

# A 'Special Relationship?' American and British Soft Power in Iran, 1953- 1960

PhD in History

Department of History

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*I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.*

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines Britain and the United States' use of cultural diplomacy and propaganda in Iran between 1953 and 1960. It identifies why British and American policymakers placed so much importance on cultural ties with Iran, how officials from both countries used these initiatives to attract Iranians to their respective ways of life and the extent to which they perceived these policies to be successful. This PhD considers how Britain and the United States sought to strengthen ties with Iran at an elite and popular level. It explores how the UK Foreign Office and the US State Department forged links with their Iranian counterparts to instruct them on the production and dissemination of propaganda. The project proceeds to explore the role played by government-affiliated institutions at a non-state level to promote British and American cultures, norms, values and ways of life in Iran. These include the British Council, the Iran-America Society and the United States Information Agency (USIA).

The analysis of British and American soft power in Iran between 1953 and 1960 makes three key contributions to the literature on this topic. First, it views Anglo-American relations with Iran through the prism of soft power. This is an original take on the topic. Previous research has emphasised economic and military interactions between the UK, US and Iran. Second, the thesis explores how Britain and the United States responded to the changes in their respective global positions. During this period, the UK was a declining power, crippled by the financial cost of the Second World War and was in the process of relinquishing most of overseas colonies. The US, in comparison, was a booming superpower, taking a greater interest in the struggle against Communism in regions such as the Middle East. Finally, it highlights the tensions and competitive element of Anglo-American relations in the Middle East. Both countries, while collaborating in many fields, had similar aims but different regional priorities. The project points out the ways in which they co-operated and competed with one another for regional supremacy

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## **Abbreviations**

AIOC – Anglo-Iranian Oil Company

BP – British Petroleum

BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation

CIA – Central Intelligence Agency

DPB – Department of Press and Broadcasting

FOA - Foreign Operations Administration

GATT – General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

ICA – International Cooperation Administration

IRD – Information Research Department

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NSC – National Security Council

OCB – Operations Coordinating Board

PAO – Public Affairs Officer

SIS – Secret Intelligence Service

TVI – Television Iran

UAR – United Arab Republic

UN – United Nations

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

USIA – United States Information Agency

USIS – United States Information Service

VOA – Voice of America

## **Abbreviation of Terms Used in the Footnotes**

BBC WAC – British Broadcasting Corporation’s Written Archives Centre

DDEL – Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library

FRUS – *Foreign Relations of the United States*

NAII – National Archives II (US)

TNA – The National Archives (UK)



## **Introduction**

*'At the heart of the Iran deal was a giant fiction that a murderous regime desired only a peaceful nuclear energy program.'*<sup>1</sup>

In May 2018, the US President, Donald Trump, withdrew the United States from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. Dubbed the 'Iran deal', the agreement pledged that the country would halt its nuclear programme in return for the lifting of economic sanctions.<sup>2</sup> The incumbent President claimed that the Iranian government had flouted the agreement by cultivating plutonium, something its leadership in Tehran vehemently denies. The treaty had been a key foreign policy achievement of Trump's predecessor in the White House, Barack Obama. Presuming that both countries shared mutual regional goals, he had adopted a more conciliatory approach towards Iran, working with moderate Iranian government elites to achieve these goals. Between 2013 and 2015, Obama and his then Secretary of State, John Kerry, worked with the Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani, and his Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif, to construct the 'Iran deal' and create an international consensus around this agreement.<sup>3</sup> The juxtaposing approaches taken by Trump and Obama towards the Iranian regime here are nothing new. Echoing the stance adopted by the incumbent in the White House, George W. Bush used his 2002 State of the Union Address to place Iran, among

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<sup>1</sup> 'Remarks by Donald Trump on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action', *The White House*, 8 May 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-joint-comprehensive-plan-action/> (accessed 31 May 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Peter Baker, 'President Obama Calls Preliminary Iran Nuclear Deal "Our Best Bet"', *New York Times*, 5 April 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/06/world/middleeast/obama-strongly-defends-iran-nuclear-deal.html> (accessed 2 April 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Steve Hurst, *The United States and the Iranian Nuclear Programme: A Critical History* (Edinburgh, 2018).

others, in his 'axis of evil.' He proceeded to accuse the country of supporting terrorist groups and of working to manufacture a nuclear weapon. In his first term, likewise, William J. Clinton implemented the policy of 'dual containment.' Grouping the country with its neighbour, Iraq, he strove to starve Iran's economy and deprive it of its regional influence.<sup>4</sup> From the 1997 election of reformist Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, though, Clinton abandoned this policy, working with his Iranian counterpart to improve US-Iran relations.<sup>5</sup>

Britain's relationship with Iran in this period has been similarly fractured. An advocate of the 'Iran deal', the British government have led European efforts to resurrect the agreement in light of Trump's refusal to comply with it. Despite this willingness to engage with the country, Anglo-Iranian relations have, at times, been difficult. Since 2012, the Iranian authorities have tried to jam the BBC Persian Service's televisual transmissions, threatened its staff, and detained relatives of those working for the broadcaster. The continuance of such aggressive tactics compelled the BBC in March 2018 to appeal to the UN's Human Rights Council in Geneva to get the Iranians to halt these practices.<sup>6</sup> In 2009, moreover, the British Council was forced to depart Iran after its office in Tehran was vandalised, with the British Embassy following suit in 2011 after its site was attacked by protestors.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Anthony Lake, 'Confronting Backlash States', *Foreign Affairs*, 73/2 (1994), 44-55.

<sup>5</sup> Donette Murray, *US Foreign Policy and Iran: American-Iranian Relations Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution* (London, 2010), 90-115.

<sup>6</sup> Kasra Naji, 'BBC UN Appeal: Stop Harassing Persian Service Staff', *BBC News*, 12 March 2018, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-43334401> (accessed 26 March 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Saeed Kamali Deghan, 'Hague Says Iran Will Face "Serious Consequences" over Embassy Attack', *The Guardian*, 29 November 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/nov/29/iranian-students-storm-british-embassy> (accessed 2 April 2019); Matthew Moore, 'Iran: British Council Suspends Work in Tehran', *The Telegraph*, 5 February 2009, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/4518269/Iran-British-Council-suspends-work-in-Tehran.html> (accessed 2 April 2019).

The United States and Britain's tense relationship with Iran was the consequence of proceedings during the middle and latter stages of the Cold War. In 1979, the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, was overthrown, replaced by an oligarchy of Islamic clerics opposed to the UK and US. Popular discontent had arisen in Iran due to the Iranian monarch's authoritarian rule, endemic corruption within the government and vast disparities in wealth and income among the country's people. In response to America permitting the deposed Shah to reside in New York for hospital treatment, supporters of the new regime stormed the US Embassy in Tehran in November 1979 and took 52 hostages. Lasting for 444 days, America and Britain led international efforts to impose political and economic sanctions on Iran to halt the ensuing stand-off.<sup>8</sup> Although the US and UK's relationship with Iran has been difficult since this flouting of hitherto sacrosanct diplomatic conventions, this was not always the case. In the 1950s, American and British policymakers relied on close ties with the Shah to fight the Cold War in the Middle East. Vehemently opposed to Communism, the Iranian monarch had led efforts to restrict and quash the activities of the Soviet-backed Tudeh Party in the country. US State Department and UK Foreign Office officials, equally, feared that the USSR, which neighboured Iran, sought to meddle and exercise considerable influence over Iranian affairs. In so doing, they could use the country as a platform to expand their presence across Asia, the Arab world and the Persian Gulf.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ivor Lucas, 'Revisiting the Decline and Fall of the Shah of Iran', *Asian Affairs*, 40/3 (2009), 419; Amin Saikal, 'Islamism, the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan', in: Melvyn Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds) *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume Three: Endings* (Cambridge, 2010), 118.

<sup>9</sup> United States interests and objectives in respect of the Near East (NSC 155/1), 14 July 1953, Abilene, Kansas, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library (hereafter document, date, DDEL), White House Office, NSC Series, Policy Papers; Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), 1 June 1957, Kew, Richmond, The National Archives, BW 49/13 (hereafter document, date, TNA, file reference).

US and British policymakers, therefore, authorised the provision of considerable military and economic aid to Iran. As well as deterring the Soviets from making incursions into the country, they aimed to transform Iran into an anti-Communist buffer for the whole region.<sup>10</sup>

Complementing this military and economic aid were a whole host of Anglo-American soft power initiatives. Rather than deterring or coercing the Soviets, these policies aimed to persuade and attract Iranians away from the Soviet Union and more towards Western powers. The main aim of this thesis, therefore, is to establish how the UK and US used soft power between 1953 and 1960 to combat Communism and promote their respective ways of life in Iran. It identifies their motives, the types of initiatives employed and the extent to which they were successful. While British and American policymakers placed a considerable importance on diplomatic ties with Iran, little scholarly attention has been paid to how UK and US diplomats and officials used cultural diplomacy to foster ties with the country. Moreover, despite the considerable body of literature dedicated to the 'special relationship' in the Middle East, there has been little comment on how ties between the UK and US were shaped by both countries' dealings with Iran. As a means of introducing the thesis, this chapter begins by examining American and British soft power, establishing a theoretical framework for this PhD in the process. It proceeds to review the literature on Anglo-American relations in the Middle East, followed by an analysis, in turn, of scholarly work undertaken on the US and UK's diplomatic engagements with Iran. The introductory section finally moves on to outline the project's main research questions, the methods and sources employed and the overall chapter structure.

## **The UK, US and Soft Power**

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<sup>10</sup> Memorandum from Robert Bowie (State Department representative on the NSC Planning Board) to Robert Cutler (President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs), 1 August 1957, Oxford, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957, Near East Region; Iran; Iraq, Volume XII* (hereafter document, date, *FRUS*, year, volume).

Soft power is a crucial tenet of Anglo-American foreign policy. Coined in 1990 by political scientist Joseph Nye, the term is used to describe foreign policy initiatives that persuade and attract others to do one's bidding.<sup>11</sup> Examples include propaganda, cultural exchanges and language teaching. While contrasting with hard power - which involves the use of force to accomplish diplomatic aims – sources of soft power are not exclusively non-military. An attractive reputation that may influence others can also be achieved through military and economic means if these coercive sources of power are employed in ways widely perceived as legitimate. The employment of armed forces in a manner and for reasons other actors deem appropriate, for example, can bolster soft power appeal, which, in turn, can lead these countries and organisations to side with the US.<sup>12</sup> Political elites may exercise soft power at a state level to set an example that they wish others to follow. Alternatively, governments may boost their soft power through establishing cultural institutions and radio broadcasters - such as the British Council, the Voice of America (VOA) and, in the case of Iran, the BBC Persian Service – that operate overseas.<sup>13</sup> In so doing, these non-state actors highlight their home country's values, culture or economic prosperity to worldwide audiences, creating a positive perception of their home nation.<sup>14</sup>

The concept of soft power stems from international relations theory. Marxist scholars, such as Robert Cox and Stephen Gill, applied the ideas of the Italian theorist and politician Antonio Gramsci to the international sphere. As a political prisoner in the 1930s, Gramsci had devised the concept of cultural hegemony, the idea that societal norms, values and

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<sup>11</sup> Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York, 2004), 12.

<sup>12</sup> Nye, *Soft Power*, 14-15.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Nye, 'Soft Power and American Foreign Policy', *Political Science Quarterly*, 119/2 (2004), 255.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Nye, 'Public Diplomacy and Soft Power', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616 (2008), 97.

lifestyles had been shaped by elites as a way of furthering their goals. He cited the example of the Roman Catholic Church, claiming its scriptures were a means by which to control the public's behaviour.<sup>15</sup> Cox and Gill transferred these ideas to the realm of international politics. They argued that prominent states on the world stage, such as the UK and US, shape the actions of other actors. Focusing on proceedings in bilateral talks and intergovernmental summits, both scholars highlight the ways in which these nations and their governments use their reputation to persuade others to adhere to their proposals and agreements.<sup>16</sup>

In recent years, British and American political elites have emphasised the value of soft power policies. In 2015, the UK government's Strategic Defence and Security Review, extolled the virtues of British soft power. The paper referred to the UK as one of the most prominent proponents of soft power globally. Cultural exchanges and English language teaching, along with radio and television broadcasts, promote British 'values and interests', provide the UK with 'international influence' and can help 'tackle the causes of security threats.'<sup>17</sup> A Chatham House Report titled *Strengthening Britain's Voice in the World* echoed these sentiments, calling on the government to 'ensure continued funding of key elements of the UK's soft power such as the BBC World Service and the British Council.'<sup>18</sup> Similarly, a 2005 report by the US State Department underlined the importance of soft power to wider American foreign policy. According to the report, policies of attraction and persuasion are the

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<sup>15</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London, 2005), 18.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Cox, 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 10/2 (1981), 128; Stephen Gill, 'American Hegemony: Its Limits and Prospects in the Reagan Era', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 15 (1986), 332.

<sup>17</sup> *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom* (Westminster, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> *Strengthening Britain's Voice in the World: Report of the UK Foreign and Security Policy Working Group* (Chatham House, 2015).

only way that the United States can effectively 'inform, engage and influence foreign publics over the long term.'<sup>19</sup>

Despite the importance that UK and US policymakers' place on soft power, historians of diplomacy and international affairs have only systematically investigated the subject in recent decades. Scholarly attention as to how this facet of foreign policy was used to achieve diplomatic goals began with the publication of political scientist Joseph Nye's *Bound to Lead*. The book acted as a counter to claims by leading American scholars in the 1980s that the US' international commitments overstretched its capacity, leading to the country's decline.<sup>20</sup> Nye urged those engaged in the study of diplomacy of the need to move beyond the examination of military and economic resources. The US had played a prominent role in the Second World War and it had led efforts to contain and combat the Soviet Union after 1945. Its military strength and allocation of economic aid were abnormally high because of these events and it was only after the Soviet Union's decline that American capabilities in these areas were coming back down to normal.<sup>21</sup> Using the Cold War as a case study – which this thesis is also an example of - Nye recommends that scholars should instead investigate how the US sought to attract and coerce others into doing their bidding. It is only through this that we would understand why the United States triumphed over the Soviet Union.<sup>22</sup>

Scholars have accordingly investigated the ways in which soft power is employed.

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<sup>19</sup> 'Cultural Diplomacy: The Lynchpin of Public Diplomacy', *Report of the Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy, the US Department of State* (September 2005).

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York, 1991), 3.

<sup>21</sup> Nye, *Bound to Lead*, 10-11.

<sup>22</sup> Nye, *Bound to Lead*, 27.

Utpal Vyas maintains that all agents wanting to use soft power initiatives exercise them in the following way. Actors first create a 'pool' of beliefs, norms, values and cultures.<sup>23</sup> Others, including but not confined to, government bodies, businesses and NGOs, proceed to use resources from this 'pool' when interacting with overseas agents. Once links have been made, ideas can be transferred that alter the target's perceptions.<sup>24</sup> Building on this model, Seiichi Kondo analyses how the delivery of soft power can be evaluated. To assess its success, he recommends that there should be an examination of how soft power is received, namely the intended and unintended consequences of these initiatives.<sup>25</sup>

Hence, soft power is generated in many forms and a detailed account of each type is beyond this dissertation's remit. The policies undertaken by actors in this field usually encompass more than one form of soft power. They are also either interwoven with hard power initiatives or applied in tandem.<sup>26</sup> For the purposes of this dissertation it is important to have a broad conception of soft power. This thesis focuses particularly on the production and dissemination of propaganda, the promotion of lifestyles, the sharing of language and literature, the advocacy of Anglo-American values, ideas and practices and the promotion of socio-economic advancements. Three key attempts to generate soft power are explored in this thesis. The first is cultural diplomacy. According to Milton Cummings, this is the exchange of norms, values and ideas across both cultures and borders to foster mutual

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<sup>23</sup> Utpal Vyas, *Soft Power in Japan-China Relations: State, Sub-State and Non-State Relations* (Abingdon, 2013), 61.

<sup>24</sup> Vyas, *Soft Power*, 52.

<sup>25</sup> Seiichi Kondo, 'Wielding Soft Power: The Key Stages of Transmission and Reception', in: Yasushi Watanabe and David McConnell (eds) *Soft Power Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of Japan and the United States* (London, 2008), 193.

<sup>26</sup> Nye, *Bound to Lead*, 35.



understanding.<sup>27</sup> Policies can be undertaken at a state level, through cultural and educational exchanges, or at a non-state level. Government affiliated semi-independent institutions such as the British Council and the United States Information Agency (USIA) are key to this. Operating overseas, these organisations, among other things, translate British and American literature, organise exhibitions and offer language courses that provide students with an insight into life in the UK and US.<sup>28</sup> When employed effectively, cultural diplomacy can help foster a dialogue with the people of a country immune to either regime change or governmental clashes on the world stage. It also provides a foundation from which future bilateral political, economic and military agreements can be achieved.<sup>29</sup>

The second key form of generating soft power covered in this thesis is the power and influence of intelligence agencies. These are usually clandestine governmental organisations, most notably the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS). As well as this, there are also open-source intelligence agencies such as the UK Foreign Office's Information Research Department (IRD). As Andrew Defty explains, this was a department established to combat Communist propaganda and co-ordinate attempts to discredit the Soviet Union and its allies abroad.<sup>30</sup> To achieve this, the IRD collaborated with foreign political elites, as well as those it regarded as 'opinion formers', typically teachers, journalists and civil servants.<sup>31</sup> Agencies such as the IRD, SIS and CIA exercise soft power through what Richard Aldrich termed the 'hidden

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<sup>27</sup> Milton Cummings, *Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey* (Washington, DC, 2003), 11.

<sup>28</sup> Cummings, *Cultural Diplomacy*, 26-48.

<sup>29</sup> Cummings, *Cultural Diplomacy*, 17.

<sup>30</sup> Andrew Defty, "'Close and Continuous Liaison": British Anti-Communist Propaganda and Cooperation with the United States, 1950-51', *Intelligence and National Security*, 17/4 (2002), 126-128.

<sup>31</sup> Defty, 'Close and Continuous Liaison', 110-111.

hand.' They supplied individuals and organisations at home and abroad sympathetic to their cause with pro-Western and anti-Communist material for them to publicise and disseminate. In so doing, these agencies steered foreign and domestic publics unnoticed and from afar.<sup>32</sup> They occasionally collaborate with counterpart organisations in other countries should they share mutual goals. This is an area that has only recently gained scholarly attention. Priscilla Roberts highlights the ways in which the SIS' Hong Kong Department established links with moderates in the Communist Chinese government during the 1970s.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, Pearse Redmond charts the CIA's relationship with the Hollywood film industry from the early twentieth century up to the present day. He examines how, during the Second World War, the Office of Strategic Services, the CIA's forerunner, openly collaborated with American film studios in the production and funding of films that supported the American war effort. Developing these links further during the Cold War's early stages, the CIA covertly continued this practice, assisting in the production of films that skewed the political messages behind George Orwell and Graham Greene's novels.<sup>34</sup>

The third form of soft power relevant to this dissertation is propaganda. This is a contentious term. Andrew Yarrow claims it is the 'selling' of ideas domestically and overseas.<sup>35</sup> He suggests that, from a foreign policy perspective, political elites manipulate

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<sup>32</sup> Richard Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (London, 2001).

<sup>33</sup> Priscilla Roberts, 'Rebuilding a Relationship: British Cultural Diplomacy Towards China, 1967-80', in: Greg Kennedy and Christopher Tuck (eds) *British Propaganda and Wars of Empire: Influencing Friend and Foe, 1900-2010* (Abingdon, 2014), 192-194.

<sup>34</sup> Pearse Redmond, 'The Historical Roots of CIA-Hollywood Propaganda', *The American Journal of Politics and Sociology*, 76/2 (2017), 280.

<sup>35</sup> Andrew Yarrow, 'Selling a New Vision of America to the World: Changing Messages in Early U.S. Cold War Print Propaganda', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 11/4 (2009), 9.

popular opinion to cement or increase support for their approach to international affairs.<sup>36</sup> Such a definition, however, fails to acknowledge the complexities of propaganda. Kenneth Osgood agrees that shaping the views of the public is key but notes the importance of truth to propaganda's effectiveness. Campaigns should be based on facts, even if these have been taken out of context.<sup>37</sup> Osgood proceeds to note the importance of having a broad conception of propaganda. It is not just present in radio broadcasts, literature and films, but also in cultural initiatives and attractions.<sup>38</sup> Equally, the Yarrow conception does not recognise that propaganda is a two-way process. As Nick Cull attests, propaganda involves not just the shaping of public opinion, but listening to it too. He recommends that the term public diplomacy should be used instead. Not only does it provide a more accurate description, but also it lacks the negative connotations of the term propaganda, which infers that foreign and domestic publics have had ideas imposed on them. Public diplomacy, in contrast, suggests that actors have taken on board the views of their target audiences, using these perspectives in the framing and shaping of initiatives.<sup>39</sup>

Public diplomacy, though, does not just underpin propaganda efforts. It is, in fact, key to the success of the majority of soft power initiatives. According to Jan Melissen, public diplomacy describes foreign policy approaches that target both the general public and non-state actors. It seeks to alter foreign perceptions, influence domestic audiences, promote the integration of cultures and encourage bilateral business dealings.<sup>40</sup> Successful public diplomacy makes use of 'short run' instruments such as press releases and radio

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<sup>36</sup> Yarrow, 'Selling a New Vision', 13.

<sup>37</sup> Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence, KS, 2006), 22-24.

<sup>38</sup> Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 26.

<sup>39</sup> Nicholas Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy During the Cold War* (New York, 2003), 5-7.

<sup>40</sup> Jan Melissen, *New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations* (Basingstoke, 2005), 5.

broadcasts, as well as long-term educational and cultural programmes.<sup>41</sup> William Rugh explains the workings of public diplomacy. He claims that political elites elucidate the aims of these initiatives and both embassy officials and non-state actors strive to achieve these objectives.<sup>42</sup> Concurring, Laura Belmonte argues that there are three key aspects to this. First, actors have to explain their decisions to targets. Second, they have to finance and encourage pressure groups and other organisations to protest and advocate in favour of these norms, values and ideas. Thirdly, links have to be established with prominent individuals.<sup>43</sup>

However, there are certain factors that undermine the effectiveness of soft power initiatives. As stated by Peter Von Ham, the money and hegemonic capabilities of Britain and the United States do not guarantee success in this field.<sup>44</sup> Focusing on US soft power in the Arab world, Hosam Matar places these limitations of soft power into two groups, those within the government's control and those outside of its jurisdiction.<sup>45</sup> With regard to the former group, there are many Arabs suspicious of America's motives in the region. To diminish the threat posed by Communism, and latterly Islamic fundamentalism, the US has directly intervened in the affairs of Arab states. In doing so, the Americans undermine many of their soft power initiatives in the region, many of which promote democracy and human rights.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, Matar explains the problem of the American 'deaf ear.' In formulating and

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<sup>41</sup> Melissen, *New Public Diplomacy*, 15.

<sup>42</sup> William Rugh, *American Encounters with Arabs: The "Soft Power" of US Public Diplomacy in the Middle East* (London, 2006), 28-30.

<sup>43</sup> Laura Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: US Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia, 2008), 56.

<sup>44</sup> Peter Von Ham, *Social Power in International Politics* (Abingdon, 2010), 72.

<sup>45</sup> Hosam Matar, 'Limits of US Soft Power in the Arab World (2003 – 2015)', *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, 9/3 (2016), 428-444.

<sup>46</sup> Matar, 'Limits of US Soft Power', 432.

delivering soft power initiatives, policymakers assume it is a one-way process. Many in the Arab world are under the impression that the US assumes a supposed moral and intellectual authority over other actors in the region, imposing their values and ideas on others.<sup>47</sup>

Outside the US government's control, Matar states that the actions of other states regionally and internationally can undermine the effectiveness of American soft power. Locally, countries in the Arab world take defensive measures against US cultural and public diplomacy overtures. They impose Internet and media restrictions, promote local culture and provide clandestine support to paramilitary and terrorist groups opposed to the US. Other prominent global powers, such as the UK, France, Russia and China, may also devise their own soft power initiatives, competing with those of the United States and crowding it out. Furthermore, Matar argues that the US has failed to grasp the structural complexities of the Arab world. He claims that American policymakers have failed to appreciate the importance of Islam to societies here, as well as failing to recognise the fragmented nature of Arab cultures.<sup>48</sup>

Matar's critique brings the question of 'culture' to the heart of the debate on soft power. In *Bound to Lead*, Nye treats American values as universal, presuming all peoples and nations are attracted to them. This Western-centrism is not unique in the literature. Analysing American attempts to project US values in East Asia, Michael Hunt highlights the same mentality. He claims that efforts by American missionaries and business figures to export US-style freedom and liberty to the region was used to justify the failed intervention on the side of the Chinese Nationalists during the 1940s.<sup>49</sup> The 'Luce vision' also failed to take into account the societal complexities of East Asia. Here, there was a suspicion of individualism, a value for order and a view that US prescriptions of change were paternalistic

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 436-438.

<sup>49</sup> Michael Hunt, 'East Asia in Henry Luce's "American Century"', *Diplomatic History*, 23/2 (1999), 321-323.

at best and destabilising at worst.<sup>50</sup> Equally, Nye fails to take into account that the exertion of soft power is a two-way process. As Edward Lock attests, *Bound to Lead* encourages scholars to focus on the agent exercising soft power. Not enough attention is therefore paid to the target, which does more than just receive. Their response to the soft power overtures of others is shaped by public opinion, the actions of non-state actors and the social and economic actions of states other than the agent.<sup>51</sup>

As a result of these debates, historians have begun to incorporate the concept of soft power into their own work. For instance, a new wave of historical research on the Cold War has emerged that analyses how the US promoted American norms, ideas and lifestyles in their struggle against the Soviet Union.<sup>52</sup> Walter Hixson examined how the United States used an exhibition in Moscow in 1959 to illustrate the superior living standards enjoyed by Americans to Russian people.<sup>53</sup> Frances Saunders, likewise, highlighted the CIA's indirect financial support for cultural movements that originated in the United States. She pays particular attention to Abstract Expressionism, an art movement that emerged in the mid-1940s. Saunders explains how, to help transform America's east coast into a cultural centre for art, the CIA provided funds via third party organisations to key Abstract Expressionist artists such as Jackson Pollock so they could showcase their work at European exhibitions.<sup>54</sup> The works of both scholars here have contributed towards a new, emerging

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<sup>50</sup> Hunt, 'East Asia', 335.

<sup>51</sup> Edward Lock, 'Soft Power and Strategy: Developing a "Strategic" Conception of Power', in: Inderjeet Parmar and Michael Cox (eds) *Soft Power and US Foreign Policy: Theoretical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Abingdon, 2010), 32-33.

<sup>52</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford, 1997), 85-86.

<sup>53</sup> Walter Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (New York, 1997), 206-207.

<sup>54</sup> Francis Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London, 1999), 252-254.

strand of literature that asserts that the US 'won' the Cold War through its exertion of soft power. American fashion, music and values, most notably human rights and democracy, pervaded the 'Iron Curtain' into the Soviet Union, fuelling elite and popular desires for political and economic change.<sup>55</sup>

Yet such revisionist analyses, despite their greater consideration of soft power, still largely dealt with diplomatic elements of the superpower rivalry. Many early 'new Cold War histories', Kenneth Osgood notes, focused on the US government's attempts to showcase America abroad.<sup>56</sup> In other words, there has been a greater emphasis on how cultural initiatives were used by institutions such as the State Department to highlight the ways in which a 'typical' American lifestyle was supposedly superior to the Soviet way of life. How these governmental bodies applied culture and propaganda to encourage those overseas to adopt US customs, perspectives and lifestyles has received little scholarly attention. It is only in recent years, according to Federico Romero, that this has changed.<sup>57</sup> A growing body of work has started to underline the domestic, transnational and cultural elements surrounding US diplomacy. Luminita Gatejel, for instance, assesses the impact of the marketing and production of automobiles – the ownership of which is a cornerstone of the American lifestyle – on the car industry in the Warsaw Pact.<sup>58</sup> American firms, notably Ford and General Motors, promoted the idea in their advertisements that their automobiles were not only necessary for modern life, but also a luxury. Car ownership was something that was frequently presented to the public as something to aspire to, a supposed marker of personal

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<sup>55</sup> Nye, 'Soft Power and American Foreign Policy', 257.

<sup>56</sup> Kenneth Osgood, 'Hearts and Minds: The Unconventional Cold War', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4/2 (2002), 85-86.

<sup>57</sup> Federico Romero, 'Cold War Historiography at the Crossroads', *Cold War History*, 14/4 (2014), 686-688.

<sup>58</sup> Luminita Gatejel, 'Appealing for a Car. Consumption Policies and Entitlement in the USSR, the GDR and Romania, 1950s-1980s', *Slavic Review*, 75 (2016), 125.

and professional attainment. Seeing the success of this strategy, Eastern European manufacturers such as the Romanian Dacia and the East German Wartburg incorporated these capitalist marketing techniques into their overall business strategy.<sup>59</sup>

The analysis of US exertions of soft power in the Cold War have not just been confined to automobiles. Examining the projection of American movies overseas, both Peter Biskind and Nora Sayre argue that numerous Hollywood films of the 1950s, seemingly unrelated to the superpower struggle, contained implicit real-world messages that reinforced views espoused by the United States government.<sup>60</sup> In *Hollywood's Cold War*, Tony Shaw explains how this worked at length. He explores how filmmakers in California were influenced by the US government's approach to Soviet inspired Communism. Shaw elucidates how officials from the State Department, CIA and USIA provided covert financial support to pro-Western filmmakers in a bid to create 'grey' propaganda. This conception of the persuasive tool was devised and implemented by non-state actors, with political elites shaping it from afar. American political elites regarded this form of propaganda as more credible than conventional, state-run alternatives. It was also more flexible, enabling films to be watched by both domestic and overseas audiences.<sup>61</sup>

Despite this focus on US soft power in the Cold War, how the United States used this form of foreign policy in Iran and the wider Middle East during this period remains largely unexplored. By contrast, there has been much analysis of how institutions like the British Council and the BBC were used by the Foreign Office to achieve the UK government's diplomatic goals in the region. James Vaughan discusses the British Council's distribution of pro-British books, magazines and films that extolled Britain's virtues throughout the region in

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<sup>59</sup> Gatejel, 'Appealing', 127-129.

<sup>60</sup> Peter Biskind, *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (London, 1984); Nora Sayre, *Running Time: Films of the Cold War* (New York, 1982).

<sup>61</sup> Tony Shaw, *Hollywood's Cold War* (Edinburgh, 2007), 4-5.



the aftermath of the Second World War.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, Alban Webb highlights the tensions between British diplomats and the BBC over the latter's Arab language broadcasts to the Middle East during the early stages of the Cold War. Eager to have a greater editorial control over these transmissions, Foreign Office diplomats withheld funding and objected to content they felt contravened British diplomatic interests.<sup>63</sup> The 1952 election of Egyptian Prime Minister Gamal Abdel Nasser was a case in point. Due to his anti-British views, the UK government encouraged the BBC to be more critical of Nasser, something the BBC was reluctant to do.<sup>64</sup>

Likewise, there has been a considerable amount of research undertaken on the IRD's initiatives in the Middle East. James Vaughan focuses on the department's activities in the Middle East and North Africa between 1945 and 1956. He explores the IRD's financial support for the popular Arab language radio station *Sharq-Al-Adna*. Situated in Cyprus, this radio broadcaster transmitted light entertainment programmes across the Arabic-speaking world.<sup>65</sup> Recent research has also stressed the ways in which Middle Eastern actors manipulated the IRD for their own ends. Chikara Hashimoto's PhD thesis explores this department's counter-subversion activities across the region between 1949 and 1963. He reveals how the IRD established links with pro-Western officials in the Turkish, Iraqi, Iranian and Pakistani governments to encourage the spread of anti-Communist propaganda in these

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<sup>62</sup> James Vaughan, 'A Certain Idea of Britain': British Cultural Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1945–57', *Contemporary British History*, 19/2 (2005), 151–168.

