

Fear of Communism and U.S.-Iran Rapprochement: 1984-1986

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Abstract

The advent of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 significantly worsened Iran-U.S. relations. Although this relationship has been founded upon hostility ever since, the 1984-86 period can be mentioned as one when relations between the two actors were exempt to the rule, with both sides trying to establish unofficial relationships. This article seeks to explore the reasons for U.S. proximity to Iran during those years and to answer the following question: Why did the United States pursue rapprochement with Iran in 1984-86 in spite of hostility and negative space found between the two states? The hypothesis which is proposed in this writing revolves around the discussion of fear of Communist influence in Iran; a fear that made the United States devise a plan for approaching Iran. This ultimately resulted in the Iran-Gate or Iran-Contra affair. In other words, this research seeks to test the following hypothesis: Fear of Communist influence in Iran led the United States to approach Iran in the 1984-86 period.

Keywords: Iran, United States, Unofficial Relations, McFarlane, Communist Influence

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Introduction

The advent of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 significantly worsened Iran-U.S. relations. Although this relationship has been founded upon hostility ever since, the 1984-86 period can be mentioned as one when relations between the two actors were exempt to the rule, with both sides trying to establish unofficial relationships. This article seeks to explore the reasons for U.S. proximity to Iran during those years and to answer the following question: Why did the United States pursue rapprochement with Iran in 1984-86 in spite of hostility and negative space found between the two states? The hypothesis which is proposed in this writing revolves around the discussion of fear of Communist influence in Iran; a fear that made the United States devise a plan for approaching Iran. This ultimately resulted in the Iran-Gate or Iran-Contra affair. In other words, this research seeks to test the following hypothesis: Fear of Communist influence in Iran led the United States to approach Iran in the 1984-86 period.

I- Pre-Revolutionary Era

The 1951-53 period was the heyday of the oil nationalization movement in Iran. Although the United States, in the beginning, supported the movement, it ultimately succeeded in overthrowing Mosaddeq's government in the 1953 coup backed by the United Kingdom.⁹⁾ From this historical era, the United States emerged as the major player in Iran's foreign policy and domestic politics, resuming its aid to Iran which had been cut off during the oil nationalization process. U.S.-Iran relations prior to the Revolution can be categorized



in terms of security, regional, financial and military cooperation. In the security dimension, Iran and the U.S. initiated vast security collaboration after the 1953 coup. In the domestic arena, the most important act undertaken by the U.S. was the creation of the Organization of Intelligence and National Security (SAVAK) and in the foreign area, the establishment of eavesdropping centers for surveillance on Soviet activities, training spies and counterespionage training can be mentioned (Gasiorowski, 2000: 114-116). In the regional cooperation sphere, reference can be made to Iran's membership in the Baghdad and later CENTO pacts, support for Israel and countering radical movements. In the financial sector, U.S. aid to Iran is worth mentioning. U.S. financial aid to Iran during the 12 months prior to the coup amounted to \$145 million, including \$70 million in financial assistance, \$50 million weapons procurement aid and \$25 million according to Truman's Point Four Program. A month after the 1953 coup, the U.S. administration declared that the \$145 million in aid to Iran had been unconditional and not subject to negotiations with the Great Britain (Ettelaat Newspaper: September 9, 1953). On September 3, 1953, the U.S. Administration agreed to pay \$23.4 million as annual technical assistance of Truman's Point Four program. Two days later, it granted Iran a \$45 million ex gratia loan, citing its satisfaction with Iran's reaching agreement with the Great Britain in resolving mutual problems (Mahdavi, 2001: 222). Annual report released by the U.S. Department of Defense on May 21, 1973 described its financial aid to Iran as follows: \$883,122,000 ex gratia military aid; Sending defense equipment amounting to \$20,271,000; Selling arms amounting to \$793,573,000; and Conducting training courses for 10,807 Iranian military personnel (Ettelaat Newspaper, May 21, 1973).

In the arms and military assistance section, selling modern weapons to Iran as well as granting the role of regional police to Iran in the Persian Gulf can be mentioned. Under Nixon, Iran-U.S. relations culminated in Iran's recognition as the closest U.S. ally in the Persian



Gulf. Within the framework of U.S. overall strategy and particularly the Nixon doctrine, Iran gained significant importance. In the aforementioned strategy, the U.S. Administration, according to the National Security Council's decision, had to further assist the countries surrounding the sphere of influence of China and Soviet Union. Accordingly, at least by the early 1970s, the foundations for U.S. national security policies were laid, leading the U.S. to establish closer relations with Iran (Gasiorowski, 1979: 108-111). Overall, Iran-U.S. relations moved in a direction that introduced Iran as the major regional power in the Persian Gulf as envisaged in the Nixon doctrine (Mahdavi, 2001: 401). That is the reason why a few historians and analysts of Iran's contemporary political developments have called the Pahlavi regime a client state. In an interview with France's Radio and Television in 1975, Mohammad Reza Shah answered a question on whether he considers himself as the policeman of the region. He said: "Of course we play a particular role. We want to keep the region afar from the threats in peace and tranquility. We want navigation in the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz to be free and reliable" (October 20, 1975).

