³⁰ “SAVAK Said at Work in Washington,” *Washington Post*, May 10, 1977, A1.

¹³¹ Navarro College and Mr. Walker’s Hospitality,” 4.

hanging up by the arms to the ceiling, and introduction of a broken bottle in the anus.”¹³² Mock executions and torture were even performed by ISA members in hundreds of shopping centers, neighborhoods and other crowded areas to educate the American public of the situation in Iran.¹³³ Appealing to the humanity of the American public, these descriptions were often brutal and graphic, describing events such as: starvation, daughters raped in front of family members, children tortured in front of parents, and the stench of burning flesh seeping throughout prison cells.¹³⁴

SAVAK agents supervised all Iranian’s lives like Big Brother. Some students even claimed that the Shah’s White Revolution was a “fake reform program” devised to make “extremely superficial change that actually increased the repression of the villages and surveillance of the people’s lives.”¹³⁵ Even outside of Iran, SAVAK agents were active in finding opposition to the Shah.¹³⁶ Wherever there were sizable Iranian communities, primarily the United States and Europe, Iranians could be sure there were also SAVAK agents watching them. The Washington Post would later report that there were at least 13 full time SAVAK agents who had infiltrated and informed upon students on U.S. campuses.¹³⁷ With spies everywhere, SAVAK agents would record the names of students who were politically active against the regime. As a result, these students upon arrival home and/or their families in Iran would be punished and interrogated for such

¹³² Le Monde, December 1974. Translated in Iranian Student Association of America, *On Violation of Human Rights in Iran: [report to the Subcommittee on International Organizations (U.S. Congress)] (College Park: ISAUS, 1976)*, University of Michigan Special Collections, Labadie Collection, 12.

¹³³ “Mr. ‘Human Rights’ Meets King Torture,” 11.

¹³⁴ Iranian Student Association of America, *On Violation of Human Rights in Iran*, 10-15.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 6.

¹³⁶ Iranian Students’ Association in Northern California, *Defend Iranian Political Prisoners* (Berkeley: Iranian Students’ Association in Northern California, 1975), University of California, Davis, Shields Library, 2.

¹³⁷ “Foreign Spy Activity Found Rampant in U.S.,” *Washington Post*, August 9, 1979, A12.

outspoken views. An example of this can be seen through the story of Jashid Hormoz, an Austrian educated architect who was president of the Iranian student organization during his days studying in Austria in the early 1970s. Identified by SAVAK during a CISNU meeting in East Germany, he was interrogated upon his return home, then tortured and kept in solitary confinement for over a year without any formal charges. After 18 months in prison, Hormoz was brought to trial with only 20 minutes notice and found guilty. During lunch with an United States embassy representative in Tehran, Homoz clearly stated that the majority of Iranian students and the university community want the Shah to step down and be tried by an Iranian people's court for his crimes, and that the only future government which would have any future success would be a government decided by the people. ¹³⁸

Iranian student organizations abroad were extraordinarily cautious of SAVAK agents who could be within their mist. SAVAK was known to give scholarships to Iranian students abroad who could not afford the education themselves with the intent that they would serve as informants upon their fellow classmates.¹³⁹ To avoid getting identified, the Iranian Student Association put in place a number of precautions which were to be observed by all of its members. First, during all demonstrations, hunger strikes and other activities, all Iranian participants were advised to wear face masks to hide their identity. Second, no one was allowed to be addressed by their family name. Even best friends would not know each other's last names, not due to mistrust of each other but from fear of others overhearing it. Lastly, while abroad many members of the ISA did

¹³⁸ "Comments of Jamshid Hormoz, Former President of Iranians Students Federation in Austria" (January 1, 1979), *Digitized National Security Archive*, no. IR01990, 3

¹³⁹ "Tehran Sensitive about Renown of its Secret Police," *Washington Post*, September 4, 1976, C1.

not vacation in Iran because they were afraid of being recognized as a political dissident.¹⁴⁰ These precautions were often carried out by other Iranian student organizations as well.

SAVAK's omnipresent like character did suppress the voice of a number of students who were afraid of the possible repercussions of being named a dissident. And those who were willing to stand up and openly voice their critique would only voice their views under pseudonyms and with masks over their faces during protests. Their fears were backed up by a Nov. 1976 report on the political situation in Iran in which Amnesty International wrote that Iranian students studying abroad are subject to particular surveillance. SAVAK agents became more apparent within the U.S. as the Revolution escalated in Iran. In Chico, California SAVAK agents who were themselves Iranian students fired 5 shots at the leader of the local ISA chapter.¹⁴¹ The Justice Department later linked one of the suspects to SAVAK, yet the two assailants were still acquitted at their trial.¹⁴² Students noted this more active stance by SAVAK after the Shah's visit on November 15. "Our families back home are being harassed, and there is a lot more rightwing activity both in our organization and in pro-Shah demonstrations. This shooting is the first, but it is not isolated" one New York based ISA leader stated.¹⁴³

Iranian students witnessed the growing Human Rights movement in the United States and used the language and images of torture and repression to rouse sympathy with the American people. In the 1970s, most human rights activism attacked state-sponsored

¹⁴⁰ Iranian Student Association of America, *On Violation of Human Rights in Iran*, 8.

¹⁴¹ Seth Derrish, "Routine Crime in Chico?" *Seven Days*, June 2, 1978, 6.

¹⁴² "Foreign Spy Activity Found Rampant in U.S.," *Washington Post*, August 9, 1979, A12.

¹⁴³ Derrish, "Routine Crime in Chico?" 6.

repression, focusing on the global concerns and new interpretations of how to address international affairs.¹⁴⁴ Stepping away from Cold War theories of containment, Americans became more aware of the military dictatorships throughout the world which oppressed their citizens, such as the cases of Nicaragua, Argentina and Iran. As a result Iranian student organizations placed emphasis within their writings and demonstrations of the viciousness of SAVAK both within Iran and the United States. Appealing to the American public, Iranian students demonstrated that the Shah's repressive regime not only kept most Iranians living in a state of constant fear, it also left them without basic civil and political rights. The American public was left with the question: how could the United States support a nation which did not share its tenets of democracy and self-determination?

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND A LACK OF CRITICISM BY CARTER:

In November of 1978, at the height of the Revolution and two months before the Shah felt it necessary to leave Iran, Carter once again reinforced his support for the Shah. In an Interview with Bill Moyer, the President declared, "We look on the Shah, as you know, as a friend, a loyal ally, and the good relationship that Iran has had and has now with ourselves and with other democracies in the world, the Western powers, as being very constructive and valuable."¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Kenneth Cmiel "The Emergence of Human Rights Politics in the United States" *Journal of American History* vol. 86, no. 3 (December 1999): 2.

¹⁴⁵ "Presidential Interview with Bill Moyers of the Public Broadcasting Company [excerpts]," (November 13, 1978) in Yonah Alexander and Allan Nanes, ed., *The United States and Iran: A Documentary History* (University Publications of America: Aletheia Books, 1980), 462.

In June of 1977, early on in his presidency, the ISA cynically stated that “Carter’s ‘human rights’ campaign, which was launched with a bang in just a few months, is going out with a whimper as large and small tyrants and dictators with fresh blood still clinging to their hands stream into the White House drinking toasts to the new boss and pledging eternal service.”¹⁴⁶ Seen by these students as a propaganda weapon for global influence and control, Carters human rights views became less believable as time continued. As the United States stayed firmly committed to the Shah, Carter continued to sell arms to Iran and overlook the repression and death in the streets; Iranian students could only laugh when the President talked of absolute respect for human rights. In fact, Carter mostly used his human rights campaign as a bludgeon to carry on Cold War politics with east European communist regimes.

DAMAGING IMPORTS OF ARMS SALES:

The strongest example of support the Carter administration gave to the Shah was its commitment to sell Iran the most technologically advanced arms that it was selling to any Third World nation. As he publicly spoke of diminished American arms sales abroad, in the case of Iran and the Shah, Carter was willing to make an exception. With the help of the United States and its immense oil revenue, the Shah was able to create one of the world’s largest military establishments. In the 23 years between 1953 and 1976, the armed forces grew from 120,000 to over 400,000. As alarming as this figure may seem, the real numbers can be viewed through arms bought abroad. In the beginning of

¹⁴⁶ “Guess who is coming to the States?” Resistance Vol. 4, no. 6 (June 1977): 1.

his reign, between 1941 and 1953 the annual defense budget was \$60 million. The figure reached almost \$17 billion between 1972 and 1976. By 1976, Iran had become the largest buyer of the most sophisticated American and British weaponry.¹⁴⁷ As Ervand Abrahamian notes, “the Shah ruled first and foremost as the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, and only secondly as the head of state.”¹⁴⁸

The Shah was given the role of gendarme of the Persian Gulf and Africa by the United States in the late 1960s. This allowed the Shah the opportunity to enlarge his arsenal and maintain a strong dictatorship. Among the Shah’s purchases were: F-4 Phantom fighter bombers, modern F-14A jets, giant G5A transport planes, tanks, helicopters, destroyers, aircraft carriers and over 4 billion dollars worth of telecommunications equipment.¹⁴⁹ All of this cost the Iranian government billions of dollars a year. Through these purchases the Shah was not only gained more tools to repress his opposition, but he was using the nation’s revenues to support the western world market rather than focusing on domestic issues which were falling apart. Iran at this time had poor school, medical, dental, housing, and agricultural facilities. High inflation and poor job prospects continued to polarize the rich and the poor. Iranian students saw their nation deteriorating in the name of modernization and the Carter administration was seen to be supporting it. Not only was Iran used as a watch-dog of U.S. interests in the Gulf, the Shah had made Iran an “arsenal for U.S. imperialism.”

¹⁴⁷ Abrahamian, “Iran in Revolution,” 4.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Iranian Student Association of Western U.S., *Condemn the Fascist Shah’s visit to U.S.: ‘Benevolent Monarch’* (Iranian Student Association of Western U.S, 1975), Georgetown Library Special Collections, Herz Collection, 2.

Students felt that the Shah had handed over the entire wealth and resources of their country to the United States.

CARTER'S SUPPORT OF SHAH:

Before his election, Carter stated, "I am particularly concerned by our nation's role as the world's leading arms salesman."¹⁵⁰ And in a presidential debate with Ford, Carter critiqued the sale of sophisticated weaponry to Iran in particular. Yet despite all these verbal retracements, once in office Carter continued to sell arms and maintain the status quo when it came to U.S.-Iranian relations. Defending his actions, he maintained that the Shah was a progressive and benevolent monarch which the U.S. needed to assist. Throughout his presidency, Carter openly supported and praised the Shah for his work in the Middle East. As a result, Iranian students saw Carter and his administration as simply "new skin on the same old baloney."¹⁵¹

To most Iranians by the late 1970s, the Shah had come to symbolize everything that was wrong within their society. He had overthrown the only democratic system Iran had ever had, under Prime Minister Mossaddeq with the aid of the United States and had installed a despotic regime. In fact, despite their different ideologies and religious views, it had been their unified hatred of the Shah which brought the over 12 different Iranian student organizations within the United States together. All over the world, the Shah's repressive measures had come out, and Carter continued to ignore them when assessing the growing opposition to the Shah's regime. Viewed as a "merchant of death" and a

¹⁵⁰ *Events*, 26 August 1976. Quoted in "Shah's U.S. Visit: Newest Plot against Iranian People," *Resistance* vol. 4, no.8 (September 1977): 3.

¹⁵¹ "Mr. 'Human Rights' Meets King Torture," 2.

man with “selective morality”, Iranian students saw Carter as not only a hypocrite but a crutch to the problem, mainly the continued reign of Mohammad Pahlavi Shah.



Figure 2: Political Cartoon created by the ISA Protesting the Shah's Visit to Washington D.C. (Source: *Resistance* November, 1977)

Images often demonstrated the sentiment of these students. The ISA used pictures and vivid political cartoons within their posters and newsletters to demonstrate the Shah's tyranny. [Figure 2] is from a poster denouncing the White House visit, in November of 1977. It shows how the Shah riding a chariot to towards the White House, away from the angered Iranian mob. The Iranians are dark and massed together chanting and raising their arms in resistance; depicted as one in the same with no distinguished characteristics. They are not intimidated by the Shah. The worried Shah holds on to all that is dear to him: an oil rig, his U.S.A. crown, and a noose symbolizing his oppressive regime and being led by military jets (probably AWACS). It is almost as if the White House is a place of sanctuary, a place in which he is respected and honored like the magnificent monarch he sees himself as. The artist is demonstrating that the shah is not a

“democratic” and “benevolent” monarch at all but rather a selfish individual who would sell out his own people to the United States. Iranian students would not forgive Carter for the role he played in propping up the Shah during his presidency.

CONCLUSION:

Between 1977 and 1979, Iranian students actively critiqued both the Shah and the Carter administration for their policies towards the Iranian people. In a diplomatic and peaceful matter, these students repeatedly stated that Iranians have no qualms with the American people, but rather U.S. policy in Iran. They saw U.S. policymakers making the same mistake in their homeland as they had made supporting dictators in South Korea, Chile and Vietnam. By restricting their circles of contacts to only those close to the Shah the United States “consequently viewed Iran through an imperial prism.” Since the Shah had been such a strong ally to the United States, these students felt the American government had been quick to allow the crimes and excesses of the Shah. It was believed that continued U.S. support for the Shah would only make relations in the coming years more strained between the two nations.¹⁵²

A letter addressed to the American public written by Iranian students clearly demonstrates the anger and frustration many Iranians felt towards the United States. The problem stemmed from the fact that Iran was viewed as a backwards Third World country by most Americans, which allowed for the Carter administration and his predecessors to turn the other cheek when exploitation and repression was present.

¹⁵² “Comments of Jamshid Hormoz, Former President of Iranians Students Federation in Austria” (January 1, 1979), *Digitized National Security Archive*, no. IR01990, 3-4.

Aligning themselves with the Third World radical movement, many of these students were sick and tired of watching their nation be raped of its resources while they watched their own countrymen deteriorate. In it they state...

Yes, people of America, for the past 37 years we have been watching another invader of our country, the Americans. We have watched them exploit us and deprive us of our simplest rights. We have watched them, live in castles and villas built with our money while our people have slept and died in the streets. We have watched our children in Balouchestan, Kurdistan, Khuzestan, die of malnutrition, of lack of medicine and doctors in the twentieth century; the banishment of our once prosperous agriculture and the introduction of what you call "iranian industry" and we call a 'catastrophe', dependent and Useless. We also watched in terror the killings and tortures performed by C.I.As most skilled trainees i.e.; savaks. He has been deprived of talking, reading even thinking. Our best writers, poets, thinkers and even film producers died or became insane in jails under the tremendous tortures. Our most brilliant students were crucified in prisons and we did not hear a word of sympathy from you, people of America.¹⁵³

These students continued to reach out and try to enlighten the American public about the repressive regime in their homeland; but, during this time, many Americans knew or cared little about the events happening across the globe. In addition, the Carter administration and media's support for the Shah would leave most Americans ignorant of the true situation in Iran until the rise of Khomeini, and then it would be too late.