<sup>63</sup> Alban Webb, *London Calling: Britain, the BBC World Service and the Cold War* (London, 2014), 5-7.

<sup>64</sup> Webb, *London Calling*, 72-73.

<sup>65</sup> James Vaughan, "'Cloak Without Dagger": How the Information Research Department Fought Britain's Cold War in the Middle East, 1948-56', *Cold War History*, 4/3 (2004), 56-84.

countries.<sup>66</sup> Over time, however, these countries' governments began to exploit the IRD. Fearful of the growing Arab nationalist threat, they coerced officials from this department into supplying them with anti-Egyptian propaganda, even though this contravened wider British foreign policy.<sup>67</sup>

However, many of these histories pay little attention on the UK's attempts to forge cultural ties with Iran during the Cold War specifically. Annabelle Sreberny and Massoumeh Torfeh, for instance, have explored how the UK sought to engage with Iran culturally, evaluating the BBC Persian Service's role in promoting British interests in the country. They argue that the UK Foreign Office exerted considerable pressure on the broadcaster to adhere to its foreign policy stance on Iran. During the 1951-53 Iranian Oil Crisis, for example, diplomats expected the Persian Service to be critical of the Prime Minister Mohammad Mossagdeh.<sup>68</sup> Yet whilst surveying its broadcasts between 1945 and 2012, Torfeh and Sreberny only analyse the Persian Service and Iran at certain key points. These include the 1951-53 Oil Crisis, the 1979 Revolution and the 2008 launch of the BBC Persian television channel. The writers pay little attention to proceedings before and between these events.<sup>69</sup>

## **Anglo-American Relations and the Middle East**

A key element of Anglo-American foreign policy is the 'special relationship' shared between Britain and the United States. According to Christopher Phillips and William Wallace, this

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<sup>66</sup> Chikara Hashimoto, 'British Intelligence, Counter-Subversion and "Informal Empire" in the Middle East, 1949-63', PhD Thesis, University of Aberystwyth, 2014, 3-6.

<sup>67</sup> Hashimoto, 'British Intelligence', 22-24.

<sup>68</sup> Annabelle Sreberny and Massoumeh Torfeh, *Persian Service: The BBC and British Interests in Iran* (London, 2014), 112.

<sup>69</sup> Sreberny and Torfeh, *Persian Service*, 64.

bilateral relationship is complex and multi-faceted. Close ties between the UK and US began during World War Two and continued thereafter. Policymakers from both countries realised that they shared an aversion to Communism and a penchant for free trade. By working together, British and American diplomats and officials were convinced that these objectives could be achieved more quickly.<sup>70</sup> At a transnational level, Anglo-American collaboration has led to the establishment of global institutions, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the World Trade Organisation, that promote UK and US geopolitical and economic values.<sup>71</sup> Nationally, close ties between both countries led to intelligence sharing between clandestine agencies, co-operation on military campaigns and frequent dialogue and collaboration between British and American political leaders.<sup>72</sup>

Since the 1950s, Britain has been regarded as the 'junior partner' in this 'special relationship', particularly in the Middle East. Prior to this, the UK was perceived to be the hegemonic Western power in the region. It straddled two prominent British diplomatic interests, the Suez Canal and the Indian Subcontinent. Since 1763, the Royal Navy had maintained a presence in the Persian Gulf, while Foreign Office diplomats and officials held influential positions in the courts of many of the state's ruling regimes.<sup>73</sup> Historians have accordingly debated why Britain's prominence in the Middle East declined at the United States' expense. According to Corelli Bartlett and Frederick Northedge the Second World War was behind the UK's international demise. The conflict had crippled the UK economically and the country no longer had the monetary means to pursue its ambitious

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<sup>70</sup> William Wallace and Christopher Phillips, 'Reassessing the "Special Relationship"', *International Affairs*, 85/2 (2009), 270.

<sup>71</sup> Wallace and Phillips, 'Reassessing', 275.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 277.

<sup>73</sup> William Taylor Fain, *American Ascendance and British Retreat in the Persian Gulf Region* (Basingstoke, 2008), 4-6.

foreign policy goals.<sup>74</sup> Recent research, though, has given more specific reasons as to why the UK's financial capabilities diminished after the Second World War. Between 1941 and 1945, the United States had provided Britain with 13.5 billion US dollars expecting these loans to be paid back upon the cessation of hostilities. The UK, though, was unable to raise the capital to repay the United States post-1945. Prior to the outbreak of war, British businesses had various markets in both Europe and South-East Asia in which to export their goods and services to. Nations in both these regions though had seen much of the fighting during the Second World War and were unable to resume commercial activities at their pre-1939 levels.<sup>75</sup>

Other scholars, however, have posited different reasons as to why Britain declined in international prominence after 1945. Paul Kennedy, for example, argued that a post-war desire for a welfare state and healthcare system led to the British government neglecting its foreign policy.<sup>76</sup> Contemporary research, though, has proffered radically different explanations for Britain's demise on the world stage. Rather than considering the UK's declining political and economic capabilities, scholars have emphasised the agency of colonised subjects: namely how they resisted and overthrew imperial rule. Caroline Elkins, for example, analyses how the 1952-1964 Mau Mau Uprising culminated in the end of British rule in Kenya. The rebellion had been instigated by the Kikuyu, the largest ethnic group in the country, in response to being forced off their ancestral lands for white settlers. The British government's response to the rebellion was unmeasured and barbaric. Officials overlooked and covered up its military forces' internment, rape and execution of suspected

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<sup>74</sup> Corelli Bartlett, *British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke, 1989), 63; Frederick Northedge, *Descent from Power: British Foreign Policy 1945-73* (London, 1974), 38-40.

<sup>75</sup> Richard Wevill, *Britain and America after World War II: Bilateral Relations and the Beginnings of the Cold War* (London, 2012), 17.

<sup>76</sup> Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York, 1987), 7.

dissidents and whole Kikuyu villages. Yet the nature of the fighting culminated in the British relinquishing their East African colonies in the 1960s.<sup>77</sup>

The United States, in comparison, emerged from the Second World War as a booming superpower. Military action against Germany and Japan had stimulated its domestic economy and it was showing a greater willingness to involve itself in international affairs, especially those of the Middle East.<sup>78</sup> This growth in political, economic and cultural reach coincided with growing Soviet involvement in the region. The USSR had established strong links with the governing regimes in Egypt, Iraq and Syria. It was also providing significant financial support to movements like the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the Communist Tudeh Party that sought to undermine the pro-Western regimes in Israel and Iran respectively.<sup>79</sup> Policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic feared that a significant Soviet presence in the region would jeopardise the safe supply of Middle Eastern oil and undermine the British and American military interests in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean respectively.<sup>80</sup>

Traditionally, historians of twentieth century British foreign policy have regarded the Suez Crisis as the watershed moment. In response to Nasser's decision to nationalise this shipping route – which had hitherto been under British control – UK, French and Israeli

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<sup>77</sup> Caroline Elkins, *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (London, 2005).

<sup>78</sup> Michael Lombardi, 'The Decline of the American Superpower', *Defense and Security Analysis*, 21/3 (2005), 312.

<sup>79</sup> Shahram Chubin, 'Iran', in: Yezid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim (eds) *The Cold War and the Middle East* (Oxford, 2003), 220-244; Gregory Gause, 'British and American Policies in the Persian Gulf, 1968-73', *Review of International Studies*, 11/4 (1985), 255; Douglas Little, 'The Cold War in the Middle East: from the Suez Crisis to the Camp David Accords', in: Melvyn Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds) *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume Two: Crisis and Détente* (Cambridge, 2010), 324-326.

<sup>80</sup> Peter Sluglett, 'The Cold War in the Middle East', in: Louise Fawcett (ed) *International Relations of the Middle East* (Oxford, 2009), 44-46.

soldiers seized the Suez Canal in October 1956. The international condemnation that followed, first from the UN and then, crucially, the US, compelled the three countries to acquiesce to the Egyptian President and withdraw their armed forces.<sup>81</sup> Scholars have regarded the UK's climbdown here as the beginning of the end of Britain's dominance over the Middle East and the start of the United States' role as the dominant Western power in the region. Keith Kyle claims that UK officials were reluctant to intervene in Middle Eastern affairs after 1956 for fear of repeating the embarrassment caused by the Suez Crisis.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, William Roger Louis asserts that Britain's failure to reverse the Egyptian nationalisation of this vital shipping route persuaded policymakers in London of the need for the UK to relinquish most of its overseas colonies.<sup>83</sup> More broadly, historians have pointed to the Suez Crisis as the point where Britain became the 'junior partner' to the United States. William Scott Lucas and John Charmley argue that the British acquiesced to the US in all foreign policy matters post-Suez. UK policymakers realised that their foreign policy aims were similar to those of their American counterparts, but that the US had the greater political and economic clout to achieve these objectives.<sup>84</sup>

From the mid-1990s, however, a new wave of literature emerged, questioning the extent to which the Suez Crisis was a watershed moment for the UK and US in the Middle East. It urged researchers to view the diplomatic incident in its wider context. Tore Petersen

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<sup>81</sup> Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire* (London, 2008), 52; Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism, 1850-1995* (London, 1996), 344-347; William Wallace, 'The Collapse of British Foreign Policy', *International Affairs*, 81/1 (2005), 55; George Peden, 'Suez and Britain's Decline as a World Power', *The Historical Journal*, 55/4 (2012), 1073.

<sup>82</sup> Keith Kyle, *Suez: Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* (London, 1991), 7.

<sup>83</sup> John Charmley, *Churchill's Grand Alliance: The Anglo-American Special Relationship, 1940-57* (London, 1996), 353; William Scott Lucas, *Divided We Stand: Britain, the United States, and the Suez Crisis* (London, 1991), 324.

<sup>84</sup> Charmley, *Churchill's Grand Alliance*, 349; Lucas, *Divided We Stand*, 326-328.

claims that Britain's decline in the Middle East actually began earlier, in 1952. It was then that the Egyptian Prime Minister Abdel Gamal Nasser, who was opposed to the UK, came to power and it also marked the beginning of the US' expansion of its role in Saudi Arabia.<sup>85</sup> Both these events resulted in the crowding out of Britain in the region, with the Suez Crisis serving to confirm this.<sup>86</sup> On the other hand, Ritchie Owendale opines that UK policymakers had been aware of Britain's declining role in the Middle East for six years before the Suez Crisis. Having already shed most of its territories in Southeast Asia and the Indian Subcontinent, Foreign Office and Downing Street officials knew that the UK's Middle Eastern interests were next. UK policymakers recognised that the United States was paying greater attention to the region's affairs and was taking its place as the dominant Western power there.<sup>87</sup>

The perception, however, that British diplomats and officials were happy for the United States to have significant influence over the Middle East is not something shared by all scholars on the subject. Nigel Ashton claims that underneath this 'special relationship', there were significant tensions between the UK and US. Focusing on proceedings in the Middle East during the 1950s and 1960s, he refers to Britain and America's relationship as one of 'competitive collaboration.' Both countries worked together on the larger regional issues, most notably in fighting the Cold War, but had different regional priorities.<sup>88</sup> A wave of research has accordingly sought to examine the dynamics of the Anglo-American 'special

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<sup>85</sup> Tore Petersen, *The Middle East Between the Great Powers: Anglo-American Conflict and Cooperation, 1952-57* (Basingstoke, 2001), 11.

<sup>86</sup> Petersen, *The Middle East*, 15-16.

<sup>87</sup> Ritchie Owendale, *Britain, the United States and the Transfer of Power in the Middle East, 1945-62* (London, 1996), 211.

<sup>88</sup> Nigel Ashton, *Kennedy, Macmillan and the Cold War: The Irony of Interdependence* (Basingstoke, 2001), 5; for a more detailed discussion on the origins, key tenets and ideas surrounding the 'special relationship', please consult pages 55-65.

relationship' in the Middle East. Research by Simon Smith, for example, explores how the UK and US sought to bolster their presence in the Persian Gulf states between 1956 and 1971 to prevent the spread of Soviet-inspired Communism here. Underneath this collaborative effort, though, there were significant tensions. As the region had long been under British influence, UK policymakers frequently resisted attempts by their American counterparts to encourage leaders in the region to invest their surplus revenue into dollars.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, according to David Watry, Britain's global political and economic decline was something that the United States welcomed.<sup>90</sup> Suspicious that the UK still harboured imperialist ambitions in the Middle East, US policymakers sought to accelerate the weakening of the UK internationally.<sup>91</sup> During the Eisenhower presidency, the White House and the State Department pursued a foreign policy of 'brinkmanship', where America would be poised on the verge of war without being in conflict. Not only did this contravene British foreign policy – which called for a more pragmatic approach of détente towards the Soviet Union – but it was also something that the UK could not afford to adhere to financially.<sup>92</sup>

Few histories have discussed how these tensions in the 'special relationship' manifested themselves in Anglo-American interactions with Iran in this period specifically. There has been a greater focus on the UK and US response to the rise of Arab nationalism, which called for political and cultural unity and a rejection of Western powers across the Middle East.<sup>93</sup> In 1952, the prominent Arab nationalist Gamal Abdel Nasser was elected

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<sup>89</sup> Simon Smith, 'Power Transferred? Britain, the United States and the Gulf, 1956-71', *Contemporary British History*, 21/1 (2007), 4-5.

<sup>90</sup> David Watry, *Transatlantic Brinkmanship: The Anglo-American Alliance and Conservative Ideology, 1953-56*, PhD thesis, University of Texas Arlington, 2012.

<sup>91</sup> Watry, *Transatlantic Brinkmanship*, 56.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 61.

<sup>93</sup> Nathan Citino, *From Arab nationalism to OPEC: Eisenhower, King Sa-ud, and the Making of US-Saudi Relations* (Bloomington, 2002).



Egyptian Prime Minister, rising to President in 1956. Syria, in turn, was taken over by an Arab nationalist government, too, with both countries joining together in 1958 to form the United Arab Republic (UAR).<sup>94</sup> As Iran is not an Arab country, how Arab nationalism's emergence shaped the UK and US approach towards the country has been ignored. This is in spite of Arab nationalist advocates calling for the deposing of regimes like the Shah's, who relied on political, military and economic aid from Western powers.<sup>95</sup> Equally, histories of Britain and the United States' response here do not acknowledge the soft power elements of their approach, focussing principally on the military and economic aspects of their diplomacy.

Convinced that Arab nationalism jeopardised their Middle Eastern interests, the British encouraged the pro-Western governments in the Middle East – Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey – to sign the Baghdad Pact.<sup>96</sup> The signatories pledged to extensively cooperate with one another economically, culturally and militarily, promising to defend one another if attacked or invaded. The British government regarded the Baghdad Pact as a buffer against any possible Soviet and Arab nationalist involvement in the Middle East.<sup>97</sup> Nigel Ashton explores how the formation of the Baghdad Pact exacerbated the differences in the 'special relationship.' Despite the US State Department's involvement in all general meetings of this organisation, its officials opposed the Baghdad Pact. The State Department rightly noted the potential to heighten Arab-Israeli tensions and stoke up Arab nationalist feeling across the Middle East. US policymakers accordingly resisted British attempts to persuade the United

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<sup>94</sup> Ashton, *Kennedy*, 90.

<sup>95</sup> David Dilks, *Retreat from Power: Studies in Britain's Foreign Policy of the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke, 1981), 52.

<sup>96</sup> Ashton, *Kennedy*, 94-96.

<sup>97</sup> Robert McNamara, *Britain, Nasser and the Balance of Power in the Middle East, 1952-67* (Portland, 2003), 142.

States to become full Baghdad Pact members and did little to support its initiatives.<sup>98</sup> In a December 1955 meeting with the Jordanian monarchy, for example, both Eisenhower and Dulles discouraged Jordan's leaders from joining the organisation.<sup>99</sup>

In contrast, the US initially sought to appease the UAR. Fearful that many Arab nationalists possessed Communist sympathies, State Department figures in Washington felt that this would deter Nasser and his followers from collaborating closely with the Soviet Union.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, US policymakers regarded Arab nationalism as something that was of more threat to British interests in the Middle East. Its anti-colonial doctrine was more critical of the UK, and its proponents had paid little attention to the expanding regional role of the United States.<sup>101</sup> Analysing the British approach towards Egypt between 1952 and 1957, Robert McNamara attributes the United States' decision to not support Britain during the Suez Crisis down to these reasons. If they backed Britain, American policymakers feared that the Soviet Union would exploit the inevitable downturn in US-Egyptian relations and that such support would enhance Britain's role in the Middle East.<sup>102</sup>

It was only in the months after the Suez Crisis that the Eisenhower administration adopted a tougher stance towards Arab nationalism. In January 1957, Eisenhower used a speech to Congress to announce an alteration in his administration's approach towards the Middle East. Termed the Eisenhower Doctrine, it offered economic and military support to US allies in the region.<sup>103</sup> In so doing, American policymakers hoped that this financial

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<sup>98</sup> Nigel Ashton, 'The Hijacking of a Pact: the Formation of the Baghdad Pact and Anglo-American Tensions in the Middle East, 1955-58', *Review of International Studies*, 19 (1993), 123-137.

<sup>99</sup> Ashton, 'Hijacking of a Pact', 123-137.

<sup>100</sup> Ashton, *Kennedy*, 99.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 102.

<sup>102</sup> McNamara, *Britain, Nasser and the Balance of Power*, 162.

<sup>103</sup> Greg Brew, "'Our Most Dependable Allies": Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the Eisenhower Doctrine, 1956-58', *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 26/4 (2015), 89.

backing would compel Arab states to lean more towards the United States, and away from Nasser. US diplomats and officials deemed Egypt's regime too closely aligned with the Soviet Union.<sup>104</sup> Historians have accordingly explored the ramifications of the Eisenhower Doctrine on Anglo-American ties. Both Salim Yaquub and Ray Takeyh argue that the US aimed to ensure that the UK remained subservient to America in the Middle East.<sup>105</sup> Britain's historical ties to the region and its aversion towards Soviet-style Communism meant the Eisenhower administration, as well as the State Department, were content for the UK to retain a significant presence in the Middle East. Yet US diplomats and officials did not want this influence over the region's affairs to supersede its own. The Eisenhower Doctrine was aimed at ensuring that the UK's Baghdad Pact played a secondary role to American diplomatic manoeuvres in the Middle East.<sup>106</sup>

Likewise, scholars have deliberated over the impact of the Eisenhower Doctrine. According to Salim Yaquub, it was an unsuccessful foreign policy approach. Eisenhower and Dulles overestimated US influence in the Arab world and failed to realise the influence Nasser had over other states in the region.<sup>107</sup> Eisenhower's diplomatic stance was also undermined by internal disputes in the Arab world. Many of its leaders were hamstrung by domestic popular opinion - which was significantly anti-US - and they were suspicious of the motives of other Arab governments to approach the United States as a bloc. Moreover, Eisenhower and Dulles' attempts to use the doctrine to sideline the British in the Middle East proved unsuccessful. Reviewing Anglo-Jordanian ties before during and after the Suez Crisis, Stephen Blackwell claims that its leader, King Hussein, relied significantly on UK and

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<sup>104</sup> Brew, 'Dependable Allies', 92.

<sup>105</sup> Ray Takeyh, *The Origins of the Eisenhower Doctrine: The US, Britain and Nasser's Egypt, 1953-57* (Basingstoke, 2000), 16; Salim Yaquub, *Containing Arab nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (North Carolina, 2004).

<sup>106</sup> Takeyh, *Origins*, 19-20; Yaquub, *Containing*, 7.

<sup>107</sup> Yaquub, *Containing*, 4-5.

US support equally, despite American diplomats' protestations that he should discuss regional affairs with US officials only.<sup>108</sup>

## **The United States and Iran**

Scholars have traditionally paid little attention to the United States' use of soft power in Iran. The body of literature exploring US-Iranian relations in the Cold War has, instead, emphasised the role of elites in exerting military and economic power. Historical commentaries of Eisenhower and Iran are a case in point. As well as being limited in scope, research focuses specifically on the Republican President's handling of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis. In April 1951, Mohammad Mosaddegh was elected Prime Minister of Iran. One of the first acts of his premiership was to halt the British government-backed AIOC's monopoly over the Iranian oil industry.<sup>109</sup> By August 1953, however, the failure to resolve this dispute, combined with significant British diplomatic pressure, compelled the CIA to support an MI6 backed coup against Mosaddegh. Officials from both intelligence organisations paid Iranians opposed to their Prime Minister to demonstrate and topple Mosaddegh.<sup>110</sup> Much of the literature on Eisenhower and Iran therefore focuses on his administration's motives for involving itself in Iranian affairs. Truman's White House had distanced itself from the issue,

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<sup>108</sup> Stephen Blackwell, *British Military Intervention and the Struggle for Jordan: King Hussein, Nasser and the Middle East Crisis, 1955-58* (Abingdon, 2009), 3.

<sup>109</sup> Mark Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne, *Mohammad Mossaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran* (New York, 2004), 126.

<sup>110</sup> Ali Rahnema, *Behind the 1953 Coup in Iran: Thugs, Turncoats, Soldiers and Spooks* (Cambridge, 2015), 13; Moraes Ruehsen, 'Operation "Ajax" Revisited: Iran 1953', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 29/3 (1993), 471; Steve Marsh, 'HMG, and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis: In Defence of Anglo-Iranian', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 12/4 (2001), 148-153.

claiming it was a dispute for Britain and Iran to settle.<sup>111</sup> While supporting the British-led economic embargo of Iran, White House and State Department officials believed the incident would make the Iranians more inclined to deal with the Americans in future.<sup>112</sup>

Scholarly views as to why the US involved itself in the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis are varied, with some historians attributing it to global developments and others claiming it was down to events occurring within the country. Links have been made between the Eisenhower administration's approach towards Iran and its stance towards big business. Both Richard Barnet and David Horowitz regarded Eisenhower's attempts to liberalise markets in the Middle East, Asia and Africa as a crucial tenet of his administration's approach to the Cold War. Whereas Barnet deems the American 1953 involvement in Iranian firms as part of Eisenhower's wider embrace of commerce, Horowitz regards it as a reactionary manoeuvre to the growing Soviet influence in Iran.<sup>113</sup>

Beyond commercial considerations, certain historians have discussed how events internationally shaped Eisenhower's approach towards the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis. Barry Rubin claims Eisenhower's stance was influenced by his aversion to Communism and the 'loss of China' under his predecessor, Harry Truman. In 1949, the Soviet-backed Communists had wrestled control of the Chinese mainland from the Nationalists, supported by the Americans. The Communist takeover of China surprised officials in Washington, and had considerable implications on wider US foreign policy. Policymakers had presumed that China would be a vital Cold War ally, a counterbalance to the Soviets in Southeast Asia. They were now determined that this would not be repeated in the Middle East.<sup>114</sup> Similarly,

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<sup>111</sup> Barry Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions: The American Experience in Iran* (Oxford, 1951), 64.

<sup>112</sup> Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions*, 66.

<sup>113</sup> Richard Barnet, *Intervention and Revolution: The United States in the Third World* (New York, 1968); David Horowitz, *The Free World Colossus* (New York, 1965).

<sup>114</sup> James Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of US-Iran Relations* (Yale, 1988), 288-290; Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions*, 56.

Mark Gasiorowski argues that a conviction that the US should play a bolder, more prominent global role compelled the White House to take a greater interest in Iranian affairs. Both Eisenhower and his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles were keen for the US State Department and the CIA to have a larger international presence.<sup>115</sup>

In comparison, James Bill and Barry Rubin attribute the change in US policy towards Iran during the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis to political proceedings within the country. During Mosaddegh's first two years in office, American diplomats and officials believed that they could have a productive relationship with Mosaddegh at Britain's expense.<sup>116</sup> By 1953, they realised this was not the case for two reasons. First, while he was not a Communist, Iran's then Prime Minister did not possess pro-Western views. Mosaddegh was convinced that Iran should adopt a 'third way', staying neutral in the Cold War by distancing itself from the superpowers. Second, Mosaddegh's government was close to collapse. By April 1953, internal squabbling in his party, the National Front, had caused the movement to split in two and the dissolution of parliament. Key allies with more moderate pro-US views, such as Interior Minister Fazollah Zahedi and Chairman of the Iranian Parliament, Ayatollah Abol-Ghasem Mostafavi-Kashani, had abandoned Mosaddegh. He was instead making overtures to the Communist Tudeh Party, something US officials deemed untenable.<sup>117</sup>

The implications of US intervention in Iranian affairs in 1953 was highly significant. A prominent political opponent of the Shah, the removal of Mosaddegh strengthened the Iranian monarch's grip over his country's affairs.<sup>118</sup> It also signalled the beginning of a change in the United States' approach to fighting the Cold War in the Middle East. Before 1953, initial attempts by American diplomats and officials to achieve their foreign policy

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<sup>115</sup> Mark Gasiorowski, *US Foreign Policy and the Shah: Building a Client State in Iran* (Ithaca, 1991).

<sup>116</sup> James Goode, 'Reforming Iran During the Kennedy Years', *Diplomatic History*, 15/1 (1991), 13; Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions*, 72-75.

<sup>117</sup> Goode, 'Reforming Iran', 17; Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions*, 75-76.

<sup>118</sup> Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions*, 56.

goals in the Middle East had been confined to the forging of bilateral ties with the Saudi Arabian monarchy.<sup>119</sup> Yet the Shah's enhanced political position, combined with his vehement opposition towards Communism, compelled figures in the White House and the State Department to work more closely with Iran. Diplomats and officials envisaged providing both nations with enough support to make them the two most powerful states in the region. In so doing, they hoped to maintain a balance of power between them.<sup>120</sup>

From Iran's perspective, there has been considerable focus on the extensive US military and economic support provided to the Iranians between 1953 and 1979, as well as on the clashes between the Shah and certain US presidential administrations in this period. While the Iranian monarch sought high-tech weaponry to ward off internal threats, American policymakers pushed for the Shah to deal with domestic issues.<sup>121</sup> The literature's tendency to neglect cultural aspects of American diplomacy towards Iran is unsurprising. In spite of wider historiographical developments in the importance of soft power to foreign policy goals, historians were under the impression that, after 1953, US policymakers were uninterested in fostering cultural ties with Iran. According to Deborah Kisatsky, geopolitical security concerns overrode all other priorities in Iran. While Truman had indicated a willingness to increase the number of Persian language VOA radio broadcasts, engaging and shaping the views of Iranians was of little interest to US policymakers.<sup>122</sup>

With this in mind, histories have, instead, considered the Soviet Union's application of soft power and cultural diplomacy in Iran. This focus has stemmed from the conviction, articulated by Kristen Blake, that the Iranian plateau was one of the main theatres for US-

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<sup>119</sup> Gasiorowski, *US Foreign Policy and the Shah*, 115.

<sup>120</sup> Goode, 'Reforming Iran', 13; Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions*, 3-5.

<sup>121</sup> Cooper, *The Oil Kings*, 189.

<sup>122</sup> Deborah Kisatsky, 'Voice of America and Iran, 1949-1953: US Liberal Developmentalism, Propaganda and the Cold War', *Intelligence and National Security*, 14/3 (1999), 161-162.

Soviet Cold War competition outside Europe.<sup>123</sup> Researchers have assumed that the USSR regarded schemes in this field as one of the only means by which to match or adequately compete with American initiatives in Iran. Charting proceedings during and after the Second World War, James Pickett examines the activities of the Soviet All-Union for Cultural Ties Abroad (VOKS). He argues that this organisation established links with left-wing Iranian intellectuals in the cities of Tehran, Mashhad, Tabriz and Gilan. Through planning activities and exhibitions, the organisation emboldened Iran's leftist intellectuals, making them much more politically active. Their determination to promote Iranian-style Communism in Iran and in the Turkic regions of the USSR frightened the Shah, compelling him to order VOKS' closure in 1955.<sup>124</sup> Analysing proceedings in the 1950s and 1960s, likewise, Nodar Mossaki and Lana Ravandi-Fadai analyse Soviet cultural diplomacy in the wake of VOKS' departure from Iran. With the Iranian government's increasingly draconian measures towards Soviet activities in the country, they note that the USSR's officials had low hopes for the success of soft power and cultural diplomacy initiatives. Yet figures in Moscow and the Soviet Embassy in Tehran were frequently surprised at the overwhelmingly positive popular reception towards Soviet musicians, dancers and sporting figures visiting or competing in Iran.<sup>125</sup>

A significant body of literature has instead been dedicated to elite level US-Iran interactions. There is a considerable focus in the literature on how President John F. Kennedy's 'New Frontier' approach to domestic and foreign affairs shaped his administration's approach towards the Iranian government. Accepting the Democrat Presidential nomination in June 1960, Kennedy claimed that the United States was on the

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<sup>123</sup> Kristen Blake, *The US-Soviet Confrontation in Iran, 1945-1962: A Case in the Annals of the Cold War* (New York, 2009), 2-3.

<sup>124</sup> James Pickett, 'Soviet Civilisation Through a Persian Lens: Iranian Intellectuals, Cultural Diplomacy and Socialist Modernity, 1941-55', *Iranian Studies*, 48/5 (2015), 808-812.

<sup>125</sup> Nodar Mossaki and Lana Ravandi-Fadai, 'A Guarded Courtship: Soviet Cultural Diplomacy in Iran from the Late 1940s to the 1960s', *Iranian Studies*, 51/3 (2018), 438-445.



culsp of the 'new frontier' of the 1960s. If elected, he promised to enact significant political, social and economic reforms to reflect this.<sup>126</sup> From a foreign policy perspective, this entailed the promotion of democracy in developing countries as a key to winning the Cold War. Countries that received significant US economic and military support, but were ruled by authoritarian governing regimes, were told to reform themselves for American backing to continue.<sup>127</sup> In Iran's case, Kennedy signalled his intention to shift the US approach away from a policy of appeasement. Previously, the US provided the Iranian military with advanced weaponry and tactical training, while ignoring the Shah's flagrant abuse of human rights and his authoritarian rule. A task force, comprised of National Security advisors McGeorge Bundy, Walt Rostow and Robert Komer, as well as Secretary of State Dean Rusk, was appointed by Kennedy to resolve these issues in Iran.<sup>128</sup>

Traditionally, Cold War histories on the United States' diplomatic approach towards Iran's government presumed that American policymakers rode roughshod over Iranian affairs in this period. James Goode examines the 'revolutionary change' that the Kennedy administration enacted in Iran.<sup>129</sup> Ignoring the Iranian monarch's protestations, the White House's task force forced the Shah into undertaking a series of domestic reforms to prevent the spread of Communism in the country. Officials from this working group offered the Shah US economic and military support on the condition that he streamline Iran's armed forces,

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<sup>126</sup> Robert Dallek, *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963* (London, 2003).

<sup>127</sup> Roby Carol Barrett, *The Greater Middle East and the Cold War: US Foreign Policy Under Eisenhower and Kennedy* (London, 2010).

<sup>128</sup> Roland Popp, 'Benign Intervention? The Kennedy Administration's Push for Reform in Iran', in: Manfred Berg and Andreas Etges (eds) *John F. Kennedy and the 'Thousand Days': New Perspectives on the Foreign and Domestic Policies of the Kennedy Administration* (Heidelberg, 2007), 197-220.