The degree of Iran's dependence on the U.S. can also be seen in John Foran's analysis. He believes that in the world economic system, Iran was largely in interaction with the United States, including numerous sectors such as trade, military, banking, economy, countering Soviet moves and intelligence collaboration (Foran, 2004: 508-515). The U.S. tendency to Iran can be understood in the following statements: "Iran is politically, economically, and militarily significant for the United States. The country has a 1200-mile common border with the Soviet Union. It has a special strategic status in the Middle East, and controls a sizable portion of world oil reserves" (Foran: 2004: 508). Or "Iran's importance for Persian Gulf security, the future of the Middle East and production of oil is vital" (Foran, 2004: 509).

These are exactly the reasons why the United States following the advent of the revolution made its utmost efforts (including coup attempt



and military attack plans) in order to return Iran to its own sphere of influence. With Carter's coming to power, though, a few criticisms were put forth regarding Iran's violations of human rights, leading the Shah to embark on a series of actions in the direction of liberalization of political space, and overall, Iran-U.S. relations moved in the security path. This can be visibly seen in Carter's unconditional support for the Shah's action in the Jaleh Square massacre on September 8, 1978 (Azghandi, 2003: 362). In this respect, Mark Gasiorowski believes: "Overall, one can argue that the security perception of world events at that time led the United States to continue a policy which was not consistent with the human rights policies, not respecting human dignity too much" (Gasiorowski, 2000: 134). Ultimately, in spite of all U.S. efforts to prevent the overthrow of the Pahlavi regime, it fell on February 11, 1979, opening a new chapter in Iran-U.S. relations.

II- Iran-U.S. Relations after the Revolution

With the advent of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iran-U.S. relations entered a new stage. Although in the early revolutionary period, the U.S. Administration declared that it would like to maintain diplomatic relations with the Iranian government, circumstances led the pre-revolutionary mutual interactions to move to coldness, shaping a period described as mutual antipathy.

1979-1984: Mutual Antipathy Period. It was almost impossible for the United States to accept the loss of Iran as its major ally in the Middle East, and at the same time, the revolutionary atmosphere did not allow the interim government to step towards the way of previous Iran-U.S. relations. Even a few politicians tended to theorize and institutionalize this confrontation, acting accordingly. Mutual confrontation between Iran and the U.S. caused the revolutionary atmosphere governing the decision-making bodies in Iran's foreign policy to move towards radicalism, opening a new chapter in Iran's previous relations with the U.S. In this respect, non-acceptance of U.S. ambassador-designate to Tehran Walter Cutler and expulsion of Los Angeles Times and New



York Times journalists in July and August 1979 are examples of this new period in the U.S.-Iran relationship. With the Shah's trip to America in November 1979 and storming of the U.S. embassy by students following the Line of the Imam, tensions were further exacerbated. The U.S. proceeded to cut off the purchase of oil from Iran and to freeze Iranian gold and assets in American banks.

In April 1980, Iran-U.S. relations were ruptured by Carter, with the issuance of visas for Iranians banned and new sanctions imposed on Iran. Following U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance's resignation in response to the failed American military operations in Tabas to free the hostages, the situation became worse as economic sanctions were initiated against Iran on June 1. Although the hostage crisis ended with Iran's 4-point conditions and the issuance of the Algiers Accords (Tayarani, 2000: 298), the U.S. embarked on reinforcing its forces in the Persian Gulf in order to counter threats arising from the Iranian Islamic Revolution.

With the outbreak of Iraq's imposed war on Iran, the main decision-makers of the Islamic Republic accused the U.S. of provoking Iraq to invade Iran and destroy the nascent Islamic system, though the U.S. had declared neutrality at the beginning of the war (Ettelaat Newspaper, October 13, 1980). Furthermore, describing Israel and the U.S. as the common enemy of Iran and Islamic states, the leader of the Revolution called for the use of the oil weapon against America and Israel (Ettelaat Newspaper: June 7, 1980). The U.S. Administration also extended economic and diplomatic sanctions against Iran for another year. The U.S. Department of State, moreover, called upon its allies including West Germany, Great Britain, Italy, South Korea and Israel to stop sending military hardware to Iran through an operation called Staunch (Timmerman, 2007: 5). Then U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Hague remarked: "The Reagan Administration has to embark on measures, which are of aggressive nature, for countering Iran" (April 29, 1983).

