

Jaroslav Zukerstein

The Making of a Special Relationship: Iran in the Foreign Policy of the United States, 1953-1979

PhDr. Assessment

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Jaroslav Zukerstein has selected the issue of U.S. foreign policy towards Iran between 1953 and 1979 as the topic of his PhDr. dissertation. This topic is a very important one because of Iran's oil wealth and strategic importance during the Cold War. The work is divided into an Introduction, nine main chapters, and a Conclusion. It is well referenced and the theory of constructivism is applied to United States-Iran relations in the given period.

The Introduction explains very clearly the theoretical approach adopted by Jaroslav when tackling the United States-Iranian relationship. Jaroslav also does an excellent job analyzing the vast literature on the subject.

In Chapter 1, Jaroslav explains the theory of constructivism and its application in the sphere of international relations. Essentially, Jaroslav accepts the idea that "...socio-political international reality is constructed by human interaction. The world is therefore a social construction which is created by interactions among agents of international structure." (p. 9) The remainder of the chapter discusses the origins of constructivist theory, its evolution, and its types. Overall, this theoretical introduction is helpful to understanding Jaroslav's theoretical framework.

Chapter 2 tells the reader just how constructivist theory can be applied to the U.S.-Iranian relationship. He goes into great detail when analyzing the hegemonic nature of ties between the United States and Iran. Different types of discourse (speech) are defined and applied in the description of the relationship. Essentially,

Jarda argues that the ultimate rejection by the Iranian people of American hegemony resulted in the crisis that culminated in the Iranian Revolution of 1979.

In Chapter 3, Jarda examines the history of U.S.-Iranian relations prior to 1953. There is a brief section scrutinizing relations before World War II, during the war, after the war, after the nationalization of U.S. and British petroleum interests, as well as the CIA's role in the coup that restored the Pahlavi dynasty to the throne. I believe that Jarda's explanation of the coup is balanced.

Chapter 4 represents a discussion of the policies of the Eisenhower administration towards Iran. The section dealing with the oil settlement shows how both economic desires of Western companies and political considerations resulted in the Iranian oil industry remaining nationalized on paper with foreign companies in charge of operations. Indeed, Iran could save face while Western companies could get their share of the oil wealth. Insofar as economic and military aid from the U.S. to Iran was concerned, the United States provided much military equipment because of the Shah's obsession with fancy military equipment. Other forms of aid also were given so long as the Iranians acquiesced to American wishes.

In Chapter 5, Jarda discusses the relationship between President Kennedy and the Shah's regime. During Kennedy's tenure as president, the State Department even went so far as to suggest a very deceptive program for the Iranian regime meant to appease the local population. The Shah, who was not fond of President Kennedy, refused to abide by the 14-point program prescribed by the Americans and instead pursued his own reforms.

Chapter 6 examines the policies of the Johnson administration towards Iran. Unlike Kennedy, President Johnson admired the Shah and his ability to rule Iran. Under Johnson, a "status of forces" agreement was reached, which provided

diplomatic immunity to U.S. soldiers based in Iran and their dependents. Support was provided for the Shah's version of reforms (known as the White Revolution) and state of the art military equipment was provided to Iran and oil production increased thanks to the Shah's lobbying of Western oil companies. This chapter is very informative.

Chapter 7 takes readers into the era of the Nixon presidency. President Nixon and Henry Kissinger made sure that Iran continued to receive the most modern military equipment and even overrode reservations expressed by the U.S. Defense Department. The Shah used oil as a bargaining chip to enhance his international prestige and with great success. As Britain's military withdrew from the region in 1971, Iran's military filled the security gap left by the British departure, which was in line with the Nixon Doctrine that called for strong regional allies to further U.S. goals.

In Chapter 8, Jarda discusses the policies of the Ford White House. As Kissinger remained in charge of foreign policy as secretary of state, suggestions that the U.S. link military sales to Iran to the lowering of oil prices were flatly rejected. Military equipment continued to pour in. However, opposition to the Shah in Iran was mounting and the American authorities did not appreciate some of the Shah's tactics, which were anti-American, designed to deflect criticism from the Iranian regime and transfer it to the Americans.

Chapter 9 scrutinizes the presidency of Jimmy Carter and its relationship with the Shah's Iran. One problem was Jimmy Carter's obsession with placing human rights at the forefront of his foreign policy agenda, but the lack of change in U.S. policy towards Iran. Another problem was the deteriorating economic situation inside Iran coupled with a rise in discontent. The opposition, largely Shia inspired, demonstrated ever more violently. In failing health, the Shah hoped for a smooth transition to his son and he adopted a more liberal approach to the opposition than

previously because earlier repression by the military and secret police (SAVAK) proved counterproductive. Also, the Americans, while concerned, did not understand the dynamics of the situation and American intelligence overestimated the Shah's ability to sustain his rule in the face of mounting opposition. On 16 January 1979, the Shah and his family fled Iran and the Islamic Revolution took place shortly thereafter. The American experiment in Iran ended in failure.

In his Conclusion, Jarda recapitulates the main points expressed in the body of the dissertation. His findings are sound and valid. Basically, American overreliance on the Pahlavi dynasty and the ruling elite in Iran resulted in a misunderstanding of events resulting in decisions that ultimately doomed the U.S.-Iranian relationship.

Jaroslav Zukerstein has produced an impeccable PhDr. dissertation. His ability to see the U.S.-Iranian relationship as heteronomic and his application of structuralist theory provides a useful framework through which to observe the relationship between the United States and Iran between 1953 and 1979. I look forward to the oral defense.

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