¹⁵³ American Embassy in Tehran, "Letters to President" (December 14, 1978), *Digitized National Security Archives: Iran 1977-1980*, no. IR019204.

Chapter 3

Shouting slogans like “Death to the Shah” and “the Shah kills people- the people take arms,” on July 11, 1977, 700 to 1000 masked Iranian students and their supporters staged a militant yet orderly protest at the White House in response to a visit there by Iran’s Empress Farah Pahlavi. Even a sudden torrential downpour, which drenched protesters in the middle of the day, could not stop the largest political demonstration directed against the White House since Carter took office six months earlier. This was just one of many protests staged against Empress Farah, and more particularly her husband, by the Iranian Student Association which shadowed her visit across the United States, having days earlier protested in Los Angeles, Williamsburg and New York.¹⁵⁴ As the Empress lunched on mussel soup, Swiss cheese soufflé and peach melba inside the White House with the First Lady, students outside marched with an effigy of the Shah “bespangled with medals, dollar signs, a swastika and a star of David.” In addition, a flatbed truck drove up and down Pennsylvania Avenue with students dressed as an armed firing squad “executing” political dissidents with wooden rifles in a mock demonstration of SAVAK’s actions. “We oppose Farah’s visit because it is just preparing the way for a visit by the Shah. It’s a publicity effort,” said Victoria, an organizer of the demonstration. “We want to offset that.”¹⁵⁵ Four months later, Empress Farah would return to the White House, but this time it would be alongside her husband and they would be met by a larger and more militant crowd of protestors.

¹⁵⁴ Donnie Rodcliffe, “Iran’s Farah Diba, Empress on the Move,” *Washington Post*, July 13, 1977, D12.

¹⁵⁵ Paul Valentine, “Iran Students Protest Empress,” *Washington Post*, July 12, 1977, C7.

By the second half of the 1970s, ideological differences splintered the Confederation of Iranian Students, Nation Union (CISNU). No longer a single unified international student movement body, the CISNU's different factions still cooperated together for what each group considered their main objective – the overthrow of the Shah. Iranian students' voices and the international news had together brought to the world stage the oppressive nature of the Shah's regime. Even though an Islamic authority would be the heir to the Pahlavi throne, it was the secular students abroad that conducted the most political resistance up until 1978. And as their population grew in the United States, so too did their receptiveness to anti-regime politics. Iranian students abroad served as the vanguard of protest in opposition against the Shah.

As the decade went on, it became harder for the Shah to hide his repressive measures. Amnesty International had declared Iran the worst human rights abuser in the world; secret documents concerning the spying and violation of laws by SAVAK agents throughout Europe and Iran were uncovered; inflation and a universally discontented population were some of factors which brought about open resistance to the political situation in Iran in 1978. A year earlier, the Shah began his "year of liberation" where, for the first time in over a decade, some liberties were reintroduced to the public and a number of political prisoners were released. The Shah hoped it would appear as if he were abandoning the most excessive repressions of his regime and replacing them with personal freedoms. This was a blatant facade, as James Bill asserted, in 1977 "the liberalization was partial, the reforms were superficial, and the political system was to

remain fundamentally the same.”¹⁵⁶ In a sense, the Shah had lost touch with the Iranian people, a fact which would finally come to his attention by the end of the same year.

ROLE OF KHOMEINI:

Imam Ayatollah Rudollah Khomeini mobilized the masses of Iran behind religious authorities and language. To many he became the voice of the Revolution, agitating resistance through broadcasts and writings outside of the country. Forced into exile by the Shah in 1964, Khomeini openly criticized the Shah, his White Revolution and U.S. imperialism. A respected scholar and religious leader, Khomeini created the concept ‘Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist,’ in which he proposed a replacement of the monarch with a theocratic Islamic Republic ruled by Islamic technocrats. In addition to his religious message, Khomeini was a strong nationalist. The strong connection in Iran between Shiite mythology and nationalism brought his message to those not as stringently Muslim. Millions of Iranians followed this charismatic leader as he promised a better Iran: a classless society free from foreign domination.

As religious opposition rose in Iran, so too did it rise amongst students abroad. 1976 saw the first self proclaimed student Iranian Muslim group – the Organization of Iranian Muslim Students. With this group came new student publications, such as *Jihad*, *the Rise*, and *Khordad Khouneen*. Even as their numbers grew, Muslim students remained a minority within the Iranian student movement in the United States. For example, during the largest anti-Shah protest held in Washington DC, when the Shah’s

¹⁵⁶ Bill, *Eagle and the Lion*, 255.

visit in November 1977, the body of Muslim students present for the protest only amounted to about 10 percent of the total anti-Shah demonstrators.¹⁵⁷ Yet Khomeini's voice and message was still supported throughout all of the Iranian student factions, proving that his appeal went beyond the simple pretense of religion.

Through the establishment of a "just Islamic government," Khomeini spoke of a utopia based on popular vote, social equality, and national independence. Contrary to his actions after the revolution, Khomeini declared his belief in social, political and legal rights for all members of Iranian society. With such a beautiful vision for Iran, there is little wonder why so many would follow such a charismatic leader. Even Iranians who did not see themselves as Muslims bought into this promise of a new classless society, a sort of "promised land." Seen as a leader of the people and an alternative to foreign colonialism, the words of Khomeini were taken at face value and often repeated verbatim in the students' publications. In the spring of 1979, the editorial group of *RIPEH*, a scholarly journal with no religious connotation, were convinced the Khomeini in post-revolutionary Iran would bring about "qualitative changes in the political, economic, social, and cultural conditions" while pursuing "an active and truly non-aligned foreign policy."¹⁵⁸ In essence he was revered by many solely because he seemed to be everything the Shah was not.

The words and views of Khomeini were embraced by even those who did not consider themselves Muslim or Iranian. This versatility is demonstrated by great admirers of this revolution and Khomeini such as Michael Foucault. A French

¹⁵⁷ Martin-asgari, *Student Opposition*, 163.

¹⁵⁸ "Editorial," *RIPEH* (Spring 1979), i.

philosopher, historian and sociologist Foucault rejected the belief that western modernization was a result of reason, emancipation and progress. He focused on the discourse of power relations, believing every human interaction is in fact a struggle for power. By not buying into the belief that science and technology innately bring progress, but rather questioning Western societies accepted way of life, Foucault appealed to many on the left. During 1978, Foucault visited both Iran and the exiled Khomeini in his residence outside of Paris, resulting in fourteen published pieces on the Iranian Revolution. He viewed this event as a dawning of a new age, one which was not centered on a Western model. Khomeini, to him, had the ability to bring about a new world order, one based around the concept he called “political spirituality.” Foucault understood that to Khomeini and his followers there was more to Islam than the religion itself. Rather, as Foucault stated, the Islamic movement was “an entire way of life, an adherence to a history and a civilization.”¹⁵⁹ In addition to Islam, Khomeini touched upon issues that were secularist and nationalistic in nature. Foucault believed Khomeini would change the way modernization was viewed not only in Iran, but throughout the world.

Khomeini saw the monarchy as fundamentally opposed by Islam and used the rhetoric of struggle by the masses against an oppressor to rally others to his cause. This struggle was felt amongst most Iranian students abroad, in both the United States and Europe, despite their personal ideologies and views. The CISNU was strictly a democratic anti-imperialist organization with no religious orientation. Even though they

¹⁵⁹ Michael Foucault, “A Power Keg Called Islam,” in *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 241.

were comprised of mostly Marxists, these students supported any organization that was against the Shah's regime, be it clerics or Muslim militants.¹⁶⁰ The CISNU also throw its support behind the clergy on issues such as anti-colonialism, Zionism, and internal reaction.¹⁶¹ Early on, students saw Khomeini as a potent symbol of opposition to the Shah. In January 1970, members to the CISNU met Khomeini in Baghdad on invitation from the National Union of Iraqi students. Once there, they declared, "the solidarity of the Iranian students with the progressive clergy's struggle against the Shah's regime."¹⁶² This meeting would lead to later encounters in which these students would ask Khomeini for his support in their fight to end the oppression of political prisoners. In response, Khomeini embraced the student movement, praising them for their active resistance against the regime. In June 1975 after an uprising in Qom, Khomeini emphasized the role student and youth abroad served Iran and Islam with their "valuable striving and expose the crimes of colonialism and its agents."¹⁶³ Together, the religious and the student movement rallied the masses against the reactionary regime of the Shah.

SHAH VISITS WASHINGTON D.C. (NOVEMBER 1977):

The Shah's visit to Washington D.C. in 1977 was a turning point in the Iranian student movement. Thousands of Iranians actively protested throughout the nation's capital, wearing paper bags over their heads and shouting slogans, bringing their struggle to the American public. The next day major newspapers all over the world reported on

¹⁶⁰ Martin-asgari, *Student Opposition*, 111.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, 132.

¹⁶² Shanzdahom-e azar, no. 1 (January-February 1970): 1, 3-4. In *Ibid*, 115- 116.

¹⁶³ Text in Payman (NU), no. 65 (October 1975), 1-2. In *Ibid*, 152.

the protests, which brought both President Carter and the Shah to tears. As each new president had come to power, the Shah came to visit Washington to reassess Iranian-American interests. Each meeting had re-affirmed the intimate relationship previously shared by the two nations, as demonstrated by the increasing armaments and acclaim affording to his role as gendarme of the Persian Gulf. This meeting in November was the chance for the Shah to demonstrate to Carter his loyalty towards the United States. In return, the Shah expected U.S. arms, technical assistance, and support for his repressive political and human rights. Iranian students viewed the Shah as a puppet of U.S. imperialism; as a result, during his visit they planned on exposing both the Shah and Carter on what they viewed as blatant hypocrisy and dishonesty among their policies.

Criticizing the effects of the Shah's regime through a Third World revolutionary lens, Iranians openly encouraged support from anyone who was willing to join them in their fight for an "independent and democratic" Iran. Joining their cause, they were met by progressive Americans, Leftist and Muslim foreign students. The Shah's visit was seen as the opportune time to bring the Shah's repressive regime and corrupt government policies to the forefront. Protests and demonstrations were set up nationwide and, over four days, there demonstrations were held in Boston, Baltimore, New York, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Atlanta, Los Angeles and San Francisco. On the international scene, Iranian students in Europe also protested the Shah outside of U.S. embassies in Paris, London, Stockholm, Vienna and various German cities as a sign of solidarity with their American counterparts. In 1977, student opposition in Iran also intensified as a number of universities launched cultural nights which involved the open reading of censored literature, demonstrations and strikes. Once the Shah returned from the United States,

police and SAVAK agents indiscriminately attacked students and professors at the University of Tehran for their dissident acts.¹⁶⁴

Through newsletters, posters and demonstrations, Iranian students worked at exposing the reactionary nature of the Shah's regime. "Condemn the Shah's U.S. Visit!" one poster by the ISA states for the "purpose of this visit is so that the Shah can be re-instructed as to the aggressive policies of U.S. monopolies and their new representative in the White House, Jimmy Carter."¹⁶⁵ They asked Americans and all free-minded individuals to pressure the U.S. government to withdraw support from the Shah. They particularly sought out Americans who would be responsive to their cause. In the two months leading up to the Shah's visit to Washington, members of ISA distributed more than 2.5 million copies of *Resistance* throughout the country, concentrating on "poor and working class neighborhoods, on street corners, in universities, colleges and in front of factory gates." Particular attention was also paid to areas with large Assyrian and Armenian populations, specifically California, Chicago and New York. These populations were national minorities in Iran, so it was believed they would be more responsive to the students' pleas. Groups, like the ISA, published works in Assyrian and Arabic and visited churches and community groups to create further bonds with these communities.¹⁶⁶ Drawing upon the basic concepts of legitimate sovereign rights and free choice, these individuals stressed their desire for their own democratic government.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 158-159.

¹⁶⁵ "Condemn the Shah's U.S. Visit" *ISA* (November 14, 1977), Kent State University, Special Collections, Viezer.

¹⁶⁶ "Mr. 'Human Rights' Meets King Torture," 11.

For one of the first times since the CISNU's fractionalization, Iranian students of all backgrounds came together to voice their opposition to current U.S-Iranian foreign policy despite their ideological differences. One student at the event, who refused to give his name for fear of government reprisal at home, joined the protest despite its potential repercussions. Embracing the language of a revolutionary, and denouncing the Shah as a "fascist butcher" he explained his reasons for joining the demonstrations to a reporter. "You know, you just feel it in your guts when you are totally repressed," he said, "when there is no freedom of speech, no freedom of assembly, no security in choosing your own destiny."¹⁶⁷

Fearful of SAVAK and D.C. police, many of these students covered their faces with paper masks during the demonstrations to conceal their identity. Reports from fellow students, friends and family members at home all confirmed accusations that



Figure 3. Demonstration by Iranian Muslim Students in Washington D.C., December 10-11
(Source: *The Rise*, Vol 1. Number 4)

SAVAK tortured and intimidated anyone close to opposition forces abroad. This fear would prove to be justified when, a week later, the Shah admitted that SAVAK had been keeping tabs on Iranian dissents in the United States.¹⁶⁸

Masked with picket signs and hateful slogans, it is no wonder these students would become identified as militant radicals – a name they

¹⁶⁷ "Conflicting Views on Shah lead to emotional, bitter Confrontations by Iranian students on Foreign Soil," *Washington Post*, November 17, 1977, A10.

¹⁶⁸ "When Persians Collide," *Newsweek*, November 28, 1977, 65.

would be given by the press, government organizations and the Shah himself. [See figure 3] Throughout the streets they chanted, “Carter’s human rights means fascism in Iran” and “The Shah kills the people, the people take up arms.”¹⁶⁹ In his memoir, the Shah would later state that these demonstrators were not even Iranian, for no one could tell with their faces covered up what nationality they belonged to. Instead he asserted that, “most of them were young Americans- blonde, blacks Puerto Ricans together with some Arabs.”¹⁷⁰ But claims such as this can be easily discredited by numerous reports from both Iranian students and the press. Documentation proved that most of these protesters were of Iranian origin and were active in addressing their grievances with the regime to anyone who would listen.