In the meantime, U.S. actions in the way of initiating and direct



involvement in the war in Iraq's favor (Perry, 1993: numerous pages), actions in the UN Security Council (concerning non-recognition of state of war and Iraq as the aggressor) and giving military intelligence to Iraq during the war can be mentioned. In response, intensifying their positions on countering the U.S. and its conspiracies, the Iranian authorities emphasized that they would not allow any state to interfere in the Persian Gulf.²⁹

In early 1984, we witnessed efforts being made for the initiation of an informal relationship in parts of the U.S. decision-making establishment, despite the continued war of words and mutual threats exchanged by the two sides. This effort had indeed begun in 1982-83 and by 1984 proceeded to be pursued formally in the U.S. National Security Council as "An Attitude towards Iran", which will be addressed below.

Efforts at Rapprochement: 1984-86. Although in the first years after the Revolution, voices were heard occasionally in the United States favoring the formulation of a plan for approaching Iran, in early 1984 we witnessed how a number of decision-making bodies in the U.S. designed a plan for rapprochement. It is noteworthy that there was lack of consensus in the U.S. decision-making apparatus in this regard as was the case with respect to the Iranian Islamic Revolution. While the members of the National Security Council led by Brzezinski believed in adoption of definite policies and full-fledged support for the Shah's actions, the State Department and U.S. embassy in Tehran sought to establish liaison with the moderate elements and other political groups (Azghandi, 2003: 306).

This disagreement once again appeared in the post-revolutionary developments. While the State Department sought to improve relations with the interim government, the National Security Council team advocated military action and coup in Iran in order to restore monarchy. Resignation of the Secretary of State following the failure of the U.S. military operation in Tabas proves this point, as the National Security Council team had planned this operation (Tayarani,



2000: 298). Moreover, the National Security Council apparatus headed by Robert McFarlane had planned rapprochement with Iran, whereas a survey of the statements and actions made by the State Department officials indicated the adoption of a harsh non-conciliatory policy towards Iran in the executed plans.

In late January 1981, in the first National Security Council meeting under Reagan, the question of Iran and Libya was among the major issues discussed (Tayarani, 2000: 302). In a nutshell, in this period of time, the United States tried to establish relations with the moderate groups in Iran.⁹ In January 1984, the Director of the Near East Affairs at the U.S. National Security Council Geoffrey Kemp prepared a report for the then U.S. National Security Advisor McFarlane, indicating that “Ayatollah Khomeini is a threat to Western interests and the United States should consider covert operations that would lead to the overthrow of Iran’s regime” (Tower Commission Report, 1987: 104).

Since the members of the National Security Council believed that the U.S. lacked an overall vision concerning Iran after the demise of Ayatollah Khomeini, on September 8, 1984, McFarlane called for an inter-organizational study of Iran-U.S. relations after the demise of Ayatollah Khomeini (Raies Tousi, 1994: 36). In the meantime, the hostage-taking crisis in Lebanon perpetrated by the resistance movements provided the grounds for the initiation of covert relations between Iran and the U.S., because the U.S. believed that those groups were in touch with Iran. Hence, what took shape, which was later known in the documents as ‘first communication channel’, advanced by an arms dealer named Manouchehr Ghorbanifar.

On May 18, 1985, an analysis entitled “Towards a Guideline about Iran” prepared by the National Intelligence Officer for Near East and South Asia at the CIA Graham Fuller and Howard Teacher was handed to CIA Director William Casey. In the analysis, describing the U.S. difficult position towards Iran’s events, a plan for dealing with Iranian issues was suggested. The analysis proposed to



put pressure on Iran and its allies, assisting Iraq on the one hand and encouraging American allies to help Iraq, withdrawing the U.S. fleet from the Persian Gulf and issuing statements regarding American goodwill towards Iran on the other hand (Raeis Tousi, 1994: 37).

On July 1, 1985, the hijacking of the TWA airplane which had been hijacked on July 15, 1985 in the Athens-Rome route by Islamic Jihad came to an end (Center for War Studies and Research, 2004: 298).⁴⁾ Immediately after the crisis over the hijacking was resolved successfully, the CIA Director William Casey was informed that a proposal to receive arms from the Americans had been put forward. This proposal entailed a meeting between Iranian and American authorities for negotiation on trade of American hostages with arms. This was made possible through Ghorbanifar and one of the Iranian Prime Minister's deputies. David Kimcheh, a director general in the Israeli Foreign Ministry, met with Robert McFarlane in the White House on July 3, 1985 and informed him of Ghorbanifar's proposal indicating Iran's willingness to trade hostages at the hands of Hezbollah with arms and parts needed by Iran (Tower Commission Report: 1987: 106). According to the Western sources, the CIA had been in touch with Ghorbanifar since 1980.⁵⁾ At last, Reagan agreed with sending Iran's needed arms in exchange for the release of hostages on August 6, 1985 (Chronicle of Iran-Iraq War, 1999: 629).