<sup>129</sup> Goode, 'Reforming Iran', 13.

delegate government responsibilities and distribute land owned by nobles to peasants.<sup>130</sup>

Goode argues that, by 1963, American pressure compelled the Iranian monarch to implement his own reform programme, dubbed the 'White Revolution', which aimed to advance Iran socially and economically.<sup>131</sup>

Contemporary analyses, however, have questioned the extent to which US policymakers influenced Iranian foreign and domestic policy. Such publications have formed part of the much broader revisionist Cold War historiography, which pays significant attention to how actors in the developing world manipulated the UK, US and the Soviet Union for their own ends.<sup>132</sup> Roham Alvandi, for instance, disputes the notion that the Shah was an American stooge, arguing instead that he was an autonomous ruler.<sup>133</sup> He claims that, in September 1962, the Iranian monarch promised the Soviet First Leader Nikita Khrushchev that no US missiles would be installed in Iran. Not only did this pledge intend to highlight the Shah's independence from Washington, but it was also a means by which to leverage more military and economic aid from the United States.<sup>134</sup> Ben Offiler, likewise, has discussed the tension between the need to modernise Iran's infrastructure and economy on the one hand and the Shah's push for military aid on the other. Charting proceedings during the Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon administrations, he argues that this issue shaped US-Iran relations throughout the 1960s and 1970s. By the end of this period, he notes how White House and State Department officials gave up on their efforts to modernise Iran and just provided the Iranian monarch with the weaponry he coveted. Their acquiescence to the

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>132</sup> Tony Smith, 'New Bottles for New Wine: A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War', *Diplomatic History*, 24/4 (2000), 567-591.

<sup>133</sup> Roham Alvandi, 'The Shah's Détente with Khrushchev: Iran's 1962 Missile Base Pledge to the Soviet Union', *Cold War History*, 14/3 (2014), 423-425.

<sup>134</sup> Alvandi, 'The Shah's Détente', 431.

Shah's demands was in part caused by his manipulation of US officials, playing on their fears of Communism and by disagreements surrounding how Iran should be modernised.<sup>135</sup>

Alvandi and Offiler are not alone in perceiving the Shah as a ruler willing and able to tactically outmanoeuvre American policymakers. David Collier discusses the ways in which the Iranian monarch curtailed the activities of Kennedy's Iran Task Force, fearing that this working group would eventually remove him from power.<sup>136</sup> Suspicious that his pro-American Prime Minister, Ali Amini, was a US puppet, the Shah replaced him with his close confidante, Asadollah Alam. The Iranian monarch proceeded to outmanoeuvre the Iran Task Force, implementing his own set of reforms through his 'White Revolution'.<sup>137</sup>

Accordingly, there has been a reassessment in the literature of the effectiveness of the Kennedy administration's Iran Task Force in enacting long-term social, economic and political change in the country. Roland Popp argues that John F. Kennedy's failure to understand regional politics resulted in the failure of US policymakers' attempts to reform Iran. Corruption and nepotism were rife in Iranian society and politics, and this undermined the initiatives conceived by White House and State Department officials to redistribute farmland to Iranian peasants.<sup>138</sup> The historiographical re-evaluation of the US approach to Iran during the Kennedy presidency is not just confined to its initiatives. Scholars have also explored the inner workings of the administration's Iran Task Force. Victor Nemchenok highlighted the tensions between the two different factions of this working group. He differentiates between the advocates of New Frontier thinking, like Bundy, Rostow and

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<sup>135</sup> Ben Offiler, *US Foreign Policy and the Modernisation of Iran: Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon and the Shah* (Basingstoke, 2015), 2-3.

<sup>136</sup> David Collier, 'To Prevent a Revolution: John F. Kennedy and the Promotion of Democracy in Iran', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 24 (2013), 473.

<sup>137</sup> Collier, 'To Prevent a Revolution', 474-475.

<sup>138</sup> Popp, 'Benign Intervention?', 34.

Komer, and the traditionalists, such as Rusk and State Department officials.<sup>139</sup> The individuals in the latter group wanted to support the Shah regardless of his human rights record and regime's lack of democratic accountability.<sup>140</sup> Similarly, April Summit examines how disagreements between these two factions of the Iran Task Force undermined US attempts to promote democracy in Iran. Tensions within Kennedy's inner circle compelled the Democrat to take the 'middle road' in his diplomatic approach towards Iran.<sup>141</sup> The Democrat still provided the Shah with significant economic and military aid and discussed, instead of forced, the issue of reform with the Iranian monarch. Compromising in this way made Kennedy's diplomacy towards Iran appear weak, incoherent and contradictory, enabling the Shah to delay or curtail US-led initiatives to promote land reform and democratic accountability in Iran.<sup>142</sup>

Similarly, there have been a significant number of publications dedicated to Richard Nixon's close relationship with the Shah. Much is made of Nixon's decision to provide the Shah with a 'blank cheque.' In a May 1972 visit to Tehran, the US President promised the Iranian monarch that Iran would receive unlimited American military and economic support.<sup>143</sup> The 'blank cheque' is referred to often in the literature as the pinnacle of US-Iran relations, comparing bilateral ties then with the strained, complicated relationship shared between both countries after the Iranian Revolution.<sup>144</sup> The motives behind Nixon's promise

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<sup>139</sup> Victor Nemchenok, 'In Search of Stability Amid Chaos: US Policy Towards Iran, 1961-63', *Cold War History*, 10/3 (2010), 341-369.

<sup>140</sup> Nemchenok, 'In Search of Stability', 348.

<sup>141</sup> April Summit, 'For a White Revolution: John F. Kennedy and the Shah of Iran', *Middle East Journal*, 58/4 (2004), 562.

<sup>142</sup> Summit, 'For a White Revolution', 574.

<sup>143</sup> Stephen McGlinchey, 'Richard Nixon's Road to Tehran: The Making of the U.S.- Iran Arms Agreement of May 1972', *Diplomatic History*, 37/4 (2013), 843.

<sup>144</sup> McGlinchey, 'Richard Nixon's Road', 845.

to the Shah of unlimited US support have been discussed in depth. According to David Schmitz, Nixon's provision of a 'blank cheque' to the Shah formed part of wider US foreign policy goals.<sup>145</sup> In the wake of the withdrawal from Vietnam, there was less willingness among both the public and Congress for the US to directly intervene in foreign affairs. In response to this, the Republican President and his Secretary of State devised the 'Nixon Doctrine.' To assist in the global fight against Communism, both figures pledged to provide their allies on the world stage indirectly with military equipment and financial support.<sup>146</sup> Likewise, Roham Alvandi discusses how the 'blank cheque' formed part of a wider desire between both Nixon and the Shah for Iran to play a greater role in Middle Eastern affairs. Between 1968 and 1972, the Iranian monarch urged Nixon to alter his diplomatic approach towards the Middle East. Instead of trying to maintain a balance of power between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the Shah persuaded the US government to dedicate most of its resources in the Middle East to support his regime.<sup>147</sup>

## **Britain and Iran**

In contrast to the significant body of literature on US-Iran relations, there has been far less research dedicated to the study of Anglo-Iranian interactions. This can be attributed to the United States' emergence as Iran's main ally, and the scholarly perception that Britain's post-war political and economic decline meant that it was less interested in the Middle East after the 1950s. Compounding this were the events of January 1968, when the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, announced the withdrawal of all British armed forces 'east of Suez',

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<sup>145</sup> David Schmitz, *The United States and Right Wing Dictatorships* (Cambridge, 2005), 75.

<sup>146</sup> Schmitz, *The United States and Right Wing Dictatorships*, 79-81.

<sup>147</sup> Roham Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War* (Oxford, 2014), 2-4.

with all Royal Navy ships ordered to leave the Persian Gulf by December 1971.<sup>148</sup> The decision was part of a broader British foreign policy strategy that stressed the need for the UK to concentrate more on European affairs. It was also in response to the ongoing counter-insurgency campaign mounted by British military forces in the Aden protectorate, which now forms part of modern-day Yemen, that was proving unwinnable.<sup>149</sup> The Royal Navy's 1971 Persian Gulf departure had created the impression that Britain no longer had an interest in the Middle East. As there was no longer a Royal Navy presence in the Persian Gulf, historians felt the British government were no longer willing or able to engage with nations in the region.<sup>150</sup>

The perception that Britain only had a minor role in Iran after the 1950s had meant that historians have paid little attention to Anglo-Iranian interactions after the 1953 coup. As historian Edward Posnett surmises, analyses of dealings between Britain and Iran after 1953 tend 'to be the preserve of those who formulated it.'<sup>151</sup> As these publications are geared towards a non-academic audience, they focus on events of public interest involving Iran, namely the 1979 Revolution. Former Foreign Secretary David Owen pays great attention to the actions of the Shah towards the end of his reign. Writing in his memoirs, he rues the British government's unwillingness to try and encourage the Shah to rein in his autocratic

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<sup>148</sup> Shohei Sato, 'Britain's Decision to Withdraw from the Persian Gulf, 1964-68: A Pattern and a Puzzle', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 37/1 (2009), 101.

<sup>149</sup> Helen Parr, *Britain's Policy Towards the European Community: Harold Wilson and Britain's World Role, 1964-1967* (Abingdon, 2005); Gavin Wyn Rees, 'British Strategic Thinking and Europe, 1964-1970', *Journal of European Integration History*, 5/1 (1999), 63.

<sup>150</sup> Fain, *American Ascendance and British Retreat*, 41; Simon Smith, *Ending Empire in the Middle East: Britain, the United States and Post-War Decolonisation, 1945-1973* (Abingdon, 2012), 22; David Holden, 'The Persian Gulf: Life After the British Raj', *Foreign Affairs*, 49/4 (1971), 721-723.

<sup>151</sup> Edward Posnett, 'Treating His Imperial Majesty's Warts: British Policy Towards Iran, 1977-79', *Iranian Studies*, 45/1 (2012), 119.

style of leadership.<sup>152</sup> Likewise, the Foreign Office's former Middle East Department head Ivor Lucas and the former British Ambassador to Tehran Anthony emphasise how the government department sought to strengthen Britain's ties with the Shah. The former focuses specifically on the ways in which the Foreign Office supported the Shah at the outbreak of the Iranian Revolution.<sup>153</sup> Parsons, on the other hand, spells out the various methods he used to appease the Iranian monarch and how this ensured that France, Italy, West Germany or Japan did not take Britain's position in Iran.<sup>154</sup>

Traditionally, scholarly works concerning the UK and Iran after 1945 have tended to emphasise the actions of political elites and diplomats in seeking to limit the Soviet Union's involvement in Iranian affairs. In writing about the Iran-Azerbaijan Crisis – where USSR loyalists in Northwest Iran formed a breakaway state - Daniel Yergin focuses on the response of London and Washington to this event. He discusses how British and American officials urged their counterparts in Moscow to stop supporting the Communist rebels.<sup>155</sup> Similarly, Fred Halliday attempts to place the Iran-Azerbaijan Crisis into its historical context. By referring to the incident as one of the first superpower clashes of the Cold War, he argues that this was the first in a series of direct attempts by the USSR to bolster its presence in the Middle East.<sup>156</sup>

Equally, the first wave of literature on the British response to the 1951-53 Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis analyses proceedings from the 'top down.' Ian Speller discusses the Foreign Office's failure in persuading British armed forces to invade the oil rich region of

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<sup>152</sup> David Owen, *Time To Declare* (London, 1991), 390-393.

<sup>153</sup> Lucas, 'Revisiting', 418-24.

<sup>154</sup> Anthony Parsons, *The Pride and the Fall* (London, 1984), 72-73.

<sup>155</sup> Daniel Yergin, *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State* (London, 1977), 179.

<sup>156</sup> Fred Halliday, 'The Middle East, the Great Powers and the Cold War', in: Avi Shlaim and Yezid Sayigh (eds) *The Cold War in the Middle East* (Oxford, 1997), 11.

Khuzestan to reverse the nationalisation of Iran's oil industry. In meetings with the Chief of Air Staff, Sir John Slessor, diplomats were informed that it was beyond the military's means to muster an invading force. The Second World War had economically crippled Britain, the country had recently relinquished control of the Indian army and the UK's global commitments meant it lacked the manpower to effectively intervene.<sup>157</sup> Mark Curtis, likewise, focuses on the British government's attempts to impose an international embargo of Iranian oil in response to Mosaddegh's nationalisation of the AIOC. Between 1951 and 1953, Foreign Office officials took advantage of the UK's relative global power and influence to deter other nations, in particular the United States, from purchasing Iranian oil.<sup>158</sup>

The complex, interdependent strands of the UK's ties with Iran were only recognised with the emergence of the 'new diplomatic history' standpoint. Contrary to the suggestions of many traditional diplomatic histories, non-state actors such as cultural institutions and private sector firms have a significant influence on the shaping of a nation's diplomacy. In turn, the actions of diplomats and officials impact on the activities of these non-state actors.<sup>159</sup> Reflecting these historiographical developments, Rowena Abdul-Razak has analysed the British government's use of propaganda to shape the views of Iranians during the 1941-1945 Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran. Commencing in August 1941, the joint occupation stemmed from fears that the then Shah, Reza Khan, was going to side with the Axis powers in World War Two. In so doing, they would possess a foothold in the Middle East and would deprive the Allied forces of oil. Throughout the occupation, Abdul-Razak notes how the Foreign Office disseminated propaganda in Iran through the BBC Persian Service and the establishing of links with the Iranian press. Via literary and audio news

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<sup>157</sup> Ian Speller, 'A Splutter of Musketry? The British Military Response to the Anglo-Iranian Oil Dispute, 1951', *Contemporary British History*, 17/1 (2003), 49; 64-66.

<sup>158</sup> Mark Curtis, *The Ambiguities of Power: British Foreign Policy Since 1945* (London, 1995).

<sup>159</sup> John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History* (London, 2002).



content, they hoped to persuade the country's people of the need to fight Nazi Germany, as well as promote Britain in Iran. The latter was crucial to ensuring that Iran became a pro-British nation after the Second World War's conclusion.<sup>160</sup>

Analysing proceedings in the Cold War period, moreover, Louise Fawcett's exploration of the 1946 Azerbaijan Crisis moves beyond the analysis of prominent powers. It instead considers how Iran manipulated the demands and wishes of the UK, US and Soviet Union. Using evidence from the Russian archives, she highlights how the Iranian government threatened to cut off the USSR's access to oil unless it withdrew from its northern territories.<sup>161</sup> Similarly, Steve Marsh gives pronounced consideration to the actions of the 'Seven Sisters' in the making and shaping of Anglo-American policy towards Iran during and in the immediate aftermath of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis. The 'Seven Sisters' were the major oil companies of the period, composed of the AIOC, Gulf Oil, Standard Oil of California, Texaco, Royal Dutch Shell, Standard Oil of New Jersey and Standard Oil of New York.<sup>162</sup> According to Marsh, this consortium of petroleum firms had unprecedented access to British and American diplomats and officials. Desiring to control the Iranian oil industry, the 'Seven Sisters' used their governmental links to force the UK and US to directly intervene in August 1953. Prior to this, both countries had been content to use the oil embargo to wear down Mosaddegh.<sup>163</sup>

However, analyses of Anglo-Iranian relations after 1953 that consider the role of soft power, transnational networks and non-state actors are noticeable by their absence.

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<sup>160</sup> Rowena Abdul-Razak, 'But What Would They Think of Us? Propaganda and the Manipulation of the Anglo-Soviet Occupation of Iran, 1941-46', *Iranian Studies*, 49/5 (2016), 819.

<sup>161</sup> Louise Fawcett, 'Revisiting the Iranian Crisis of 1946: How Much More Do We Know?', *Iranian Studies*, 47/3 (2014), 382.

<sup>162</sup> Steve Marsh, 'Anglo-American Crude Diplomacy: Multinational Oil and the Iranian Oil Crisis, 1951-53', *Contemporary British History*, 21/1 (2007), 45-46.

<sup>163</sup> Marsh, 'Anglo-American Crude', 47.

Researchers are under the impression that the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis marked the end of the UK's role as the main Western hegemonic power in the country. Focusing on the immediate aftermath of the diplomatic incident, Juan Romero points out that the AIOC lost its monopoly over Iran's oil industry.<sup>164</sup> In 1954, British, American and Iranian government figures, as well as officials from the seven prominent petroleum firms, agreed that a consortium of Western oil companies, and not the AIOC, would take over control of the cultivation and distribution of Iranian supplies of the commodity.<sup>165</sup> A greater degree of attention, in contrast, is paid to how the events of August 1953 had a detrimental effect on Iranian popular perceptions of the British. Ofer Israeli contends that Mosaddegh's failed attempt to nationalise the Iranian oil industry strengthened anti-imperialist feeling across the Middle East. Britain's August 1953 decision to intervene in Iranian affairs appalled policymakers from other countries in the region opposed to colonialism. The incident encouraged them to challenge and undermine other British Middle Eastern interests such as the Suez Canal. Scholars have suggested that the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis cemented the idea of 'perfidious Albion' into the Iranian popular consciousness. According to Maysam Behraves, this is a term used to describe suspicion towards British motives and intentions, the idea that Britain is involved in Iranian affairs from behind the scenes and is responsible for unfortunate events that befall Iran.<sup>166</sup>

## **Methodology, Sources and Chapter Structure**

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<sup>164</sup> Juan Romero, 'Decolonisation in Reverse: the Iranian Oil Crisis of 1951-53', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 51/3 (2015), 465.

<sup>165</sup> Romero, 'Decolonisation', 466.

<sup>166</sup> Maysam Behraves, 'The Formative Years of Anglo-Iranian Relations: Colonial Scramble for Iran and its Political Legacy', *Digest of Middle Eastern Studies*, 21/2 (2012), 391.

The literature review highlights soft power's importance to American and British policymakers and the extent to which both countries competed with one another for supremacy in the Middle East. However, an appraisal of the historiography concerning the UK, US and Iran indicates a dearth of research on British and American soft power initiatives in the country. Analyses of how Britain and the United States promoted their respective lifestyles have either been confined to the Arab world or tackle the Middle East as a whole. With regards to Iran, a significant body of literature has, instead, been dedicated to military and economic dealings between the White House and the Shah, while historians assume that Britain had a minor role in Iran after the events of August 1953. As such, prior research has neglected to examine how the UK and US interacted and competed with one another to be the dominant Western power in Iran. This thesis addresses these gaps in the literature. It will do so by answering the following questions: What were American and British policymakers' motives for seeking to improve diplomatic relations with Iran via soft power initiatives? How did the UK Foreign Office and the US State Department use cultural and propaganda initiatives to achieve their diplomatic goals in Iran? What was the nature of the policies implemented by the British Council and the United States Information Service (USIS)? How successful were the UK and US here? More broadly, what consequences did Anglo-American cultural diplomacy in Iran between 1953 and 1960 have on the UK-US 'special relationship' in the Middle East? And what implications did it have on the wider Cold War?

In seeking answers to these questions, the dissertation will adopt a thematic approach. Chapter I explores the background behind American and British cultural diplomacy in Iran. It analyses the development and nature of the UK-US 'special relationship', both countries' historic dealings with Iran and the roots of their respective cultural diplomacy programmes. The chapter proceeds to chart the development of American and British government backed initiatives in this field before August 1953.

The next two sections pay specific attention to US cultural diplomacy in Iran. Chapter II focuses on the USIS' attempts to contain Communism in Iran, as well as protect and

bolster the Shah's regime. It highlights the motives behind these objectives, as well as how these aims were achieved. The chapter discusses how the USIS forged links with certain Iranian governmental institutions to disseminate propaganda through the state broadcaster Radio Tehran. Chapter III explores how the USIS promoted the American way of life in Iran. It notes how USIS officials expanded the US-Iran exchange programme, collaborated with Iranian universities and sought to foster a culture of regular extra-curricular activities for Iran's youths.

Chapter IV proceeds to discuss how the UK Foreign Office sought to reassert themselves in Iran through working with SAVAK, the Iranian secret and intelligence service, in the production and dissemination of anti-Communist propaganda. Collaborative efforts were initially undertaken through the Baghdad Pact, a non-aggression treaty signed in 1955 between the UK, Iran, Turkey, Iraq and Pakistan. As the period progressed, though, the Foreign Office and their SAVAK counterparts would increasingly work bilaterally. Chapter V, on the other hand, focuses on UK cultural diplomacy in Iran. Outlining the British Council's 1955 return to Iran after its 1952 departure, it explains the Foreign Office's motives for relying on the agency to implement cultural initiatives on its behalf. The chapter explores the British Council's efforts in English language teaching, notably the conception and production of a programme for Iranian television titled *English by Television*. It proceeds to analyse the USIS' response to British cultural diplomacy in Iran.

Bringing the American and British sides together, Chapter VI assesses the impact of both countries' cultural diplomacy efforts in Iran between 1953 and 1960. It explores how UK and US policymakers perceived the success of their respective initiatives in this field, as well as noting some of the limitations that constrained their activities. Though not an exhaustive comparison, the chapter makes preliminary inferences on whether one country was more successful than the other, as well as whether certain sections of Iranian society were more receptive towards American and British cultural diplomacy than others. It also explores how the UK and US' respective soft power policies in Iran impacted on the Anglo-American

'special relationship', as well as how both countries' initiatives shaped the Cold War more widely.

In addressing these themes and concepts, there are two key issues that need to be considered. First, it is difficult to define the success of soft power initiatives. Due to the intangibility of many of these policies, they are difficult to measure. As Christopher Layne explains, public opinion does not make foreign policy, policymakers do. Attitudes are transient, not static, and it is difficult to establish a causal link between a state's soft power exertions and the views of targets domestically and overseas.<sup>167</sup> Second, there is a scholarly tendency to deal with hard and soft power as separate entities. This raises the question of where hard power stops and soft power starts. The literature assumes that methods of coercion, such as military intervention and economic embargoes are far removed from policies of attraction. Both foreign policy forms are instead entwined with one another. Policymakers utilise elements from both at the same time to achieve diplomatic objectives.<sup>168</sup> To alter this misconception, Nye recommends that we should refer to a combination of hard and soft diplomacy as smart power. He claims that this was frequently exercised by the Obama administration to achieve US diplomatic goals. In encouraging Iran to halt its nuclear programme, for example, a combination of economic sanctions and cultural overtures were utilised.<sup>169</sup> Meanwhile, Andras Simonyi and Judit Trunkos suggest the viewing of hard and

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<sup>167</sup> Christopher Layne, 'The Unbearable Lightness of Soft Power', in: Inderjeet Parmar and Michael Cox (eds) *Soft Power and US Foreign Policy: Theoretical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Abingdon, 2010), 56.

<sup>168</sup> Geraldo Zahran and Leonardo Ramos, 'From Hegemony to Soft Power', in: Inderjeet Parmar and Michael Cox (eds) *Soft Power and US Foreign Policy: Theoretical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Abingdon, 2010), 13-15.

<sup>169</sup> Joseph Nye, 'Smart Power', *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 26/2 (2009), 7.

soft power through a 'spectral lens', with each foreign policy form at either end.<sup>170</sup> As a country's diplomatic initiatives would be situated in the middle of this spectrum, they claim that this would enable a better understanding of both foreign policy tools and the relationship between the different elements of international affairs.<sup>171</sup>

These issues can be explained by the fact that there has not been enough focus on policies of persuasion and attraction from a historical perspective. As soft power was a concept devised and elucidated by political scientists, more literature exists on soft power from an international relations standpoint. While scholars from both fields examine global developments, they do so in different ways. Colin and Miriam Elman explain the general differences between diplomatic history and international relations. Diplomatic historians generally seek to explain singular events, arguing that outcomes occur due to the congruence of several factors at once. Historians, as such, are wary of making predictions about the future and favour narrative and context-based explanations to concepts and events.<sup>172</sup> In comparison, the arguments of international relations scholars are founded on theory. Researchers in this field are more willing to make predictions, advise political elites on policy and examine multiple cases in order to determine more universal 'truths' about political life.<sup>173</sup>

However, as Jack Levy explains, history and international relations should be regarded as two ends of a spectrum, with most scholars of both disciplines operating

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<sup>170</sup> Andras Simonyi and Judit Trunkos, 'Eliminating the Hard/Soft Power Dichotomy', in: Aude Jehan and Andras Simonyi (eds), *Smarter Powers: The Key to a Strategic Transatlantic Partnership*, (Washington, 2015), 22-25.

<sup>171</sup> Simonyi and Trunkos, 'Eliminating', 27-29.

<sup>172</sup> Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius-Elman, 'Diplomatic History and International Relations Theory: Respecting Difference and Crossing Boundaries', *International Security* 22/1 (1997), 6-9.

<sup>173</sup> Elman and Elman, 'Diplomatic History', 9-12.

somewhere in the middle.<sup>174</sup> While retaining historical methods, this dissertation will incorporate theory by international relations scholars on the concept of soft power. British and American government papers, particularly those of institutions such as the British Council and USIA, will provide answers to this project's research questions and support its arguments. More broadly, such documents will highlight the complexities of this particular case study and the differences in the use of soft power in theory and in practice.

The examination of both British and American soft power in Iran means that primary research has been undertaken in both the UK and US. The thesis focuses on American and British cultural diplomacy, particularly the nature of the policies pursued and policymakers' perceptions of their success. As such, there is little scope for research to be undertaken on the Iranian side. The majority of the research undertaken on the UK aspects of this project was at the National Archives in Kew. The British Council and Foreign Office papers formed the bulk of the primary evidence for the UK side of this thesis. The former highlighted the nature of the agency's 1952 departure from Iran, as well as its return in 1955. The documents reveal the motives for UK cultural diplomacy, the nature of the initiatives employed and their perceived success. The annual reports, notably, provide a fascinating insight into Britain's response towards American soft power initiatives. Interaction between British Council and Foreign Office officials convey the UK's frustration at the superior resources of the US and its seemingly greater success at attracting Iranians towards American norms, ideas and lifestyles. Papers from the Foreign Office's Political and Cultural Relations departments complemented the British Council records, illustrating the government department's input in shaping the agency's activities in Iran. Documents from the BBC's Written Archives Centre in Reading were also consulted to assess the BBC Persian Service's contribution to British cultural efforts.

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<sup>174</sup> Jack Levy, 'Explaining Events and Developing Theories: History, Political Science and the Analysis of International Relations', in: Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius-Elman (eds) *Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists and the Study of International Relations* (London, 2001).

On the American side, research was undertaken at the National Archives at College Park, Maryland. The US State Department's papers identify the motives behind American cultural diplomacy in Iran. The documents highlight the State Department officials' determination to combat Communism in Iran and change popular political and cultural perceptions of the United States. They also underline some of the key cultural and propaganda initiatives by the USIS on the USIA's behalf. Documents illuminate the State Department and Embassy's input here, as well as the extent of the collaboration with Iranian governmental officials. Moreover, the National Archives house documents belonging to the two agencies responsible for US soft power in Iran, the USIA and its constituent organisation, the USIS. These papers highlight how the agency used, among other things, cultural exchanges, Iranian universities and Radio Tehran to combat Communism and promote the American way of life. The documentary record also enables judgements on the American use of soft power in the country to be made. Not only do these sources highlight the role of these actors in the making, shaping and delivery of foreign policy, but they will also indicate whether certain societal groups were more receptive towards US cultural overtures than others. Complementing this, the NSC and OCB papers from the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library in Abilene, Kansas, place American cultural diplomacy in Iran in its wider context. The documents here provide a background to the motives and objectives of US foreign policy in Iran. They proffer explanations as to why White House and State Department figures paid so much attention to shaping the views of Iranian people. To strengthen and support the findings from both these archives, oral histories from the Association of Diplomatic Studies and Training's project were used. With interviews from key USIS and Embassy personnel, these provide a personal perspective on the American cultural initiatives employed in Iran.

To assess these Anglo-American cultural and soft power overtures, reports from *Ettelat* (Information), one of Iran's most prominent newspapers in this era, were used. Located on microfilm in the British Library, they provide an insight into the reception of British and American cultural initiatives at an elite and popular level. As the newspaper was



controlled by the state, reports provide some insight into the Iranian establishment's response to UK and US cultural diplomacy. They also underline the Iranian public's reception towards exhibitions and other events organised by the British Council and USIS.

The analysis of British and American soft power in Iran between 1953 and 1960 makes three key contributions, each of which is revisited in the Conclusion. First, it views Anglo-American relations with Iran through the prism of soft power. This is an original take on the topic. Previous research has emphasised economic and military interactions between the UK, US and Iran. Second, the thesis explores how Britain and the United States responded to the changes in their respective global positions. During this period, the UK was a declining power, crippled by the financial cost of the Second World War and was in the process of relinquishing most of its overseas colonies. The US, in comparison, was a booming superpower, taking a greater interest in the struggle against Communism in regions such as the Middle East. Finally, it highlights the tensions and competitive element of Anglo-American relations in the Middle East. Both countries, while collaborating in many fields, had similar aims but different regional priorities. The project points out the ways in which they co-operated and competed with one another for regional supremacy.

**Chapter I - The ‘Special Relationship’, the Cold War and Soft  
Power: The Motives Behind Greater American and British Cultural  
Diplomacy in Iran**

*‘We saw Turkey on the one hand, and Pakistan on the other. Each was fairly stable and with some strength, and Iran was in the middle. That was our picture of the Middle East; so, Iran was very important to us. It was the soft underbelly of Russia.’<sup>1</sup>*

Henry Byroade, the US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs between 1952 and 1955, served in this role at a tumultuous time for Iran’s relations with the United States and Britain. Not only were British and American officials forced to contend with the fallout from the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis, but it was also the period in which America took Britain’s place as the dominant Western power in the country. Due to the country’s geographic proximity to the USSR, American and British officials regarded diplomatic ties with Iran as crucial, as Byroade noted in the quote above. With these aforementioned developments in mind, he argued that US policy should move beyond ‘just preserving’ the country from the Soviets. In strengthening America’s ties with Iran, a ‘dangerous gap’ between Europe and Asia would be closed. It would form a barrier to Soviet expansionism, preventing the USSR’s influence from transcending regions.<sup>2</sup> Byroade’s views were shaped by his formative years

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Byroade interviewed by Niel M. Johnson, 19 September 1988, Arlington, Virginia, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, [http://www.adst.org/OH\\_TOCs/Byroade,Henry.toc.pdf](http://www.adst.org/OH_TOCs/Byroade,Henry.toc.pdf) (accessed 11 April 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Henry Byroade interviewed by Niel M. Johnson, 19 September 1988, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, [http://www.adst.org/OH\\_TOCs/Byroade,Henry.toc.pdf](http://www.adst.org/OH_TOCs/Byroade,Henry.toc.pdf) (accessed 11 April 2019); Telegram from Henry Byroade (Bureau of

as a military officer. During the Second World War, he presided over the building of airbases in the Pacific. After the conflict, Byroade became a senior figure in the mission to China headed by the US General, George Marshall. The diplomatic endeavour aimed to reconcile warring Chinese Communists and Nationalists to form a united government. The Marshall Mission's failure, coupled with the 1949 'loss of China' to Soviet-inspired Communists, hardened Byroade. Not only was he acutely conscious of how political and transnational forces could subvert nation states, but also, he was aware of how and why people were attracted to Communism.<sup>3</sup>

Byroade's close friend, the then US Ambassador to Iran, Loy Henderson, shared his views. The two had built a close rapport in the late 1940s while working in the State Department. Byroade had been the Director of the Bureau of German Affairs, while Henderson had been at the Bureau for Near Eastern and African Affairs. With little-to-no experience of the Middle East when appointed to his current role, Byroade had relied on his friend to advise him on regional matters. Henderson had underlined the importance of engaging with Iran to maintain geopolitical stability in the Middle East. Both feared that if the country succumbed to Communism, the ideology would spread to the Arab world and the Indian Subcontinent. They, accordingly, viewed US cultural diplomacy in Iran as the best means to prevent the expansion of Soviet influence in the region. Byroade and Henderson were convinced that once Iranians were aware of the superior living standards and the

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Near Eastern Affairs) to the State Department, 15 October 1953, College Park, Maryland, National Archives II (hereafter document, date, NAI), US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Political Relations (1950-1954).