It is important to note that there was a pro-Shah crowd as well. But, as the Washington Post pointed out, most of these individuals were first and second generation Assyrian, Armenian and other Iranian related ethnic groups who appreciated the Shah’s accepted recognition of their minority communities and cultures.¹⁷¹ Organized by the Shah’s men and separated from the opposition, this group was well dressed with family in hand to support the monarch during his visit to Washington in 1977. From all over the country, especially the Chicago area, a number of these demonstrators came on the dime of “the Iranian government” or “rich Iranian businessmen.” Most of these individuals were given free airline tickets, eating expenses, hotel rooms and \$100 for spending cash

¹⁶⁹ Paul W. Valentine, “Iranians Protest Peacefully Here,” *Washington Post*, December 9, 1977, A17.

¹⁷⁰ Pahlavi, *Answer to History*, 152.

¹⁷¹ Paul W. Valentine, “2 Iran Factions Clash; Hurt at White House; 124 Hurt as Iranian Picketers Clash Near White House; Tear Gas Fired,” *Washington Post*, Nov 16, 1977, A1.

for their protesting.¹⁷² These “rent-a-crowd” tactics were confirmed by demonstrators and some Iranian students even used this situation to their benefit. One student, who refused to be identified, admitted that once he had his money in hand he walked away and joined the anti-Shah demonstration. As he told reporters, “we flew in here (D.C.) on the Shah’s money...He paid the airfare plus expenses and \$300 to anyone who would come to show their support for him. I’ll take this money and demonstrate against him. To hell with him.”¹⁷³ This dichotomy of peaceful expatriates with their families and angry disenchanting Iranians did little to help portray the student activist cause amongst the American public.

PROTESTS, STRIKES & CONTINUED DEMONSTRATIONS:

The Shah’s visit to Washington left 96 demonstrators and 28 police officers injured. A Park Service spokesman cited the damage caused by the demonstrations at about \$20,000.¹⁷⁴ After such unexpected violence erupted, police and American citizens voiced concern over future requests by Iranian students to demonstrate.¹⁷⁵ In fact, a month later the D.C. Park Service’s denied Iranian students requests for a demonstration

¹⁷²Phil McCombs and Joseph D. Whitaker, “Defending the Shah; Thousands, Well Organized, Here to Show Support for Iran Leader,” *Washington Post*, November 16, 1977, A23.

¹⁷³ Courtland Milloy and Juan Williams, “Opposing the Shah, protesters most exciting day has some touches of reunion,” *Washington Post*, November 16, 1977, pg. A23.

¹⁷⁴Stephen J. Lynton and Courtland Milloy, “Shah Violence Sporadic, Shah Demonstrators are Boisterous but Mostly Orderly, Groups Crisscross City” *Washington Post*, November 17, 1977, A1.

¹⁷⁵ “A Rally Permit for the Iranians,” *Washington Post*, December 17, 1977, A1.

permit citing “clear and present danger.” It was the first time in the memory of Park officials that a request was denied solely on that principle.¹⁷⁶

Yet none of these student organizations actively promoted violence. The ISA and other leftist student organizations declared that they were peaceful in nature. Even so, these students did clearly state that they did believe in self defense when necessary. For instance, during the Shah’s visit, student activists tried to stick with non-violent forms of resistance. A student spokesman for the Federation of Iranian students, along with other leaders of the anti-Shah students, blamed SAVAK for provoking the riots by shouting insults and throwing sticks.¹⁷⁷ Protests and demonstrations were organized with the aim of was to inform the American people of their situation in Iran while pressuring the U.S. government to take responsibility for their actions, not to discredit their cause through violent actions. Students saw civil disobedience as the most effective way to bring about change in Iran.

The Iranian Student Association was one of the Iranian student factions noted by Park Service officials for its militancy.¹⁷⁸ Yet in 1978 this organization alone had sponsored approximately 700 demonstrations in which over 240,000 people participated, and there were few outbreaks of violence.¹⁷⁹ As with most Iranian student organizations the Shah attributed their militancy to connections with Soviet communism. Although there is little truth to this, the Shah was well aware of the fear Americans had with Soviet

¹⁷⁶ “Iranians Protest Peacefully here,” A17.

¹⁷⁷ “2 Iran Factions Clash; 124 Hurt at white House; 124 Hurt as Iranian Picketers Clash Near White House; Tear Gas Fired,” *Washington Post*, November 17, 1977, A1.

¹⁷⁸ Paul Valentine, “Iranians Denied Permit for Protest Rally at White House,” *Washington Post*, December 7, 1977, A13.

¹⁷⁹ “The 26th annual convention of the ISAUS,” 8.

communism and Cold War tensions, often using it to delegitimize his opposition. In reality most students who defined themselves as Marxist did not agree with the ideologies and practices of the Soviet Union. Some Iranian students supported revolutionary groups that were ready to take the revolution to the next stage through aggressive tactics. Within Iran two radical Marxist-Leninist inspired guerilla organizations had developed a following in the 1970s- the Fada'ian and the Mohahedin. Both groups asked student movements abroad to focus their attention on defending all groups opposed to the Shah within whatever means available, although they did stress armed resistance.¹⁸⁰ It seems as though some Iranian students were willing to support guerilla organizations in theory, but they were not willing to use similar tactics within the United States. Violent attacks were few and far between, and when students were injured and arrested reports usually claim they were acting in self defense. Despite Iranian students support for guerilla organizations, most students proposed a more democratic and peaceful way of protest.

In January of 1978, the Iranian paper *Ittali'at* published an article which openly attacked the progressive ideas of the left and religious reactionaries; while openly berating Ayatollah Khomeini's character. Massive demonstrations and protests resulted in Iran as troops opened fire on clerics and religious students in the holy city of Qom, killing over two dozen people.¹⁸¹ This event reaffirmed the belief held by Iranians all over the world that the Shah was not concerned with liberalization and human rights; a claim Carter had defended on Iranian soil just days before. A decisive moment in the Iranian revolution, public reaction in Iran made the situation a revolution of rising angst. The

¹⁸⁰ Martin-asgari, *Student Opposition*, 153.

¹⁸¹ Bill, *Eagle and the Lion*, 235.

rest of the year saw significant turmoil culminating with martial law enacted throughout the country by the end of the year. In 40-day cycles, in accordance with Shiite mourning ceremonies, major and minor cities were hit with more and more public demonstrations, each of which regularly produced yet further deaths to be mourned.

As more riots emerged in Iran, Iranian students became more vocal in the United States. Although none of these protests or demonstrations was larger than the November 1977 anti-Shah demonstration, the protests which followed did average sizable crowds, usually composed of anywhere between 600 and 1000 Iranian students and their fellow supporters. Students also printed millions of copies of newsletters in English throughout the United States, while scores of rallies and conferences were held to inform Americans of the situation in Iran. The ISA alone printed over 5 million copies of *Resistance*, their English newsletter, in 1978.¹⁸² Although they were the largest Iranian student organization, they were not the sole creators of dissident literature in the United States. The OIMS had their own English language newsletter *The Rise*, and other organizations were active in putting out posters and leaflets. The fact that these students were so active in publishing writings in English, in addition to numerous publications in their native Farsi, shows how important it was for them to inform the American public of the true situation in Iran.

Iranian students believed they needed outside support to help topple the Shah's regime, especially amongst Americans because the United States was the Shah's

¹⁸² The 26th annual convention of the ISAUS," 8.

strongest backer. By reaching the American public, Iranians hoped they could have an influence on U.S. policy. To do so students addressed multiple aspects of the Shah's repressive regime and President Carter's lack of humanitarian concern for Iran. More particularly, students focused their attention on more progressive and Leftist Americans who were fed up with America intervention in the Third World, drawing upon the comparisons with Korea and Vietnam and using rhetoric which demanded self-determination, basic rights and democratic ideals. A leaflet promoting a demonstration at Youngstown State University addresses all of these points. "The Iranian people are struggling for a society in which human, social and political needs and rights are met," the Iranians Student Organization of Youngstown, Ohio affirmed. Yet despite all the known human rights abuses in Iran "Carter is trying to hide his real face behind a humanitarian mask...to deceive the American people" while he "pushes Congress to approve the sale of AWACS to the Iranian regime, and stated in a secret report that he would send American troops to Iran."¹⁸³ In addition students used the distrust the American public had in the 1970s for their government for their benefit, emphasizing the deceitful nature of the CIA and other government agencies. Students also focused on the corruption and influence American big business had within Iran. Over the years, Iranian students tried to convince the American public that no good could come from American support for the Shah.

¹⁸³ *Condemn Murdering of Iranian People* [March 28, 1978] ISA & YSU, Kent State University Special Collections, Viezer Papers.



Figure 4: Iranian Students in Logan, Utah were part of a nationwide hunger strike organized by the ISA. (Source: *Resistance*, December 1977.)

One critique of the regime was its poor treatment of about 100,000 political opponents who were in jail for their aversion to the Shah. In Iran, hunger strikes were used often used by such political prisoners as a form of protest. As a result similar hunger strikes were held in the United States by a handful of students in

solidarity with these prisoners. [See Figure 4] Drawing upon the precedence of nonviolent resistance, very much in the spirit of the Civil Rights struggle, these students used their protests to bring word of the oppression in Iran to the streets of America. An example of this can be found in April of 1978, when a group of students held a hunger strike in support a 14 day hunger strike which had occurred simultaneously by political prisoners in Iran. These students demands were that the “news be [made] aware of the situation in Iranian prisoners” and that prisoners be “allowed to communicate with family, friends, the outside world.”¹⁸⁴ As these requests demonstrate, most students were democratically progressive- asking for basic rights for their fellow Iranians. Although their demands were not met fully, they were successful in getting their grievances aired. During another hunger strike, this time in protest against a visit by the Shah’s wife in July 1977, the Organization of Iranian Muslim students in seven days had landed: 2 interviews by WRC (NBC) and local radio stations in Washington, D.C., an interview by CH 5 in T.V. in D.C., an interview by Ch 11 in Chicago, and announcements of the hunger strike on several radio stations in Washington, Michigan,

¹⁸⁴ *Support the Hunger Strike of Political Prisoners in Iran* (poster), ISA (April 1978), Kent State University Special Collections, Viezer Papers.

Chicago and the surrounding areas.¹⁸⁵ Iranian students used a combination of Third World, revolutionary and Human Rights politics to draw support to their cause.

Student opposition made it difficult for the Shah to hide his treatment of political opponents to the regime. These groups helped to encourage Amnesty International, the International Association of Democratic Jurist and the International Federation of Human Rights, along with a number of liberal and leftist organizations to examine the situation in Iran. The Iranian Student Association even sent their own delegation of four American international observers to Iran for two weeks in early 1978. Sent with the sole purpose of observing the political oppression in Iran firsthand, these individuals meet with families of political prisoners and students. The delegation of international observers left Iran with the impression that U.S. intervention had “kept in power a regime that has brought economic bankruptcy, chaos, brutal poverty, [and] unparalleled repression against all the needs and aspirations of the Iranian people.”¹⁸⁶ After they returned from Iran, these four individuals spoke all over the country about the trip and the future implications of the U.S. military getting involved. The ISA continued to fund other American delegations later to continue to check up on the situation in Iran from an international observer’s perspective.

Students often encouraged individuals to use their own voice to speak out against the repression and activities of SAVAK in Iran and the United States. Despite the differences held by various Iranian student organizations, they used many of the same tactics to retaliate against authorities in power. Almost every leaflet and newsletter put

¹⁸⁵Expose the Shah’s Puppet Dictatorial Regime,” 95.

¹⁸⁶“Delegation of Observers Visits Iran,” Resistance vol. 5, no. 2 (March 1978): 9.

out by Iranian students in the late 1970s bluntly explained how anyone could help them fight the situation in Iran. Their solution was simple, and diplomatic. They asked anyone, who is concerned about the treatment of those in Iran or those students whose rights were violated, to write letters or call distinct authorities with complaints and demands. Names, phone number and addresses were included of embassy members, ambassadors and government officials. This tactic was later also used by students in Iran. By the late 1970s Iran students and professors wrote several letters of complaint to President Carter for his support of the Shah.

Iranian students often choose nonviolent resistance: protests, hunger strikes, phone calls, letters and publications to state their opposition to the Shah and his regime. The story of the Lexington 11 displays how Iranian students not only used peaceful forms of protest but that their methods brought them support by local Americans. On April 12, 1978 the University Of Kentucky School Of Diplomacy sponsored a program featuring the current CIA chief, Stanfield Turner. A group of demonstrators, of both Iranian and American descent, staged a peaceful demonstration during this lecture to expose the CIA directed coup which put the Shah on the throne again and the CIA's involvement over the years with SAVAK. Riot equipped police came in and arrested 11 protesters (8 Iranians, 3 Americans) and booked them of charges on disrupting a public meeting. Overnight this case gained public recognition, and other students and sympathizers saw it as a clear violation of their "freedom of speech." For four months demonstrations, leaflets and rallies were held to support the demonstrators by campus and community members. While in prison, nine of the Lexington 11 waged an 11-day hunger strike in solidarity with their supporters. In the end they were found guilty and given the maximum sentence



Figure 5. Released Iranian Students shake hands with Mr. and Mrs. Smiley who paid their bond. (Source: *Resistance*, November 1978)

of \$250 fine plus three months imprisonment. The ISA complained that the punishment was over the top, noting that “with an outrageous and oppressive total cash bond of \$125,000, [the courts] know fully well that the students could not afford such an exorbitant bail.”¹⁸⁷ Iranian students saw this as a blatant example of how the U.S. government officials were in

collaboration with SAVAK and the Shah to keep Iranian dissents in check. Yet, the story ends on a happy note. A retired couple, Mr. & Mrs. Smiley of nearby Sterling, Kentucky were so appalled by what they saw as miscarriage of justice posted the bond of \$125,000 and freed the students. [See figure 5] The ISA noted in its magazine, that the posting of the bond “was not only a victory for the students but for the future of Iranian-American friendship and joint struggles against their common enemy.”¹⁸⁸

REACTION TO THE ABANDAN FIRE:

One of the worst events in Iran during the Revolution was the Abadan cinema fire set on August 19, 1978. By student accounts, this was an attack on the people’s revolutionary movement by the Shah himself. In a popular progressive movie theatre, the Rex Cinema, more than 800 people were burned alive. Civilians in the area at the time reported that the theatre was chained from the outside and set ablaze secretly by SAVAK agents. Instead the Shah claimed the fire was set by Muslim radicals who are threatened

¹⁸⁷ “The Lexington 11 vs. CIA Chief Turner” *Resistance* vol 5, no. 8 (November 1978): 10.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

by modernization and the West. By student accounts this seemed very unlikely, because the neighborhood around the theater was a known site of leftist activity. In fact, the theatre was located in an area of strong anti-Shah activity and was surrounded by a coffee house and a bookstore which were frequented by young individuals who were critical of the Shah' regime. That night the movie house was showing the film that had been banned by the regime, "Reindeer", a progressive film with a theme of injustice of tyranny and oppression and the heroism of the struggle against it.¹⁸⁹ Iranian students were quick to respond that if it was the work of Muslim reactionary's banks, pornographic theatres, or American institutions would have been the target. Most importantly, the fire was set on the 25th anniversary of the coup which placed the Shah back on the throne- a symbolic day, and a fact which both the Shah and U.S. media purposely ignored.