It is noteworthy that due to his failure to fully release the hostages, McFarlane resigned and was replaced by John Poindexter. Colonel Oliver North then prepared a report on the initiative of sale of arms for Poindexter on December 5, 1985.⁶⁾ This proposal involved sending 3300 TOW missiles and five Hawk missiles in exchange for the release of all American hostages and one French hostage. The missiles would be delivered to Iran during 24 hours within five stages after the hostages were released (Tower Commission Report, 1987: 165).

The highest level meeting between the American and Iranian authorities was held after seven years on February 7, 1986 in



Frankfurt in which North, Richard Secord and a CIA official took part. In addition to these authorities, Ghorbanifar as the intermediary and military deputy of the Israeli Prime Minister Amiram Nir were present. Americans claimed in the meeting that they did not intend to deceive Iran. Oliver North indicates: “We will return 18 Hawk missiles which were out of order and had been delivered to Iran by mistake and instead we will give 1000 TOW missiles. The atmosphere was very friendly, and the members of the two delegations even exchanged cheek kisses at the end. Following this meeting, a cargo of 500 TOW missiles was dispatched from the Kelly air base in the U.S. and the airplane brought back the out of order Hawk missiles” (Tower Commission Report, 1987).

Following this meeting, John Poindexter said to North to ask Ghorbanifar to inform Iran about the visit of an American delegation to Tehran headed by McFarlane on May 25. North, Amiram Nir and George Kew met with Ghorbanifar in London where Kew called up one of the authorities in the Iranian Prime Minister’s office in Tehran. Then Kew told the members of the meeting that the American delegation would meet with the President, the Prime Minister and perhaps the Speaker of the Parliament (Tayarani, 2000: 322). Thus, “the American delegation headed by Robert McFarlane arrived in Tehran on May 25, 1986. The delegation also carried a cargo of spare parts for the Hawk missiles. The delegation consisted of McFarlane, Oliver North, George Kew, Howard Teacher (an expert at the National Security Council), Amiram Nir and a CIA telecommunications official” (Tower Commission Report, 1987: 296).

Hashemi Rafsanjani writes in his memoirs in this regard that: “The Americans had brought one fourth of the requested Hawk parts. McFarlane brought revolvers and cookies for our leaders, wishing to meet them” (Hashemi Rafsanjani, 2009: 108). As the head of the delegation, McFarlane who expected to meet high-ranking Iranian officials became able to just meet deputies of the Prime Minister and an advisor to the Prime Minister. The meetings were



held in Esteghlal Hotel on May 25 and May 26 and did not yield any tangible results (Doroudian, 1997: 164).

However, dissatisfaction arising from the sales of expensive Hawk missiles to Iran, which was a result of Iranian access to documents on the factory price, as well as continued hostage taking in Lebanon by the first communication channel, provided the grounds for the direct meetings between Iranians and Americans without any intermediary present. Concerns about Ghorbanifar's presence, moreover, contributed to preference for direct contacts (Chronicle of Iran-Iraq War, 2001: 108). (This channel is called the 'relative' in the Tower Commission Report.) According to American sources, the second meeting by the second communication channel from the White House included negotiations on arms sales, the fate of Kuwaiti al-Dawah prisoners, release of hostages and the future of Saddam (Chronicle of Iran-Iraq War, 1999: 633).

On October 1, 1986, Oliver North informed John Poindexter of the demand made by the second channel concerning a meeting with the American delegation on October 5, 1986. The 'relative' had suggested the signature of a Bible by the President in return for a Koran by the Iranian delegation to be presented to the American delegation. According to North, the 'relative' viewed this act as highly effective in the reinforcement of relations (Chronicle of Iran-Iraq War, 2001: 235). Thus, the two American and Iranian delegations met each other in Frankfurt. North explained his points of views which included seven items. At the end of the meeting, the two sides reached a 9-point agreement (Chronicle of Iran-Iraq War, 2001: 571).

These endeavors, however, entered a new stage with the disclosure of secret meetings by the Lebanese al-Shora Weekly. The Weekly names the source as Mahdi Hashemi, a relative of Ayatollah Montazeri (Tayarani, 2000: 327). Hence in the meeting between the second communication channel and the American delegation in Mainz, Germany, the Iranian delegation remarked that a student group along with a group within the Lebanese Hezbollah had independently disclosed



the news about the secret meetings. Nonetheless, the Iranian side said that a commission has formed in Iran consisting of various groups in order to review the future of relations with the United States (Chronicle of Iran-Iraq War, 2001: 584). Following the disclosure, Hashemi Rafsanjani declared on November 5: "Five persons holding Irish passports entered Iran, claiming that they carried important messages for the Iranian authorities from the American officials. We expelled them without holding any meeting with them" (Ettelaat Newspaper, November 5, 1986).