<sup>3</sup> Henry Byroade interviewed by Niel M. Johnson, 19 September 1988, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, <http://www.adst.org/OH/TOCs/Byroade,Henry.toc.pdf> (accessed 11 April 2019).

enhanced socio-economic opportunities in the 'free world', they would be less inclined towards Communism.<sup>4</sup>

Both Byroade and Henderson were among the initial exponents of the need to expand US cultural diplomacy in Iran after 1953. Their respective State Department and ambassadorial roles provided them with the authority and credibility to push this strategy through and make it a reality. American and British cultural diplomacy programmes had been in place in Iran and elsewhere before 1953. Each country's initiatives in this field were shaped by the actions of the other. As well as providing a methodological and theoretical framework for this thesis, the previous chapter reviewed the literature on Anglo-American interactions with Iran and the Middle East. The aim of this chapter, though, is to provide a contextualisation and historical background to this thesis. It pays specific attention to the UK-US 'special relationship', America and Britain's historic ties and interests with Iran, as well as their respective soft power policies. Charting proceedings prior to August 1953, it outlines how both countries' geopolitical motives compelled them to employ the United States Information Service (USIS) and the British Council respectively to foster cultural ties with Iran. The first section examines the Anglo-American 'special relationship' and the Cold War. Specifically, this explores the origins of the UK and US' ties in the nineteenth century, how these developed before and during the First World War and how both nations shared a similar worldview by the Cold War's onset. The section proceeds to chart both countries' respective fortunes on the world stage after 1945.

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Byroade interviewed by Niel M. Johnson, 19 September 1988, Arlington, Virginia, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, [http://www.adst.org/OH\\_TOCs/Byroade,Henry.toc.pdf](http://www.adst.org/OH_TOCs/Byroade,Henry.toc.pdf) (accessed 11 April 2019); Loy Henderson interviewed by Richard McKinzie, 14 June 1973, Independence, Missouri, The Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum, <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/henderson.htm> (accessed 11 April 2019).

The second part of the chapter explores the UK and US' prior diplomatic dealings with Iran. From the late Eighteenth Century, the former had significant interests in Iranian affairs. Desperate to ensure geopolitical stability for their Indian and Suez concessions, the British frequently intervened in Iran's politics. The US, conversely, only dedicated significant attention to its relations with the country during the Cold War. With the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, wary of Communist incursions into Iran, the US had a vital ally in fighting the superpower struggle in the Middle East. The third section analyses British and American soft power more broadly. It charts the development of these initiatives, traditionally implemented by religious groups and non-state actors on the UK and US' behalf, into a key tenet of Anglo-American foreign policy. The transformation here was influenced by a fear of Communism, compounded by the realisation that producing their own soft power policies would enable both countries to conduct public diplomacy abroad. The fourth and final part considers UK and US cultural diplomacy in Iran before 1953. The former was more longstanding, with the British Council and BBC Persian Service in operation from 1934 and 1941 respectively. American cultural diplomacy in Iran, comparably, developed significantly during the early years of the Cold War, as part of the Truman administration's broader efforts to contain Communism globally. As the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis progressed, the British Council was forced to leave Iran, while the US Embassy had to radically alter their soft power policies.

### **The Origins of the 'Special Relationship' and the Cold War**

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Britain and the United States have shared a close, unique relationship. Prior to this, ties between both nations had been convivial and intertwined, yet tense. Between 1775 and 1783, the US had fought for independence from Britain and was eager to maintain its territorial sovereignty and autonomy. Its thirst for imperial expansion, moreover, brought it into conflict with the British Empire. Across the nineteenth century, US officials resisted the UK's attempts to secure more colonies in the Americas. Opposition to European – notably British – attempts to further colonise the

Western hemisphere compelled the then President James Monroe to devise the Monroe Doctrine. In a December 1823 speech to Congress, he referred to the Americas as falling within the US' sphere of influence, urging European powers to withdraw from the continent.<sup>5</sup> Closer to America's borders, moreover, both nations frequently clashed over America's westward expansion. Since declaring independence from the British, the US and its people had sought to move beyond the 13 colonies on the east coast, across the American plains to the Pacific seaboard. Britain had resisted these territorial acquisitions on the grounds that it endangered their Canadian interests. These fears were only allayed with the signing of the 1846 Oregon Treaty. The agreement set the boundary between America and Canada, with all territory below the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel belonging to the United States and shared ownership of the Great Lakes in the upper east mid-region of North America.<sup>6</sup>

Despite these geopolitical tensions, both the US and the UK were tied together economically and culturally. Throughout the nineteenth century, both countries were prominent trading partners, most notably in agricultural products such as cotton. Up until the US Civil War's onset in 1861, mills in the British counties of Yorkshire and Lancashire solely relied on cotton grown through slave labour in America's south.<sup>7</sup> Long after recognising its independence, Britain's culture retained a stranglehold over the American populace. For much of the 1800s, middle and upper classes across the US' east coast looked to British fashion trends and literature. Many deemed the consumption of these as a symbol of high status, contributing towards the rising public demand for American household products from the 1870s onwards.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ernest May, *The Making of the Monroe Doctrine* (Cambridge, 1975), 55; Jay Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth Century America* (New York, 2011), 3-5.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Hixson, *American Foreign Relations: A New Diplomatic History* (Abingdon, 2015), 65.

<sup>7</sup> Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A New History of Global Capitalism* (London, 2015), 242-245.

<sup>8</sup> Kristin Hoganson, 'Cosmopolitan Domesticity: Importing the American Dream', *The American Historical Review*, 107/1 (2002), 80-81.

From the US Civil War's aftermath, though, Anglo-American ties increasingly strayed beyond the economic and cultural into the political. Between 1865 and 1900, the US transformed from an agrarian into an industrial economy like Britain. Both countries, accordingly, shared a desire to protect, expand and invent new global markets for goods. Anglo-US political interests further converged after the 1898 Spanish-American War. The American government's assistance to Cubans in their fight for independence from Spain compelled Spanish forces to declare war on the US. A succession of naval victories between April and August 1898 forced Spain to cede Cuba, Guam, Hawaii and the Philippines to the US.<sup>9</sup> Now possessing overseas imperial territories, an industrial economy and a shared cultural heritage, UK and US officials increasingly worked together on the world stage to achieve and develop these mutual interests. The first successful Anglo-American diplomatic endeavour was the building of the Panama Canal. The construction of a shipping route to negate the need for merchants to circumnavigate the perilous Cape Horn in South America to reach the other side of the US coastline had been an oft-stated policy goal. British and French attempts, however, to build such a route had been costly and disastrous. In 1901, Britain permitted the US the right to build a canal through Central America to connect the Atlantic and Pacific shipping routes.<sup>10</sup>

Events during the two world wars in the first half of the twentieth century served to cement and further Anglo-American political and economic mutual interests. The sinking of UK and US ships by German U-boats in the First World War did not just hinder UK and US Atlantic trade, but also resulted in many casualties. By 1917, the increasing loss of life and damage to commerce, combined with the increasing American public backlash, compelled

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<sup>9</sup> Alvita Akiboh, 'Pocket-Sized Imperialism: US Designs on Colonial Currency', *Diplomatic History*, 41/5 (2017), 874-876.

<sup>10</sup> Alan Dobson, *Anglo-American Relations in the Twentieth Century: The Policy and Diplomacy of Friendly Superpowers* (London, 1995), 5-7.

the US to side with Britain and declare war on Germany.<sup>11</sup> During the Second World War, likewise, both governments cooperated with one another to combat and curtail the expansionist policies of Germany and Japan. It was during this conflict that the notion of an Anglo-American 'special relationship' supposedly became a reality. Erstwhile Conservative Party leader, and former British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill coined the term in 1946. It originated from his 'Iron Curtain' speech he gave at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri as part of a speaking tour across America. Churchill argued here that the UK and US possessed a 'special relationship' due to both governments' near identical military, political and economic aims.<sup>12</sup>

Both countries' similar visions for the post-war international system became apparent towards the Second World War's end. Eager to be the main economic beneficiaries of the post-1945 world order, the UK and US established global institutions and treaties to encourage free trade. The 1944 Bretton Woods system agreed by Japan, Australia, North American and Western European powers maintained favourable currency exchange rates, tying the US dollar to the value of gold. The agreement here also led to the establishment of the World Bank, an institution that promoted foreign investment and international trade by providing loans to developing world countries. Just three years later, the success of these initiatives encouraged the Bretton Woods signatories, among others, to agree to the General

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<sup>11</sup> Jennifer Keene, 'A "Brutalizing" War? The USA After the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 50/1 (2015), 79.

<sup>12</sup> Winston Churchill, 'Sinews of Peace', 5 March 1946, <https://www.winstonchurchill.org/re-sources/speeches/1946-1963-elder-statesman/the-sinews-of-peace/> (accessed 10 January 2018). As well as making the phrase 'special relationship' part of popular political discourse, the speech is also famous for introducing the term 'Iron Curtain' for describing the difference between the Soviet backed Central and Eastern European states and the US-backed European nations in the West.



Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The treaty called for the reduction of trade barriers to foster free global trade.<sup>13</sup>

The Cold War's onset consolidated the sense of an Anglo-American 'special relationship.' Having annexed Eastern Europe and imposed Communist governments on the region's nations, UK and US officials feared that the Soviet Union desired to further expand its influence. The British and American governments, moreover, were concerned that the Soviet Union's emphasis on state ownership would jeopardise their attempts to foster a world economy driven by low tariffs and free trade.<sup>14</sup> Developments on the world stage by the late 1940s exacerbated their concerns. On 22 September 1949, the Soviet Union successfully tested an atomic bomb, a capability only the US had hitherto possessed. Having used such weapons on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, American officials presumed it would be 10-15 years before the Soviets possessed nuclear capabilities. Now that the USSR had access to atomic bombs, the US could no longer rely on its supposed superior weapons arsenal to deter and contain the Soviet Union.<sup>15</sup> Further shaking Anglo-American interests and influence on the world stage was the October 1949 loss of mainland China to Communism. Since 1927, left-wing revolutionaries led by Mao Tse-tung had wrestled for control of the country with US-backed Nationalists fronted by Chang Kai-shek. Presuming the latter would emerge victorious, American and British officials assumed China would play a vital role in fighting the Cold War in Southeast Asia. The country's 'loss' to Communism, combined with Mao's February 1950 signing of the

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<sup>13</sup> Eric Helleiner, *Forgotten Foundations of Bretton Woods: International Development and the Making of the Postwar Order* (London, 2014), 29-31.

<sup>14</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War* (New York, 2000), 283; Richard Wevill, *Britain and America After World War II: Bilateral Relations and the Beginnings of the Cold War* (London, 2012), 5-7.

<sup>15</sup> Campbell Craig and Sergey Radchenko, *The Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War* (Yale, 2008), 73-75.

Treaty of Sino-Soviet Friendship, meant that the UK and US had to play a larger role in combating Communism in Asia.<sup>16</sup>

In response to these Cold War developments, American and British officials further cemented their geopolitical ties. They regarded the Anglo-American 'special relationship' as the most efficient way to overcome Soviet-inspired Communism. Through sharing similar foreign policy perspectives, the UK and US could also exert combined diplomatic pressure on other global actors or persuade or coerce them to do their bidding.<sup>17</sup> Both countries, notably, worked to counter the Communist threat to West Berlin. Between June 1948 and May 1949, the Soviet Union had imposed a blockade on rail, road and canal routes into the city. The embargo was in response to Anglo-American attempts to reform and strengthen Germany's economy. UK and US officials responded by approving the supply of food, coal, water and medicine to the city's people by air. Lasting nearly six months, the Berlin airlift's success forced the Soviet Union to reopen the routes into the city.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, to deter and contain Soviet incursions in Asia and Africa, the UK and US maintained a military presence in these regions. The British, thanks to their naval base in the Persian Gulf, focused on the defence of the Middle East and North Africa. The Americans, in part motivated by their desire to bolster their standing in the Pacific, concerned themselves with preserving

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<sup>16</sup> Deborah Kaple, 'Agents of Change: Soviet Advisers and High Stalinist Management in China, 1949-1960', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 18/1 (2016), 5-7; Lorenz Luthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton, 2008), 24-31.

<sup>17</sup> David Reynolds, 'A "Special Relationship"? America, Britain and the International Order Since the Second World War', *International Affairs*, 62/1 (1985), 1-20.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Harrington, *Berlin on the Brink: The Blockade, Airlift and the Early Cold War* (Kentucky, 2012), 293-295.

Southeast Asia from Communism.<sup>19</sup> Beyond military matters, UK and US intelligence agencies also fostered close ties. The British SIS and the American CIA worked closely together to subversively undermine pro-Communist governments and share intelligence.<sup>20</sup>

At the outset of their collaborative efforts during the Second World War, both countries were prominent global powers. As the post-war era progressed, however, it became increasingly clear that the United States was the 'senior partner.' The disparity in Anglo-American relations can be explained by both countries' contrasting fortunes after 1945. An imperial power for the previous two centuries, Britain was now facing political and economic decline. In seeking to secure a greater number of overseas territories, the UK had overstretched itself.<sup>21</sup> The Second World War highlighted the British Empire's unsustainability. The cost of protecting Britain's borders, as well as mounting military campaigns in Europe, North Africa and Asia, forced the UK government to accept considerable loans from their American counterparts.<sup>22</sup> An inability to juggle repayments with the cost of their global commitments forced the British to begin relinquishing their overseas territories and responsibilities. In 1947, UK officials were forced to concede to their American counterparts that they could no longer provide military and economic assistance to the Greek and Turkish governments. Fearful that both countries would succumb to Communism,

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<sup>19</sup> William Taylor Fain, *American Ascendance and British Retreat in the Persian Gulf Region* (Basingstoke, 2008), 4-6; William Wallace and Christopher Phillips, 'Reassessing the "Special Relationship"', *International Affairs*, 85/2 (2009), 270.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (London, 2001), 55.

<sup>21</sup> Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire* (London, 2008), 52; Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism, 1850-1995* (London, 1996), 344-347; William Wallace, 'The Collapse of British Foreign Policy', *International Affairs*, 81/1 (2005), 55.

<sup>22</sup> Corelli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power* (London, 1972), 579-581; David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1991), 52.

US President Harry Truman devised the Truman Doctrine. He asked Congress for permission to provide Greece and Turkey with military and economic support in Britain's place.<sup>23</sup>

In contrast, having been a regional power with considerable standing in East Asia and Latin America since the nineteenth century, the US was now a superpower with a global reach. The country emerged from the Second World War as the world's best performing economy, with its government's success in establishing a post-war world order enhancing the US' global standing. The country's involvement in international affairs was boosted further by its determination to combat Communism globally. To prevent the Soviet Union from expanding its influence into Western Europe, US officials agreed in 1948 to implement the Marshall Plan. To dissuade the region's people from turning to Communism, the programme pledged considerable economic aid and expertise to rebuild war-torn Western Europe.<sup>24</sup> America's commitment to fight the Cold War globally was enshrined in April 1950 when Truman approved NSC Document 68. Established in 1948, the NSC met to discuss pressing foreign policy and national security issues. Meetings were comprised of White House, Cabinet, State Department, intelligence and military figures, with policy papers and proposals produced as a result of their discussions.<sup>25</sup> Fully titled 'US objectives and programmes for national security', NSC 68 called for the US to commit to containing Communism by involving itself in world affairs. It was only through American involvement

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<sup>23</sup> Dobson, *Anglo-American Relations*, 83-84.

<sup>24</sup> Melvyn Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration and the Cold War* (Stanford, 1992), 182-185.

<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Spalding, *The First Cold Warrior: Harry Truman, Containment, and the Remaking of Liberal Internationalism* (Lexington, 2006), 231.

across the globe that the Soviet Union's aggressive, expansionist tendencies could be curtailed.<sup>26</sup>

In achieving mutual diplomatic goals, the United States increasingly played a prominent role, with the UK supporting and supplementing American-led initiatives. The shift in the balance of power towards the US in the 'special relationship' was illustrated in the 1949 talks to establish NATO. The institution aimed to bring together North American and Western European nations to coordinate on military, security and intelligence matters, pledging to directly assist one another should they be attacked by the Soviet Union.<sup>27</sup> While the UK and US jointly conceived this regional defence arrangement, it was the latter that encouraged and contributed most to NATO initiatives. American officials also played a greater role in persuading the institution's other members to adopt a stronger stance against the Soviet Union.<sup>28</sup>

Such developments inevitably caused tensions within the Anglo-American 'special relationship.' Despite the country's political and economic decline, Britain still sought to maintain its prominent international standing. British diplomats and officials envisioned themselves as ideally situated between the 'three circles' of Europe, the Commonwealth and the United States. While the country's political and economic clout had clearly diminished, its foreign policy aims remained the same. UK officials were in the process of identifying ways

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<sup>26</sup> 'US Objectives and Programmes for National Security (NSC 68)', 12 April 1950, Independence, Missouri, The Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum, [https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study\\_collections/coldwar/documents/pdf/10-1.pdf](https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/coldwar/documents/pdf/10-1.pdf) (accessed 12 April 2019); Spalding, *The First Cold Warrior*, 233-235.

<sup>27</sup> Timothy Andrews Sayle, "A Great List of Potential Mistakes": NATO, Africa and British Efforts to Limit the Global Cold War', *Cold War History*, 16/1 (2016), 19; John Baylis, *The Diplomacy of Pragmatism: Britain and the Formation of NATO, 1942-49* (Kent, 1993), 5.

<sup>28</sup> John Kent, 'NATO, Cold War and the End of Empire', in: Gustav Schmidt (ed) *A History of NATO: The First Fifty Years* (Basingstoke, 2001), 141-152.

in which Britain could retain its international presence in spite of its reduced means.<sup>29</sup> Their American counterparts, by contrast, were happy with this unequal balance of power in the 'special relationship.' It enabled the US to act unilaterally if convenient, and bilaterally if its interests coincided with the UK's. Such freedom of manoeuvre meant that the pitfalls of cooperating with other nations, such as striking compromises when both actors' aims clashed, did not occur.<sup>30</sup> Many American diplomats and officials, moreover, were opposed to European-style imperialism. Not only would colonial expansion diminish America's international standing, but it also went against the US' supposed founding principles which emphasised the need for states to be governed by democratic consent. In seeking to reassert itself on the world stage, the US government feared that Britain still harboured ambitions to be an imperial power.<sup>31</sup>

Equally, while they possessed, and worked towards achieving, mutual foreign policy goals, the UK and US' contrasting global fortunes meant their priorities often differed. Often, this resulted in Britain and the United States adopting different policies in particular regions. Anglo-American attempts to secure geopolitical objectives in the Middle East were a case in point. As approximately 90% of Britain's oil supplies came from the Middle East, the British government were more concerned with the economic implications of the Communist threat in the region. They feared that any pro-Soviet regime that came to power in the Middle East would seek to disrupt the supply of Middle Eastern oil. Such developments would initiate a

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<sup>29</sup> David Dilks, *Retreat from Power: Studies in Britain's Foreign Policy of the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke, 1981); Geoffrey Fry, *The Politics of Decline: An Interpretation of British Politics from the 1940s to the 1970s* (Basingstoke, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> Ray Takeyh, *The Origins of the Eisenhower Doctrine: The US, Britain and Nasser's Egypt, 1953-57* (Basingstoke, 2000), 16; Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (North Carolina, 2004).

<sup>31</sup> Nigel Ashton, 'The Hijacking of a Pact: The Formation of the Baghdad Pact and Anglo-American Tensions in the Middle East, 1955-58', *Review of International Studies*, 19 (1993), 123-137.

multiplier effect, encouraging any Persian Gulf and Arab neighbours to be less amenable towards British demands for the resource, too. Foreign Office officials instead accordingly strove to ensure the safe supply of the resource from the region. After 1945, they paid significant attention to maintaining and bolstering the pro-British Iraqi monarchy, which controlled vast oilfields in the south of the country.<sup>32</sup> The American government, in contrast, placed a greater priority on fighting the Cold War in the region. Relying on its own oil supplies in Alaska, Texas and the Gulf of Mexico in this period, the US had little need for Middle Eastern oil. It, therefore, paid greater attention to curtailing and combating Communism more generally in the region. With the Iraqi government looking more towards Britain for support, the US instead pledged considerable economic and military aid to Saudi Arabia. State Department officials envisioned that the country's anti-Communist ruling regime would provide a strong pro-Western bulwark to the spread of Soviet-inspired Communism in the Middle East.<sup>33</sup>

### **Iran's Importance to British and American Foreign Policy Goals**

The UK and US' cooperative, tense and competitive relationship is illustrated in how both nations sought to boost ties with Iran in the 1950s. The country had been crucial to British foreign policy objectives in the Middle East since the late eighteenth century. Initially, Britain's interest in Iranian affairs was primarily geopolitical. The country fell between the Suez Canal and the Indian Subcontinent, two regions of increasing colonial and economic

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<sup>32</sup> Zach Levey, 'Britain's Middle East Strategy, 1950-52: General Brian Robertson and the "Small" Arab States', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 40/2 (2004), 63-65.

<sup>33</sup> Patrick Conge and Gwenn Okruhlik, 'The Power of Narrative: Saudi Arabia, the United States and the Search for Security', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 36/3 (2009), 361.

importance to the UK.<sup>34</sup> From 1790 onwards, the Royal Navy maintained a permanent presence in the Persian Gulf, while the Foreign Office sought to strengthen ties with Iran's ruling Qajar dynasty.<sup>35</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, Britain's Iranian interests were challenged by the Russian Empire's growing presence in central and southern Asia. Foreign Office officials suspected Russia of using its newly gained territories in modern day Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan as a platform from which to expand into India and the Middle East.<sup>36</sup> As a regional power straddling these two areas of interest, Iran quickly became integral to the Anglo-Russian 'Great Game' for Asian dominance. Beginning in the 1860s, officials from both imperial powers sought to accrue as many Iranian commercial concessions as possible.<sup>37</sup> The UK and Russia's carving up of Iran's infrastructure and resources culminated in a 1907 treaty between the two imperial powers, the terms of which divided Iran into two spheres of influence. Britain would concern itself with affairs in the south of the country, while Russia would focus on the north.<sup>38</sup>

With the 1908 discovery of oil in the Khuzestan region of southwest Iran, the Foreign Office began to prioritise Anglo-Iranian relations for economic reasons. Britain needed supplies of the resource and it was apparent that Iran had it in abundance.<sup>39</sup> Backed by the

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<sup>34</sup> Firouz Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia: Imperial Ambitions in Qajar Iran* (London, 2013), 581-583.

<sup>35</sup> Fain, *American Ascendance and British Retreat*, 4-6.

<sup>36</sup> Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia*, 562.

<sup>37</sup> Elena Andreeva, *Russia and Iran in the Great Game: Travelogues and Orientalism* (New York, 2007), 3-5.

<sup>38</sup> Andreeva, *Russia and Iran in the Great Game*, 9; Ali Ansari, *Confronting Iran: The Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Roots of Mistrust* (London, 2006), 19; Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia*, 17.

<sup>39</sup> Mark Sedgwick, 'Britain and the Middle East: in Pursuit of Eternal Interests', in: Jack Covarrubias (ed) *Strategic Interests in the Middle East: Opposition or Support for US Foreign Policy* (Abingdon,



British government, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) quickly secured a monopoly over the country's oil industry that it enjoyed until 1953.<sup>40</sup> Whenever these economic interests were threatened, Britain directly intervened in Iranian affairs. By the 1920s, Foreign Office officials suspected the ruling monarch, Ahmad Shah Qajar, was not sufficiently protecting British oil interests in Iran. Between 1921 and 1926, they provided considerable assistance to cavalry colonel Reza Khan's successful campaign to seize the Iranian throne.<sup>41</sup> In August 1941, moreover, British armed forces, in tandem with their Soviet counterparts, invaded central and southern Iran. Both countries' governments were concerned that Shah Reza Khan was going to side with the Axis powers and deprive the Allied forces of the oil they needed to fight the Second World War. They replaced the Iranian monarch with his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, deeming him more accommodating towards their oil interests.<sup>42</sup>

From the beginning of the Cold War after 1945, US government officials started to place greater importance on ties with Iran. As well as being a vital oil source, the Shah's opposition to Communism made him a crucial ally in the struggle against the Soviet Union in the region.<sup>43</sup> It was for this reason that the United States began to pay considerable attention towards Iranian affairs. Previously, US-Iran interactions had been confined to a series of American private missions that visited Tehran at the Iranian government's behest in the 1890s and early 1900s. Officials in Iran had requested the US' help with modernising practices in its Treasury as it did not want to cede control of the country's finances to the

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2017), 3; Ian Speller, 'A Splutter of Musketry? The British Military Response to the Anglo-Iranian Oil Dispute, 1951', *Contemporary British History*, 17/1 (2003), 39.

<sup>40</sup> Steve Marsh, *Anglo-American Relations and Cold War Oil* (Basingstoke, 2003), 75.

<sup>41</sup> Muhammad Gholi Majd, *Great Britain and Reza Shah: The Plunder of Iran* (Gainesville, 2001), 7-9.

<sup>42</sup> Jennifer Jenkins, 'Iran in the Nazi New Order, 1933-1941', *Iranian Studies*, 49/5 (2016), 728-29.

<sup>43</sup> Douglas Little, 'The Cold War in the Middle East: from the Suez Crisis to the Camp David Accords', in: Melvyn Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds) *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume Two: Crisis and Détente* (Cambridge, 2010), 324-326.

British or Russians.<sup>44</sup> The high value American policymakers placed on US-Iran relations in the early Cold War stems from discussions during NSC meetings and from the policy papers devised as a result of these dialogues. These placed great emphasis on Iran's role in fighting the Cold War in the Middle East.<sup>45</sup> Containing and combating the spread of Communism in this region was a high priority to the NSC. Much of the world's oil supplies and shipping routes, notably the Suez Canal, were located in the Middle East. Its region and surroundings were also of military and religious significance. The US and Royal Navy maintained a permanent presence in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf respectively, while the region contained many Christian, Jewish and Moslem Holy places. As parts of the Middle East bordered the Soviet Union, the USSR sought to increase its influence here, undermining these Anglo-American interests in the process.<sup>46</sup>

UK and US policymakers regarded close ties with Iran as crucial to achieving and securing these regional objectives. They were helped by the Shah's enthusiasm for greater dealings with Britain and the United States. From his 1941 ascension to the throne, the Shah had courted Anglo-American economic and military assistance. He regarded considerable UK and US support as key to his attempts to modernise Iran's infrastructure, and westernise its society. In so doing, the Iranian monarch hoped to leave a country for his successor that was on a social and economic par to Western European nations.<sup>47</sup> Militarily, moreover, the Shah envisioned Iran as a state with the potential to be a substantial power on the global

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<sup>44</sup> Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, 16-18.

<sup>45</sup> A report to the NSC on the United States' policy regarding the present situation in Iran, 7 September 1952, Abilene, Kansas, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library (hereafter document, date, DDEL), White House Office, NSC Series, Policy Papers.

<sup>46</sup> United States interests and objectives in respect of the Near East (NSC 155/1), 14 July 1953, DDEL, White House Office, NSC Series, Policy Papers.

<sup>47</sup> A report to the NSC on the United States' policy regarding the present situation in Iran, 7 September 1952, DDEL, White House Office, NSC Series, Policy Papers.

stage. Through investment in military equipment and training, the Iranian monarch hoped to transform his country into a regional bulwark with the capabilities to police the Arab world and the Persian Gulf.<sup>48</sup>

The Shah's vision and approach directly contrasted with the stance taken by most other Middle Eastern governments. As well as the pro-Soviet Syrian and Afghani governments, newly independent Arab nationalist regimes in Egypt and Syria were also particularly hostile to the UK and US' regional presence. Influential proponents of this anti-Western ideology, such as the then Egyptian Prime Minister Gamal Abdel Nasser, sought to undermine the regimes of key Anglo-American allies in the region like the Shah. Within months of his 1952 ascension to power, Nasser encouraged domestic dissent and unrest towards the Iranian monarchy. He helped establish Radio Cairo, an Arabic language broadcaster aimed at appealing to overseas audiences. Targeting Arab and Kurdish peoples living in Iran, its news and current affairs content was particularly critical of the Iranian monarch. Programmes would depict the Shah as a ruler indifferent to the plight of non-ethnic Iranians, highlighting the better treatment of Arab and Kurdish peoples in other Middle Eastern countries and Soviet held territories. Broadcasts would also foster self-identity among these peoples by playing notable folk songs and anthems daily.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> For discussions of bilateral US-Iran military and economic dealings, please consult: James Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iran Relations* (New Haven, 1988); Mark Gasiorowski, *The United States and the Shah: Building a Client State in Iran* (New York, 1999); Mark Lytle, *The Origins of the Iranian-American Alliance, 1941-53* (New York, 1987).

<sup>49</sup> Memorandum of conversation between the President and the Shah of Iran, 30 June 1958, Oxford, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960, Near East Region; Iraq; Iran; Arabian Peninsula, Volume XII* (hereafter document, date, *FRUS*, year, volume); Memorandum of conversation between the President, William Rountree (Bureau of Near Eastern and African Affairs), the Shah of Iran and Dr Ali Ardalan (Iranian Ambassador to the United States), 1 July 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Volume XII*; Memorandum of discussion at the 379<sup>th</sup> meeting of the National Security Council, 18 September 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Volume XII*.

Therefore, to British and American policymakers, strong ties with Iran became even more important than before. UK officials were especially concerned about how the spread of nationalism and Communism across the Middle East would affect their oil interests in the region. By the early 1950s, approximately three quarters of Britain's supplies of the resource came from Iran, so they were determined to ensure the Shah's regime did not fall. If the Iranian monarch was toppled, Foreign Office figures were convinced that a Soviet or Nasser-backed government reluctant to supply Britain with the same levels of oil would replace him.<sup>50</sup> As the US had less need of Iranian oil, American officials, comparably, regarded Iran as a potential bulwark against these regional threats. Several NSC policy papers noted how the emergence of several nationalist and socialist governments in the Middle East would lead to the West 'losing' their standing and influence in the region by the end of the decade. NSC figures saw building a strong political, economic and social relationship with Iran as an effective way to reverse these 'unfavourable trends.' Through commercial, military and cultural agreements, Iran could be made into a symbol of US influence in the Middle East and Asia. Its relative prosperity compared to neighbouring countries would not only serve as an example of what can be achieved with American support, but also illustrate the benefits of being part of the 'free world'.<sup>51</sup>

However, from 1945 onwards, several threats undermined the Shah's rule and endangered British and American interests in Iran. Internally, the Tudeh Party was growing in prominence and becoming increasingly radical. Established in 1941, the organisation had

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<sup>50</sup> Telegram from the Foreign Office's Levant Department (Beirut) to the British Embassy in Tehran, 17 February 1956, Kew, Richmond, The National Archives, FO 371/121248 (hereafter document, date, TNA, file reference).

<sup>51</sup> National Security Council report on the United States' policy towards Iran (NSC 5504), 15 January 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XII; Memorandum from the Department of State Representative on the NSC Planning Board (Bowie) to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Cutler), 1 August 1957, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XII.

over 10,000 members and eight seats in the Majlis (Iranian Parliament) in 1944. Its initial manifestoes espoused moderate, liberal ideals, emphasising women's rights and the need for Iran to have a constitutional monarchy. The onset of the Cold War, though, compelled the Tudeh hierarchy to shift the party more towards the left. The senior leadership were increasingly concerned with what they saw as US expansionism across the globe. They feared that, if a war broke out between the superpowers, the Shah's pro-Western tendencies would mean that Iran would side with the United States. The Tudeh, therefore, became more closely aligned with the USSR. Thanks to Soviet influence and financial aid, a weekly newspaper, titled *Rahbar* (Leader), was distributed across Iran. Articles would praise the USSR, while criticising the Shah and the United States. By the end of the 1940s, *Rahbar* had proved so popular that it had an estimated circulation of 100,000, three times more than the state-run *Ettela'at* (Information) newspaper. At the same time, Soviet assistance was pivotal in the formation of the Tudeh's military wing. With USSR military equipment and training, the organisation's armed dissidents attempted to destabilise the Iranian government, notably by making a failed attempt on the Shah's life in 1949.<sup>52</sup> In response to this, the Iranian monarch had led efforts to restrict and quash the Tudeh's activities. As well as preventing the organisation's members from participating in Iranian politics, the Shah had ordered the authorities to arrest and interrogate all known or suspected Tudeh officials.<sup>53</sup>

The Soviet Union, moreover, was also seeking to directly undermine and intimidate the Iranian monarchy. Since Reza Khan's 1941 removal by the Soviets and the British, both armies' soldiers remained in Iran. UK forces were stationed in the south of the country, while the USSR's were located in northwest Iran, a region with a large Azeri and Kurdish

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<sup>52</sup> Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 67-69; Gasiorowski, *US Foreign Policy and the Shah*, 55.