The response from emergency and civil service crews further hurt the Shah's credibility. It took over four hours for a fire truck to come from approximately 350 yards away in the one city in Iran with the most modern and advanced firefighting equipment, being located near the largest oil refinery in the world. And the police, who were only 50 yards away did not help, rather they stood around the cinema and did not allow anyone near the perimeter.¹⁹⁰ Anti-Shah demonstrations were held throughout Iran in the following days- leading to repeated clashes with police and SAVAK agents. People were devastated by what became known as "The Shah's Inferno," and new slogans against the

¹⁸⁹ "Background Information for the ISA," *Shahs Inferno: Abadan, Aug. 19, 1978* Supplement to Resistance, no. 2 (Berkeley: Iranian Student Association in the U.S., 1978), 7, 29. Also "Abadan Background," *Shah's Inferno*, 2.

¹⁹⁰ Background Information for the ISA," 34.

Shah emerged such as “Shah must burn.” Such slogans were repeated and used by Iranian activist in the U.S. and abroad for the rest of the duration of the Revolution.

In Washington D.C., the ISA was quick to criticize the *Washington Post* for quoting reports solely from Iranian officials, accusing extremist elements of the Shiite Muslim clergy for starting the blaze, in opposition to the political and social changes set about by the Shah. Upset with the *Post*'s reporting of the events and the Carter administrations reaction, these students protested in front of the Washington Post's office and the White House for two days. They also wrote a letter to the editor, in which they critiqued *the Post* for its clear support for the Iranian government's attack on progressive opposition and its justification of the Shahs unbridled dictatorship and authority. Outside the Post building they demonstrated and chanted, “The Shah burns the people, the Post blames the people.”¹⁹¹ Iranian students felt as if the Posts reporting on the incident in Iran portrayed to the American public the Shah's opposition as people who “Shah enjoy burning women and children alive” and “are against democracy, freedom, modernization.”¹⁹² *The Post* refused to print this letter in their magazine, but they did make reference to the ISA's disappointment in their reporting of the event.

On September 1, 1978, a group of roughly 500 demonstrated outside of the *Los Angeles Time*'s building also protesting the lack of attention in the news media concerning the recent massacre at the Rex. Iranian student asserted that demonstration was meant to be peaceful, verified by the fact that there were a number of women and

¹⁹¹ “The Cream of the Crop,” *Washington Post*: Cited in *Shah's Inferno*. 26.

¹⁹² “Background Information for the ISA,” 31

children who joined in the march.¹⁹³ Police officers quickly arrived at the scene with riot gear on and encircled the crowd of students and demonstrators. Some students tried trying to escape arrest attempted to break through the police lines, but police reacted with violence, beating demonstrations with batons. The end results were 30 civilians, including bystanders, with serious injuries and 171 arrested.¹⁹⁴ Following this event, a number of further protests were held in LA in front of the Police Department and Federal Building to protest both police brutality in LA and martial law in Iran. By September 23rd the crowds had almost doubled, and Americans and other nationalities belonging to different progressive organizations actively joined in the protests in solitary with the Iranian student movement's mission.¹⁹⁵

THE END DRAWS NEAR:

By the end of 1978 many Iranian students had become confident that the ousting of the Shah was inevitable and the revolutionary struggle would soon be victorious. To demonstrate such beliefs, students slowly began to take off their paper masks, which for so long had been a symbol of their oppression. Instead, they choose to show their faces openly, expressing their support of their fellow Iranians who openly demonstrated in the face of the Shah. Iranian students' commitment to the Revolution had also helped to stir the voices of older Iranians within the business community, building a new unity based upon the basic goals to oust the Shah and rid Iran of foreign dominance.

¹⁹³ "171 arrested in L.A., Scores severely injured by Police," *Resistance* vol. 5, no. (October 7, 1978): 9.

¹⁹⁴ Bill Hazlett, "30 Hurt as Iranians, L.A. Police Clash," *Los Angeles Times*, September 2, 1978, sec. San Diego County, A13.

¹⁹⁵ "171 arrested in L.A., Scores severely injured by Police," 9.

Students became mixed with worries about how they could best help their friends and family in Iran. A number of Iranian student activists thought if they were truly committed to the Revolution, they should return home. By November 1978, some groups, such as the CISNU, had already advised their members that now was the time to fight the struggle on their own turf. ¹⁹⁶ “With millions of people shouting ‘Down with the shah’ in the streets of Iran,” said one longtime activist in the ISA, “it doesn’t mean much to shout ‘Down with the shah’ here in Washington.”¹⁹⁷

Still others remained in the United States continuing to undermine U.S. support for the Shah and fight the Revolution on U.S. soil. Anger and radicalization amongst Iranian students who remained resulted in the most violent event of the Iranian student movement in the United States, named the “Battle of Beverly Hills.” On January 2, 1979 at the apex of the Revolution in Iran, about 2000 students marched into Beverly Hills, California right up a mansion being occupied by the Shah’s 90 year old mother. Americans watched on television as Iranian students threw rocks and started fires in demonstration of the fact the U.S. government had granted the Shah’s family sanctuary on American soil. As one demonstrator stated, angered at the friends and family he had lost during the revolution, “no matter where the Shah and his pest family flee, we’ll get them.”¹⁹⁸ Police were not prepared for the militancy of the event, resulting in 45 people suffering serious injuries. As Americans looked at the front page of the newspaper the following days, which displayed pictures of bloody Iranian students conducting mayhem

¹⁹⁶ Christopher Dickey, “Protests at Home Pose Troubling Questions for Iranians in U.S.” *Washington Post*, November 12, 1978, A28.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, 3 January 1979. Cited in Matin-asgari, *Student Opposition*, 192.

in Beverly Hills, the fear that such students were radically militant only justified the belief that these students were communist and/or against modernization. Still Iranian students continued to reach out to the American people, noting that at least next to the vivid pictures ran a story SAVAK savagery in Iran.¹⁹⁹

CONCLUSION:

It is estimated that between 10,000 and 12,000 people were actually killed during the fourteenth month revolution in Iran.²⁰⁰ This number pales in comparison of the casualties reported in other Third World Revolutions of the era. Despite the image commonly held about Iranians, they maintained a relatively peaceful revolution against an oppressive regime in a short period of time. In the end, Washington's support for the Shah could not quell the voice of the Iranian peoples both at home and abroad. Through a variety of means: demonstrations, meetings, conferences, leaflets, hunger-strikes and publications, thousands of Iranian students continued to fight on American soil. Like their counterparts in Iran, these diverse groups of students came together in generally peaceful protests and used resistance techniques to help bring the Shah's repression to the world stage. Even as Iranian student organizations began to splinter off, each with their own views of what post-revolutionary Iran would be, their determination to oust the Shah had continued to unify them.

¹⁹⁹ "Battle of Beverly Hills," *Resistance* vol 6, no. 1 (January 1979): 1.

²⁰⁰ Bill, *Eagle and the Lion*, 236.

Between 1977 and 1979, Iranian students abroad helped to rally support for the struggle of the Iranian people for independence and democracy. In the United States, thousands of Americans had joined the cause of these students, actively protesting and participating in conferences and the like. Thousands had marched in Brazil, Greece, France, Italy, India, Great Britain and Turkey. Other revolutionary and leftist parties joined their cause, creating a web of solidarity movements amongst students and revolutionaries throughout the world.²⁰¹ The ISA expresses this best when they note, “As we have been inspired by the undaunted revolutionary struggles of other peoples around the world for many years, it is now the turn for our people to raise the banner of anti-imperialist revolutionary struggle still higher to encourage and inspire others in achievement of the lofty aim: freedom.”²⁰²

²⁰¹ “Friends and Foes of Iranian Movement,” *Resistance* vol. 5, no. 8 (November 1978): 3.

²⁰² “The 26th Annual Convention of ISAU.S.,” 8.

Chapter 4

“Iranian students either should behave in this country, or abide by the law, or else the United States Government should make arrangements to deport the offenders among them without delay,” wrote the editor of the San Francisco Examiner in response to Iranian student demonstrations in Beverly Hills which turned violent outside the home of the Shah’s mother. The ISA and other Iranian student organizations were outraged by such comments. Especially since local journalists and photographers reported that Iranian students were met with intense violence from police officers, such as running speeding cars into demonstrators.²⁰³ Why, they asked, was the media “determined to avoid the political question of why the U.S. has given all out support, financial protection, armed forces and polices backing for 37 years to the fascist rule of the Pahlavi’s in Iran?”²⁰⁴ This contradiction was prevalent amongst most reporting of Iranian opposition to the Shah. “The assumption [of the press and official Washington] was that the Shah was the only person who counted in Iran; that the country being underdeveloped, had no politics in the sense that advanced countries do,” argued Frances FitzGerald of the *New Times* in December 1978, and “that Iranians, being apolitical, would simply accept a dictatorship as necessary and good for them.”²⁰⁵ This tendency to see politics of a country revolve around an absolute ruler was indicative of how the press viewed almost all of the Third World.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, January 3, 1979, A1.

²⁰⁴ “No Refuge for the Pahlavis,” *Resistance* vol 6, no. 1 (January 1979): 2.

²⁰⁵ Frances FitzGerald, “The Shah Discovers his People” *New York Times*, December 11, 1978, 9.

²⁰⁶ Dorman, *U.S. Press and Iran*, 161.

Media shapes our lives and determines our perspective of the world. Mainstream journalism creates American perceptions of events overseas by legitimatizing selected actions and omitting others. The U.S. mass media has often taken the side of U.S. officials and ally governments when it comes to the treatment of foreign nations. Foreign policy is one way in which a nation defines themselves, through its character, its interests and who it views as an ally or enemy.²⁰⁷ This bias is found amongst major newspapers in all countries because newspapers are a reflection of a culture, providing the groundwork for a unified cultural and social entity. As such, one of the biggest obstacles for Iranian students was the press, as they publically portrayed events in Iran during the Revolution completely differently than the students did. The U.S. mass media represented the struggle in Iran through the eyes of Washington, a rose-tinted lens which portrayed the Shah as a modern and liberalizing leader whose country was plagued by fanatics with Communist and Islamic ties.

Foreign policy news has often been defined along the lines of national economic, political, military or diplomatic significance. During the 1970s and the few decades earlier, U.S. policy took a strong anti-communist stance. The United States considered Iran to be its largest Third World ally's against communism and the Soviet Union. Strategically, geographically, and economically important to the United States, the Shah was supported by the likes of those in Washington. Together, the United States and the Shah formed a special relationship which benefitted both actors even as it was built upon a discontent Iranian social base. As the opposition grew amongst Iranians all over the

²⁰⁷ Melanie McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 6.

world, this special relationship was openly criticized by Iranian students in the years leading up to the Shah's departure.

Throughout the 1970s the United States increased its influence within Iran. William Dorman points out that during this period the following occurred: Iran became the largest buyer of American arms in its history; the United States made a bilateral trade agreement which was worth more money than it took to reconstruct Europe under the Marshall Plan; Iranian students embodied the largest number of foreign students within the United States; both SAVAK and the Iranian military were trained by the United States; and over 45,000 American advisors were the largest national minority within Iran by 1978.²⁰⁸ Even so, the average American knew nothing about how interconnected these two nations had become. Before the Revolution began, Iran was hardly mentioned in the news and what was said usually praised the Shah for his modernization efforts. Journalism was the main contributor to the failure of Americans in understanding who Reza Shah Pahlavi was and what was going on in Iran during his reign.

The Shah's strong geo-political and economic importance to the United States made it so that the brutality of his regime was often overlooked or condoned. It also helped that the Shah's nation was halfway around the world and he ruled a population which was perceived as backwards and opposed to modernization. David Detmer, a philosopher who challenges postmodernism, defines this sort of situation as a "problem of omission," noting that the bias of U.S. media stems from its "absence of essential

²⁰⁸William A. Dorman, "Mass Media and international conflict" in T. Govier (Ed.) *Selected Issues in Logic and Communication* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1988), 66.

information needed to make (accurate) sense of the subject at hand.”²⁰⁹ Over the years of the Shah’s regime, little attention was ever paid to the events in Iran, or at least not the attention which should have been expected from such a strategically valuable ally. Additionally what was covered by the press over the years was influenced highly by U.S. interests. William A. Dorman and Mansour Farhang completed an extensive study covering twenty-five years (1953-1978) of press coverage of Iran by conventional print media. In their book, The U.S. Press and Iran: Foreign Policy and the Journalism of Deference, these two set off to comprehend the American foreign policy through the relationship of the press and U.S. ally’s in the Third World. Using Iran as a Case study, they found that:

(1)The American news media more often than not followed the cues of foreign policy makers rather than exercising independent judgment in reporting the social, economic, and political life under the shah; and

(2) Journalists proved easily susceptible to ethnocentrism, a condition that served the policy goals of official Washington remarkably well.²¹⁰

Rather than living up to the values of honest reporting, many in the press did not report the full story of happenings in Iran in the late 1970s until it was too late. Many reporters and commentators practically ignored the voice of Iranian dissents, a number of whom, such as student organizations, were easily accessible and were consistently providing publications in English to the public. But by ignoring the politics of a country such as Iran, the press perpetuated the conception that the political aspirations of Iranians did not

²⁰⁹ Detmer, “Covering Up Iran,” 91.

²¹⁰ Dorman, *US Press and Iran*, 2.

really matter.²¹¹ As such, Iranian students were up against another struggle and this one would be harder to win.

U.S. MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF IRAN AND THE SHAH:

U.S. foreign policy and interests were often influenced by Cold War tensions and Third World revolutionary tendencies. Sharing a border with the Soviet Union and geographically positions between Europe, Asia and Africa, the United States worked to maintain a pro-western government in Iran. The Shah professed to be a resolute anti-communist and throughout his reign, he would use his commitment against communism as a justification for the known abuses which had been committed against his political prisoners. By 1977 it was common knowledge of experts and journalists that the Shah was clearly abusing human rights and political freedoms through various intimidation and torture techniques put in place by SAVAK. Just as Washington was willing to condone the acts by downplaying its severity, so too was the U.S. media. As more Iranians took the streets in protest of their repressive government, the *New York Times* reported, “There has been progress in human rights...the Shah’s autocracy is more tolerable for some Iranians.”²¹² Many Iranian students knew that this was not the case and thus, more of their fellow Iranians began to stand up in open defiance to the Shah. In the true spirit of containment, the media portrayed them as Communist and radical Muslims against a

²¹¹ Ibid, 13.