The affair became public with U.S. National Security Advisor Poindexter's statements on the meetings between the American delegation and Iranian authorities and then with Reagan's admission concerning the establishment of an 11-month relationship with Iran (Chronicle of Iran-Iraq War, 2001: 663). He appointed former Senator John Tower, Brent Scowcroft and Edmund Muskie to investigate all aspects of this covert relationship (Tayarani, 2000: 333). At last this group released the details of all events in a report titled the Tower Commission Report.

III- Fear of Communism

On explaining why such a relationship took shape, this writing tests the hypothesis that the fear of Iran being driven to Communism led the United States to pursue a policy of approaching Iran. In fact, Iran's strategic position played a crucial part in the balance of power in the Middle East. Thus, Soviet proximity to Iran was viewed as a serious threat to the U.S. On this ground, U.S. policy-makers and particularly the National Security Council were determined to prevent the Soviet Union from dominating the Iranian political system by approaching Iran.

There is some evidence in the period under study that indicates American politicians' concerns in this regard. In other words, decisions made by American foreign policy-makers as affected by the bipolar atmosphere sought to revise the existing environment with respect to



Iran. In spite of making an alliance during World War II, conflict between liberal capitalism and Communism expanded in the second half of the 1940s, destroying the dream of reconciliation among nations with different social systems (Boyle, 2001: 69-86). Roosevelt tried not to distance the U.S. from the Soviet Union, but the American politicians after him came to the conclusion that Soviet behavior was unpredictable, hence war with the Soviet Union could not be ruled out.

Therefore, refusal to grant concessions to the Soviet Union and fighting Soviet expansionism topped the U.S. foreign policy agenda. Conflict with the Soviet Union created a black and white space in which the U.S. looked at every conduct through that lens. The entire world was either a sphere of U.S. political influence or that of the Soviet Union. Deputy Chief of U.S. Mission in Moscow George Kennan was the first one to formulate U.S. aggressive policy towards Soviet moves. He emphasized that the United States was in a position of power to effectively moderate Soviet policies. This would not be made possible except through exercise of pressure on the Kremlin leaders. Pressures had to be of such a quality that would facilitate gradual overthrow in Soviet domestic structure, making it unable to create liberation movements as bulwark against American interests (Schulzinger, 1990: 205).

Kennan, who developed the Containment policy, had argued that Soviet expansionism had to be contained, though not in a way that leads to war, but in such a way that makes the Soviet Union reach impasse, changing its conduct (Kissinger, 2000: 46). After World War II, economic hardship in Europe had created a fertile ground for the promotion of Communist ideas. In addition to adopting the Containment policy, the Americans tried to help their allies through Truman's Point Four Plan. Confrontation between the two powers was exacerbated under Eisenhower as his struggle against the leftist ideas in the Middle East caused a new confrontation with the Soviets. His adoption of the 'new policy' represented a military move for coordinating the decision-making apparatus for better performance in



the international scene. In this policy, U.S. unconditional defense of the countries threatened by the Soviet Union was advocated and the August 1953 coup against Mosaddeq's nationalist government was a result of this outlook (Schulzinger, 1990: 242).

Here we do not intend to address all the doctrines and policies pursued by the Soviet Union and the U.S. during the Cold War, but we aim at displaying how the two superpowers looked at each other in the bipolar world context. Expanding the spheres of influence and containing the adversary in the critical regions were the most important parameters in the bipolar world. Hans J. Morgenthau has portrayed the main characteristics of the international politics in the post-World War II era as follows: "The major characteristic of the international politics in the post-World War II era is the distribution of power between the non-European entities in international politics. Power disparity was so large that the small powers under the shadow of other powers could not disrupt the equation, losing the ability to balance power in the international arena to a large extent" (Morgenthau, 1995: 546). In such an atmosphere, the two superpowers tried to create satellite spheres for themselves, describing the other superpower as evil (Mottaghi, 2000: 98-99). In the next section, we describe briefly the Soviet strategy in the Third World countries and then we deal with the hypothesis.

Soviet attention to the Third World was rooted in Lenin's thinking, since they turned towards the East and the oppressed class ruled by Imperialism after they failed to bring Communist revolutions in Europe. In the first years after 1917, colonies were given importance in order to realize universal revolution; thus Iran was called the Suez Canal of revolution (Elahi, 1986: 23). However, if we want to focus on the Soviet Union within the bipolar context, we will find the early apparent signs of such a conduct in the Soviet refusal to withdraw its troops from northern Iran. In this period of time after the end of the Second World War, the Russians refused to withdraw from Iranian soil with the excuse of lack of security for the Soviet



Union, proceeding to support separatist movements in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan. This problem, which was ultimately resolved through the international organizations and politicking by Iranian politicians like Ghavam, can be considered as a turning point in Soviet conduct in dominating critical areas in the bipolar world. Generally speaking, Soviet policies towards the Third World and Middle East can be considered in the following four pillars: Protecting Soviet security; Expanding its power and influence in the Third World countries; Fighting against the West's existence and reducing its influence in the strategic areas; and Strengthening the Soviet power and influence and reducing the West's power and influence (Koolae, 1990: 84).