<sup>53</sup> Yassamine Mather, 'Iran's Tudeh Party: A History of Compromises and Betrayals', *Critique* 39/4 (2011), 612-613.

population.<sup>54</sup> At the 1943 Tehran Conference, British, Soviet and US representatives agreed that their forces would depart Iran at the Second World War's resolution. By 1946, however, the USSR's army had not left the country. Maintaining its presence in this Iranian region, it was, instead, providing funding and encouraging Azeri and Kurdish nationals to fight for independence from Iran. Dubbed the Azerbaijan Crisis, the ensuing standoff between Iranian armed forces and these separatists was regarded as one of the first US-Soviet Cold War confrontations in the Middle East. At the Shah's behest, American officials petitioned the fledgling UN organisation to exert diplomatic pressure on the USSR to withdraw. By 1947, international condemnation, combined with the Iranian government's refusal to supply oil to the Soviets, compelled the Communist power to order its military forces to depart Iran.<sup>55</sup>

Beyond Soviet attempts to meddle in Iranian affairs, many of the country's citizens by the early 1950s were increasingly shifting towards nationalism and Cold War neutralism. Initially, such developments endangered Britain's oil interests. April 1951 saw Mohammad Mossagdeh, a figure influenced by the nationalist ideals espoused by Nasser, elected as Iran's Prime Minister. Throughout his campaign, the incumbent premier had called for an end to foreign meddling in Iranian affairs and for the country to adopt a 'third way' of neutralism in the Cold War. He immediately nationalised the Iranian oil industry, which had been under the British government-backed AIOC's control since 1908. This decision proved highly popular among Iran's governing elites and general public. Many resented the UK's monopolisation of the country's extraction and refining of oil, convinced it deprived Iran of much needed revenue. Government officials and ordinary citizens were also opposed to

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<sup>54</sup> Nicholas Tamkin, 'Britain, the Middle East and the "Northern Front", 1941-42', *War in History*, 15/3 (2008), 314-316.

<sup>55</sup> Fred Halliday, 'The Great Powers, the Middle East and the Cold War', in: Avi Shlaim and Yezid Sayigh (eds) *The Cold War and the Middle East* (Oxford, 1997), 11; Daniel Yergin, *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State* (London, 1977), 179.

Britain's treatment of Iranian workers in Khuzestan's oilfields; most were paid less, required to work longer hours and housed in worse conditions than their British counterparts.<sup>56</sup>

The UK responded strongly to Iran's attempt to seize control of what they regarded as a British commercial asset. From the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis' outset, Foreign Office figures pressed for a military response. Working with their Ministry of Defence colleagues, they petitioned Prime Minister Anthony Eden, to approve the occupation of the Iranian oilfields by British military forces. Foreign Office officials argued that this would intimidate the Iranian government, compelling Mossagdeh to reverse his oil nationalisation decision. Eden, along with his Foreign Secretary Herbert Morrison, rejected this plan. As well as the likely UN and US condemnation of this course of action, both figures were convinced that the British public would respond unfavourably to the military occupation of Iran's oilfields.<sup>57</sup> The UK government instead resorted to imposing economic sanctions on the country. They refused to trade with Iran, persuaded other Western nations to the same, and used the Royal Navy's Persian Gulf fleet to blockade Iranian oil refineries.<sup>58</sup>

Despite adhering to the British imposed economic embargo on Iran, the American government distanced itself from the UK's actions. Publicly, the Truman administration referred to the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis as a bilateral dispute between Britain and Iran. Portraying themselves as caught between Cold War allies, US policymakers attempted to negotiate a compromise between Mossagdeh and the British government. In November 1952, State Department officials pressured the AIOC, as well as Eden and Morrison, to cede control of the Iranian oil industry to a consortium comprised of Western petroleum firms and

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<sup>56</sup> Farhad Diba, *Muhammad Mossagdeh: A Political Biography* (London, 1986), 181.

<sup>57</sup> Steve Marsh, 'Anglo-American Relations and Labour's "Scuttle" from Abadan: A "Declaration of Dependence"?' , *The International History Review*, 35/4 (2013), 828-29; Speller, 'A Splutter of Musketry', 45.

<sup>58</sup> Reza Ghasimi, 'Iran's Oil Nationalisation and Mosaddegh's Involvement with the World Bank', *Middle East Journal*, 65/3 (2011), 454.

the Iranian government. In tandem with the State Department, officials from the American Embassy in Tehran offered the same terms to Mossagdeh.<sup>59</sup> While it appeared as if the Americans were trying to reach a mutually beneficial agreement, US policymakers were actually seeking to weaken Britain's ties with Iran. To the Truman administration and State Department officials, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis presented a perfect opportunity to strengthen US-Iran ties. Their proposed settlement would not just reduce Britain's presence and dominance over Iranian affairs, but they envisaged that it would foster goodwill towards the US among Iran's political elites. In so doing, prominent figures such as Mossagdeh would be more willing to reach diplomatic agreements with the United States.<sup>60</sup>

By the spring of 1953, however, the US abandoned its policy of seeking to reach a compromise between the UK and Iran over control of the latter's oil industry. American policymakers instead sided with Britain. There were three reasons for the US' changing approach. First, Truman's successor in the White House, Dwight D. Eisenhower, pushed for a tougher stance towards Iran. Inaugurated in January 1953, the Republican President regarded the country as pivotal to the Cold War in the Middle East. Eisenhower accordingly advocated for the removal of any hurdles, such as Mossagdeh, that would prevent Iran from playing a prominent role against the Soviets in the region.<sup>61</sup> Second, in dispatches to Washington, US Embassy officials in Tehran frequently complained that the Iranian Prime Minister was a difficult person to deal with. In discussions with American ambassador, Loy

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<sup>59</sup> Barry Rubin, *Paved With Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran* (London, 1980), 63-68.

<sup>60</sup> Draft statement of policy proposed by the National Security Council, 14 March 1951, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954; Rubin, *Paved With Good Intentions*, 74.

<sup>61</sup> Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 54; Mark Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne, *Muhammad Mossaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran* (New York, 2004), 126; Steve Marsh, 'Continuity and Change: Reinterpreting the Policies of the Truman and Eisenhower Policies Towards Iran, 1950-54', *Journal of Cold War History*, 7/3 (2005), 79-80; Yaqub, *Containing Arab nationalism*, 3-5.



Henderson, Mossagdeh would appear aloof and uncooperative, often attending meetings in his nightwear.<sup>62</sup> Third, and more importantly, was the growing threat of Communism in Iran. By April 1953, the economic unrest caused by the Royal Navy's blockade – as well as political disagreements about how to approach this issue – resulted in the dissolution of the Iranian parliament. To secure his political position, Mossagdeh sought to foster left-wing support. He sought to create a coalition government comprised of Communist affiliated members of his party, the National Front, as well as Tudeh representatives. As it would be closely aligned with the Soviet Union, US officials feared that this government would result in the Shah's overthrow and the end of America's involvement in Iran.<sup>63</sup>

With the approval and assistance of their British SIS counterparts, the CIA initially implemented a propaganda campaign to discredit Mossagdeh. Much of the agency's propaganda was based on information leaked to the press or on publications produced and distributed by the UK and US embassies in Tehran. These emphasised the reduced military and economic aid to Iran while Mosaddegh remains in power, as well as highlighting his faults. They would illustrate his power-hungry nature, most notably his attempts to hold on to office at all costs, as well as his eagerness to overthrow the Iranian monarchy.<sup>64</sup> The joint CIA-SIS campaign's success in undermining and discrediting Mossagdeh provided the impetus for the Shah to dismiss the Prime Minister. On the 15 August 1953, the Iranian

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<sup>62</sup> Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 54; Gasiorowski and Byrne, *Muhammad Mossaddeq*, 126.

<sup>63</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 16 February 1952, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954; Telegram from the Central Station in Iran to the CIA, 14 April 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954; Briefing notes prepared in the CIA for Director of Central Intelligence Dulles, 21 April 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954; Loy Henderson interviewed by Don North, 14 December 1970, DDEL.

<sup>64</sup> Memorandum prepared in the Directorate of Plans, campaign to install pro-Western government in Iran, CIA, 8 March 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954; Project outline prepared in the CIA, 15 June 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954.

monarch issued a decree, replacing Mossagdeh with a close confidant, the pro-Western Fazlollah Zahedi. The incumbent Prime Minister, however, refused to leave office, instead ordering the arrest of all his political opponents and suspected pro-monarchists. CIA and SIS figures responded by fuelling public discontent among Iranians. They ordered the Shah to temporarily depart Iran, making it appear to pro-monarchists that he was the victim of a coup. British and American intelligence officials then paid the Shah's supporters to protest against Mossagdeh. The wave of public demonstrations that followed – exacerbated by Anglo-American agents in the crowd escalating the scale and intensity of these protests – made the Iranian Prime Minister's position untenable. By the 19 August, both the Tudeh and left-leaning allies in the National Front had turned on Mossagdeh, placing him under house arrest.<sup>65</sup>

### **The Roots of British and American Cold War Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power**

In the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis' aftermath, a crucial aspect of Britain and the US' approach to Iran was the implementation of cultural programmes. These sought to persuade and attract Iranians towards British and American norms and values respectively. The conception and application of these initiatives across Iran formed part of the UK and US' broader use of soft power, through institutions and transnational networks, to export and promote their respective cultures overseas. Before the early twentieth century, Britain and the United States had relied on non-state actors and the transnational spread of ideas to promote their

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<sup>65</sup> Telegram from the Central Station in Iran to CIA, 16 August 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954; Telegram from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 16 August 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954; Telegram from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 20 August 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954; Ali Rahnema, *Behind the 1953 Coup in Iran: Thugs, Turncoats, Soldiers and Spooks* (Cambridge, 2015), 13; Moraes Ruehsen, 'Operation "Ajax" Revisited: Iran 1953', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 29/3 (1993), 471.

norms, values and ideas to foreign publics. Through this they not only aimed to expand their informal empires and acquire new territories, but also open up new markets for domestic products. Underpinning this drive for cultural and economic hegemony were a number of religious groups, including the Young Men's Christian Group and the Women's Christian Temperance Union. While regarding themselves as above the state – doing the work of God to promote moral righteousness globally – missionary work was a pivotal tenet of the broader Western colonial project. American and British governments provided funding and support for their 'civilising missions.' They hoped that these missionaries would persuade and attract foreign publics in places like East Asia and Africa to trade and interact with them.<sup>66</sup>

Religious groups were not the only non-state actors that both governments relied on for cultural diplomacy. American exhibitors, for example, exposed and promoted aspects of US culture to audiences across Europe. Displays of cars, rudimentary X-ray machines and cinematography, for example, dominated media and visitor discussions in the aftermath of the 1900 Paris Universal Exhibition. In 1886, likewise, organisers from Earls Court in London invited William 'Buffalo Bill' Cody to front their exhibition of America. Before presenting to London's public, the performer had been famed for his shows depicting life in America's 'wild west' that toured across the US. Cody's first foray beyond the American border was undoubtedly a success. Involving 150 cast members, and nearly 400 animals, Cody's shows sold out weeks in advance and were given rave reviews. Through fostering these conceptions and imaginations of America that resonated with the British public, Cody was subsequently invited to organise and deliver shows across Europe. He was asked by the

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<sup>66</sup> Jon Miller and Gregory Stanczak, 'Redeeming, Ruling and Reaping: British Missionary Societies, the East India Company, and the India-China Opium Trade', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 48/2 (2009), 332-333; Ian Tyrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire* (Princeton, 2010), 4-7.

French authorities to perform at the 1899 Universal Exhibition in Paris, as well as by the Vatican to put on a show in Rome for the then Pope, Leo XIII.<sup>67</sup>

The UK and US government's reliance on fostering bilateral relations through non-state actors and transnational networks lasted well into the twentieth century. Their decision to change tack here was motivated by two factors. First, both countries sought to dissuade domestic and foreign publics away from Communism. The Soviet Union, according to Foreign Office and State Department officials, was undermining 'free world' regimes through peddling pro-Communist propaganda. Stations such as Radio Moscow would broadcast to European and Asian nations closely aligned to the US and UK, criticising the governing regimes in these states to foster domestic discontent. The USSR was also providing considerable technical and financial assistance to left-wing groups in these countries so that they could produce and distribute propaganda to destabilise these governments from within.<sup>68</sup> To combat domestic discontent in Western Europe and Asia, while also fostering popular support for the UK and US in the Cold War, programmes needed to be put in place to counter Communist subversive activities. Not only would these circumvent Soviet initiatives, but they would also persuade and attract these foreign publics to back the US and UK in the struggle against the USSR.<sup>69</sup> Second, the American and British governments became increasingly convinced that this was a better and more effective means of promoting their respective cultures and way of life overseas. Through policies devised and implemented by government-run institutions, British and American officials could

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<sup>67</sup> Robert Rydell and Rob Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanisation of the World, 1869-1922* (Chicago, 1994), 101-108.

<sup>68</sup> James Vaughan, *The Failure of American and British Propaganda in the Middle East, 1945-1957: Unconquerable Minds* (London, 2005), 45.

<sup>69</sup> Andrew Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 1945-53: The Information Research Department* (Abingdon, 2004), 102-103; Alban Webb, 'Auntie Goes to War Again: The BBC External Services, the Foreign Office, and the Early Cold War', *Media History*, 12/2 (2006), 117.

communicate directly with foreign publics. They hoped that this would cement and bolster the UK and US' global positions, open up new markets for British and American businesses and nullify potential external threats.<sup>70</sup>

For Britain it was in the years prior to the Second World War's outbreak that its government considered the possibility of creating formalised state-run institutions to devise and implement cultural diplomacy. In 1934, the Foreign Office established the British Council. Operating overseas, either through embassies or office buildings, the institution sought to inform foreign publics about British norms, values and lifestyles. Key to this was its English language courses, which enhanced students' linguistic skills, while also showcasing the way of life in the UK.<sup>71</sup> To give the British Council's activities greater authenticity, Foreign Office figures distanced themselves from the institution. However, it sponsored its initiatives, while also providing funding so that it could establish offices in cities across the globe. The government department's decision to expand Britain's cultural diplomacy programmes overseas was motivated by its desire to bolster British commerce, as well as by the rise of totalitarian regimes across Europe. Fascist governments in Germany and Italy, as well as the Communist Soviet regime, were increasingly peddling propaganda demonstrating their strength and highlighting Britain's global decline. Foreign Office figures sought to use the British Council's activities to counter this perception, combating the propaganda activities of these states.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom* (Westminster, 2015); *Strengthening Britain's Voice in the World: Report of the UK Foreign and Security Policy Working Group* (Chatham House, 2015).

<sup>71</sup> Edward Corse, *A Battle for Neutral Europe: British Cultural Propaganda During the Second World War* (London, 2014); Frances Donaldson, *The British Council: The First 50 Years* (London, 1984).

<sup>72</sup> Donald Birn, 'The War of Words: The British Council and Cultural Propaganda in the 1930s', *Peace and Change*, 14/2 (1989), 183-185.

Britain's advocacy of cultural diplomacy further expanded during the Second World War. Having transmitted radio broadcasts overseas since 1932, the BBC's activities in this field increased exponentially in the early years of this conflict. The broadcaster introduced services in all the major languages of Europe, the British Empire and countries of geostrategic interest. The BBC Persian Service was a case in point. Established in 1941, its twice-daily Farsi news and current affairs programming sought to foster Iranian support for Britain's wartime efforts, while also informing and educating listeners on British culture. From its inception, its transmissions proved particularly popular in Iran. Surveys undertaken by the BBC in the country, as well as letters sent to the broadcaster in London, highlighted that many Iranians trusted the Persian Service's coverage over domestic news content.<sup>73</sup> The success of these broadcasts in promoting Britain overseas encouraged the British government to make cultural diplomacy a key tenet of its approach to world affairs after the Second World War. In July 1946, the Deputy Prime Minister, Herbert Morrison, published a white paper calling for the BBC overseas services to be editorially independent yet funded by the Foreign Office. Such an arrangement, he argued, would ensure that its broadcasts would not contradict government policy while also appearing to foreign publics as if the BBC was not an instrument of the British state. The report received parliamentary assent, forming an integral part of the 1947 Charter that outlined how the BBC was structured and funded.<sup>74</sup>

While sponsoring and influencing policies of institutions such as the British Council and the BBC, the Foreign Office also implemented cultural initiatives of its own. In January

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<sup>73</sup> Emma Robertson, "'I Get A Real Kick Out of Big Ben': BBC Versions of Britishness and on the Empire and General Overseas Service, 1932-1948', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 28/4 (2008), 467; Annabelle Sreberny and Massoumeh Torfeh, 'The BBC Persian Service 1941-79', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 28/4 (2008), 524-25.

<sup>74</sup> Alban Webb, 'Constitutional Niceties: Three Crucial Dates in Cold War Relations Between the BBC External Services and the Foreign Office', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 28/4 (2008), 558-59.

1948, it established the Information Research Department (IRD). Operating from within the Foreign Office until its 1977 close, this open source intelligence agency coordinated the production and dissemination of British Cold War propaganda. In particular, the IRD strove to counter pro-Communist publications, discredit the Soviet Union and promote British values domestically and overseas. Its officials sought to achieve these aims by working with prominent individuals and organisations at home and abroad who also opposed Communism.<sup>75</sup> In the Middle East, for example, the IRD provided media outlets in the region wary of Communism and Arab nationalism with relevant material. Between 1951 and 1953, it supplied the Jordanian government backed radio station, the Hashemite Broadcasting Service, with anti-Soviet content. The IRD also supplied articles to pro-Western Egyptian, Iraqi and Syrian newspapers. Many of these publications criticised Nasser, highlighted the Soviet Union's aggressive expansionism in the Middle East and extolled Britain's virtues.<sup>76</sup> Beyond Middle Eastern affairs, IRD officials cooperated with the US State Department to produce and disseminate anti-Communist propaganda when their motives converged. As both countries' governments were concerned about the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia, UK and US officials worked together to devise a psychological programme for the region. To ensure a streamlined operation, each agency focused their efforts on a particular area. As the IRD had more experience and contacts in Singapore and Hong Kong, its officials focused their subversive activities on these territories and their surroundings. State Department figures, on the other hand, paid greater attention to proceedings on the Korean Peninsula, Taiwan and China.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 1945-53*, 1-3; 74.

<sup>76</sup> James Vaughan, "'Cloak Without Dagger': How the Information Research Department Fought Britain's Cold War in the Middle East, 1948-56", *Cold War History*, 4/3 (2004), 61-62.

<sup>77</sup> Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 1945-53*, 154-156; Tony Shaw, 'The Information Research Department of the British Foreign Office and the Korean War, 1950-53', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 34/2 (1999), 279-280.

Indeed, it was by the Cold War's early stages that the US became increasingly interested in cultural diplomacy. Prior to this, its activities in this field had been confined to the overseas radio transmissions of the Voice of America (VOA). Established in 1942, its broadcasts, in English and 40 other languages, initially targeted citizens living in Latin America and Europe. The VOA aimed to foster resentment towards Nazi political parties and occupying German forces respectively.<sup>78</sup> The US' role in liberating North Africa, southern Europe, and East Asia enabled the VOA to expand. Transmitters were built in all three regions, enabling radio broadcasts to reach new audiences. Such an accelerated expansion in its formative years made the VOA crucial to the US' attempts to combat Soviet propaganda after 1945. As its transmitters were placed across the globe, the radio broadcaster was perfectly poised to communicate to overseas audiences the pitfalls of Communism and the socio-economic benefits of siding with America.<sup>79</sup>

With the Cold War's onset, however, senior figures within the Truman administration had become increasingly dissatisfied with this informal arrangement. They feared that the work of businesses, religious groups and mass culture in promoting America overseas was minuscule in comparison to the anti-US ideology espoused and disseminated by the Soviet state. So as to better promote America overseas, the US government increasingly looked towards formalising cultural diplomacy, giving them greater control over the scale, funding and nature of the endeavours pursued. In January 1948, the US Congress approved the Smith-Mundt Act. The legislation enacted into law the provision of greater funding for state-sponsored soft power initiatives more broadly, specifically in the fields of propaganda and cultural diplomacy. It provided the State Department, and its constituent overseas embassies, monies to open information centres, produce broadcast films and print literature.

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<sup>78</sup> Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, 320.

<sup>79</sup> Gary Rawnsley, 'The Campaign of Truth: A Populist Propaganda', in: Gary Rawnsley (ed) *Cold War Propaganda in the 1950s* (Basingstoke, 1999), 33.



While much of this aimed at swaying foreign publics away from Communism, its content also extolled the virtues and values of America.<sup>80</sup>

The Smith-Mundt Act was the impetus behind President Harry Truman's 'Campaign for Truth.' Launched in April 1950, this was the US' first sustained, unified attempt to combat Communist propaganda and promote America overseas. The campaign was influenced by the arguments outlined in NSC 68, which had been approved by Truman several weeks before. The aim, therefore, was to contain Communism, through strengthening the will of the US and its allies to resist Soviet propaganda, as well as outlining the faults of the USSR and its satellite states to the people residing in these nations.<sup>81</sup> The VOA played a pivotal role in achieving these objectives. Targeting citizens beyond the Iron Curtain, its programming was increasingly critical of the Soviet Union. In tandem with the VOA's activities, the State Department established the USIS to conduct all its subversive and propaganda activities. The in-house agency operated through US embassies across the globe, publishing and disseminating anti-Communist propaganda, while also translating American books and films into foreign languages.<sup>82</sup>

The nature and scale of US cultural diplomacy was further developed during the first year of the Eisenhower administration. Building on his predecessor's 'Campaign for Truth', Eisenhower sought to make this aspect of foreign policy central to the US' approach to the Cold War. He had two motives for doing so. First, during his command of the Allied forces in Europe during the Second World War, Eisenhower had come to see the merits of cultural diplomacy. Not only was it cheaper than the use of tanks and guns, it was less costly in

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<sup>80</sup> Andrew Yarrow, 'Selling a New Vision of America to the World: Changing Messages in Early US Cold War Print Propaganda', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 11/4 (2009), 20-22.

<sup>81</sup> Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 1945-53*, 140-141; Rawnsley, 'The Campaign of Truth', 35-36.

<sup>82</sup> William Scott Lucas, *Freedom's War: The US Crusade Against the Soviet Union, 1945-56* (New York, 1999), 74-76.

terms of lives. Second, there was an increased need to foster public support for American initiatives. The early years of Eisenhower's presidency dovetailed with a period in which technological progress had made information and media more accessible. Such developments had resulted in audiences at home and abroad becoming much more politically aware and active.<sup>83</sup>

Upon entering office, Eisenhower established the Jackson Committee. Comprised of national security officials, intelligence figures and individuals within the presidential administration, the committee analysed and evaluated America's cultural and propaganda initiatives. Its final June 1953 report called for, among other things, an organisation under the State Department's auspices to oversee all American cultural and propaganda campaigns.<sup>84</sup> The Jackson Committee's findings compelled Eisenhower to expand and institutionalise the USIS, establishing the United States Information Agency (USIA) in August 1953. Reporting to the State Department, this institution strove to explain and advocate US policies to overseas audiences; provide information about American officials and initiatives to foreign publics; foster cultural and economic ties between the peoples and businesses of America with their overseas counterparts; and advise the US government on how foreign peoples will receive American policies and overtures.<sup>85</sup> The USIA maintained a formal presence in cities across the globe. It oversaw and coordinated all USIS activities, with the department being institutionalised and provided with greater autonomy from US embassies

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<sup>83</sup> Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence, KS, 2006), 6-8, 11; Shawn Parry-Giles, 'The Eisenhower Administration's Conceptualisation of the USIA: The Development of Overt and Covert Propaganda Strategies', *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 24/2 (1994), 265.

<sup>84</sup> The report of the President's Committee on International Information Activities (the Jackson Committee), 30 June 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Volume II, part 2.

<sup>85</sup> Sixth progress report on NSC 59/1, 'the foreign information programme and psychological warfare planning', DDEL, White House Office, NSC Series, Policy Papers.

and consulates. The agency would often strive to achieve its objectives through exhibitions showcasing the American way of life, translating US books and Hollywood films into foreign languages and by offering English language teaching courses.<sup>86</sup>

### **American and British Cultural Diplomacy in Iran Before August 1953**

UK government sanctioned initiatives promoting British values, norms, ideas and way of life in Iran had been in place in the two decades prior to the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis. From 1934 to 1952, the Foreign Office had funded the British Council's presence in the cities of Tehran, Esfahan, Tabriz and Mashhad. These centres aimed to educate and promote British norms, values and lifestyles to Iranians. Beginner, intermediate and advanced English language courses were offered to Iran's students, many of which provided the opportunity to study at UK universities. Exhibitions, concerts and British Council libraries, likewise, showcased elements of Britain's musical, art and literary traditions to Iran's citizens.<sup>87</sup> Beyond these large urban settlements, the British Council in Iran had a negligible presence, something they were reluctant to change. The agency, for instance, rejected the AIOC's December 1946 requests to expand its operations into the UK government-controlled oilfields in the south-west region of Khuzestan. In meetings with British Council officials, senior AIOC figures maintained that, while this was an area of Iran where the UK's influence was strong, its culture was 'inadequately put across' to locals. Resolving this issue, they asserted, would alleviate the increasing public disquiet over Britain's control of the Iranian oil industry.<sup>88</sup> British Council officials, though, dismissed the AIOC's claims, regarding the opening of

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<sup>86</sup> Parry-Giles, 'Eisenhower Administration's Conceptualisation', 271.

<sup>87</sup> Conversations with the AIOC regarding the possibility of British Council operations in oil fields areas, 19 September 1946, TNA, BW 49/13.

<sup>88</sup> George Hitchcock (Regional Officer, British Council) to Victor Blomfield (Controller, British Council Iran), 24 September 1946, TNA, BW 49/13.

centres in the region a futile exercise. As the oil company already had fully established education facilities catering for Iranian workers and their families, there was no need for similar British Council centres. The agency's officials instead offered to provide books, transcripts of lectures and musical recordings to AIOC staff.<sup>89</sup>

As the Cold War intensified, the UK Foreign Office placed greater pressure on the British Council in Iran. Previously, the government department had paid little attention to the agency's functions in the country. During the Second World War, for example, diplomats and officials had relied more on the BBC Persian Service to disseminate pro-British propaganda.<sup>90</sup> Up until the 1946 Azerbaijan Crisis, the British Council had been left to provide English language teaching to Iranian people without the need or demand from the Foreign Office to promote the UK in the process. In the diplomatic incident's aftermath, however, the government department called on the agency to overhaul its strategy in Iran. According to senior Foreign Office figures, the British Council should concentrate less on educating Iranians and more on promoting Britain's values. In so doing, it should undertake the bulk of the work that was being undertaken by the UK Embassy in Tehran's Information Department, which included the publication of magazines and the organising of exhibitions.<sup>91</sup> As the British Council had a degree of independence from the government, the Foreign Office maintained that it would be best served to undertake these operations. With the Soviet Union's apparent desire to expand into the Middle East, combined with increasing domestic disquiet in Iran, Britain needed to do more to engage with Iranians and allay popular concerns.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Meeting between the British Council and the AIOC, 25 September 1946, TNA, BW 49/13.

<sup>90</sup> Rowena Abdul-Razak, 'But What Would They Think of Us? Propaganda and the Manipulation of the Anglo-Soviet Occupation of Iran, 1941-46', *Iranian Studies*, 49/5 (2016), 817-820.

<sup>91</sup> Minutes of meeting between the British Council and the UK Embassy in Tehran, 2 January 1947, TNA, BW 49/13.

<sup>92</sup> British Council report on the situation in Iran, 25 April 1946, TNA, BW 49/13.

The British Council acquiesced to some of the Foreign Office's demands. The agency jettisoned its three permanent lecturers from Britain, on the grounds that they were over-qualified for the work the British Council needed to do in Iran. It also expanded its offices and activities in certain provincial cities, notably those in Rasht, Mashhad and Tabriz that were close to the Soviet border, hiring more local staff to teach English.<sup>93</sup> While happy with being used by the British government as an instrument of soft power, the British Council took issue with the approach the UK Foreign Office recommended. Justifying its stance to the government department, the agency's senior officials in Iran claimed that many Iranians would see through this change in tack and lose trust in the British Council. Victor Blomfield, the chief of the institute's operations in Iran between 1945 and 1952, instead recommended that the British Council be allowed to adopt a subtler, nuanced approach. Rather than relying on publications and exhibitions to promote Britain, the agency should be given the capabilities to train Iranian teachers. Through this, the British Council could immerse these educators in the norms and values of Britain, with these figures subconsciously relaying these ideals to their students.<sup>94</sup>

In tandem with the British Council's efforts, the BBC's Persian Service communicated UK news, culture and perspectives. Established in 1942 and broadcasting out of the Foreign Office in London, its twice-daily 30-minute radio transmissions had proved popular with Iranians. Many of Iran's citizens, particularly the educated middle classes residing in urban areas, preferred the broadcaster's current affairs content to its domestic equivalent. As well as supposedly appearing more objective and impartial – many of Iran's radio stations were government controlled – its coverage of global affairs was supposedly more

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<sup>93</sup> George Hitchcock (Regional Officer, British Council) to Victor Blomfield (Controller, British Council Iran), 1 January 1948, TNA, BW 49/13.

<sup>94</sup> Victor Blomfield (Controller, British Council Iran) to the British Council's Education Division, 28 January 1949, TNA, BW 49/13.

comprehensive.<sup>95</sup> It was for these reasons that the Foreign Office relied on the BBC Persian Service as the main exponent of British government-sanctioned soft power in Iran. During the Second World War, British diplomats and officials ensured that much of the broadcaster's news content emphasised the expansionist desires of the Axis powers. The Foreign Office, in particular, hoped to underline the extent of German and Japanese transgressions in Europe, Africa, East Asia and beyond.<sup>96</sup>

By 1953, however, British cultural programmes in Iran faced considerable challenges. Crucially, the BBC Persian Service and British Council's initiatives to promote Britain's norms, values and ideas to Iranians were undermined by the UK's diplomatic approach towards the country. Many of Iran's citizens were convinced that Britain was using the country as a tool to achieve its own diplomatic objectives, possessing little regard for its fate. In particular, many Iranians disapproved of the UK's frequent direct intervention in Iran's affairs. Throughout the modern period, the British government had encroached on the country's territorial sovereignty, undermined its international standing and hindered its social, political and economic progress.<sup>97</sup> Popular Iranian opposition to British foreign policy began in the early nineteenth century. In 1826, Britain refused to side with Iran in its war with Russia, despite pledging to do so. Two years later, after it was defeated, the British government forced their Iranian counterparts to sign the much-contested Treaty of Turkmenchay. The terms forced Iran to cede control of its north-Western territories – modern day Armenia and southern Azerbaijan – to the Russian Empire.<sup>98</sup> Iranian resentment

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<sup>95</sup> Survey of the BBC Persian Service's output in Iran, 17 December 1963, Caversham, Reading, BBC Written Archives Centre, E/3/182/1 (hereafter document, date, BBC WAC, file reference); Minutes of conference of Baghdad Pact radio broadcasters, 7 September 1957, BBC WAC, E 1/2.085/1.