²¹² “Shah, Shifting Stand, Pledges to Oppose Increase in Oil Price; He Offers to Give U.S. ‘A Break,’ ”*New York Times*, 17 November 1977, 1 col. 6.

modernizing and enlightened ruler.²¹³ Iranian activist during protests noted that Americans often assumed that they were communist, even though it was not always the case. During a protest on January 6, 1979, as demonstrators tried to give leaflets to those passing by a group of women rebuffed the offer shouting that they did not want any of their “communist” literature. In response the Iranian student protested “We are not communist, we believe in God.”²¹⁴

Although human rights violations were mentioned in the press, they often appeared in fleeting references found within a larger story. Instead of focusing on political and human rights issues, the American mainstream press tended instead to focus on economics and foreign policy. Most accounts did not even take notice of the fact that Carter’s policy on human rights had done little in changing U.S. behavior towards the Shah. Rather, the press portrayed events as if policy might have had helped to change the Shah’s practices. An example of this is the headlines such as “Iran Feels Impact of Carters Human Rights Measures.”²¹⁵ This article discusses how the Shah appeared to be considering President Carter’s outspoken human rights policies, implying that Carter’s stance would lead to new international pressure on the monarch to change his treatment of prisoners and dissidents. Dorman and Farhang point out that, in 1975, both a high point for U.S.- Iranian relations and the year Amnesty International declared Iran an extremely repressive government, the *New York Times* published only three stories which focused on human rights violations in Iran. During the same period, the *Times* published

²¹³ Dorman, *U.S. Press and Iran*, 180.

²¹⁴ “Iranian Students here Protest Shah, Usual Paper Masks not Used.” *Washington Post*, January 6, 1979, D1.

²¹⁵ John K. Cooley, “Iran Feels Impact of Carters Human Rights Message” *Christian Science Monitor*, March 3, 1977, 6.

150 articles concerning dissidents and human rights violations in the Soviet Union.²¹⁶ On that note, they also point out that the only attention the American press gave to SAVAK's torture techniques was "a series of hard hitting columns by Jack Anderson, two articles in the Washington Post and a treatment by CBS's "60 Minutes" after the revolution."²¹⁷

The Carter administration's support for the Shah convinced the press to portray the Shah as unshakeable and necessary for the stability of the Middle East region. It was not until after Khomeini came to power that the mass media noted the failures of U.S. foreign policy with Iran, which resulted mainly from the direct effects of the Kissinger-Nixon administration's support of a despot for the benefit of arms sales and greater control of the region.²¹⁸ In a memorandum to Nixon, his Secretary of State William Rodgers stressed that the United States had

...a high regard for the Shah as a world statesman and a wise national leader who is leading his country to stability and economic well-being. We deeply appreciate the valuable international role of Iran, which is a stable entity in a highly neuralgic part of the world. We are also grateful for valuable intelligence, communication and over flight facilities which Iran provides the U.S. We hope that we may continue to work as closely in the future as we have in the past toward our common goal.²¹⁹

During the late 1970s when the United States was not faring well in the Third World, Iran was viewed as a strong ally with strategic importance. News coverage, like

²¹⁶ Dorman, *U.S. Press and Iran*, 145.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 146.

²¹⁸ Martin Walker, *Powers of the Press: Twelve of the World's Influential Newspapers* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1982), 374.

²¹⁹ U.S. Department of State, "#26, Memoranda to the President (October 17, 1969)" in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Documents on Iran and Iran Val 4-E, 1969-1976* [database on-line].

U.S. foreign policy itself, had a strong anti-Soviet or anti-communist stance. Due to this, the Shah professed all of his “human rights abuses” were in fact the Shah protecting his people and borders from the infection of communist ideologies. Since the Western world saw this change as benefitting their own interests, the Shah was given the title of “policemen” of the Persian Gulf region.

A strong U.S. ally, the Shah was initially viewed by the American news media as an enormously popular and accomplished ruler, one who worked to bring western modernization to Iran. Promoting the White Revolution as an ambitious program and sweeping success of westernization and economic growth, as a 1970 *New York Times* article began, “There is a new feeling of hope and pride in Iran, and it is evident in this sprawling capital with its new office buildings, supermarkets, freeways and modern factories....a sweeping program of reforms” has turned “a primitive peasant society into an industrialized nation.”²²⁰ Between 1974 and 1975 media coverage began to slowly change, and reports began to focusing on the poor economy, oil, U.S. arms sales, corruption, torture by SAVAK, oppositional critics of the Shah’s regime and by the 1978 the role of Islam.²²¹ This critical attitude most likely stemmed from the politics of oil and the Shah’s involvement as a member of OPEC in the American energy crisis.²²² As Dorman and Farhang explain, the Shah began to be viewed as an “increasingly arrogant ruler who insisted on equal footing for Iran as a world power, who lectured Americans on the need to tighten their belts and who engaged in a spending spree of spectacular

²²⁰ “Reforms in Iran bring new hole ; ‘White Revolution’ leads to wide industrialization,” *New York Times*, July 17, 1970 , 9.

²²¹ J.V. Vilanilam, *Reporting a Revolution: The Iranian Revolution and the NICO Debate* (New Delhi: Sage, 1989), 371- 381.

²²² McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 137.

proportion at the expense of the industrial world's economy."²²³ In spite of such perceptions, the press's criticism of the Shah was relatively mild, demonstrating the influence he had over U.S. policy makers, corporate America and American journalist.

Even as criticisms began to emerge, the Press maintained that there was no real alternative to the Shah's regime. In August of 1978, Joseph Kraft, a *Washington Post* reporter claimed "the opposition in Iran cannot take over. It is incapable of managing the modernization process that has not gone too far to be reversed."²²⁴ Western imposed modernity seemed to take precedence over concepts of self-determination and human rights. Even as American mass media began to report more upon the Shah's repressive regime, in most articles the background to the stories were poorly laid out, and the space allotted never equaled its importance.²²⁵ Rarely did the press mention issues which were important points of contention for the opposition such as: the severity of unemployment, food shortages, inflation, lack of housing, education or health care problems which were prevalent throughout Iran. In ten years Iran had lost half of its nation's arable land while its population had almost doubled. With imports 36 times its exports, Iran was plagued by growing inflation and corruption by the end of the decade.²²⁶ But, Iranian students asserted, as long as the Shah maintained a continuous flow of oil to consumer countries and was anti-communist the situation between the United States and Iran would remain the same. Senator Abraham Ribicoff of Connecticut reaffirmed this stance, as he told reporters, "Iran is one the most important allies the United States has. When you realized

²²³ Dorman, *US Press and Iran*, 132.

²²⁴ Joseph Kraft, "The Case for the Shah," *The Washington Post*, August 29, 1978, A15.

²²⁵ Dorman, *US Press and Iran*, 136."

²²⁶ "Uprising in Iran- Regime in Shambles," *Resistance* vol. 5, no. 2 (March 1988): 10.

that 50 percent of the world's oil comes through the Straits of Hormuz and the only armed forces to protect it are Iran's, to refuse [the Shah] arms would be sheer stupidity on the part of the United States."²²⁷ If and when the media ever mentioned the depressing circumstances of many of its citizens, they did little to connect it to the vast wealth that was leaving the country which often benefited American interests and foreign corporate profits.

The mainstream media came from the same school of thought which praised "modernization" as the only beneficial way to improve a Third World country. The modernization and development plans proposed by U.S. foreign policy and contemporary theories of economic growth put forth the notion that eventually the modernization policies of the Shah would result in an era of prosperity for the Iranian people. Since the Shah was sold as a "modernizer" to the press by Washington and himself, he was presented as the best hope for Iran's future. To most Iranians this was not the case; student dissents saw within Iran depreciating standards of living and rich natural resources were being drained by global powers like the United States. Still, official support for the Shah was reinforced by the mass media. For example, on November 4, 1974 as the economic and social situation worsened, in a cover story, *Time* magazine described the monarch as having "brought Iran to a threshold of grandeur that is at least analogous to what Cyrus the Great had achieved for ancient Persia."²²⁸ He was presented as a great leader; Iranian students would call him anything but.

²²⁷ Donnie Rodcliffe "Iran's Farah Diba, Empress on the Move," *The Washington Post*, July 13, 1977, C2.

²²⁸ "Oil, grandeur and a challenge to the West," *Time*, 4 November 1974, 17.

To many Iranians, the United States was a constant reminder of oppression and imperialist ambition. Since 1953 with the CIA organized and financed coup which displaced Mohammad Mossaddeq and reinstated the Shah to the throne, Iranians had been skeptical about the role the United States had played in their government. A strong advocate against foreign intervention, Mossaddeq nationalized the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, which had previously been under British control. Mossaddeq over the years had become part of a greater myth within the Iranian psyche. To this day, Mossaddeq is still seen by Iranians as the “ultimate nationalist martyr.”²²⁹ By restoring the Shah, the United States was able to increase its influence in the region. . The coup was viewed by many Iranians as the moment in which the United States hooked its imperialistic tentacles on Iran, causing it to dissolve its democratic system and forcing it into market economics.

Nevertheless, from the beginning of his term as popularly elected Prime Minister in 1951, Mossaddeq and his party the National Front were both perceived as communist inspired by the U.S. media. In 1951, *Time* magazine described Mossaddeq’s nationalist movement as “one of the worst calamities to the anti-Communist world since the Red conquest of China.”²³⁰ The rise of nationalism within Iran was seen as a threat to Western regional and economic interests. In fact, the coup was followed through without the knowledge of the American public. It would be almost 20 years until any member of the U.S. media made reference to U.S. involvement in coup, and it was only mentioned in passing. Even the *New York Times*, the paper which released the information at that late

²²⁹ Gonzalez, *Engaging Iran* 44.

²³⁰ “Iran: Whose Ox is Nationalized?” *Time*, March 26, 1951, 31.

date, had known about the involvement of the CIA for years and not mentioned anything about it.²³¹

Highly sensitive to criticism, the Shah became preoccupied with American public opinion. He, like his Iranian student opposition, knew the importance of having the American public on his side. As a result, the Shah and those close to him, worked hard at creating close ties to major American journalists. Fluent in English, the Shah kept tabs on the American press' reporting of his rule. Adapt at public relations, he also participated in a number of interviews by prestigious reports like Barbara Walters and Mike Wallace in which he defended his regime with a cool and confident demeanor. The Pahlavi royal family was extremely close with such influential journalists as Arnald de Borchgrave, Joseph Kraft, Barbara Walkers and Betty Beale to name a few. Through numerous gifts and personal mementos, the Pahlavi regime was able to cement and maintain strong personal relationships with a number of American supporters. Distributed to all levels of individuals employed by the mass media, the Shah even gave gifts to cameramen and newsroom personnel.²³² Although most journalists would have still viewed the Shah as a strong anti-communist American ally and friend, these gifts helped the Shah to cement his strong support from journalist and possible critics of his regime.

In November 1978, some protesting students began to take off their mask in solidarity with their fellow Iranians who openly opposed the Shah. The atmosphere in Iran had changed, and it began to appear to Iranian students that the Shah was on his way out. Even as this turn of events became apparent to Iranian students in the U.S., the

²³¹ Dorman, *US Press in Iran*, 119-129.

²³² Bill, *Eagle and the Lion*, 369-372.

media continued to back up the Shah noting President Carter and his administrations words of support. That same month, the *Wall Street Journal* put forth the position, “What the U.S. ought to do now is let everyone concerned know that the Shah is our man, and that we will back his decisions on how to cope with his crisis.”²³³ This goes to demonstrate how the news media strongly endorsed the words and views of Washington in concerns to the Shah and backing his regime. When the Shah left Iran for the last time, it was reported under the assumption he was taking a “vacation” and created the image of ill-treated and sympathetic monarch who was driven out by his ungrateful people.

In early January of 1979 the Shah’s abdication from the throne was inevitable. When he left Iran he placed Shahpur Bakhtiar, who was Deputy Minister under Mossaddeq as Prime Minister of the newly created civilian government. Hoping to save his regime in a last ditch effort, the Shah appointed Bakhtiar to the position of Prime Minister to appease his opposition. Viewed as a political moderate who was favorable towards the West, the Carter administration backed up Bakhtiar. As a result, the press also viewed him in a positive light, believing that with the Shah gone he was one of the only men who could reunite Iran. Most importantly, he was seen as a supporter of U.S. foreign policy; being strongly anti-communist and willing to crack down on communist at home and Iranian students abroad.²³⁴ Little attention was paid to the fact he was appointed by the Shah and had no public support amongst the Iranian people, nor even his own party the National Front. If anything, Bakhtiar was viewed as just another puppet of both the Shah and the American government by the Iranian opposition. Along

²³³ “Crisis in Iran,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 3, 1978, 20.

²³⁴ Vilanilam, *Reporting a Revolution*, 113-115.

these lines, major papers like the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* wrote that Bakhiar's government was the last chance Iran had, for if it didn't succeed, there was a strong "possibility of a xenophobic government distant from, even hostile to the West, and ill-suited to lure back the foreign technicians necessary to operate Iran's economy."²³⁵ Demonstrating strong ethnocentrism, the press was quick to back up anyone who would encourage a "western" and therefore "modern" lifestyle or culture.

While recollecting his term in Iran, Henry Pretch, a U.S. State Department official during the 1970s, found two basic problems with the reporting and analysis of events in Iran. The first was that the Shah did not want the world, especially the United States, to know that opposition was a constant barrier to his rule. Whenever government officials tried to meet with Mullahs or Leftist leaders, they were quickly vetoed by the Shah, making it harder to see the events in Iran within a bigger picture. Secondly, as far as Americans were concerned, Iran was a success and thus if things were going wrong the government did not want to know.²³⁶ The mass media accounts of this time illustrate exactly the lack of attention to known problems within Iran as mentioned by Pretch. By projecting the image of the Shah and events in Iran through a nationalist lens most mainstream journalism tended to prop up the Shah as a great modernizer to justify our involvement and interests in the region. The Iranian student movement often critiqued the mainstream media for its misinformation and omissions of facts.²³⁷ Iranian activist would have to fight harder to get their voice and opinions out. As the events in Iran gain

²³⁵ "Shah Departs Finally," *New York Times*, January 17, 1979, 22 col. 1.

²³⁶ Foreign Affairs Oral History Project "Nass, Charles and Henry Pretch," 3. Georgetown University Library, Special Collections Division, Washington D.C.

²³⁷ Iranian Student Association of America, "ISAUS newsletter" no. 4, May 12, 1978 (Berkeley), 2.

more publicity in the news, students begin to protest more, and often in front of major newspaper buildings, like the *Washington Post*, *L.A. Times* and *New York Post*. On the 25th anniversary of the coup, Iranian students held numerous protests throughout the country to bring attention to years of covert American involvement in Iran.