The abovementioned goals can be formulated in ideological, political, economic and strategic terms. The place and importance of the Third World had led the Soviet Union to attach utmost importance to these countries in the question of balance of power at the international level. For this reason, enlargement of economic and commercial relations and on occasion ignoring the political nature of those countries were taken into consideration in the Soviet foreign policy (Koolae, 1990: 39-40).

In the meantime, the Soviet Union took advantage of a multitude of instruments in order to attain its objectives including the creation of dependent Communist parties, economic aid, and technical, economic and military cooperation. The Communist parties in the Third World countries were dependent upon the Soviet Union in several aspects including financial, psychological and political reliance of the party members (as the Communists considered the Soviet Union as triumphant revolutionaries and their guides) and finally the presence of Soviet organizational elements within those parties (Koolae, 1990: 87).

In the economic sector, granting financial aid to countries that enjoyed strategic significance was at the top of these programs. These aid programs included extensive concessions for financing development projects as well as huge loans. The creation of the 'vast



region of peace' served this purpose (Farsi, 1991: 170). In the military dimension, conclusion of technical agreements paved the way for influence in military affairs and then with sending military equipment, grounds were provided for the consolidation of relations. The Middle Eastern and South Asian countries including Libya, Syria, Iraq and Algeria purchased 74% of Soviet military hardware in the 1970s and 1980s (D'Encausse, 1988: 326). It is worth noting that Russians were characterized with the sales of modern military hardware, because this provided them with the chance to dispatch thousands of military advisors to the countries in question. In the 1980s, the number of advisors working in the Third World Countries reached 24000 (D'Encausse, 1988: 328). Anthony Cordesman describes Soviet strategic goals in the Middle East as follows: To offset or remove Western military strength and influence in the region; To forge coalitions with friendly states throughout the Persian Gulf region; To expand Soviet influence in the regional states; and To take advantage of tension and friction between the West and its allies in the region.

Iran-Soviet relations can be classified within such a strategic outlook envisaged by the Russians. But in an overall glance, it can be argued that Soviet expansionism in the Middle East was closely related to its perception of the balance of power at the international level vis-à-vis the United States. Soviet foreign policy in the Middle East was persistently affected by considerations of confrontation with the West (Koolae, 2000: 47-49).

Iranian foreign relations with the Soviet Union prior to the revolution should be analyzed as affected by the bipolar atmosphere and Iranian mentality towards the refusal of Soviet Red Army to withdraw from Iran and then Iranian accession to the West bloc. As a result of the relative improvement of relations between the U.S. and Soviet Union in the 1960s, Iran-Soviet relations also improved. In those years, Iran announced that it would not allow any foreign country to establish missile bases in its soil (Sadeghi et al, 1977: 197). In return, Russians advocated the Iranian White Revolution, praising it as positive. Although



Iran-Soviet economic ties improved between 1962 and 1978, Iran-Soviet diplomatic ties were limited because of Iran's tendency to the West, Iran's Westernized military structure and Western aid to the country (Sadeghi et al, 1977: 216). In a nutshell, Graham Fuller believes that in the relations between the two players, the Soviet Union tried to maintain economic and technical relations in order to enhance its influence and the balance of power (Fuller, 1994: 183).

With the revolutionary changes unfolding in Iran, the Soviet Union adopted a waiting and patience policy towards the 1979 revolution. Although the anti-Imperialist line of the revolution could attract Soviet backing, its religious character, possibility of Shah's return and the perception that Americans would not leave Iran easily, led the Soviet Union to have a cautious approach to the revolutionary developments. In their first reaction to the Iranian developments, in a harsh speech in the fall of 1978, Brezhnev described American intervention in Iran as intolerable, drawing upon the 1921 Iran-Soviet Amity Treaty. He warned against any intervention in Iran and described what happened in Iran as an authentic domestic move (Azghandi, 2003: 223).