<sup>96</sup> Abdul-Razak, 'But What Would They Think of Us?', 824.

<sup>97</sup> Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, 11-12; Morgan Shuster, *The Strangling of Persia: A Personal Narrative* (London, 2006), 32-35.

<sup>98</sup> Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, 141.

towards the British government increased in the following years. The UK's assistance to Reza Khan in his 1926 seizure of power, followed by its 1941 invasion and removal of the monarch, demonstrated that the UK was willing to ride roughshod over Iran's political affairs to achieve their aims.<sup>99</sup> Constant British intervention in Iran's affairs had resulted in the notion of 'perfidious Albion' becoming engrained in the Iranian popular consciousness. Sections of Iran's public had falsely attributed the British government's 'hidden hand' as being behind the country's political developments.<sup>100</sup>

Buoyed by the increasing traction of the 'perfidious Albion' notion, many Iranians were now rejecting British culture. In the midst of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis in February 1952, pro-Mossagdeh loyalists ransacked the British Council offices in Esfahan, Mashhad and Shiraz. They suspected the organisation of using cultural activities as a means of turning public opinion against the National Front and the nationalisation of Iran's oil industry.<sup>101</sup> Fearful of reprisals and repeat attacks, the British Council closed all of their provincial Iranian offices, relying solely on its centre in Tehran. While this still offered English language courses, the number of applications retrieved by Iranian students reduced dramatically. The unpopularity of British Council initiatives sparked fears among the organisation's officials that Iranians were not just opposed to UK foreign policy, but everything attributed to Britain. The organisation's representatives in Iran were concerned that attacks on the Tehran office were imminent. In light of Mossagdeh's October 1952 decision to expel Britain's Iranian Embassy and consulates, the organisation would be isolated without diplomatic support. It was with these concerns in mind that by November

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<sup>99</sup> Shuster, *The Strangling of Persia*, 48.

<sup>100</sup> Review of press in Baghdad Pact countries, 14 November 1956, TNA, FO 371/121766; Survey of the BBC Persian Service's output in Iran, 17 December 1963, BBC WAC, E/3/182/1.

<sup>101</sup> Paul Wakelin (British Council, Iran) to Thomas Morray (British Council Director, Middle East Department), 29 September 1952, TNA, BW 49/14; Paul Wakelin (British Council, Iran) to Thomas Morray (British Council Director, Middle East Department), 20 October 1952, TNA, BW 49/14.

1952, the British Council announced its suspension of all its Iranian activities and its departure from the country.<sup>102</sup>

In the British Council's absence, the US became the dominant Western cultural power in Iran, displacing the role Britain had enjoyed since the eighteenth century.<sup>103</sup> America's programme in the country had not been as longstanding as their British equivalent. Their cultural diplomacy initiatives had begun in 1925, with the establishment of the Iran-American Relations Society in Tehran. As a bi-national centre, the institute focused on English language teaching, while also providing a forum for Western-orientated Iranians to meet and interact with one another. Clashes between the older, established patricians and a newer generation of members over the organisation's direction culminated in the Iran-American Relations Society splitting in 1936. In forming the America-Iran club, those within the latter group claimed that the institute was not doing enough to attract new members and was unwilling to organise activities beyond the teaching of the English language.<sup>104</sup> With no US governmental financial support, despite repeated requests, both organisations relied on member donations and lacked the money to establish and maintain a sustained cultural programme. It was only from 1951 onwards that American government officials in Iran took a greater interest in the bi-national centres. At the State Department's behest, both organisations were forced to amalgamate into the Iran-America Society. The US Embassy pushed for the centre to have a board of 21 directors, 11 Iranians and 10 Americans, 7 of whom were American staff working in its office. By August 1953, the organisation had 13 part-time teachers and 807 members, 721 of who were enrolled in English language

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<sup>102</sup> From Paul Wakelin (British Council, Iran) to British Council Head Office (London), 26 October 1952, TNA, BW 49/14.

<sup>103</sup> Firouz Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia: Imperial Ambitions in Qajar Iran* (London, 2013), 581-583.

<sup>104</sup> A note on the history of bi-national centres in Iran, undated, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Reports on the USIS in Iran.



classes. The overwhelming majority of the membership were middle or upper-class Iranians. 60% of members were government officials, 20% were merchants and 7% were teachers or university students. As well as lectures, concerts and a lending library, the Iran-America Society focused on English language teaching, offering 46 classes and an annual seminar held every July for secondary school teachers.<sup>105</sup>

The provision of governmental funds to the Iran-America Society was part of the US' broader efforts to expand its global cultural diplomacy as a result of the 1948 Smith-Mundt Act. From the late 1940s onwards, the American Embassy in Tehran was given the authorisation and the finance from the State Department to devise and implement an information programme for Iran. Initiatives aimed to complement the US' broader foreign policy goals, specifically the promotion of 'economic vitality, military strength and political stability.' The achievement of these objectives would ensure that Iran became a vital US ally, resistant to Communism. Chief of its operations was Edward Wells, who had worked in the US Embassy as a liaison officer since the beginning of the Second World War. As someone who had previously collaborated with business and government figures in Iran, the Embassy regarded him as best placed in this role.<sup>106</sup>

Rather than focusing on engaging with the general public, Wells' initial programme sought to foster US ties with Iranian elites, particularly senior government, education and business figures. As Iran's society was deeply hierarchical, with those higher up the social order possessing disproportionate levels of wealth, power and status, Wells regarded the

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<sup>105</sup> Report on the Iran-America Society (1 October – 31 December 1952), 3 February 1953, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1950-1954); Report on the Iran-America Society (1 January – 31 March 1953), 19 May 1953, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1950-1954); A note on the history of bi-national centres in Iran, undated, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Reports on the USIS in Iran.

<sup>106</sup> USIS country plan for Iran, 2 June 1953, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1950-1954).

shaping of these people's views as imperative. Most of them also predominantly resided in Tehran or its surroundings, meaning that all his efforts could be concentrated on the capital city.<sup>107</sup> Initiatives focused on both the fostering of unfavourable views of Communism and the demonstration of Iran's socio-economic progress. A series of American books, pamphlets and periodicals, for example, were translated by US Embassy figures and distributed across Tehran. Such publications, including a biography of Thomas Jefferson and a leaflet entitled *The New Soviet Empire*, extolled so-called American values like freedom and were critical of the USSR's expansionism. While only distributing a small volume of publications, the Embassy hoped that they would become popular, encouraging Iranian publishers to translate more and other American works into Farsi.<sup>108</sup> Complementing this, Wells authorised the supplying of stories critical of Communism to the Iranian press and approved the production of a bi-monthly magazine for the agrarian sector. Titled *Land and People*, the publication was sent to all leading figures in the agricultural sector. Articles demonstrated how the US was at the forefront of numerous advancements in farming animals and crop production, and how the country was seeking to modernise practices in Iran.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> USIS semi-annual evaluation report (1 December 1952 – 31 May 1953), 12 September 1953, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1950-1954).

<sup>108</sup> American Embassy (Tehran) to the State Department, 17 March 1951, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1950-1954); American Embassy (Tehran) to the State Department, 2 January 1952, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1950-1954).

<sup>109</sup> American Embassy (Tehran) to the State Department, 2 January 1952, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1950-1954); State Department to American Embassy (Tehran), NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1950-1954); American Embassy (Tehran) to the State Department, 3 November 1952, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1950-1954).

Beyond the production and distribution of publications, the most significant scheme devised and implemented by Wells was the newsreel programme. The cinema had become an increasingly popular pastime among Iran's middle classes, with the overwhelming majority wanting to watch the latest Hollywood films. Exploiting this phenomenon, Wells established links with various cinema managers and proprietors across Tehran, paying them to allow the Embassy to broadcast content before the showing of each film. These newsreels would often last for 15-20 minutes and would highlight the pitfalls of Communism and the various infrastructure and modernisation projects taking place across Iran. With regards to the latter, Wells was able to secure State Department funding to pay for mobile film units to travel across Iran to obtain video content.<sup>110</sup>

After 1952, however, Wells and the US Embassy were forced to change tack. The Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis showed no sign of abating. Mossagdeh's refusal to back down, coupled with the American government increasingly siding with their British counterparts forced Wells to halt all newsreel, book translation and press initiatives. The diplomatic dispute had the potential to irreparably damage US-Iran ties, compelling the State Department to order the Embassy to distance itself from Iranian politics. If Iran's elites and general public came to regard its cultural activities as a propaganda tool, then its schemes would have no credence.<sup>111</sup> With these concerns in mind, Wells increasingly worked to promote the Embassy's library. As one of the only lending institutions in the country, he hoped to attract more educated 16-25-year-old students, most of whom could speak and read English to a proficient level. Wells presumed that they would like to read American factual magazines such as *Time*, *Life* and *Newsweek*, stocking the library with more of these publications. At the same time, moreover, Wells worked to establish and promote a

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<sup>110</sup> USIS semi-annual evaluation report (1 December 1952 – 31 May 1953), 12 September 1953, NAIL, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1950-1954).

<sup>111</sup> State Department to the American Embassy (Tehran), 19 August 1953, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1950-1954).

dedicated children's section of the library. No other Iranian institution in Tehran or elsewhere provided a reading room and lending service for those younger than 12 years of age. Not only would this facility seek to rectify this, but it would also provide an opportunity for US officials to interact with the children's parents. To achieve this, Wells organised a one-hour weekly story time session every Friday morning to be read by the librarian, inviting children and their parents along.<sup>112</sup>

Wells' attempts to promote the US Embassy's Library lasted until the August 1953 coup that toppled Mossagdeh and ended the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis. The impact of the CIA and MI6-led coup, though, on popular perceptions of the US and UK in Iran resulted in the expansion and transformation of the American and British soft power programme in Iran. This chapter has highlighted the nature of the Anglo-American 'special relationship', specifically how the supposed shared values and aims of both countries on the world stage have sustained and developed US-UK bilateral ties. Both nations' differing priorities, however, compounded by their contrasting political and economic fortunes post-1945, strained the 'special relationship.' These tensions were highlighted in Iran, a country of historic importance to the UK and part of its 'informal' empire. With America's increasing interest in developing US-Iranian ties in light of the Cold War, Britain's position as the dominant Western power in Iran was in jeopardy. As demonstrated by its growing cultural diplomacy programme, American diplomats and officials were displaying an increasing interest in persuading and attracting Iranians towards US norms, values and ideas. The attentiveness of policymakers towards this aim would only develop as the 1950s progressed, something the next chapter explores in more depth.

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<sup>112</sup> American Embassy (Tehran) to the State Department, 18 July 1952, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1950-1954).

**Chapter II - Maintaining Geopolitical Stability: The USIS' backing of  
the Shah's Regime and its Attempts to Counter the Spread of  
Soviet-inspired Communism in Iran**

*'We now have a second chance in Iran.'*<sup>1</sup>

To US State Department and White House figures, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis had nearly resulted in Iran's 'loss' to Communism. This would have proved a considerable setback that would have repercussions for US prestige across the region. A stable and strong Iranian government was therefore required, as was an armed force able to maintain internal security and make a considerable contribution to the defence of the wider region. More broadly, State Department and White House officials deemed it crucial that Iran developed into a prominent regional political and economic power. Not only would this serve as an example of what can be achieved with American support and influence, but also highlight the benefits of being part of the 'free world.'<sup>2</sup> The then Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, concurred with this view. With the August 1953 toppling of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh, and the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's restoration, the US now had a 'second chance' to achieve these foreign policy goals in Iran.<sup>3</sup> Upon retaking the throne, the Iranian monarch

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<sup>1</sup> Record of the 170<sup>th</sup> meeting of the NSC, 12 November 1953, Abilene, Kansas, Dwight D.

Eisenhower Presidential Library (hereafter document, date, DDEL), Dwight D. Eisenhower (Whitman) papers, NSC Series.

<sup>2</sup> NSC report, 15 January 1955, Oxford, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957, Near East Region; Iraq; Iran, Volume XII* (hereafter document, date, *FRUS*, year, volume).

<sup>3</sup> Record of the 170<sup>th</sup> meeting of the NSC, 12 November 1953, DDEL, Dwight D. Eisenhower (Whitman) papers, NSC Series.

shifted his role away from that of a constitutional ruler. Taking a greater interest in Iran's political affairs, he dissolved the National Front, the party hitherto led by Mossagdeh; ordered the police to clamp down further on the Tudeh; and appointed his key ally, Fazlollah Zahedi, as Prime Minister.<sup>4</sup>

To support the Shah with his efforts here, US policymakers authorised the provision of considerable military and economic aid. From 1953 onwards, the Iranian armed forces were provided with modern American weapons, hardware and training. White House officials anticipated that this would not only make Iran's soldiers capable of repelling internal dangers, but also enable them to make a considerable contribution to the defence of the wider Middle East.<sup>5</sup> In February 1955, Britain, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and Turkey signed the Baghdad Pact. As well as providing a regional buffer to Soviet incursions in the Middle East, the signatories pledged to support one another if attacked.<sup>6</sup> American policymakers, while refusing to join the pact, gave the arrangement their approval. They envisaged that Iran's military, due to the Shah's vociferous opposition towards Communism, would play a prominent role in defending the Baghdad Pact nations should the USSR attack.<sup>7</sup> Likewise,

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<sup>4</sup> Telegram from the American Embassy (Tehran) to the State Department, 26 August 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954; Briefing notes prepared in the CIA for Allen Dulles (Director of Central Intelligence), undated, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954.

<sup>5</sup> Monthly report prepared in the Directorate of Plans, CIA, undated, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954.

<sup>6</sup> Brian Burrows (British Embassy, Ankara) to George Hiller (Eastern Department, Foreign Office), 7 April 1961, Kew, Richmond, The National Archives, FO 371/157496 (hereafter document, date, TNA, file reference); Telegram from the Foreign Office's Levant Department (Beirut) to the British Embassy (Tehran), 17 February 1956, TNA, FO 371/121248; Robert McNamara, *Britain, Nasser and the Balance of Power in the Middle East*, (Portland, 2003), 150-55.

<sup>7</sup> Memorandum from John Jernegan (Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs) to Loy Henderson (the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Administration), 7 January 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XII.

recognising that it would take over a decade for the country to benefit from oil revenue, US policymakers provided substantial financial and technical assistance to bolster Iran's economy.

The State Department focused specifically on modernising Iran's agricultural sector. Through the US Embassy in Tehran, they invested in machinery that would enable Iranian farmers to modernise their practices, increase crop yields and harvest produce more quickly and efficiently. To improve the plight and prospects of Iran's rural population, Embassy officials strove to develop the infrastructure in many Iranian villages. They approved projects to improve access to clean water and sanitation, as well as authorising the building of schools and hospitals.<sup>8</sup>

Complementing US military and economic support for Iran were cultural diplomacy and propaganda initiatives devised and implemented by the United States Information Service (USIS). As discussed in the previous chapter, the Americans already had a soft power programme in place in Iran. Since the late 1940s, the USIS had sought to engage with the Iranian public through book publications and cinema newsreels critical of Communism. In so doing, they hoped that these individuals would push these anti-Soviet views to their peers and acquaintances. To promote American values, moreover, the USIS, via the State Department, provided funding and support to the Iran-America Society, which offered English lessons to Iranians willing to learn the language. During the early 1950s, the organisation was forced to conduct its activities in the face of growing Iranian public antagonism towards Western institutions as a result of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis.

Once the diplomatic dispute was resolved the USIS changed tack somewhat. The agency initially operated out of the American Embassy in Tehran, proceeding to open offices in US consulates in major Iranian provincial cities. Overseen by the United States

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<sup>8</sup> Memorandum from Robert Bowie (State Department representative on the NSC Planning Board) to Robert Cutler (President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs), 1 August 1957, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XII.

Information Agency (USIA) in Washington, the institution initially sought to sway Iranians away from Communism, as well as protect and bolster the Shah's ruling regime.<sup>9</sup> The aim of this chapter is to examine the policies the USIS implemented to achieve these objectives. It charts the development of this aspect of US soft power in Iran while also highlighting its key tenets. The chapter begins by discussing the US government and USIS' rationale for expanding their cultural diplomacy activities in Iran. It proceeds to outline the agency's initial initiatives, including its book publication programme, its attempts to foster a library culture in Iran and the USIS' collaboration with Iranian journalists. The chapter finally explores how the agency fostered ties with pro-US elements in the Iranian government and military to disseminate anti-Communist propaganda and counter Soviet-subversion in Iran.

From August 1953, America's cultural diplomacy programme in Iran expanded exponentially. Heading up the running and implementation of these initiatives at the USIA's behest, USIS officials in Iran focused particularly on containing and combating the Communist threat in Iran. Their rationale for doing this was based on demands from various branches of the US government. Individuals on US President Dwight D. Eisenhower's NSC, most notably CIA Director Allen Dulles and the then Under Secretary of State, Herbert Hoover Junior, were desperate to protect the Shah's regime from the Soviet threat. On the other hand, the Iranian Embassy in Tehran, supported by the State Department, aimed to foster negative views regarding Communism and the Soviet Union among the Iranian middle classes. The USIS' first initiatives in Iran centred on promoting the free world, illustrating to Iranians the contrast between the freedoms enjoyed by Western societies and the authoritarian nature of the Communist regime. This was achieved through forging ties with the Iranian press, supplying stories to journalists that were critical of the Soviet Union and its

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<sup>9</sup> Outline plan of operations for US ideological programme in Iran, 27 June 1955, College Park, Maryland, National Archives II (hereafter document, date, NAI), US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).



allies. At the same time, the USIS also devised a book programme, translating works from English into Farsi that extolled the virtues of American politics and history.

From 1955 onwards, however, the USIS reconsidered their strategy in Iran. The aforementioned initiatives, crucially, relied on most Iranians being able to read and write, something only one fifth of the population was able to do by the mid-1950s. Consequently, the American agency increasingly relied on using the country's radio stations to combat Communism and bolster the Shah's regime. To do this, they forged ties with several officials within the Iranian government who possessed pro-American sympathies. The most notable figures the USIS worked with included the Deputy Prime Minister, Nasser Zolfghari, and the head of the Department of Press and Broadcasting (DPB), Nosratollah Moinian. Along with these individuals, the American agency was instrumental in establishing the Information Council. A joint enterprise between the USIS and the Iranian government, this advisory group sought to bolster Iran's capabilities in the field of radio, focusing particularly on the country's sole state broadcaster, Radio Tehran. Through the Information Council, the USIS provided the station with a new studio and transmitter. The latter was particularly crucial in combating Soviet jamming of Iranian radio and for ensuring that Radio Tehran's signal could be reached in the volatile provincial areas in northern and eastern Iran. The success of these collaborative efforts culminated in the Shah seeking US assistance to establish a new radio station in Iran to broadcast to the wider Middle East. It also encouraged the USIS to work closely with the Iranian army to improve its production and dissemination of anti-Communist propaganda.

### **The Expansion of the USIS' initiatives in Iran**

In the immediate aftermath of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis, figures within the State Department looked to expand the USIS' cultural diplomacy and propaganda programme in Iran. The most prominent proponent was the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Henry Byroade. Writing to the American Embassy in Tehran in 1953, he stressed the

need for USIS officials in the country to convince Iran's leaders and public of the need to side with Western powers. In so doing, the agency would be able to highlight the 'speciousness' of Soviet friendship to the Iranians, foster the country's socio-economic development and demonstrate the extent of US friendship.<sup>10</sup> Both the Embassy and the USIS agreed with Byroade's recommendations. The former deemed it imperative that an American agency should focus on backing the Shah's regime. With the CIA's involvement in the August 1953 coup, the White House and the Iranian monarchy were now closely entwined. So as to reflect well on the US globally, every effort should be made to bring Iran more into the international community and to encourage its domestic development.<sup>11</sup> The USIS in Iran, similarly, specifically discussed how they could make Byroade's vision a reality. In an October 1953 telegram to his USIA superiors, the PAO and chief of agency operations, Edward Wells, claimed that the changed Iranian political situation means that they can do a 'full scale job' on Iran. A new programme should be put in place that relies on press and broadcasting to encourage unfavourable views of Communism and foster the country's socio-economic development. In achieving these aims, the USIS would require more staff. To develop contacts and effectively distribute literature, officials would need to be placed in the Tabriz, Esfahan and Mashhad consulates. The agency would also require a dedicated information officer, an individual to focus on publicising aid programmes and three more secretaries to deal with the increasing bureaucratic burden.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> State Department to American Embassy (Tehran), 19 August 1953, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1950-1954).

<sup>11</sup> American Embassy (Tehran) to the State Department, 16 September 1953, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1950-1954); American Embassy (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 19 September 1953, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1950-1954).

<sup>12</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 2 October 1953, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1950-1954).

Yet it was only through the actions of Herbert Hoover Junior, a senior State Department official with considerable experience of Iran, that the USIS and Byroade's vision was put into practice. In 1944, the newly crowned Shah invited Hoover, then a successful businessman and manufacturer, to Iran to act as an economic advisor. The close rapport that developed between the two figures resulted in the Iranian monarch also consulting Hoover on military and political matters.<sup>13</sup> As a result, Eisenhower sent Hoover to Iran in 1953 to assist with the settlement over the oil industry in Iran. Negotiations between the UK and Iranian governments, as well as BP, had stalled. The British wanted to reassert their control over the country's oil industry, which Iran's representatives deemed unthinkable. Hoover's brief was to restart the talks and help reach a settlement that sidelined the British and was amenable to the Iranians. Arguing that Iran's public would not accept British control over the country's oil supplies, Hoover was crucial in persuading BP to accept one seventh of Iran's oil industry. The rest would be owned by each of the other 'seven sisters', the most prominent European and North American petroleum firms, with the Iranian government receiving a 15% share of the profits.<sup>14</sup>

Hoover's approach impressed Eisenhower. Despite antagonising both British and American Embassy officials, Eisenhower appointed him Under-Secretary of State upon his October 1954 return to Washington. Second only to John Foster Dulles in the State Department, Hoover was crucial in making and shaping policies that sought to affect Iranian public opinion. Crucially, he feared a negative popular response to the October 1954 oil settlement. He was convinced that this settlement would not go down well with the Iranian

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<sup>13</sup> Memorandum of discussion at the 160<sup>th</sup> meeting of the NSC, 27 August 1953, DDEL, Dwight D. Eisenhower (Whitman) papers, NSC Series.

<sup>14</sup> Clary Thompson (State Department) to Richard Sanger (Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs), 13 October 1953, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Political Relations (1950-1954); Memorandum for the Executive Officer, OCB, 24 May 1954, DDEL, White House Office, NSC Staff, OCB Series.

people. While the agreement sidelined the British, it did not give control of this lucrative industry to Iran. Hoover was aware that public dissatisfaction of foreign control of Iranian oil had significantly contributed to former Prime Minister Mohammad Mossagdeh's election, the attempted nationalisation of this industry and the August 1953 coup. He accordingly wanted to try and foster a favourable feeling towards this settlement in Iran to ensure similar situations did not occur in the future.<sup>15</sup>

More broadly, as a close ally of the Shah, Hoover was convinced policies should be put in place to protect the fledgling pro-US regime. CIA Director, Allen Dulles, shared his convictions. The younger brother of the then Secretary of State had been the architect behind the propaganda campaign that undermined the Mossagdeh regime in the final months of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis.<sup>16</sup> As they spent considerable time monitoring the Iranian domestic situation, both figures were aware that public antagonism towards Zahedi, the new Prime Minister, was high. Living standards among many Iranians were low in comparison to nations of an equal economic standing to Iran, with many in the country also resenting the Shah and Zahedi's increasingly authoritarian rule.<sup>17</sup> As such, Hoover and Dulles were concerned about how changes in Iran's position towards the Cold War would resonate among the country's general public. They sought to persuade the Iranian people of the importance of siding with the United States. Mosaddegh's removal, as well as the

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<sup>15</sup> Progress report on NSC 5402, United States policy towards Iran, 29 March 1954, DDEL, White House Office, NSC Series, Policy Papers.

<sup>16</sup> Memorandum prepared in the Directorate of Plans, campaign to install pro-Western government in Iran, CIA, 8 March 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954; Project outline prepared in the CIA, 15 June 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954.

<sup>17</sup> Quarterly report prepared in the Directorate of Plans, CIA, 8 July 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954; Quarterly report prepared in the Directorate of Plans, CIA, 12 October 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954; NSC report, statement of US policy on Iran (NSC 5821/1), 15 November 1958, DDEL, White House Office, NSC Series, Policy Papers.

exponential increase in American aid, meant Iran was quickly becoming a key US ally in the Middle East. They calculated that the general public would notice the country's shift away from Cold War neutrality. Dulles and Hoover suspected that many Iranians, especially those with nationalist and pro-Mosaddegh tendencies, would be opposed to Iran's changing diplomatic tack.<sup>18</sup>

Mindful of the Iranian people's views, Communists in and outside of Iran waged a propaganda campaign to exploit this public dissatisfaction and destabilise the Shah's regime. Radio Moscow broadcasts and Farsi editions of Pravda, the Soviet Union's official newspaper, sought to discredit the oil settlement. Its reports argued that the agreement was a way for the US 'to squeeze profits' out of Iran, a means for America and the Shah to take control of Iran's resources and gift them to private companies.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, Iran's Soviet-backed underground Communist party, the Tudeh, sought to foster popular resentment against the government, publishing and distributing anti-Shah leaflets, booklets and periodicals. The content of these mythologised the Mossaddegh regime, arguing that the US and the Shah rode roughshod over the Iranian people's interests in removing him. It drew unfavourable comparisons between this administration and the government that replaced it. Since its August 1953 formation at the Shah's behest, the Prime Minister and his Cabinet had been plagued by accusations of incompetency and corruption. Tudeh literature repeatedly accused the government of being composed of the Shah's favourites. It was allegedly an administration ill equipped to govern Iran, slow to respond to domestic and international developments, and whose members lacked the political antennae to devise and

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<sup>18</sup> Progress report on NSC 5402, United States policy towards Iran, 29 March 1954, DDEL, White House Office, NSC Series, Policy Papers; Memorandum from John Hollister (Director of the International Cooperation Administration) to Herbert Hoover Junior (Under Secretary of State), 23 January 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XII.

<sup>19</sup> Suggested programme for combating Communism in Iran, 19 October 1953, NAII, US State Department papers, Iran, Communism in Iran (1950-1954).

enact legislation.<sup>20</sup> Senior US government officials were greatly alarmed by the Tudeh Party's activities, deeming the Iranian Communist party the 'best organised and most effective Communist force in the Near East.' If they failed to deal with organisation, they feared that its tactics and practices would spread to left-wing movements in other countries in the region.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, USSR officials collaborated with Arab nationalist regimes in the Middle East, who shared their opposition towards the US' growing regional presence. Originating in the nineteenth century, the movement grew exponentially with the 1952 Egyptian military coup that resulted in the prominent Arab nationalist Gamal Abdel Nasser becoming Prime Minister, rising to President in 1956. In 1954, the Syrian electorate had also opted for an Arab nationalist government, with both countries joining in 1958 to form the UAR. Such regimes called for the deposition of neighbouring regimes like the Shah's that were closely aligned with Western powers.<sup>22</sup> Senior figures on the NSC were wary of Arab nationalism. They regarded the ideology and its adherents as being one step removed from Communism. Despite not being an Arab country, US government figures were concerned Arab nationalism could take hold in Iran. The 1951 election of Mossagdeh, a figure with neutralist

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<sup>20</sup> Information report prepared in the CIA, 14 October 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954; Memorandum from Nicholas Kitchen (Deputy Director of the Office of Greek, Turkish and Iranian Affairs) to William Rountree (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs), *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XII.

<sup>21</sup> Note by the Executive Secretary to the NSC on US policy towards Iran, 15 January 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XII.

<sup>22</sup> Nathan Citino, *From Arab nationalism to OPEC: Eisenhower, King Sa-ud, and the Making of US-Saudi Relations* (Bloomington, 2002); McNamara, *Britain, Nasser and the Balance of Power in the Middle East*, 142.

and nationalist views, indicated that many Iranians sympathised with Arab nationalism's key ideological tenets.<sup>23</sup>

With Soviet assistance, Egyptian Arab nationalists sought to destabilise the Shah's regime. They aimed to foster resentment against the monarch among non-ethnic Iranians, especially the Arab diaspora residing in the oil-rich region of Khuzestan and the Kurdish peoples living in the Northeast of the country. In so doing, the Egyptian regime hoped to cause economic and political instability that could affect the whole of Iran.<sup>24</sup> Much of these subversive activities centred on radio broadcasting. In 1953, Nasser had helped establish Radio Cairo. Recognising the broadcaster's potential to destabilise pro-Western regimes in the Middle East and Arab world, the Soviet Union immediately provided financial and technical assistance. Radio Cairo's transmissions paid particular attention to Arab and Kurdish peoples living in Iran. The broadcaster, according to US Embassy officials, sought to 'stir up trouble in Iran's frontier areas.' Programmes would highlight the better treatment of Kurds in Soviet-held areas, as well as foster Kurdish self-identity by playing the national anthem daily.<sup>25</sup>

It was with these developments in mind that the American Embassy in Tehran lobbied for the implementation of policies to shape Iranian popular opinion. In particular, they

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<sup>23</sup> Progress report on NSC 5402, United States policy towards Iran, 29 March 1954, DDEL, Dwight D. Eisenhower (Whitman) papers, NSC Series.

<sup>24</sup> Progress report on NSC 5402, United States policy towards Iran, 29 March 1954, DDEL, Dwight D. Eisenhower (Whitman) papers, NSC Series.

<sup>25</sup> Record of Baghdad Pact Council meeting, 8 February 1956, TNA, FO 371/121248; Memorandum of conference between Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Shah of Iran, 30 June 1958, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XII; Memorandum of telephone conversation between Dwight D. Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles, 30 June 1958, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XII; Memorandum of discussion at the 379<sup>th</sup> meeting of the NSC, 18 September 1958, DDEL, Dwight D. Eisenhower (Whitman) papers, NSC Series.

were concerned that Communist and Arab nationalist propaganda would have a disproportionate and detrimental effect on Iran's middle classes. Much of this burgeoning political stratum had left-wing and neutralist tendencies. As such, they were more susceptible to Soviet propaganda, which Embassy officials feared would play on their dissatisfactions and political leanings.<sup>26</sup> Figures from the American Embassy in Tehran were determined to dissuade urban middle class Iranians from deeming Communism 'a good thing.' In telegrams to both the CIA and the State Department, they called for more literature and media critical of the Soviets. This would help keep Communism to 'manageable proportions', enhance the prestige of the monarchy and crush the Tudeh.<sup>27</sup>

Yet it was only after Hoover's October 1954 return to Washington that the State Department's desire for policies that sought to shape Iranian public opinion became a reality. As Under-Secretary of State, Hoover was required to attend all NSC Planning Board meetings. Composed of representatives from the White House, Central Intelligence, State and Defence departments, this committee reviewed papers and proposed strategies. Their recommendations and conclusions would then be forwarded to the NSC as a whole, where they would be accepted and implemented as policies.<sup>28</sup> A December 1954 Planning Board report on the situation in Iran pushed for the shaping of Iranian public opinion to become a

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<sup>26</sup> Loy Henderson (US Ambassador to Iran) to John Foster Dulles (Secretary of State), 2 September 1953, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Political Relations (1950-1954); American Embassy (Tehran) to the State Department, 6 November 1954, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, Communism in Iran (1950-1954); Despatch from the American Embassy (Tehran) to the State Department, 30 October 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954; Project outline prepared in the CIA, 14 June 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954.