PORTRAYAL OF EVENTS BY THE ALTERNATIVE PRESS:

Alternative Press literature was the one of the only sources, aside from Iranian student activism, that informed the American public of the events going on in Iran which were neglected by mainstream media. Unfortunately, these materials did not have a large circulation and did not reach nearly the same number of individuals as the mainstream press. But every little bit counts, and a number of smaller magazines and journals carried stories of the oppression, human rights abuses, economic problems, arms sales and revolution in general. Also, unlike the mass media, these publications often humanized the Iranian people's message and encouraged their struggle during the Revolution. Looking at opinion magazines like *Inquiry* and the *Nation*, along with foreign works such as *Le Monde*, Dorman and Farhang documented workers "producing only enough oil for domestic consumption; of blood donors besieging hospitals to help those wounded in demonstrations; of shopkeepers stocking and selling only enough goods and foodstuffs to sustain their costumers; of public services and offices at a standstill for months at a time; of a sense of unity and a spirit of cooperation in all sectors of society that was palpable as

it was unprecedented.”²³⁸ Stories like these could not be found in the *Washington Post* or *New York Times*.

Many of the publications which reported on either Iranian students abroad or the Revolution was rooted in the fact that most alternative press material from the 1970s was influenced by the Left and Third Worldism. Often focusing on the masses, either from a Worker’s or Third World perspective, their ideology was much more on par with the students than any mass media of the day would have been. The reports coming in from the alternative press tended to be more truthful, having either gotten their facts from Iran, Iranian experts, revolutionaries, or the students themselves. An example of this can be found in *Workers Power*, a socialist paper, which did not blame leftist Marxist or radical Muslims as the cause of unrest which was building within Iran; rather, they saw it as a “national uprising against the domination of Iran by American imperialism.”²³⁹ These publications also set out to counter “myths” about the Iranian opposition as medieval and the Shah as modernizing. And, although it is true that the Muslim leadership was at the head of the movement by 1978, they note that this is because the left was too weak to challenge their leadership.

Since Iranian students were active in the greater Third World and leftist movements, news or reporting upon Iranian student activism in the United States can be found more often amongst alternative press publications. One example is a story out of Chico, California in which two students fired 5 shots at Abadullah Malekoshoarai the leader of the local ISA chapter. The ISA claimed that their fellow students were in fact

²³⁸ Dorman, *U.S. Press and Iran*, 157-159.

²³⁹ “Iran: “Enlightened” Ruler Murders Thousands” *Workers Power*, 28 September- October 11, 1978, 4-5.

SAVAK agents, sent to scare active protesters. *Seven Days*, a magazine out of New York which carried current events which had been aired on the world circuit, supports their story. Students had noticed a stronger “counter-offensive” by SAVAK since the Shah’s visit on NOV 15. One New York based ISA leader stated, “Our families back home are being harassed, and there is a lot more rightwing activity both in our organization and in pro-Shah demonstrations. This shooting is the first, but it is not isolated”.²⁴⁰ This story only appeared in local papers, Iranian newsletters and radical press such as *Seven Days*. It would be confirmed by government documents that at least one of the students who fired was a SAVAK agent.²⁴¹ More accounts like this would follow.

The alternative press was also very critical of U.S. foreign policy with Iran and the mass media accounts of events. As the magazine *Socialist Monthly Changes* remarked in March of 1979, “no Cabinet officials, no White house spokesperson, no Congressional committee chairman has in any way expressed satisfaction that the Iranian people finally blew the lid off of one of the most oppressive dictatorships in the world.”²⁴² The article notes how the end product of Carter’s “human rights” policy was an attempt to save the “murderous Shah.” In addition, “the press launched a vile racist attack on Iranian students and the Justice Department threatened to deport them.”²⁴³ A political cartoon exaggerating the mainstream presses view of Iranian students was included. [See Figure 6]

²⁴⁰ “Routine Crime in Chico?” 6.

²⁴¹ “Headlines of Several Articles on Iranian Students and Human Rights from Various Leading Newspapers,” June 24, 1977, *Digitized National Security Archive: Iran, 1977-1980*, no. IR01193, 3.

²⁴² David Finkel, “The Iranian Revolution and the Crisis of Imperialism,” *Socialist Monthly Changes* (March 1979), 18.

²⁴³ Ibid.



Figure 6: Political Cartoon reflecting public opinion of Iranian students in U.S. (Source: *Socialist Monthly Changes*, March 1979)

Some international publications also defended the allegations of oppression and autocracy in Iran. One of the most influential world newspapers out of Paris, *Le Monde* wrote quite often about the events in Iran dating back to the early 1970s. Sympathetic to the anti-colonial and imperialist struggles of the Third, *Le Monde* attempted to give a fair hearing of the Third World.²⁴⁴ In 1972, before Amnesty International even declared Iran one of the world's worst human rights abusers, *Le Monde* published thirty-nine articles on SAVAK and international security in Iran.²⁴⁵ They

continued to publish hundreds of articles like this up until 1979, reporting on a number of perspectives rarely touched upon in the U.S. mainstream news. With reporters on the ground in Iran, this newspaper was able to rightly identify how the revolution was progressing. For instance, in April of 1978 Jean-Claude Guillebaud had identified Khomeini as the most significant force of the opposition. Khomeini at the time was living in Paris and was himself a loyal reader of *Le Monde*. A year earlier, when his son was killed, Khomeini placed an advertisement in this magazine, thanking people for all of the condolences he received.²⁴⁶ Unlike the American press which saw the Islamic movement as medieval, Guillebaud noted, "the apparently reactionary character of the religious opposition is not as clear as one might think. Certainly, the mullahs feared

²⁴⁴ Walker, *Powers of the Press*, 79.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 350.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 355.

being robbed of their traditional authority by modernization, but Shiite Islam joins the reformist or progressive critics of the Shah on the same ground.”²⁴⁷ Similar views were reported by the American alternative press. Jim Cockcroft, a reporter for *Seven Days* and a teacher of Sociology at Rutgers University stated “Information about Khomeini reported in America has usually been either wrong or colored by an ethnocentrism equating the Ayatollah with anti-modern, theocratic reaction. In fact Khomeini’s vision of an Islamic republic entails secular political parties and modernization.”²⁴⁸

VIEW OF OPPOSITION TO THE SHAH:

Many Americans were ill-equipped to understand what went wrong in Iran in 1979 when the Shah left, and, one month later, Khomeini returned home to a crowd of roughly 4 million supporters. Since the Shah had been viewed as a modernizer and supported strongly by Carter and the press the average American could not sympathize with the Iranian Revolution. The press often simplified the sectarian motives of the revolution to more fundamental religious and leftist idioms. The roles played by students, women, middle to upper classes, industrial and salaried workers were relatively ignored. By distorting the general themes of revolt, all opposition became grouped into radical lines. Terms like “religious fanatics” and “Islamic-Marxist”.²⁴⁹ The ISA felt as if

²⁴⁷ *Le Monde*, April 6, 1978. Translated and cited in *Ibid.*, 356

²⁴⁸ Jim Cockcroft, “Iran’s Khomeini: His Life, His Program, His Words,” *Seven Days* vol. 3, no. 1 (February 23, 1979), 17.

²⁴⁹ Dorman, *US Press and Iran*, 180.

“the entire anti-shah opposition is being systematically and uniquely slandered through the medium of major U.S. press agencies.”²⁵⁰

The press was not part of a conspiracy to damage the image of the Iranian opposition to Americans intentionally. Still, through poor reporting and broad generalizations, the media did just that. Often taking the words of the Iranian government or Washington’s view of the opposition, Iranians were perceived as backwards and against the modernizing practices of the Shah. Perceiving world events through a Cold War lens, the media presented the opposition as unenlightened, focusing more on articles concerning riots and religion rather than the economic and social factors which created such dissent. This was especially true amongst editorial writers, who were quick to place Iranian opposition to the Shah within the content of opposition against modernity.²⁵¹ In September 1978, contrary to information reported upon elsewhere in the same newspaper, a *Washington Post* editorial commented on the “frenzied opposition to the erosion of feudal ways and such basic policy planks as land distribution and the granting of rights to women...throw in the dimension of Communist subversion and you have a poisonous brew.”²⁵² Reporting and commentary like this was common throughout the American Press.

In one of their newsletters, the ISA asked the press, “what function is served by these daily slanders against Iranian people, calling everyone who opposes repression and policy tyranny a “fanatic and an “extremist.”²⁵³ The problem lay in the high value the

²⁵⁰ “Why are 35 Million People Being Called Fanatics?” *Resistance* vol. 5, no. 6 (September 1978): 3.

²⁵¹ Walker, *Powers of the Press*, 380.

²⁵² “The Tumult in Iran,” *The Washington Post*, September 12, 1978, A12.

²⁵³ “Why are 35 Million People Being Called Fanatics?” 3.

United States had put on Iranian oil. On November 15, 1978 two columnists for the *Washington Post* Evans and Novak bluntly noted that Americans needed to forget about the human rights which were being violated in Iran and back the Shah solely because he was a strong U.S. ally.²⁵⁴ Positions such as these were motivated by the failures of both U.S. officials and journalist who did not look into academic studies on the failures of the Shah's reform and did not make an attempt to understand the opposition. In fact, the most insightful reporting and analysis of the happening in Iran in the late 1970s came from syndicates from international newspapers like *The Guardian* which actively used academic and first hand source material over government accounts.

In 1978 with the Revolution gaining ground in Iran, major newspapers began reporting articles about Iranian student opposition in the United States. Unfortunately for these students, the press tended to report only on protests and militant demonstrations. The ISA noted, "Around the country vicious editorials and "investigative" reports have tried to depict the [student opposition] as a "band of troublemakers" in order to reduce its influence among the American people and to white wash Shah's bloody rule."²⁵⁵ In reality, the press probably attacked student opposition because it was rhetorically anti-Western. By discrediting such a revolution, the press was innately confirming and imposing on the public its own sense of ethnocentric superiority.²⁵⁶ The concept of modernity was the standard by which the press often viewed Iranians. Since most Iranian opposition, especially the student vocally criticized the U.S. model as imperializing, these

²⁵⁴ Evans and Novak, "Covering Iran's Crisis: A Gulf between Press and Palace," *The Washington Post*, November 15, 1978, A24.

²⁵⁵ "U.S.-Shah Begins Attack on ISA as Carter Prepares for Iran Visit," *Resistance* vol. 5, no. 1 (December 1977), 15.

²⁵⁶ Dorman, *U.S. Press in Iran*, 180.

individuals became perceived as backwards and not capable of maintaining their own civilized society without the aid of the U.S. or Shah.

IRANIAN STUDENT RESPONSE TO THE MEDIA:

Within their publications, the ISA and the OIMS continually critique the American press for poor news coverage. Iranian students found it almost laughable that the Shah was portrayed as a symbol of modernization and liberalization in the Middle East. One of the main goals of the Iranian student movement in America was to inform the American public opinion, along with other non-Persian speaking groups and communities, of the oppressive situation they and their fellow Iranians had lived through under the brutal regime of the Shah. This was not an easy task, as newspapers and national news broadcasts portrayed the Shah as a “benevolent monarch.” Even as it became obvious that his reign was ending, the American mass media portrayed the Shah as a tragic hero- his fatal flaw was his desire to bring a more democratic and liberal society to the people. In the words of the ISA, “the press perpetuates this gross stupidity with lies heaped upon lies presenting the fiction of ‘modernization’ as the central issue.”²⁵⁷

Although many Iranian students saw themselves as Marxist, they openly criticized the fact that the U.S. press was often willing to adopt the claim that “Islamic-Marxists” were the main problem within Iran, failing to consider other sources of opposition amongst the masses such as lack of political freedoms or economic hardships. As the

²⁵⁷ “210 Arrested in Chicago,” *Resistance* vol. 5, no. 4 (July 1978): 10.

revolution continued the press tended to focus more and more on the Islamic fanatic ideologies portrayed them as backwards and anti-liberating to women. The press depicted the Iranian revolutionaries as constrained by their religious superstition and lacking a desire for political freedoms. This ignorant interpretation of events especially came to pass during the holy month of Murharram when devout Shiite were viewed as archaic due to some individuals public displays of self- flagellation. Reporting upon the holy month, *Newsweek* noted that “Iran was revving up for the annual holy day of Ashura [day ten of Murharram], when perfervid Shiite Muslims- the Shah’s fiercest foes- literally whip themselves into a frenzy. Late last week, the violence began.”²⁵⁸ This article was accompanied with a picture of young men participating in self-flagellation while right next to it there is a picture of Westerners evacuating Tehran. Journalists have always had an interest in culturally different ancient and social traditions. The celebrations that surrounded Murharran were widely covered in the media, reflecting what appeared to be a nation filled with religious zealots.

Muslim Iranians did not approve of how the press portrayed Islam to the American public. In response the Organization of Iranian Muslim Students began publishing *The Rise*, in July 1977. They blamed the press for slanderous propaganda which they felt was propagated by U.S. imperialism. One of the major critiques put forth by students, the media began to focus on the role of Islam in the revolution, instead of focusing on articles about the role money and American big business had played in Iranian domestic politics. It was easier to blame Islam for the growing failures of secular nationalism in Iran and the greater Middle East then it were to find fault with Western

²⁵⁸ David Butler and Loren Jenkins, “Iran at the Brink,” *Newsweek*, December 18, 1978, 40.

Imperialism. Due to unknown complications and limitations, OIMS were unable to produce regular publications in English. But as the revolution grew, and “reactionary and distortive propaganda [as] unleashed against it in the Western press, the U.S. in particular” made it so the OIMS felt it necessary to regularly print in English to expose and explain the situation.²⁵⁹ They felt it was important to show that the Islamic movement was one to be understood and respected.

In response, the OIMS claimed that the U.S. government and the mass media were in a campaign to boost support for the Shah amongst Americans; often critiquing the press's portrayal of the Shah as a “progressive and modernizer” and the Iranian Muslim populace as “backwards and anti-modernization.” Although this was not always the case, editorials and poor reporting did at times imply such views. What was omitted from media reports, the OIMS stated, was the fact that those in Iran, even the Muslims, were all “fighting for the establishment of a just and democratic government, committed to the independence and freedom of Iran and restoration of human rights to the people—men and women equally.”²⁶⁰ Why would the United States support such a non-democratic regime? Iranian students claimed that the U.S. establishment as a whole was afraid of the revolutionary movement. The U.S. press and news media were seen as doing everything to keep the Shah in power and secure U.S. imperialist interests.

Likewise, the ISA often had problems with the Washington Post's reporting of the Revolution. Although general critiques of U.S. mass media's analysis were common

²⁵⁹Organization of Iranian Moslems Students, *The Rise (English Defense Publication) and Leaflets in English*, (Organization of Iranian Moslem Students, 1979), 10.