With the fall of Shapur Bakhtiar's cabinet and the formation of the interim government by Imam Khomeini, the Soviet Union ended its waiting and patience policy, accusing the Shah of despotism. In a message to Bazargan, Alexei Kosigyn recognized his government, expressing the Soviet readiness to expand relations according to principles of equal rights, good neighborhood, respect for national sovereignty and non-intervention in each other's affairs (Azghandi, 2003: 333). It can be argued that as the Soviet Union tried to maintain economic and technical ties in order to enhance its influence towards the Shah (Fuller, 1994: 187), it implemented this policy after the revolution as well. Iran-Soviet relations after the revolution were affected by three issues including Russian invasion of Afghanistan, Iran-Iraq war and the spread of the Islamist wave.

With the breakout of the Iran-Iraq war, the Soviet Union



adopted a neutrality policy. In the first days after the war broke out, Leonid Brezhnev declared that the Soviet Union did not intend to intervene in the Iran-Iraq conflict, calling for a political solution as soon as possible (Islamic Republic News Agency Bulletin, September 24, 1980, quoted in Radio Moscow). Soviet policy in this period was to get closer to Iran while keeping Iraq as its ally. Russians knew that their direct help to Iraq would lead Iran to approach the West. Therefore, Russians adopted a waiting and patience policy, pursuing Iran's domestic developments closely while avoiding direct involvement in the war (Mesbahi, no date: 42).

On the other hand, the Soviet Union tried to establish economic ties with Iran. In winter 1984, there were 1600 Russian experts working in Iranian technical projects as transit of goods between the two countries increased to such a degree that almost one third of all Iran's imports were shipped through the Soviet transit routes. In the same year, the Jolfa-Tabriz railway was built with Russian help (Islamic Republic News Agency Bulletin, January 7, 1985). Moreover, the Russians made efforts at arming Iran through their allies such as Syria, Libya, Poland and Algeria (Political Office of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, no date: 224).

As noted earlier, Soviet means of influence in other countries involved, apart from bringing their friendly governments to power, spreading influence through Communist parties in those countries as was pursued in Iran by the Tudeh Party. The Party's performance in this regard included espionage for the Soviet Union, penetrating Iran's political, economic and military organs, defending Soviet performance in the Iran-Iraq war and forging secret organizations for promoting Soviet goals.

According to the confessions of the Tudeh Party leaders, the Party's policy towards the Iran-Iraq war was to defend the war till the recapturing of Khorramshahr and then to shift the policy to opposing the war as the Soviet Union began opposing it (Confessions of the Tudeh Party Leaders, 1996: 33). One of the party leaders named



Farajollah Mirzaei admitted that the Party's policy was consistent with the Soviet policy as "After the Soviet Union expressed its opposition to the continuation of war, we also sought to justify this policy and end the war." The Party's first secretary Nouredin Kianouri has confessed to the Party's dependence upon the Soviet Union, indicating the existence of the Tudeh Party's military organization, penetration in state apparatus and keeping arms (Confessions of the Tudeh Party Leaders, 1996: 44-46).

Related to this is U.S. concern about the Soviet influence in Iran and the appearance of a power vacuum in Iran after the demise of Imam Khomeini which would pave the way for the Soviet Union. When a high-ranking Soviet diplomat and KGB agent Vladimir Kuzichkin who was stationed in Tehran fled to Great Britain in mid-1982, he provided their counterespionage agencies a long list of Soviet spies and agents in Iran (Armstrong, 1987: 28). When this information was handed to Iran, thousands of Tudeh Party members were detained (Bill, 1992: 368). The detainees confessed to espionage for the Soviet Union and penetrating the Iranian system's organs. The Soviet Union, nonetheless, denied such allegations, criticizing the members of the Tudeh Party (Islamic Republic News Agency Bulletin, June 14, 1983, quoted from Radio Moscow).

IV- Rapprochement

Developments in the direction of Soviet closeness to Iran in political, economic and security spheres contradicted the U.S. strategic outlook on Iran, which made American foreign policy-makers deal with the problem regarding their absence in Iran as well as increasing Russian influence in the country in the bipolar atmosphere. This was vividly revealed in CIA Director in the Middle East Graham Fuller's report in which he spoke of Russian influence in the Islamic system and that they would use their leverage after the demise of Imam Khomeini (Bill, 1992: 418).

Therefore, one of the reasons for establishing informal relations with Iran can be found in countering Soviet influence in Iran or in



other words the threat of Iran's falling into the trap of Communism. In fact, the bipolar atmosphere dominated the mindset of the White House in countering the strong Soviet presence in the Persian Gulf, making the forging of a relationship with Iran even more important. It is noteworthy that according to the Tower Commission Report, the Iranian side had also taken advantage of the leverage of Russian influence, noting the threat of Russian influence in the Iranian system's organs (Chronicle of Iran-Iraq War, 2001: 108). For instance, in his memoirs regarding this affair, while pointing to the negotiations in Iran, Hashemi Rafsanjani writes: "They said that the Russians intended to attack Iran" (Hashemi, 2009: 109). Besides, Reagan's personal conviction on the necessity of countering the Soviet Union created conditions under which he took a big risk in establishing secret relations with a state that he called 'terrorist'. This outlook was fully supported by a group in the White House inner circle which agreed with the President on the adoption of conservative policies. For example, on the explanation of the grounds for the formation of aforementioned conditions, CIA Director William Casey observed: "Iran plays a special part in the world. This arises from the particular conditions and location where it is situated. Iran is in a region, which is geographically located in the Soviet sphere of influence. On this basis, the United States cannot ignore Iran, allowing it to fall into the Soviet arms" (Gasiorowski, 2000: 173).