<sup>27</sup> Memorandum from Anthony Cuomo (Second Secretary of the American Embassy in Tehran) to Roy Melbourne (First Secretary of the American Embassy in Tehran), 19 October 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Miller, 'The Contemporary Presidency: Organising the NSC: I Like Ike's', *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 43/3 (2013), 592.



key part of US foreign policy in the country. The report tied the need to shape the views of Iran's citizens with the US' on-going provision of military aid to the country. It argued that the American desire for Iran to be crucial to the defence of the Middle East from the Soviets would only be successful if Iran's 'national morale' improves. The 'psychological elements' of the Iranian situation were 'not static.' Many of its citizens were either ambivalent or sceptical towards the threat posed by Soviet-inspired Communism. As a result, they were opposed to the Shah and Zahedi's acceptance of American weaponry and military training. Policies, accordingly, needed to be implemented that highlight the ways in which the USSR was subversively undermining the Iranian government and the country's territorial sovereignty. In so doing, this would highlight the geopolitical threats faced by Shah and Zahedi, vindicating their decision to side with the US in this superpower struggle and bolster support for the regime.<sup>29</sup>

The findings of this report were approved in a 13 January 1955 NSC meeting. It was during discussions here that Hoover and Dulles pushed for the NSC to apply initiatives aimed at steering Iranian public opinion towards the Cold War, the Shah's regime and the oil settlement. Dulles and Hoover played on the US government's deep-rooted fear of USSR and Communist expansionism. Citing the American Embassy in Tehran's reports on Soviet propaganda, they argued that the 'precarious Iranian situation' would not be resolved without policies shaping the public's views.<sup>30</sup> The Planning Board report's findings formed a key part of the Eisenhower administration's 1955 policy paper, NSC 5402, which outlined the US' diplomatic approach towards Iran. As well as calling for sustained American military and economic support for Iran, this emphasised the importance of the country's 'attitude' towards receiving this support. It highlighted the need to bolster public enthusiasm for the fledgling

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<sup>29</sup> A report to the NSC by the NSC Planning Board on United States policy towards Iran, 21 December 1953, DDEL, White House Office, NSC Series, Policy Papers.

<sup>30</sup> Minutes of the 181<sup>st</sup> meeting of the NSC, 21 January 1954, DDEL, Dwight D. Eisenhower (Whitman) papers, NSC Series.

Iranian government, as well as for initiatives that would help Iran's citizens become more anti-Communist. These programmes would direct popular nationalism into 'constructive channels', militating against 'a relapse' into the neutralism and left-wing thinking seen under Mossagdeh.<sup>31</sup>

Largely concurring with the NSC's vision for combating Communism and protecting the Shah's regime, the USIA devised a psychological programme for Iran aimed at achieving these aims. The agency's policies, programmes and initiatives immediately became a pivotal aspect of US foreign policy towards the country, overseen by the OCB's Working Group of Iran. Comprised of figures from all major sections of the US government, the committee met bi-monthly to ensure the NSC's objectives for the country were being met.<sup>32</sup> During these discussions, USIA representatives pushed for the council to make the implementation of policies dissuading the Iranian public from Soviet-inspired Communism and fostering favourable popular impressions of the Shah's regime a priority. Opening up USIS offices in the Esfahan, Mashhad and Tabriz consulates, they called for a tailor-made psychological programme for Iran reflective of the 'post settlement period' after August 1953. This would help foster and promote political, social and economic developments, while also combating Soviet propaganda. Even though USIA figures regarded the promotion of the oil settlement as important, they absolved themselves of responsibility for it, overruling Herbert Hoover Junior in the process. Such initiatives, they argued, should be left to the four American petroleum companies that comprise the new oil consortium, Esso, Texaco, Standard Oil Company of New York and Standard Oil Company of California. The agreement was instead something that the USIA claimed the American government should keep a distance from. The Iranian public were keenly aware of the US' involvement in launching the coup and securing the ensuing oil settlement, objecting to foreign control over Iran's oil industry. Any

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<sup>31</sup> Project outline prepared in the CIA, 15 June 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954.

<sup>32</sup> Memorandum of meeting of the OCB's Iran Working Group, 16 May 1955, DDEL, White House Office, NSC Staff, OCB Series.

American attempt to promote the oil settlement, therefore, could lead to a popular Iranian backlash against the US.<sup>33</sup>

Instead, USIA figures ordered USIS officials in Iran to differentiate between the different ideologies of freedom and Communism. In underlining this dichotomy, they aimed to illustrate the loss of liberty under regimes of the latter, especially intellectual freedom of expression. In extolling the virtues of the 'free world' of Western Europe and North America, though, it was important to avoid specifics. Each Western society was diverse, possessing a different understanding of the 'free world's' key tenets. Senior USIA officials were also concerned that overstating the American conception could generate popular resistance. While they envisioned that many Iranians would be easily swayed away from Communism, they were not confident that Iran's public regarded a US-style society or politics as a credible alternative.<sup>34</sup>

To promote the 'free world' effectively and efficiently, USIS officials should strive to foster ties with prominent Iranian governmental and societal figures. Having spent most of their formative years being educated in Europe, most of these individuals possessed pro-Western views. Much of this political and societal elite were accordingly far keener to strengthen US-Iran ties than their predecessors. Due to the UK's imperial past and its historic hold over Iranian affairs, previous generations had been much more deferential towards the British government. The newer generation of elites, however, sought to detach Iran from de facto UK control, regarding the building of ties with the US as the most effective means to achieve this.<sup>35</sup> Through working with these figures the USIA hoped that the USIS

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<sup>33</sup> USIA (Washington) to OCB (Washington), 27 September 1957, DDEL, White House Office papers, NSC Staff, OCB Series.

<sup>34</sup> Outline plan of operations for US ideological programme in Iran, 27 June 1955, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>35</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 25 August 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

could engage with its 'principal targets in Iran' to create a broad middle class coalition against Communism. This included urban population government officials, university faculty, students, school children, merchants and soldiers. Not only did the USIA deem members of this section of society more receptive to American norms, values and lifestyles, but they also regarded appealing to these individuals as an effective means of shoring up the Iranian regime. Engaging with this specific group, it was hoped, would create a 'trickle down effect.' As Iran's middle classes became more politically, socially and economically prosperous, membership of this societal group would become more aspirational. Other Iranians would copy their habits and practices, which would be based on American values and culture.<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, greater educational and white-collar employment opportunities meant that Iran's urban middle classes were growing in size and prominence by the early 1950s. Possessing mainly moderate, centrist views, a growing number of this societal group's members had become more politically aware and active, eager to have more of a say in Iranian political life. Robert Payne, the USIS' chief officer for Iran from 1955 to 1958, had become increasingly concerned that many of these individuals were opposed to Iran's closer relationship with the US. In a telegram to his USIA superiors in Washington, he noted that, while most of Iran's middle classes were appreciative of American economic support, they were opposed to Iran siding with the US in its superpower struggle with the Soviet Union. There had already been 'an adverse reaction' to a December 1955 *Time* magazine article, which discussed the prospect of a defence line across the Zagros Mountains. Spanning the length of northwest Iran, northeast Iraq and Southeast Turkey, US officials had regarded the mountain range as an excellent buffer against a possible Soviet invasion. The ensuing

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<sup>36</sup> Outline plan of operations for US ideological programme in Iran, 27 June 1955, NAIL, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960); Memorandum by Fisher Howe (Acting Special Assistant to the Secretary of State for Intelligence) to John Foster Dulles (Secretary of State), 30 July 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954; Minutes of discussion at the 334<sup>th</sup> NSC meeting, 8 August 1957, DDEL, Dwight D. Eisenhower (Whitman) papers, NSC Series.

Iranian backlash against this *Time* story, however, compelled Payne and his USIS subordinates in Iran to develop the 'most favourable possible public opinion for US initiatives'. Not only would this help placate domestic opposition towards Iran's new Cold War allegiances, but it would also help make the Iranian public more amenable towards US policies and objectives.<sup>37</sup>

### **Initial USIS initiatives in Iran**

Initially, USIS officials in Iran sought to influence popular perceptions of Communism and the ruling regime through supplying stories to the press and a book translation programme. Providing stories to Iran's media outlets was something that other sections of the US government had been undertaking to steer popular Iranian views since the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis. Between 1951 and 1953, the CIA - in conjunction with the US Embassy – had implemented a propaganda campaign to foster support for the Shah and discredit Mossagdeh. Through agents entrenched in the Iranian political system, the CIA subsidised publication media and leaked information to the Iranian press. Reports suggested that the US would reduce aid to Iran while Mossagdeh remains in power, while also highlighting the Iranian prime minister's supposed faults. Articles would illustrate his power-hungry nature, most notably his attempts to hold on to office in the last few months of the oil crisis. Eager to

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<sup>37</sup> Telegram from the American Embassy (Tehran) to the State Department, 3 September 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XII; 'The Baghdad Bastion', *Time*, 67/23, 5 December 1955; Memorandum from John Hollister (Director of the International Cooperation Administration) to Herbert Hoover Junior (Under Secretary of State), 23 January 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XII; Near East, African and South Asian intelligence briefs, 13 February 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Records Relating to South Asia.

resolve the dispute, the Shah had dissolved the Iranian parliament and cabinet in April 1953, something that Mossagdeh refused to acknowledge.<sup>38</sup>

After the crisis, the USIS were determined to establish their own links with the Iranian press. Figures from the agency were primarily affected by the views of Iranian government officials with pro-US sympathies. In a meeting with Payne, Foreign Minister Abbas Aram claimed that that Iran's print press possessed 'great power and potential.' As publications were state-run - with editors closely monitored by the government - these outlets provided a perfect platform from which to extoll the virtues of government policies and criticise the Soviet Union.<sup>39</sup> The USIS, moreover, were concerned by Soviet attempts to woo Iran's press officials. At a 4 December 1956 press convention, for example, Nikolai Pegov, the USSR's Ambassador to Iran, invited 12 Iranian journalists on a tour of Moscow.<sup>40</sup> All of these reporters wrote for left-leaning publications such as *Tehran Mossavar* and *Omid Iran*, critical of the US' presence in Iran, as well as the Shah. Despite regarding these journalists as 'second rate', the USIS successfully lobbied the Iranian government to reject their exit visas.<sup>41</sup> The Soviet response to this was to invite 12 more journalists to Moscow, five from the *Tehran Times* and seven from *Ettelat*, Iran's two most popular newspapers.<sup>42</sup> In this case, and despite not being wholly comfortable with the idea, the USIS and the Iranian

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<sup>38</sup> Memorandum prepared in the Directorate of Plans, CIA, 8 March 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954; Project outline prepared in the CIA, 15 June 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954.

<sup>39</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 12 January 1957, NAIL, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>40</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 5 January 1957, NAIL, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>41</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 20 December 1956, NAIL, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>42</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 15 December 1956, NAIL, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

government allowed these journalists to visit the Soviet Union. Two of the invitees, *Kayhan* editor Mostafah Mezbezadeh and *Ettelat* columnist Majid Davami, had close ties to the US. Both writers extensively collaborated with the CIA during the oil crisis and were the USIS' closest journalist contacts. Preventing them from visiting Moscow could antagonise them, jeopardising the USIS' relationship with these figures. Besides, officials from the American agency envisaged that both journalists could be used to write critical stories of their Russian experiences in the future.<sup>43</sup>

The stories USIS figures supplied to Mezbezadeh and Davami emphasised the inferior economic conditions and restricted political freedoms in Communist societies. Reports claimed that everyday life in the People's Republic of China was a 'nightmare', and revealed how governments in the Eastern Bloc were kept in check by the fear of a Soviet military invasion.<sup>44</sup> To foster favourable popular views towards the Shah's regime, the USIS were instrumental in establishing a new Iranian newspaper, *Daily Bamshad*. Its editor, Ismael Purvali, was an ardent pro-American, a close confidante of the Iranian Prime Minister from 1957-1960, Manoucher Eqbal, from their time as students at Dar ul-Funun, forerunner to the University of Tehran. As an advocate of the Shah's rule, Purvali was determined to ensure the continuation of the Pahlavi Dynasty. He approached Payne, requesting financial support and information for stories, requests the PAO for Iran was only too happy to comply with. The first editions of *Daily Bamshad* were printed on 1 May 1957. Spanning four pages, its reports highlighted Iran's socio-economic progress under the Shah, while also praising US foreign policy in the Middle East.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 8 December 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>44</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 27 August 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>45</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 1 May 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

To further sway the Iranian literate classes from Communism, the USIS translated various books and publications into Farsi. Before 1955, this was not a particularly successful enterprise. The agency's officials focused on translating 'instructional publications.' They supplied books to stores and libraries on topics such as agricultural practices and the best ways to rear children. According to USIA figures in Washington, such a strategy was too simplistic. While it undoubtedly assisted Iran's socio-economic development, it did little to contain Communism and bolster the Shah's regime.<sup>46</sup> They instead recommended to the USIS that any book translation programme for Iran should be modelled on the thoughts of Donald Wilbur, an archaeologist who specialised in the study of Iran and Ancient Persia. While conducting research in Iran for his PhD thesis, an analysis of Ancient Persian languages, Wilbur had also moonlighted as an intelligence officer. In 1942 he had joined the Office of Strategic Services, the CIA's forerunner. He was charged with monitoring the German and Italian consulates in Iran and the Persian Gulf. At the Second World War's end he joined the CIA, providing information on popular Iranian perspectives to the agency during the 1946 Azerbaijan Crisis, as well as directly paying pro-Shah loyalists to demonstrate against Mossagdeh in August 1953. Due to his experience of Iran, a New York-based company, Franklin Publications, had commissioned Wilbur to write a report on the literary scene in Iran. The publisher was considering whether to enter the Persian market.<sup>47</sup>

The USIS had been privy to this report, with the USIA in Washington handing them a copy. Wilbur had bemoaned the lack of Iranian knowledge on promoting and displaying books. While Tehran had 12 major bookstores, each stocking 4000-20,000 publications at any one time, there was no promotion of books in newspapers, on the radio or in shop windows. The number of readers in the country was also very small. Wilbur estimated that

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<sup>46</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 4 November 1953, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Reports on the USIS in Iran.

<sup>47</sup> Advisory memorandum for Franklin Publications to Donald Wilbur, 23 September 1953, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Reports on the USIS in Iran.



only roughly 20% of Iran's 16,000,000 people were literate. Out of these, only around 20,000, mostly young, college-educated individuals residing in Tehran or other major provincial cities were keen readers. Many had confined themselves to Persian history books and had little appreciation of works written by foreign authors. Wilbur pointed out that in his visits to Tehran's 12 book stores, only one in the province of Shemiran, in northern Tehran, had copies of books from American literary giants such as Mark Twain, Jack London and John Steinbeck. Readers, in contrast, were keen on foreign news publications; *Time* magazine, in particular, had proved popular with Iran's literate classes.<sup>48</sup> In light of this supposed Iranian appreciation of US perspectives on current affairs, Wilbur recommended publishers to supply biographies and autobiographies, especially those centred on individuals who had overcome significant obstacles to achieve success. These should include biopics on 'great' Americans such as George Washington and Ulysses Grant, as well as notable living figures like Eisenhower. Wilbur, likewise, called for more books to be supplied to Iran that extolled the virtues of US history, geography and business. Due to the low literacy levels in Iran, these should not be technical, accessible to high school students and above. It would also be prudent to provide books on US perspectives on the Middle East and critiques of Communism.<sup>49</sup>

### **USIS-Iranian Government Collaboration: The Information Council**

The US State Department, however, halted the USIS' book translation programme before it could be implemented. As officials from its Bureau of Near Eastern, African and Asian Affairs pointed out, the illiteracy rate, close to two-thirds of the population, was too high to justify

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<sup>48</sup> Advisory memorandum for Franklin Publications to Donald Wilbur, 23 September 1953, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Reports on the USIS in Iran.

<sup>49</sup> Donald Wilbur to Franklin Publications, 31 October 1953, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Reports on the USIS in Iran.

such action. Unless USIS figures focused on translating and promoting illustration-heavy publications, book translations and engaging with the press were 'futile exercises.' State Department officials instead called for USIS officials in Iran to engage with the less literate, especially those in provincial cities such as Tabriz and Mashhad close to the Soviet border. These north and eastern regions were where Communist support was at its highest. Popular unrest in these cities would not just endanger the Shah's regime but also potentially destabilise the region.<sup>50</sup> Figures from the Bureau of Near Eastern, African and Asian Affairs recommended to the USIS that they should only seek to solely engage with Iran's middle classes once this threat had abated. By this point, book translation and library expansion initiatives would be much more far-reaching. Due to the Iranian people's widening participation in education, the country's literacy rate would have improved immeasurably.<sup>51</sup>

Complying with the State Department's demands, Payne claimed that the only way these aims could be achieved was through collaborating with Iranian government officials. As PAO, Payne was in charge of the agency's operations in the country, devising, approving and presiding over all of the USIS' cultural diplomacy activities. People in Iran, Payne argued, were generally wary of big powers, so a sustained USIS campaign across the radio waves would be counterproductive. In the same way that the American agency supplied stories to the Iranian media, the USIS should instead engage with Iran's people through radio via a third party. For such an approach to be effective, Payne recommended to the USIA that he should work closely with Nosratollah Moinian, the head of the DPB. Established by the Shah in 1953, it oversaw all Iranian print, audio and visual media. Its head, Moinian, was vociferously pro-American. Wary of both the Soviet Union and Britain in equal measure, he regarded the US as best placed to combat the influence and presence of

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<sup>50</sup> Bureau of Near Eastern and African Affairs to the State Department, 26 October 1955, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>51</sup> Bureau of Near Eastern and African Affairs to the State Department, 26 October 1955, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

both nations in Iran. Moinian was one of a new generation of Iranian politicians sceptical of the former imperial powers. This group had grown tired of the frequent Anglo-Russian interventions in Iranian affairs since the seventeenth century. Due to the US' oft-stated anti-imperialist stance, Moinian and his contemporaries deemed dealing with the Americans as a vastly superior alternative.<sup>52</sup> The views of this new generation of politicians had become much more prominent and powerful, with the Shah increasingly favouring these figures. Now that he was taking more of an interest in political affairs, the Iranian monarch wanted to sweep away many of the established patricians, many of whom were old and pro-British, replacing them with younger figures such as Moinian that were more amenable to dealing with modern superpowers such as the US.<sup>53</sup>

As a result, the USIS sought to engage with these pro-American figures through establishing an organisation that brought together American and Iranian officials, the Information Council. In a February 1955 meeting with Moinian, Payne suggested that an advisory group, comprised of USIS, DPB and pro-American government officials, be established. This committee, Payne suggested, would make the final decision on all propaganda and information policies, with all other Iranian government departments required to defer to it. Payne had taken inspiration for this idea from a July 1955 USIA circular. Sent to all USIS posts in the Middle East, this had suggested to PAOs that they should help establish advisory committees composed of Americans residing in these nations. Representatives in these meetings should hail from business, education, religion or the arts. They could then subsequently use their Iranian associates and acquaintances to provide feedback to the USIS on popular perceptions of the US and for constructive suggestions as

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<sup>52</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 15 March 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>53</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 25 August 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

to how these could be improved.<sup>54</sup> Unlike the USIA's conception, this advisory group, due to the nature of its activities, would remain unknown to all but the higher echelons of the Iranian government. US involvement, if it emerged, would be very embarrassing.<sup>55</sup> Per the USIS' recommendation, and unlike the USIA's conception of an advisory committee, there would be non-American representatives. Moinian fronted the Information Council, supported in this role by Iran's Deputy Prime Minister, Nasser Zolfghari, and Senator Ali Hejazi. Moinian had recruited both due to their desire for stronger US-Iran bilateral ties and greater American involvement in Iranian political and economic affairs.<sup>56</sup>

Beyond Moinian and Zolfghari, Payne was unwilling to invite other Iranian government officials to join the advisory group. According to the USIS' PAO for Iran, most of the figures surrounding the Shah did not possess an understanding of information processes and techniques. The DPB, in particular, had many 'un-talented hangers-on.' Any attempt to rectify this would take too long, blighted by the 'personal ambitions and jealousies' of officials in the DPB, as well as in and outside the Information Council.<sup>57</sup> One such individual, with the potential to destabilise the US-Iranian advisory group, was the Minister of Interior, Asadollah Alam. Born into a wealthy landowning family, he was ever-present in the Shah's inner circle from 1953 until his death in 1978. Alam was a vehement Anglophile, helping to orchestrate the August 1953 coup.<sup>58</sup> After hearing about the Information Council's existence, he sought to force his way onto the advisory group and curtail its work with US officials. Alam

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<sup>54</sup> USIA Circular, 25 July 1955, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Near East and Asia Area Objectives.

<sup>55</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 25 August 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>56</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 25 August 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>57</sup> Robert Payne (PAO, USIS Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 13 March 1956, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>58</sup> Asadollah Alam, *Diaries of Asadollah Alam* (New York, 1992).

petitioned the Shah, to no avail, to force the DPB and Moinian to work with the UK Foreign Office's IRD and model its activities on the British system.<sup>59</sup>

While aware of the Information Council's existence, the Shah was not particularly interested in its functions. Rather than preside over it, he trusted Zolfghari to oversee its activities on his behalf. In a September 1956 audience with the Iranian monarch, the then American Ambassador to Iran, Selden Chapin, enquired about the Information Council to gauge the Shah's views on this committee. Uneasy about the monarch's relative silence on this US-Iran arrangement, the USIS had asked Chapin to bring this up in the meeting. The Shah claimed that, while he was aware of the Information Council's existence, he was ambivalent about its workings and initiatives. He claimed the dissemination of anti-Communist propaganda was inconsequential, instead arguing that greater American military and economic support was the most effective way to contain Communism. The Shah proceeded to portion responsibility for the Information Council to both Zolfghari and Moinian. The advisory group was something conceived by these figures, so it should be in their remit.<sup>60</sup>

In bringing together USIS and selected Iranian government figures, the Information Council oversaw and approved all US-Iran anti-Communist initiatives and activities that involved the Iranian media. In so doing, it became the 'third party' that the USIS were looking for to engage with the Iranian public and dissuade them from Communism. Still, in relying on the Information Council as a vehicle for the anti-Soviet activities in Iran, the USIS were wary. Despite their ardent pro-Americanism, they feared that both Zolfghari and Moinian could develop their own interests counter to the US' as time progresses. Equally, should the Shah suddenly take a greater interest in the Information Council's activities, he could wield his

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<sup>59</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 14 July 1956, NAIL, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>60</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 18 June 1956, NAIL, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

considerable power to shape the programme according to his interests. To ensure that the Information Council focused on dissuading the Iranian public from Communism, the USIS were convinced that they had to play a hands-on role in the committee. As well as attending all scheduled meetings, they aimed to inform and share stories with Iranian radio and press outlets, while also assisting and advising Iran's government on media matters.<sup>61</sup>

The Information Council began operating in February 1956. From the outset, it became the main conduit for all US-Iranian anti-Communist propaganda and counter-subversive initiatives. As per Payne's suggestion, the advisory group focused on enhancing the functions and reach of Radio Tehran, a government owned broadcaster run by the DPB and overseen by Moinian. As the main - and only - Iranian audio broadcaster, it had various satellite stations in provincial cities that predominantly used Radio Tehran content, but also devised programming of their own to suit local, regional audiences. Despite its relative national monopoly, the broadcaster faced considerable external competition, notably Radio Moscow and the BBC Persian Service. The coverage, content and reception of these stations were vastly superior to that of Radio Tehran. According to Payne, the Iranian broadcaster not only had a weak signal outside the capital city, but its programming was of a 'low budget with even lower production values.' While Radio Tehran broadcast for 17 hours a day, most listeners, especially in rural areas and provincial cities, were unable to obtain an audible signal. Compounding these issues, the broadcaster suffered from a shortage of staff, numerous programmes that lacked a clear central message and not enough modern radio equipment. Initial reports from US engineers visiting Iran at Payne's behest indicated that a

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<sup>61</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 1 June 1956, NAIL, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960); Detailed development of major actions relating to United States policy toward Iran (NSC 5504), 10 July 1956, DDEL, White House Office, NSC Staff, OCB Series.

new 50-kilowatt transmitter was required to resolve these issues. This would cover the area surrounding Tehran by day and the whole country by night.<sup>62</sup>

Payne had been placed under considerable pressure by senior figures in the US government and his USIA superiors to focus specifically on improving Iranian radio. Crucially, the OCB's Iran Working Group reports on the threat of Soviet-inspired Communism in the country had lauded the 'special importance of radio' in fostering the 'goodwill of the Iranian public.' Not only was most of the country illiterate, but also broadcast news was considered by many Iranians to be more reliable than print journalism. Listeners instead placed greater importance on news programming. The Soviets, according to the OCB's Iran Working Group, had been quicker to realise this. Through Radio Moscow and Radio Baku's Farsi broadcasts, they were gathering listeners at an alarming rate. Recognising Iran's cultural and linguistic diversities, they also offered radio programmes in Turkish and Kurdish, appealing to Iranians in border areas. Radio Moscow, for example, had dedicated major sections of its Farsi and Kurdish broadcasts to comparing the Soviets' 'peace-loving' approach with the US' 'warmongering stance.' Seeking to appeal to young, college educated Iranians with an understanding of current affairs, programmes often emphasised supposed American militancy and colonialism in Asia. They often paid considerable attention to the US' reliance on Chang Kai-shek in China, drawing unfavourable parallels between this and America's relationship with the Shah.<sup>63</sup>

The USIA, equally, had made the improving of Iran's communication capabilities a key objective for USIS officials working in the country and the wider region. The aim had come direct from Theodore Streibert, the USIA's Director from 1953-1957. Before heading the organisation he had served as an executive on the board of RKO Pictures, one of the

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<sup>62</sup> Memorandum for the OCB, 30 March 1955, DDEL, White House Office papers, NSC Staff, OCB Series.

<sup>63</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 9 September 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

'big five' Hollywood studios of the early twentieth century. Through this role Streibert had come to see the merits and potential of both televisual and audio media in reaching mass audiences. In the case of nations allied to the US in the Near East, Asia and Africa, Streibert had called on USIS subordinates stationed in these countries to pay significant attention to improving radio facilities. The agency's officials, consequently, could use this medium to promote US culture and values or dissuade foreign publics from Communism.<sup>64</sup> In the case of Iran, Streibert had authorised the withdrawal of funds from the USIS budgets for Iraq, Turkey and Greece to give to the agency's staff in Tehran. The extra financial support was given to cover the costs for equipment, technical assistance and staff training for Radio Tehran, which Streibert deemed crucial to protecting the fledgling Iranian ruling regime. With more funding and technical support, he was confident that the broadcaster would be able to broadcast all day, act as a 'government spokesman' as well as provide entertainment and news.<sup>65</sup>

It was only with Moinian and Zolfghari's blessing, though, that the Information Council focused specifically on improving Iranian radio. Both figures were in complete agreement with Payne and the USIA's views on this issue. Despite facing considerable pressure from within the DPB to focus on cultivating Iran's television capabilities, they deemed the medium as being of the 'lowest priority.' Moinian and Zolfghari viewed the product as a 'luxury item' for Iranian people. Focusing on television, they argued, would only exacerbate the widening gap between the rich and poor in Iran. To combat this, it was only logical to sort out other, 'more basic forms of communication' such as radio, telegraph and telephone first. By widening access to these older, more affordable means of

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<sup>64</sup> Minutes of Radio Committee meeting, 14 July 1956, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>65</sup> Clary Thompson (Director of USIA in Near East) to Theodore Streibert (Director, USIA), 29 April 1955, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Travel Files; Minutes of Radio Committee meeting, 14 July 1956, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).



telecommunication, people residing in more impoverished parts of the country would be able to interact with prosperous regions, perhaps resulting in an improvement in living standards. It is only when this has been achieved, especially when television sets became more affordable, that the DPB should focus on this medium.<sup>66</sup>

One of the Information Council's first campaigns was to use Radio Tehran's news broadcasts to promote the Baghdad Pact. In a May 1956 meeting, Zolfghari claimed to USIS officials that 'people do not know enough about this defence pact.' Exploiting the popular and elite gaps in Iranian knowledge, Tudeh posters and leaflets claimed that being part of this arrangement made Iran a subordinate NATO member and US puppet.<sup>67</sup> Compounding this was the emerging Iran-Soviet détente. In June 1956, the Shah visited Moscow as a guest of the Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. In discussions with the Iranian monarch, the USSR's leader had pledged not to infringe on Iran's territorial sovereignty.<sup>68</sup> Both the USIS in Iran and Zolfghari were concerned by these developments. They feared that, if publicised, this pact would evoke Soviet sympathies among the Iranian public. Not only would this undo all their hard work in highlighting the perils of Communism, but it may also lead to a backlash against Western led arrangements such as the Baghdad Pact.<sup>69</sup> The advisory group

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<sup>66</sup> Robert Payne (PAO, USIS Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 13 March 1956, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>67</sup> Progress report on NSC 5402 (US policy towards Iran), 29 March 1954, DDEL, White House Office, NSC Staff, OCB Series; Outline plan of operations for Iran, 8 April 1955, DDEL, White House Office, NSC Staff, OCB Series; Near East, African and South Asian intelligence briefs, 13 February 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Records Relating to South Asia; USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 1 June 1956, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>68</sup> Roham Alvandi, 'Flirting With Neutrality: The Shah, Khrushchev and the Failed 1959 Soviet-Iranian Negotiations', *Iranian Studies*, 47/3 (2014), 422.