²⁶⁰“The Islamic Movement in Iran and the U.S. Imperialism,”*The Rise* (October 12, 1978), 3.

amongst Iranian student organizations, they were specific in calling out the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*, stating:

It is not that some facts are not reported. What is important is that even with these facts, the truth of what is happening and what it means is transformed into a grotesque mockery deliberately designed to perpetuate a totally distorted view of the struggle and aspirations of the Iranian people, a fabricated image of the Shah's regime, and a thundering lie about the real source of all problems in Iran today.²⁶¹

The ISA editorialists note that they take specific grievance with the *Post* above all others because it was the only American newspaper with a permanent correspondent stationed in Iran, and, yet, it failed to report the Iranian perspective.

Embracing a Third World ideology, many Iranian dissidents supported the large strikes and attacks on U.S. imperialism and the world market. The ISA devoted a whole issue of *Resistance* in May 1978 in accordance with May Day, to celebrate and analyze the working class role in the Revolution. Although U.S. press did print a few articles which mentioned the strikes, there were few and they did not analyze why the strikes were in place, specifically in regard to the Shah and his actions. Not one article or editorial could be found by either the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* viewed the strikes in a favorable manor. Iranian students in the U.S. were disappointed at the weak reporting on working class resistance in Iran and of the popularity of the revolutionary movement. Dorman and Farhang note that, "The rich and compelling detail of individual and collective human struggle...was remarkably absent in press accounts."²⁶² Instead, as the students would point out- wealthy Iranians were paying the salaries of striking

²⁶¹ "Iran in Turmoil," *Resistance* vol. 5, no. 2 (March 1978), 3.

²⁶² Dorman, *US Press and Iran*, 157.

workers, or that many refused bribes of higher pay. Due to preconceptions as to the nature of the revolt, mainstream journalists did not mention the humanistic face of the strikes, although there were some of the most successful in history and illustrated a huge turning point in the revolution itself.

The opposition felt that the Shah would be supported by the United States because of firmly established U.S. involvement in Iran. The Shah was seen as subservient to foreign domination, especially with the United States. Iranian students believed that Carter would continue to support the Shah and restore his dictatorial authority over the masses of Iranian society “according to the interests of the U.S. giant monopolies and multi-national corporations” operating within Iran. By 1978 there were over 500 American firms actively present, and they believed the numbers would only grow.²⁶³ Jimmy Carter’s regrets about the upheaval in Iran were seen as merely “crocodile tears” which were useless in ending the dictatorship of the Shah.²⁶⁴ The mass media’s commitment to the Carter administration and the Shah, rather than the reporting of actual events, was repeatedly critiqued. For instance, mockingly and bitter, in March 1978 the ISA felt it necessary to “congratulate the Washington Post of its extremely sophisticated and clever analysis” of events from Iran.²⁶⁵

However, the mainstream news often undermined the Iranian students’ critiques of both the Shah and the Carter administration. It undermined the students’ movement by depicting these political activist students in a negative light, as radicals and leftists; this

²⁶³ “U.S. Government Support for Shah,” *The Rise* vol. 1, no. 3 (December 1, 1978), 3.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ “Iran in Turmoil,” 3.

point of view served to discredit them in the eyes of the American public while upholding the general support for the Shah. Still, these students worked to overcome such boundaries, using quotes when available from major newspapers, such as the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Baltimore Sun*, *Wall Street Journal* and more, to validate their claims of oppression and corruptions to the American public. This practice was most prevalent amongst the ISA in their publication *Resistance*. Demonstrating how the Shah had “sold out” the Iranian people to American big business, in one page the ISA was able to quote numbers and statistics which had been published in *The Economist*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Time*, and *Events*.²⁶⁶ But Iranian students were generally unhappy with the media’s coverage of events. In response, they held a number of protests and demonstrations outside of these papers’ respective buildings when they felt the press had gone too far. Iranian students realized the power the media had in reaching the American public and they relentlessly tried to bring more truthful accounts to the public themselves.

CONCLUSION:

The atrocities and abuses committed by the Shah’s regime were repeatedly overlooked or downplayed by those in Washington and the mass media because of the economic, political and geo-strategic important interests which were relevant. This partisan reporting had future implications for Iranian-American relations. By downplaying the secular opposition and the repressive regime while supporting the Shah,

²⁶⁶ “The American Shah and the Thousand Thieves” *Resistance Vol.5, no. 9 (December 1978)*, 6.

the press was left to focus on radical fundamentalists. Seeing the Iranian revolution through different ideologies the press, through Cold War perceptions, and the Iranian students, though Third World one, created a dichotomy which presented differing views of the Revolution. In the end, the U.S. mass media was one of the biggest disappointments to the Iranian student movement.

As Henry Pretch pointed out, most journalists during this event did not speak the language or even step foot upon Iranian soil. As a result, journalists fell short of the goal of understanding the countries about which they were reporting, which has a “profound and damaging effect on the formulation of American policy.”²⁶⁷ The press brought the country of Iran into the homes of everyday America, but it was a distorted view brought about by an ethnocentric coverage of the Third World. In January 1979, before Khomeini returned to Iran, an ABC News-Harris Survey questioned the American public on their thoughts on the events which had conspired in Iran. The results found that most Americans, 52-24 percent, would have preferred “a military take-over in Iran to a ‘government dominated by extreme Moslem religious leaders who would be popular with the Iranian people.’”²⁶⁸ The language used in this survey itself illustrates the American public’s perception of superiority that a dictator or foreign influence like theirs would help the Iranian people achieve “progress” for Iran. Within the next year, perceptions of Iranians and Iranian students in American would become even more tainted.

²⁶⁷ Foreign Affairs Oral History Project “Nass, Charles and Henry Pretch,”15.

²⁶⁸ Louis Harris, “Americans Favor Military Government in Iran,” ABC News-Harris Survey (New York: Louis Harris & Associates, 1979).

CHAPTER 5

On January 16, 1979 the Shah secretly boarded a plane and left Iran for an indefinite holiday carrying a casket of Iranian soil. Millions, young and old, took to the streets of Iran to congratulate each other, honking their horns, hugging and kissing each other, passing out Persian treats and cakes and chanting “The Shah is gone forever, the Shah has run away.” “What to the Shah and U.S. was like the climax of a Sophoclean tragedy,” the ISA described, “was to the Iranian people the biggest mass celebration and festival of their history.”²⁶⁹ The Shah had represented reaction, repression, corruption and foreign dominance. Overjoyed by the news of the removal of the Shah from the political scene, the OIMS noted that this “certainly is a great victory for the whole nation at this stage of the struggle. Yet, it is not the end goal of the movement. It is only the first step.”²⁷⁰ Iranian students in the United States were elated to hear the news and accounts from their friends and family back home. Even as they won the battle, the war was not yet over; students worried about the U.S. presence still in Iran and the creation of a government entity supported by the populace that would guarantee liberties to its citizens and independence of foreign influence.

Fred Halliday, a leading expert on Middle East politics, names the Iranian Revolution the first “modern” revolution. A true byproduct of Third World populism, the Iranian Revolution was able to succeed in ousting the Shah due to its wide-ranging

²⁶⁹ “A Great Victory: The Shah is Kicked Out, U.S. Will be Next” *Resistance* vol. 6, no. 2 (February 1979), 1.

²⁷⁰ “Criminal Shah Flees Iran In Tears,” *The Rise*, vol 1, no. 5 (20 January 1979), 1.

alliance of different social groups.²⁷¹ Just two months after the Shah left, a new post-revolutionary system unlike anything before it – an Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Khomeini, was overwhelmingly endorsed by a national referendum. Rejecting the ideas of historical progress put forth in Western modernity, the Iranian Revolution was in fact a reactionary revolution with strong nationalistic ties, one which wanted to return to a previous order. It is interesting to note that despite its traditionalist ideologies, the Revolution itself was composed predominately of forms of opposition associated with more advanced capitalist countries, such as street demonstrations and political general strikes. The originality of the Iranian revolution stems from the fact that it was neither traditionalist nor modern in character, but a distinct combination of the two.²⁷²

An ideology of opposition, Islam incorporates themes of martyrdom, sacrifice and resistance. Shiites in particular carry a narrative of the weak against the strong. Told often through the story of Hussain vs. Yazid, a familiar story known by all Iranians dating back to the Middle Ages, many Iranians found the faith to carry out against the Shah's regime. According to legend, Hussain, the grandson of the prophet Mohammad and the revered third Iman for Shia Muslims, refused to pledge allegiance to Umayyad Calliph Yazid. With only 72 followers including women and children, Hussain chose to fight for his freedom against Yazid's army of over 4000 men at the Battle of Karbala. He and his men were killed in the battle, but revenge for his death would drive the split between Sunni and Shiite Muslims. Hussain is revered by Shiite

²⁷¹ Fred Halliday, "The Iranian Revolution: Uneven Development and Religious Populism," in *State and Ideology in the Middle East and Pakistan* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988), 35-36.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 33-36.

Muslims and regarded as a martyr. The story of Hussain and Yazid served as inspiration for many Iranians, becoming an allegory for their own Revolution.

The formation of an Islamic Republic was the first real alternative to the Cold War dichotomy as most individuals in Iran choose to align themselves with neither the Soviet nor the American form of modernization theory. This revolution came about as a combination of modern and traditional features, all of who wanted to see the Shah overthrown. Yet once the monarch did fall, it was nearly impossible for the students, or their leftist and democratic ideas, to hold any influence over the mass Iranian population. Even though the Iranian Revolution was a mass uprising, Khomeini considered almost all of the earlier leaders of the Revolution as obstacles to his legitimacy.²⁷³ Both secular and religious leaders as well as ardent followers were met with the same brutality the Shah reserved for his opposition.

Throughout numerous accounts, it appeared as though most Iranians' hearts leapt with hope when Carter was elected president. From Ayatollahs to the average Iranian worker, it was assumed that, with this new democratic and moral leader, America would change its policy towards Iran. Unfortunately, despite all of Carter's about human rights and arms control, there were no steps toward or real pressure upon the Shah to change the status quo. In his inaugural address, Carter laid out 3 main goals which framed his foreign policy- to defend human rights, serve as a global role model, and limit world armaments. David Farber points out how Carter's moralistic image in combination with his foreign policy goals gave Americans a romanticized vision of who

²⁷³ Ibid, 33.

they were and what they were projecting onto the world.²⁷⁴ Although a nice vision, Carter would overlook all three principles when it came to Iran. It is not that Carter did not genuinely care about human rights but rather the Cold War and other factors took precedent. In 1979 and 1980, the question asked by policymakers, scholars and the media was “who lost Iran?” Despite the ample information available in the 1970s concerning the failures of the Shah’s regime and Iranian mass struggle, the overthrow of the Shah came as a surprise to many. Much of this stemmed from the fact that Iran was not perceived by the Carter administration to be a hot spot, but it was seen as a source of stability and security in the Middle East. In the United States, many Americans were pre-occupied with their own economic situation rather than world events, as inflation and unemployment remained high.²⁷⁵ Before mainstream broadcast news channels, like CNN, and with mainly local papers to get news, many Americans cared little about foreign news that did not directly affect them. The case of Iran exemplifies this situation, as it remained barely mentioned by the news until the Iranian revolution threatened American supremacy.

The year 1979 would prove to be momentous in Iranian history, signifying both the end of the Pahlavi dynasty and the birth of the Islamic Republic. Iranian students abroad were delighted to hear that the Shah had left for good and saw it as “a great victory” for not just themselves but for the “oppressed peoples of the world and for all those who struggle for the liberation of their people and the independence of their country from domination by fascist dictators and the repressive regimes serving

²⁷⁴ Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 77.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 83.

imperialism.”²⁷⁶ ISA began their February Resistance newsletter with the headline “The Shah is Kicked Out, the U.S. Will Be Next.” Just like Vietnam before them, Iranians saw their revolution as a triumph of Third World peoples over global world powers. With the Shah finally gone, students believed they would be given the opportunity to witness Iran change for the better.

Caught up in the fervor of the Revolution, a number of students abroad returned home. Once the Shah was gone, the Iranian student movement declined in both numbers and influence as its more active students left the United States. In November 1978, the Confederation of Iranian Students advised its members to return home. In that first week, more than 600 members in Europe and the United States boarded planes back to Iran.²⁷⁷ In March 1979, the ISA announced it would be ending its publication of the newsletter Resistance. In a formal letter to its subscribers, they cite the cause of this to be the vast majority of ISA members had returned to Iran to support the struggle for an independent and democratic Iran. They apologized for the sudden changes while thanking parts of the American community for their services to the struggle. The letter states, “There can be no way to measure this contribution to the freedom of Iranian people in the part of the American people, nor any way to fully express the solidarity that has thus been cemented between our two people.”²⁷⁸ Over the years they received messages of solidarity from more than 70 anti-imperialist, progressive and revolutionary organizations and groups, and they formed support committees such as

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Christopher Dickey, “Protests at Home Pose Troubling Questions for Iranians in the U.S.,” *Washington Post*, November 12, 1978, A28.

²⁷⁸ Iranian Student Association, “Dear Resistance Subscriber letter,” (March 1979).

Americans for Independence and Democracy in Iran.²⁷⁹ Over the next 2 years, Iranian student publications in English would cease to exist. The OIMS's newsletter *The Rise* completed its last printing the following month in April. With the Shah gone from Iran and Khomeini in power, various Iranian students had little to unite them. Different factions went their own directions and with it they lost their voice in America.

Some students stayed in the United States to finish their studies. Some still picketed government building and media hubs against U.S. interference in the newly formed Islamic Republic under Khomeini, but their numbers were smaller, and therefore, created less of an impact. For instance, in May 1979, only about 50 Iranians marched on through downtown Washington, D.C. to defend the new government of Iran. The U.S. mass media portrayed the Islamic Republic in a very negative light, despite its popularity amongst the Iranian public. It was estimated that 98% of Iranians supported Khomeini, for various reasons, not just religious. A protest leader, who went by the name Simin, declared that unlike under the Shah, the new government in Iran is a democratic republic trusted by the people. Demonstrating the students' belief in such change by Khomeini, Simin pointed out positive aspects of the new government. "For example," she stated the new constitution would "provide equal rights for women and self determination for national minorities in Iran."²⁸⁰ Although in retrospect, this view may seem naïve, Khomeini spoke of utilitarian principles such as class equality and greater freedoms to the public which would have supported views like Simin's. Iranian students, like most of their fellow citizens, earnestly believed Khomeini was a person

²⁷⁹ "The 26th Annual Convention of ISAU.S.," 8.