According to the information available in the U.S. concerning the possibility of Imam Khomeini's demise, it was assumed that Iran would rapidly enter a stage of instability. From the American perspective, this would mean further exploitation of the situation by the Soviet Union to such a degree that prevention of Iran's secession was mentioned as one of the reasons for a shift in strategy towards Iran. In this regard, in a 50-page intelligence estimate addressed to CIA Director William Casey, Graham Fuller wrote: "The United States faces an unfavorable situation in developing a new policy towards Iran. The course of events is generally against our interests and we will soon see a struggle for



succession to Imam Khomeini. The United States does not have any card to play, whereas the Soviet Union has cards to play. Iran has apparently reached the conclusion that whether it likes Russia and Communism or not, the Soviet Union is a country with which it has to get along. Both the Soviet Union and the U.S. lack desirable access to Iran; the one that reaches it first, will have a solid position to eliminate the other one. Foundations of U.S. policy towards Iran facilitate the Soviet interests. No one has a clear idea about how to return the U.S. to Tehran” (Hashemi, 2009: 659-660).

Therefore, in order to understand why the U.S. approached Iran, one has to pay attention to the outlook on the centrality of the Soviet Union. This mentality has been predominant in the analysis of events and regional reactions of the White House officials as intensified by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. On this ground, the White House decision-makers sought to mend fences with Iran in one way or another. Hence, in a conclusion, it can be claimed that what made American foreign policy-makers seek rapprochement with Iran was the fear of Communist influence in Iran and its falling into Communist arms.

Conclusion

What was discussed in this writing revolved around the reasons why the U.S. approached the Islamic Republic in the heyday of their confrontation in 1984-86. The hypothesis that was tested in the writing was fear of Communism or Iran’s falling into Soviet arms. A review of the evidence and documents also reveal that because of Iran’s significant regional status and in order to prevent such a thing from happening, the U.S. tried to approach Iran. In the meantime, the release of a list of Russian spies in Iran by a defected diplomat as well as a report written by Graham Fuller concerning the possibility of Iran’s falling into the Communist hands after the demise of Imam Khomeini led the United States to realize such a plan. That is the reason why we saw an informal relationship between the U.S. and Iran in those years.

Notes

1. For more information on the August 1953 coup, see:
 - Fakhroddin Azimi, *National Sovereignty and Its Enemies; A Study of the Performance of Mosaddeq's Native and Alien Opponents Based upon the Most Recent Documents*, Tehran: Negareh Aftab, 2004.
 - Fakhroddin Azimi, *Crisis of Democracy in Iran: 1941-1953*, Trans. Abdolreza Houshang Mahdavi, Tehran: Alborz, 1993.
 - Homa Katouzian, *Mosaddeq and Struggle for Power in Iran*, Trans. Farzaneh Taheri, Tehran: Markaz, 1992.
 - Hamid Ahmadi, *Secrets of the Coup; CIA Secret Documents about Mosaddeq's Overthrowing Operation*, Tehran: Nay, 2000.
2. On November 4, 1983, Hashemi Rafsanjani stated: "We will declare whenever we want to enter war with the United States and will threaten and attack American interests anywhere in the world."
3. It is noteworthy that inside Iran the pragmatist groups also welcomed rapprochement with the U.S. to some extent. For instance, Hashemi Rafsanjani, on May 4, 1983, stated: "We suspect the United States, but if it proves that it really does not want to harm us, we can resume relations."
4. According to some observes, the Iranian authorities secretly had acted to release the airplane, provided that it is not revealed by the American authorities. From Washington's point of view, this represented Iranian government's willingness to establish relations with the outside world (Tayarani, 2000: 315).
5. Manouchehr Ghorbanifar was a member of SAVAK's 8th Department who worked for the CIA despite he was highly suspected. Michael Ledeen describes him as someone familiar with both Iranian and American cultures (Quoted in Gasiorowski, *Neither East nor West*, 176).
6. Colonel Oliver North, a counterterrorism expert at the U.S. National Security Council, was the mastermind behind the escape of American agents in Iran in 1980. He was at the 4th or 5th rank and wished to promote his position (Quoted in Gasiorowski, *Neither East nor West*, 180).

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