²⁸⁰ "Iranian Student Protest," *Washington Post*, May 26, 1979, B7.

who was determined to help the people, unlike the Shah and other American supported leaders.²⁸¹

Many Iranian students who remained in the United States after the Revolution had to deal with unexpected financial difficulties. Roughly 18,000 students in the United States had received financial assistance from either private or governmental organizations under the Shah. With a new government in place and Iranian mail and banking systems in trouble, many students were faced with the question of how they would pay for school or their livelihood abroad. Students also faced growing pressure by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to crack down on foreign students. Iranians quickly became faced with the serious question of deportation.²⁸² This further sullied the mood and assistance Iranian students were able to pay to their activism.

In 1979 the INS began to compile figures and tighten the control over foreign students, which was prompted by Attorney General Griffin B. Bell hard lined criticisms of Iranian students demonstrations which had turned violent.²⁸³ Although violence erupted only a few times, Iranian student demonstrators were portrayed by the media as terrorists. In November of 1979, the Associated Press alleged Iranian students had participated in three street bombings outside of military facilities in Chicago. This was contrary to witnesses accounts who described those connected as being of Latin origin.²⁸⁴ During a protest in D.C., Mohammed Roshanaei, a computer science major and national secretary of the ISA asserted “we are not terrorist.” In fact, they were

²⁸¹ “Millions Welcome Ayatollah Khomeini,” *Resistance* vol. 6, no. 2 (February 1979), 1, 5.

²⁸² Christopher Dickey, “Iranian Students here face bleak future,” *Washington Post*, February 15, 1979, A1.

²⁸³ “INS Survey’s Foreign Students,” *Facts on File World News Digest*, February 9, 1979, U.S. Affairs.

²⁸⁴ James Litke, “Three People Sought in Chicago Bombing,” *The Associated Press*, November, 25 1979.

merely individuals who just wanted “freedom and independence in Iran.”²⁸⁵ Yet Iranian students on campuses, especially in more remote towns in the Midwest, faced growing confrontation and hostility from American students.

The Iranian Hostage situation would further taint the image of Iranian students in the United States. On November 4, 1979, a group of students in Tehran took over the American embassy and held 52 Americans hostage in retaliation for the U.S. permitting the Shah asylum in the United States so that he could get treatment for cancer. These 52 hostages were held for 444 days, all of which were reported in detail on the nightly news. One of the most widely covered stories in television history, the Iranian Hostage Crisis portrayed Iranians daily as “terrorist” and “fanatics.”²⁸⁶ Iranians demanded the return of the Shah to be tried for his crimes against the Iranian people. Many Iranian student activists in the United States supported the hostage takers actions and continued to blame Carter and his administration for agitating the Iranian masses. The editors of *RIPEH* stated the hostage taking was seen as “both predictable and understandable reactions of anger and desperation to President Carter’s callous and cynical embrace of the monarchy.”⁴ Iranian students’ open approval of the hostage taking along with growing prejudices towards Iranians created confrontations. In December 1979, the Shah landed in San Antonio, Texas to recuperate at Lackland Air Force Base from cancer treatment and gallbladder surgery which he had received in New York. In a pre-emptive strike against Iranian students, the City Manager of San Antonio announced he would not allow anti-Shah marches by students. He claimed that he

²⁸⁵ Lawrence Meyer, “Iranian Students here protest Shah; Usual Paper Masks not used,” *Washington Post*, January 6, 1979, D1.

²⁸⁶McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 198-199.

“feared the marches could turn violent and endanger San Antonians or inflame the situation in Tehran.”²⁸⁷ Any foreign student caught demonstrating was reported straight to immigration officials.²⁸⁸ In the years to follow, Iranian students found growing hostility directed towards them as groups of Americans would later stage counterdemonstrations asking Iranian students to “go home.”²⁸⁹

In just two years between 1977 and 1979, Iran was turned upside down. The climate in Iran and throughout the world made it so the anti-Shah opposition was given the opportunity to unite and resist the Pahlavi regime. The Shah was seen by his opposition as a U.S. puppet, and, as a result, the U.S. was also to blame for the inhuman abuses which were prevalent in Iran. The Iranian Revolution would immediately change the U.S. government’s perception and control of the Middle East; but it was easily forgotten that this moment in history represented something beautiful to the Iranian people – the end of repression and corruption. The Irony here is that, despite its populist claim, the Iranian Revolution did little in the way of improving the lives and basic freedoms of the average Iranian but traded one brutal and authoritarian regime for another.

²⁸⁷ Greg Thompson, “Shah up and around, Sources Say,” Associated Press, December 5, 1979.

²⁸⁸ Greg Thompson, “Huebner said police would stop any illegal demonstrations and that any foreign demonstrators who were arrested would be reported to immigration authorities,” *Associated Press*, December 5, 1979.

²⁸⁹ McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 214.

CONCLUSION:

For over a quarter of a century, the United States had supported the Shah as a staunch ally to benefit its own domestic and foreign interests, mainly: access to oil, security in the Middle East and a barrier against communism. Placed on the throne in a coup d'état and without a base of popular support, the Shah had maintained a corrupt and authoritarian regime where all forms of political opposition were ruthlessly dealt with. To warrant their special relationship with Iran, Washington downplayed his absolute rule and portrayed the Shah as an enlightened, progressive modernizer who was "attempt[ing] to transform a poor untutored, tyrannized society into a prosperous, confident, technologically advanced and democratic nation."²⁹⁰ But as the years progressed, opponents of the Shah began to openly criticize the Iranian regime and worked hard to undermine the monarch's legitimacy. Despite their American counterparts, Iranians were well aware of the role American power and influence had played in Iranian politics. The most cited example was the CIA coup which replaced the Shah to the thrown in 1953. Growing opposition to the Shah believed the United States had continued to assert its influence in Iran and support the Shah for its own interests.²⁹¹ Outside of Iran's repressive system, Iranian students abroad were some of the first to openly criticize the Shah's regime, proving to be the leading social force of opposition to the Shah in the two decades leading up to the Iranian Revolution. Despite their ideological differences and previous fractionalization, between 1977 and 1979 the Iranian students in the United

²⁹⁰ Flora Lewis, "Iran: Future Shock," *New York Times*, November 1978, SM17.

²⁹¹ Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 37.

States worked together to help overthrow Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi from the Peacock Throne in 1979.

Like most ethnicities in the twentieth century with a strong centralized past, Iranians had a strong sense of nationalism and desire of self-determination. Drawing from a historical narrative of greatness which dated back to the Persian Empire, Iranian students drew upon their celebrated past and demanded the right to choose a governing body which was free of foreign influence while promoting justice and equality.²⁹² Motivated by the Civil Rights movement, Third World movements and other social change movements prevalent in the 1960s, the Iranian student movement culminated in the late 1970s as a well organized assembly of thousands of Iranians throughout the country. Americans had made great leaps and bounds in applying the ideals of civic inclusivity and cultural diversity since the 1950s.²⁹³ Community based and split into local chapters, Iranian students used grassroots techniques to inform the general public about their struggle for democracy and independence. Despite their darkening critique of U.S. foreign policy, Iranians students put their faith in American and foreign peoples sympathy for their oppressed brethren.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the Third World began to actively criticize the United States for its use of political, economic and military might to influence developing nations. The Iranian student movement was increasingly influenced by Third World revolutionaries and later Islamic scholars who demanded an end to U.S. imperialism and its bipolar Cold War diplomacy. After the failures of the Vietnam War and allegations of

²⁹² Gonzalez, *Engaging Iran*, 24.

²⁹³ Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 16.

CIA covert operations against adversary foreign governments, foreign students radicalized and found solidarity with other Third World liberation movements around the world. In their organization, durability, and impact, Iranian students were active players in the student movement, getting their message out through numerous demonstrations, publications and events. Building off of the precedent set up by CISNU, Iranian student organizations refused to develop ties or receive aid from any government organization to prevent manipulation and influence from tendentious groups. However, students did embrace the aid and support of individuals and other like-minded groups, comprising alliances with at least 80 different organizations in the United States alone. Full of passion and drive for better future for their homeland, Iranian students brought their Revolution to the streets of the United States.

By the late 1970s, major New Left organizations and other American social movements which Iranian students had drawn strength from had fractionalized and left the scene. In spite of this fact, Iranian student activism grew substantially. They openly challenged the status quo and helped to bring change across the ocean. Iranian students also took up a number of causes which they felt a sense of comradery with, these usually ended up being with other foreign peoples who struggled for independence from imperialism and self-sovereignty. Having gained greater social and political awareness abroad, Iranian students longed for a more democratic system in Iran. They idealized the brief period in Iranian history, under Mossaddeq, which was more democratic and pluralistic autonomous than any other period in 20th century Iranian history. Even as these students broke off into communist, socialist, secular nationalist and Islamic elements, they retained a form of pluralism as they continued to work together to oust the

Shah. A group rarely looked at by historians; the Iranian Students Movement was influential amongst both student and Third World movements throughout the world.

The Iranian student movement also had socio-cultural implications fostering a strong sense of community amongst students and eventually the larger Iranian population. United under a single cause, Iranian students were able to share a common identity in a foreign environment. This connection helped to lead to friendships and moral purpose, which fostered a strong sense of self. Struggling for universal Third World ideals, displaced Iranian students were able to put themselves within a larger struggle, giving them both purpose and optimism. They were able to put their differences aside for the common good of ousting the Shah. When it became apparent after the Revolution that Khomeini's Islamic Republic was just as ruthless and authoritarian as the Shah's had been, Iranian students in the United States tended to be very apathetic towards politics or a counter-revolution.²⁹⁴

Student opposition abroad brought to light to some of the poor treatment of political prisoners of the regime. As Afshin Matin-asgari noted, the CISNU's lobbying and persistence attracted the attention of non-government organizations such as "Amnesty International, the International Federation of Human Rights, the International Association of Democratic Jurist and numerous liberal and leftist political student organizations."²⁹⁵ These organizations sent observers to examine the social and political conditions in Iran, and they came back reporting on numerous human rights violations. In response, by 1975, American policy in Iran was challenged by various Congressmen

²⁹⁴ Matin-asgari, *Student Opposition*, 164.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 163.

who attacked both the SAVAKs brutality and U.S. continued support of such a repressive regime. Unfortunately for dissident Iranians in the United States, the Shah had more supporters in Washington than enemies, especially amongst those in charge of U.S.-Iranian relations.²⁹⁶ As the 1970s progressed, student opposition continued to undermine the Shah's authoritarian rule leading him to announce a more tolerant environment in 1977 known as the "year of liberalization." Studies of the Revolution often credit Carter's moralistic presidency for the Shah's decision to begin liberalizing his country, but this was not the case. Rather, the discussion the change came about due to increasingly negative images of the Shah on the international stage brought about by anti-Shah publicity campaigns organized by Iranian students.

Over the years, the American press influenced and informed the American public of world events. Aligning its interests with those of Washington, the mainstream media tended to report upon foreign affairs through a Cold War lens. Iranian students were the victims of such biased reporting. Representative of how the news media portrayed Third World nations, Iran is merely one example of American ethnocentrism promoted through the media. An important U.S. ally, the Shah was portrayed as a "benevolent monarch" who was attempting to bring Western modernity to Iran for the benefit of his people. At the same time, his opposition, being viewed as radical Marxist and Islamist were seen as backwards. This portrayal led to an underlined assumption that Iranians, as a mass, were not capable of a successful rebellion against their regime. As Dorman and Farhang sum it up, "Iran was the Shah, and thus all that mattered in the relations between the United

²⁹⁶ Bill, *Eagle and the Lion*, 211-213.

States and Iran was his satisfaction.”²⁹⁷ It was logic such as this which encouraged the media to describe the opposition to the Shah radical ideologies rather than basic grievances for freedoms and rights. This misinterpretation of events and actors of the Iranian Revolution is one of the underlying reasons why in 1979, when the Shah left Iran, most Americans were shocked and surprised. The case of the media’s portrayal of Iran during the Revolution is a clear example of how Third World realities were often misrepresented to benefit U.S. interests. This inability to report an accurate account of the Iranian Revolution would have a greater effect on domestic and foreign policy between the United States and Iran in the future.

The media made it harder for Iranian students to rally American support against the Shah’s regime. Although they found solidarity with a number of American leftist groups, student movements and the random humanitarian on the street, in the eyes of the media, Iranian students were violent revolutionaries with Marxist and Islamic ties. In small town colleges, Iranians students faced prejudices, riots and local attacks as the late 1970s progressed. Derogatory terms like “raghead” became more frequent and more violent clashes followed. One school, Trinidad State Junior College in Colorado, had to close down due to repeated clashes between local residents and foreign students.²⁹⁸ Aside from the goal of ousting the Shah, the Iranian student movement set out to inform the American public of both the Shah’s brutality and their own government’s imperialist goals, but the U.S. media proved to be a large adversary of the Iranian student movement on U.S. soil.

²⁹⁷ Dorman, *U.S. Press and Iran*, 233.

²⁹⁸ Joanne Omang and Alice Bonner, “Campus Demonstrations Spur INS Look at Foreign Students” *The Washington Post*, 24 April 1979, A1.

The Iranian student movement in the United States can be viewed as both a success and failure. Together Iranian student activists had banded together, temporarily overlooking ideological differences, to serve as the vanguard of resistance against the Shah. In January 1979, when the Shah left Iran for the last time, Iranians around the world savored the sweet nectar of victory. Despite all their fear of U.S. intervention, the Shah left peacefully and it appeared as if Iranians would finally be given the chance to establish a government of their liking. Thousands of students returned to Iran, hoping to support and aid the development of the new Iran. The editors of *RIPEH*, like much of the Iranian community, greeted the birth of an Islamic Revolution under Ayatollah Khomeini with great excitement. In their spring 1979 editorial, they wrote, “we are convinced that the post-revolutionary leadership [of Khomeini] will bring about qualitative changes in the political, economic, social and cultural conditions in Iran” while pursuing “an active and truly non-aligned foreign policy”²⁹⁹ Although Khomeini did bring about changes in Iran, they would not be on par with the broader goals of a democratic and liberalizing nation set by Iranian students. Instead, the following years brought about more brutality, war, poverty and suppression of the opposition. While this course of events is disheartening, in recent years Iranian students have again become vocal in opposition to the current regime. Student opposition to the current regime has been on the rise in the last decade, both in Iran and abroad. Groups such as the Student Movement Coordination Committee for Democracy in Iran (SMCCDI) have popped up in the United States calling for a modern and intellectual state based on populist, nationalist and secular

²⁹⁹ “Editorial,” *Review Iranian Political Economy and History (RIPEH)* vol. 3, no. 1 (Spring 1979): ii.

elements.³⁰⁰ Using the same methods as those before them, such as publications, demonstrations and now the internet, the Iranian student movement might yet see its efforts fully realized.

³⁰⁰ “Student Movement Coordination Committee for Democracy in Iran,” access at <http://www.daneshjoo.org/>; Internet, accessed May 12, 2008.

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