<sup>69</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 13 July 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961); Outline plan of operations for Iran, 8 April 1955, DDEL, White House Office, NSC Staff, OCB Series.

accordingly took advantage of the Shah's 21-26 May 1956 state visit to Turkey, a fellow member of the agreement. They authorised Radio Tehran to broadcast a 45-minute recording on its 27 May 1957 morning news bulletin. Its content elucidated the highlights of this state visit, stressed Irano-Turkic political and cultural unity and emphasised the need to preserve this harmony from external threats.<sup>70</sup>

Moreover, the Information Council strove to limit and alleviate any popular backlash in Iran against Western powers caused by the Suez Crisis. The incident began in October 1956, when British French and Israeli soldiers seized the shipping route. This had been in response to Nasser's decision to nationalise the Suez Canal. The US, Soviet Union and the UN all collectively opposed this seizure. Diplomatic pressure stemming from all three actors forced, the UK, France and Israel to withdraw their military forces one month later.<sup>71</sup> US officials were opposed to this Anglo-French-Israeli intervention in Egypt. They feared that it would have repercussions for popular perceptions of the US and its allies across the Arab world and the Middle East as a whole. There had already been significant popular disquiet in Iran regarding Britain, France and Israel's intervention in Suez. In a November 1956 audience with the Shah, the Iranian monarch asked the American Ambassador, Selden Chapin, and his British counterpart, Sir Roger Stevens, what they could do to alleviate the Iranian people's uneasiness towards the military intervention. The Shah claimed that his

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<sup>70</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 1 June 1956, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960); USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 13 July 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>71</sup> Keith Kyle, *Suez: Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* (London, 1991), 7; George Peden, 'Suez and Britain's Decline as a World Power', *The Historical Journal*, 55/4 (2012), 1073; William Wallace, 'The Collapse of British Foreign Policy', *International Affairs*, 8/1, (2005), 55.

advisors had been informing him daily of popular opposition towards unfolding events in Egypt.<sup>72</sup>

To deal with these increasingly unfavourable views of Western powers, the USIS worked with the Information Council to deal with the Suez Canal issue. In the advisory group's meetings, DPB and USIS representatives agreed to wage a propaganda campaign discrediting Nasser's approach to the incident. In particular, the Information Council focused on countering popular emotional support for the Egyptian leader. They authorised the production and dissemination of publications, posters and Radio Tehran broadcasts that suggested that Nasser was a Soviet stooge. More broadly, the Information Council emphasised the negative consequences of the Suez Canal's nationalisation on Iran's economy. With the events of 1951-53 in mind, DPB and USIS officials suspected that many Iranians sympathised with Nasser taking back control of an Egyptian asset from a Western power. Broadcasts on Radio Tehran's morning programme talked about how Iran relied on the shipping route for roughly three quarters of its imports and exports. Should Egypt decide to levy tariffs or intermittently block the Suez Canal, it could result in food shortages, spikes in the unemployment rate and declining productivity. With regards to the issue as a whole, news programmes on Radio Tehran emphasised that there was right and wrong on both sides. They conceded that British and French forces should not have forcibly taken the shipping route, but maintained that Nasser should not have nationalised the Suez Canal without first discussing this with the UK government first. The undiplomatic approach displayed by the Egyptians here would make the rest of the world distrust Middle Eastern leaders and would discourage others from collaborating with the region's governments economically and politically.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 2 August 1954, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>73</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 13 August 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

The Information Council's most considerable work, though, were its schemes to improve Radio Tehran's programming and signal. Key to this was the building of a new medium wave transmitter and studio to improve the broadcaster's reach. USIS officials in Iran regarded these projects as being of the utmost priority. The station's signal was very weak, almost inaudible, in most provincial areas of the country, particularly in northern and Western regions where Communist sympathies, and Soviet radio jamming, was strongest. A modern studio was also required as, according to Payne, Radio Tehran's facilities were 'archaic and unfit for purpose.'<sup>74</sup> The building of the medium wave transmitter and the studio had been initiatives the USIS and the Information Council had inherited. In January 1953, UNESCO sent officials to Iran as part of their project to improve Iranian telecommunications. The agency regarded rectifying this issue part of their broader remit to resolve socio-economic problems around the globe. With regards to Iran, the agency sought to narrow the income and wealth disparities between Tehran's more prosperous citizens and the impoverished majority residing in rural areas and provincial cities.<sup>75</sup> Despite Moinian bequeathing offices to these UNESCO officials, the DPB was largely uncooperative. Figures from the Iranian government department deemed their schemes to be unjustifiably expensive, especially as they would do little to showcase Iran to the world. They instead vetoed all UNESCO suggestions, demoralising the agency's officials until their February 1954 departure.<sup>76</sup> It was only at the USIS' behest, as well as a fear of Soviet-style

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<sup>74</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 2 August 1954, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>75</sup> Minutes of Radio Committee meeting, 18 October 1955, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>76</sup> Minutes of Radio Committee meeting, 18 October 1955, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

Communism taking hold in Iran, that persuaded the DPB to implement UNESCO's suggested plans.<sup>77</sup>

The Information Council planned to install the medium wave transmitter in Shemiran. Firmly ensconced in the Elburz Mountain range, the city, just north of Tehran, was regarded by USIS and DPB officials as ideal. By placing the transmitter at a high altitude, Radio Tehran's broadcasts would be much easier for radios across the country to pick up.<sup>78</sup> Initially, the advisory group planned to have the transmitter installed by the end of July 1956. There were, however, difficulties in securing the mast. It arrived by freight in May from Tangiers, but it had been damaged on the journey. With time, expertise and the right equipment needed to repair the mast, the transmitter was only operational by the 25 October 1956, the day before the Shah's birthday. As part of his celebrations, the Iranian monarch made the transmitter's maiden broadcast, a speech celebrating the supposed socio-economic progress Iran had made under his rule.<sup>79</sup> From its launch, the new medium wave transmitter was an unprecedented success. Radio Tehran's reception improved immeasurably and its signal successfully overpowered Soviet jamming. The station's broadcasts could now be heard clearly in the cities of Isfahan and Abadan, as well as the Caspian seaboard, places where Radio Tehran had previously found it difficult to reach.<sup>80</sup>

Though the transmitter's installation was relatively seamless, the building of a studio for Radio Tehran was less so. The Information Council envisaged the studio being ready in

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<sup>77</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 2 August 1954, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>78</sup> Minutes of Radio Committee meeting, 2 February 1957, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>79</sup> Minutes of Radio Committee meeting, 3 November 1956, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>80</sup> Minutes of Radio Committee meeting, 2 February 1957, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

July 1956; at the same time as the medium wave radio transmitter was scheduled to begin broadcasting. Yet the new studio opened nearly a year later, at the end of June 1957. The advisory group was unable to construct a studio, as planned, in the DPB's main office in Tehran. The building was not structured or electronically wired correctly for such a facility. Construction and restoration work to rectify this proved too costly for both the USIS and the DPB. Heated disagreements subsequently occurred within the Information Council. Moinian and Zolfghari pushed Payne to use USIS funds to purchase and secure a suitable building for Radio Tehran, something the agency's PAO rejected on budgetary grounds. The impasse was only resolved when the American agency acquiesced to Moinian and Zolfghari's demands. Not only did they fear that this disagreement would result in the Information Council's disintegration, but the USIS also realised that they needed similar facilities of their own. The American agency purchased a cheap plot of land in southern Tehran, constructing a studio that it shared with the DPB and the broadcaster.<sup>81</sup>

To operate the studio and radio transmitter, the USIS, with the Information Council's assistance and blessing, selected two employees, Pasha Sameli and Nasser Shirzad, to be sent for an intensive training course in the US. Lasting six months, sessions took place at both the VOA's headquarters in Washington, as well as the University of Boston. David Nalle, one of the producers for the VOA's foreign language broadcasts, instructed the trainees. Between 1951 and 1954, Nalle had been stationed in the Iranian city of Mashhad as the State Department's consular representative for eastern Iran. A keen advocate of information dissemination and cultural diplomacy, Nalle was unimpressed with the US' broader attempts to combat Soviet propaganda in this region. In telegrams to the State Department, he had expressed his frustration at the lack of finance and personnel needed to

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<sup>81</sup> Nasser Zolfghari (Iranian Deputy Prime Minister) to Robert Payne (PAO, USIS Tehran), 15 October 1957, NAIL, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

bolster Iranian communication and radio capabilities, especially in helping Iranians with how to approach this.<sup>82</sup>

With his new role with the VOA in Washington, Nalle set about rectifying this issue. Through providing training sessions to Sameli and Shirzad with the USIS' support, he hoped to influence and shape Radio Tehran's content. In telegrams to USIA figures, he claimed that this would provide the American agency with figures in the Iranian media that would effectively answer to and seek assistance from Payne and other USIS officials in Iran.<sup>83</sup> Lasting six months, the course content stressed the need for trainees, whether in a presenting or producing capacity, to provide an anti-Communist perspective on news and current affairs. Complementing this, sessions recommended to Radio Tehran trainees that they needed to play more classical music broadcasts to appeal to highbrow, intellectual audiences who tended to display a greater affinity towards the Soviet Union. In particular, they recommended the works of composers such as the American Henry Cowell. In the process, Shirzad and Sameli were given crash courses on listener habits, likes and dislikes, as well as advanced English language reading, writing and speaking.<sup>84</sup>

On their September 1956 return from the United States, Moinian promoted Sameli and Shirzad to the roles of Chief Radio Officer and Director of Radio Tehran respectively.

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<sup>82</sup> David Nalle's Final Report as PAO for Mashhad, 5 May 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961); David Nalle interviewed by Dorothy Robins-Mowry, 12 April 1990, Arlington, Virginia, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, [https://www.adst.org/OH\\_TOCs/Nalle,David.toc.pdf](https://www.adst.org/OH_TOCs/Nalle,David.toc.pdf) (accessed 11 April 2019).

<sup>83</sup> Robert Payne (PAO, USIS Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 13 March 1956, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>84</sup> Memorandum of conversation with Pasha Sameli (Radio Production trainee), 17 September 1956, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960); Memorandum of conversation with Nasser Shirzad (Radio Production trainee), 21 September 1956, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

Their training in America, according to the DPB head, had given them a 'solid grounding in radio and communication.' Sameli and Shirzad, therefore, possessed the knowledge and competencies to further modernise and improve Iran's capabilities in this field.<sup>85</sup> Through their newly gained roles, which provided them with effective control over Iranian radio, Sameli and Shirzad exploited their links with the USIS. Both figures were successful in getting the American agency to loan them two staff members to help with the running of Radio Tehran's new studio and the medium wave transmitter on a part-time basis. USIS assistance with the latter was crucial. Sameli and Shirzad argued that the Iranian broadcaster's staff 'lacked the training and motivation' to run the transmitter. Low pay and poor working conditions meant that the station's workers were apathetic, and USIS overseers were accordingly required to do the bulk of the work.<sup>86</sup> As well as this, Sameli and Shirzad asked the USIS if these staff members could instruct and train staff from Radio Tehran's provincial satellite stations. Their aim was to provide these broadcasters with help in peddling anti-Communist propaganda and to also deliver assistance in programme direction and studio engineering. In return for this, Sameli and Shirzad gave the USIS freedom to place their own programming on Radio Tehran for two hours per day.<sup>87</sup>

### **USIS and Iranian government collaboration beyond the Information Council**

The Soviet Union's response to the Information Council's initiatives was to redouble its efforts in jamming Radio Tehran's signal from early 1958 onwards. Such developments

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<sup>85</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 6 October 1956, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>86</sup> Minutes of Radio Committee meeting, 3 November 1956, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>87</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 10 August 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).



angered the Shah, who regarded this as an affront to Iran's territorial sovereignty. In an August 1958 communiqué to the State Department, the Iranian monarch called on the American government to provide more anti-jamming equipment, arguing that 'radio requirements were even more vital than military aid.'<sup>88</sup> Despite initially expressing ambivalence towards its functions, the Shah was taking an increasing interest in the Information Council's activities by the end of the 1950s. As well as witnessing the exponential growth and reach of Radio Tehran in a short space of time, the Iranian monarch was increasingly aware of Soviet and Arab nationalist attempts to destabilise his regime through radio broadcasts. He was particularly concerned with the growth and reach of two Nasserite radio stations, the Voice of Arabs and Radio Cairo. In light of these developments, the Shah was increasingly keen to move beyond relying on the Information Council to combat Soviet propaganda. He instead called for US assistance in establishing an American-backed radio station in Iran that would broadcast to the whole Middle East. In discussions with the US Embassy in Tehran, the Iranian monarch claimed that, as Iran was an Islamic country, it was far better placed than the United States to dissuade people in neighbouring nations away from Communism. Moreover, he envisaged that such an enterprise would heighten US trust in the Iranian government, compelling them to provide more military and economic aid to Iran in the medium to long term.<sup>89</sup>

Zolfghari supported the Shah here. Since helping to establish the Information Council, the Iranian Deputy Prime Minister's influence had increased immeasurably. Due to disagreements over governmental policy, the Iranian monarch had dismissed two prime ministers in the five years since August 1953. Zahedi's refusal to question the Shah on his meddling in Iranian political affairs meant that he had been left in place. This had resulted in

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<sup>88</sup> American Embassy (Tehran) to John Foster Dulles (Secretary of State), 25 August 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>89</sup> American Embassy (Tehran) to John Foster Dulles (Secretary of State), 7 August 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

Iran's Deputy Prime Minister developing a significant power base within Iranian politics, buoyed by a direct line to the USIS through the Information Council. In tandem with the Shah's demands, Zolfghari sought to expand Radio Tehran's activities beyond the level encouraged by the advisory group. In meetings with US Embassy and USIS officials, Iran's Deputy Prime Minister requested American financial support, as well as technical assistance from VOA officials, to enable Radio Tehran to broadcast in Arabic and Turkish. Zolfghari modelled this as 'an unprecedented opportunity' to draw away listeners in geopolitical sensitive regions in the north and east of Iran from hostile external broadcasts.<sup>90</sup>

The USIS, in conjunction with their USIA superiors in Washington, agreed with the Shah and Zolfghari's demands. Soviet blocking of Iranian radio, they argued, was preventing Radio Tehran from reaching 'geographically sensitive areas' such as the Caspian seaboard and the northeast of Iran. Initially seeking to rectify this issue had been the USIS' primary motive in working extensively with the broadcaster through the Information Council. Refusing to resolve the Soviets' renewed efforts in this field, therefore, would have meant that the advisory group's exertions would have all been in vain.<sup>91</sup> The impetus for the American agency's views here came from the very top of the organisation. Replacing Theodore Streibert in 1957, George Allen, the new USIA Director, was a keen advocate of the Shah and Zolfghari's policy suggestions. Between 1946 and 1948, Allen had been the US Ambassador for Iran, presiding over this role during the Azerbaijan Crisis. As such, he was keenly aware of Iran's geopolitical importance, proximity and vulnerability to Soviet penetration and subversion. Due to the region's occupation by Soviet forces in 1946, Allen paid particular attention to proceedings in the northeastern Iranian city of Tabriz. With Soviet

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<sup>90</sup> American Embassy (Tehran) to John Foster Dulles (Secretary of State), 25 August 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961); USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 25 September 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>91</sup> USIS (Tehran) to John Foster Dulles (Secretary of State), 17 September 1958, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

radio jamming affecting Radio Tehran's reception in this region, the new USIA Director accordingly pushed the US government to further assist their Iranian counterparts in the fields of radio and communication.<sup>92</sup>

The Iranian Embassy in Tehran and the State Department, in comparison, were opposed to the Shah and Zolfghari's proposals. The former were particularly horrified by the idea of further combating of Soviet jamming and of an Iranian radio station broadcasting anti-Communist propaganda to the whole Middle East. They feared it would destabilise the whole region, increasingly volatile with the rise of Arab nationalist regimes in Iraq, Egypt and Syria, antagonising the Soviet Union in the process. USSR officials would easily uncover the US' involvement in this enterprise and, due to America's previous criticism of similar Soviet actions, would publicly highlight the US' hypocrisy.<sup>93</sup> The State Department, similarly, were concerned by the cost of these endeavours. Not only was a high American financial outlay required, but it would also take a considerable amount of time to launch, promote and gather listeners for a new radio station. Moreover, the State Department were concerned that they were doing too much to support the Shah's government. By the end of the 1950s, the Iranian monarch's demands for military and economic aid had outstripped what the State Department was willing to provide. In particular, the Shah had requested large-scale weaponry and military hardware to deter neighbouring nations from attacking Iran. State Department officials were convinced that such equipment was unnecessary, angering other countries in the region. They claimed that the Iranian monarch would be better served with more rudimentary military accessories needed to quell domestic opposition.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> George Allen (Director, USIA) to USIS (Tehran), 12 July 1959, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Travel Files.

<sup>93</sup> State Department to USIS (Tehran), 13 March 1959, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>94</sup> State Department to USIS (Tehran), 13 March 1959, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960); OCB Report on Iran, 2 April 1958, DDEL, White House Office,

The Eisenhower administration, however, overruled the State Department and the American Embassy in Tehran. In a June 1958 state visit to Washington, the Shah, in discussions in the Oval Office, called on the American President to do more to combat Soviet jamming of Radio Tehran. The monarch also demanded US support for the Iranian government's initiatives to broadcast audio content in Kurdish and Arabic to appeal to those residing in Iran's border areas.<sup>95</sup> Acceding to these requests, Eisenhower pushed both of these initiatives through, ignoring protestations from the State Department and the American Embassy in Tehran. Within six months of these talks between the Shah and the US President, two Iranian radio stations were established with extensive American financial and technical support. Both broadcasters sought to counter the Farsi, Kurdish and Arabic language transmissions from, among others, Radio Cairo and Radio Moscow that sought to undermine the Iranian regime. Appealing to the Iranian population as a whole, one station transmitted in Farsi, while the other broadcast programmes either in Arabic, Turkish or Kurdish.<sup>96</sup>

The USIS' success in bolstering Iran's radio and communication capabilities also encouraged the agency's officials in Iran to work extensively with the Iranian army. Cooperation between both countries on defence matters was already significant. Since 1953, the Department of Defense had supplied military advisors to train the Iranian army. They instructed Iran's soldiers in, among other things, the use of advanced weaponry and tactics, ensuring that the Iranian army would be a first line of defence should a war with the

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NSC Series, Policy Papers; Memorandum of Conversation on Iran Budgetary Situation, 9 December 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, Volume XII.

<sup>95</sup> Memorandum of telephone conversation between Dwight D. Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles (Secretary of State), 30 June 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, Volume XII.

<sup>96</sup> Memorandum of conference between Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Shah of Iran, 30 June 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, Volume XII; Memorandum of discussion at the 379<sup>th</sup> meeting of the NSC, 18 September 1958, DDEL, Dwight D. Eisenhower (Whitman) papers, NSC Series.

Soviets break out in the Middle East. Domestically, moreover, US military figures relied on Iran's military forces to combat domestic opposition to the Shah, particularly from the Tudeh Party's paramilitary wing. The Iranian government had assigned them, rather than the police or gendarmerie, with this responsibility.<sup>97</sup> USIS officials in Iran, though, only took a greater interest in the Iranian army in the aftermath of the December 1954 to February 1955 Iranian military spy trials. Eager to rid the army of Mossagdeh loyalists and Communist sympathisers, the Shah and his acolytes spent the 18 months after the August 1953 coup purging the army's higher echelons. They arrested and executed 22 colonels, 69 majors, 100 captains and 193 lieutenants.<sup>98</sup> The sheer number of military officers tried and found guilty alarmed the USIS. The agency's officials in Iran had previously assumed that much of the public support for the Tudeh and Mossagdeh was among white-collar workers, intellectuals and the middle classes. They did not expect government officials, let alone military figures, to possess Communist or nationalist sympathies.<sup>99</sup>

To prevent the spread of pro-Soviet and Mossagdeh thinking in the Iranian military, Payne approached the pro-American and vocal anti-Communist Chief of Staff for the Iranian army, Qolam Mahmoud Baharmast. The American offered the USIS' services in propaganda production and dissemination to combat Communist thinking in Iran's armed forces, as well as to boost morale among soldiers.<sup>100</sup> Before approaching Baharmast, the USIS assessed

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<sup>97</sup> Analysis of internal security situation in Iran, 23 August 1955, DDEL, White House Office, NSC Staff, OCB Series.

<sup>98</sup> Frederic Bundy (USIA (Washington), Washington) to Elmer Staats (Executive Officer, OCB), 14 December 1954, DDEL, White House Office, NSC Staff, OCB Series.

<sup>99</sup> Analysis of internal security situation in Iran, 23 August 1955, DDEL, White House Office, NSC Staff, OCB Series.

<sup>100</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 24 January 1956, NAII, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961); Memorandum of meeting of the OCB's Iran Working Group, 16 May 1955, DDEL, White House Office, NSC Staff, OCB Series.

that the Iranian military's information activities was very rudimentary and limited, centring solely on anti-Soviet press releases.<sup>101</sup> The USIS envisioned expanding and bolstering the methods employed by the Iranian army to produce and disseminate propaganda. Officials from the American agency aimed to persuade Iranian military figures to use posters, radio bulletins and establish ties with Iran's press. They also sought to instruct Baharmast and his colleagues in the military press office in the most efficient ways to distribute pro-military propaganda across Iran.<sup>102</sup>

Key Iranian military public information drives orchestrated by the USIS included the campaign around the 1956 Azerbaijani Republic Day. Celebrated annually by Iranian Azeris on the 28 May, the public holiday commemorates the founding of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1918. The vast majority of Iranian Azeris resided in the northeast of Iran, in the vicinity of the nation of Azerbaijan before it was conquered by the Soviet Union in 1920. Much of the USIS and Iranian military's publicity campaign accordingly concentrated on this region. Newsreels were distributed to cinemas in Tabriz and other surrounding towns by the American agency illustrating how the military governor in the region was protecting individual rights from Tudeh dissidents. According to the newsreels, those with pro-Soviet tendencies had little respect for Azeri culture and sovereignty, seeking submission to the USSR.<sup>103</sup> Radio adverts on Radio Tabriz, likewise, stressed the importance of conscripts to Iranian society. National service, supposedly, helps develop individuals, while also maintaining

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<sup>101</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 24 January 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961); Memorandum of meeting of the OCB's Iran Working Group, 16 May 1955, DDEL, White House Office, NSC Staff, OCB Series.

<sup>102</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 24 January 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961); Memorandum of meeting of the OCB's Iran Working Group, 16 May 1955, DDEL, White House Office, NSC Staff, OCB Series.

<sup>103</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 27 August 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

military strength to ensure regions like Iranian Azerbaijan are protected from potential Soviet conquest.<sup>104</sup>

The USIS' work with the Iranian military marked the limit of their extensive work with institutions within the Iranian state to contain the spread of Communism in Iran. As the 1950s had progressed, the American agency had radically overhauled its strategy, moving away from the publication and dissemination of anti-Communist publications. Increasingly, the USIS had concentrated their efforts on radio and newsreels, working with Iranian government figures to do so. Their collaborative efforts, however, with, among others, the DPB and aspects of Iran's military were not just down to their anti-Communist views. They rather formed part of much wider attempts to make the Iranian government more self-sufficient, strengthening and developing their abilities to contain the spread of Communism in Iran. The USIS' anti-Soviet initiatives here, though, comprised only half of their overall soft power strategy in Iran after 1953. Moving beyond Cold War considerations, the agency's officials also sought to promote American norms, values, ideas, and cultures to Iranian people. The following chapter will analyse the rationale behind this, as well as the initiatives employed.

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<sup>104</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 16 January 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

## **Chapter III – Education and Socio-Economic Development:**

### **Promoting the American Way of Life in Iran**

*'Americans are dedicated to the improvement of the international climate in which we live. Though militarily we in America devote huge sums to make certain of the security of ourselves and to assist our allies, we do not forget that - in the long term - military strength alone will not bring about peace with justice. The spiritual and economic health of the free world must be likewise strengthened.'*<sup>1</sup>

Since President Dwight D. Eisenhower's November 1952 election, US-Iran relations had changed considerably. The country was now one of America's most prominent partners in the Middle East, with the US providing considerable military and economic aid. Iran was now regarded as a bulwark against the Soviet Union, a barrier against Communist incursions in the Middle East and Asia. It was also an example of what could be achieved with American support and assistance.<sup>2</sup> In a 14 December 1959 speech to the lower chamber of the Iranian parliament (Majlis), the former military general reflected on his administration's foreign policy achievements in Iran and the wider region. The address formed a key part of the US President's winter tour of the Middle East, North Africa and Southern Europe during the latter months of his presidency. He not only discussed the vast amount of military aid and

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<sup>1</sup> 'President Dwight D. Eisenhower's Address to the Members of Parliament of Iran', 14 December 1959, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=11624> (accessed 15 August 2018).

<sup>2</sup> A report to the NSC by the NSC Planning Board on United States policy towards Iran, 21 December 1953, Abilene, Kansas, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library (hereafter document, date, DDEL), White House Office, NSC Series, Policy Papers; NSC report (NSC 5703/1), 8 February 1957, Oxford, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957, Near East Region; Iran; Iraq, Volume XII*.



technical support he had provided to American allies such as the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, but also of the need to foster Iran's socio-economic development. The then US President proceeded to underline the importance of bolstering Iran's resistance to Communism and of the need to expose the Iranian public to American cultures and values.<sup>3</sup>

The previous chapter covered how the US had gone to great lengths to counter Soviet propaganda in Iran as well as to protect and bolster the Shah's regime. Presided over by the United States Information Agency (USIA) in Washington, the United States Information Service (USIS) undertook numerous initiatives to achieve these aims. The American agency established links with Iran's media, while also translating American books into Farsi. Most crucially, though, the USIS established links with prominent figures in the state-run broadcaster Radio Tehran, as well as the Department of Press and Broadcasting (DPB), the government department that ran the radio station. Together with these individuals the USIS established the Information Council. The committee distributed anti-Communist propaganda across Iran, working together to improve the reach and quality of Radio Tehran broadcasts. The Information Council was responsible for building a new transmitter, enabling Iranians in towns and cities outside of Iran's capital city to listen to the radio station's broadcasts. The committee also helped in the construction of a new studio, with the USIS providing technical assistance and guidance to Radio Tehran to improve the quality of its content.

Outside of combating Communism and protecting the Shah's regime, the other key tenet of US cultural diplomacy in Iran was the promotion of the American way of life. By extolling the norms, values and culture of the United States, USIS officials in Iran aimed to promote positive perceptions of America among Iranian people, foster a mutual understanding between both countries and improve bilateral ties. This chapter accordingly examines how the USIS promoted the American way of life in Iran. It explains the rationale

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<sup>3</sup> President Dwight D. Eisenhower's Address to the Members of Parliament of Iran, 14 December 1959, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=11624> (accessed 15 August 2018).

behind this aim, while also delineating the agency's key policies in this field. The chapter begins by outlining the State Department, Embassy and USIA's desire to promote the American way of life in Iran and the USIS' initial refusal to comply with their wishes. It proceeds to discuss how a turnover of staff resulted in the agency instead seeking to advocate American culture, values and ideas through the Iranian education system. The chapter finally analyses the USIS' work in publicising and promoting Iranian socio-economic development programmes. It underlines how the US sought to convey their determination to help modernise Iran to everyday people.

The American Embassy in Tehran was the initial exponent of the need to promote the American way of life in Iran. Its officials were convinced that US foreign policy in Iran should go beyond the containment of Communism. Enough work had already been undertaken in this area and many Iranians, due to the events of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis, now held an unfavourable view of the United States. For close social, political and economic ties to continue between both countries in the future, this issue needed to be rectified. Initial attempts to push for policies promoting the American way of life in Iran were at first rebuffed by USIS officials working in the country. The PAO, Edward Wells, took a limited interest in pursuing such initiatives, dedicating more time to Soviet counter-subversion. Deeming the latter more crucial due to Iran's geographic proximity to the Soviet Union, he also judged promoting the American way of life an unnecessary, expensive exercise. It was only after Wells' January 1955 replacement, Robert Payne, was appointed that the USIS began to take a greater interest in promoting American cultures, norms and ideas to the Iranian people. Having witnessed the 1952 Egyptian Revolution first-hand, Payne was determined to ensure there would be no repeat in Iran. He dedicated a significant proportion of the USIS' resources to promoting the American way of life through Iran's education system. In so doing, Payne hoped to influence the country's impressionable young while also shaping its pedagogical norms and practices from afar. To achieve this, the USIS worked extensively with the University of Tehran, collaborating with its senior management to modernise the institution and bolster its global reputation.

Concurrently, the USIS also sought to promote the Iranian government's own socio-economic programmes. From the 1950s onwards, the Shah had wished to modernise his country, creating the Plan Organisation to achieve this. The agency undertook projects to improve Iran's infrastructure and living standards, yet needed considerable assistance with its public relations activities. The Embassy and State Department were only too happy to provide such assistance. They envisaged that close ties with the Plan Organisation would convince the Iranian people that the American government was keen to modernise Iran. The USIS, though, were initially unwilling to extensively assist the Plan Organisation. The agency had already endured mixed results in the promotion of the US' own Point Four socio-economic programmes in Iran and were convinced that any contribution from them would result in a popular backlash. Many Iranians, they reckoned, would be convinced that the US, not Iran, was funding and implementing these initiatives as a means to deter individuals and businesses from dealing with the Soviet Union. However, pressure from the State Department - combined with the Plan Organisation's bureaucratic deficiencies - compelled USIS figures to relent and help the agency with its public relations operations.

### **The USIS' Rationale for Promoting American Norms, Values and Ideas in Iran**

Officials from the US Embassy in Tehran sought to move US cultural diplomacy in Iran beyond the containment and combating of Communism. With the USIS planning to rely on Radio Tehran as a vehicle to counter Soviet subversive activities, there was no need to devise and implement more anti-Communist propaganda initiatives. These could run the risk of over-saturating the Iranian population with content critical of the Soviets, negating its impact in the process.<sup>4</sup> Embassy officials, instead, regarded cultural policies as a means to

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<sup>4</sup> Suggested programme for combating Communism in Iran, 19 October 1953, College Park, Maryland, National Archives II (hereafter document, date, NAII), US State Department papers, Iran, Communism in Iran (1950-1954).

bolster America's standing in the country. The United States' involvement in the August 1953 coup had angered many of Iran's citizens. Many were opposed to the US' decision to help overthrow the former Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossagdeh, deeming the supposed issues with his premiership and the oil crisis as domestic matters. The Iranian public also suspected the American government of using the Shah as a stooge, providing military and economic assistance to bolster his regime to ensure that the Iranian monarch did the United States' bidding.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, the country's citizens now viewed the US as an imperialist power, willing and eager to exert its power and influence without any consideration of the consequences. In telegrams to the State Department in Washington, Roy Melbourne, the First Secretary of the Embassy, outlined how this 'anti-Americanism' was manifesting itself in Iran. He discussed a series of attacks on American people and property in the Iranian cities of Tehran, Esfahan and Shiraz during and after the oil crisis. Arguing that American prestige had 'suffered because of the events of August 1953, Melbourne proceeded to outline the origins and implications of the term 'Yankee go home.' Starting off as an Iranian left-wing rallying cry, this phrase had caught the public's imagination. American diplomats and business figures had reported hearing 'Yankee go home' in most of the country's regions and from a wide variety of Iranian people. Melbourne feared that if attempts were not made to prevent this term becoming part of Iran's popular vernacular then the US would not be able to sustain a long-term presence in the country.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Suggested programme for combating Communism in Iran, 19 October 1953, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, Communism in Iran (1950-1954).

<sup>6</sup> Memorandum of conversation (situation in Shiraz), 11 August 1953, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Political Relations (1950-1954); Memorandum of conversation (situation in Esfahan), 12 August 1953, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Political Relations (1950-1954).

In the eighteen months after the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis' resolution, the US' promotion of the American way of life in Iran was limited. It was initially confined to the template for an overseas ideological programme devised by the USIA in Washington. This stressed the use of libraries, exhibits and English language teaching as a means of promoting America.<sup>7</sup> As such, cultural initiatives were not tailored for Iran or to appeal to certain sections of Iranian society; their aim was to merely engage with as broad an audience as possible. The limited, generalised nature of the cultural programme can be attributed to the strong views of the USIS' first PAO in Iran, Edward Wells. From the Second World War's outbreak up until this appointment, Wells had been working in the American Embassy in Tehran. As a liaison between US diplomats, businesses and the Iranian government, he had witnessed the November 1942 Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran, as well as the 1946 Azerbaijan Crisis. Having experienced these events, Wells was much more concerned with combating Communism and bolstering the Shah's regime. He claimed that implementing initiatives to promote the American way of life in Iran would antagonise the fragile Iranian government and its people.<sup>8</sup>

Wells accordingly sought to limit the activities of the Iran-America Society. During his tenure as PAO, the agency had roughly 800 members, most of which were government officials, landlords and business figures seeking to learn English.<sup>9</sup> Its operations were confined to one bi-national centre in Tehran. Wells was opposed to the Iran-America Society's expansion beyond the country's capital city, claiming that Iranian law forbade other nations from undertaking cultural and informational activities in Iran's provincial cities. While

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<sup>7</sup> William Rountree (Charge d'Affairs, Iran) to the State Department, 27 June 1955, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>8</sup> Monteagle Stearns (Office of Greek, Turkish and Iranian Affairs) to USIA, 26 October 1955, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>9</sup> Joint USIA and State Department message, 21 February 1956, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

this legislation could be circumvented – it was devised during Mohammad Mossagdeh’s premiership – Wells feared that doing so would antagonise the Soviets. Should the Iran-America Society expand its cultural activities and presence beyond Tehran, he feared that the USSR and its allies would follow suit. The USIS’ PAO was instead convinced that the current arrangement, where vice-consuls in Iran’s cities acted as information officers when appropriate, worked perfectly. These officials were well placed and qualified to teach the English language to interested citizens, and the fact that there was only one figure in each city made it unlikely that their activities would alarm Soviet officials.<sup>10</sup> Even in Tehran, the Iran-America Society’s activities were limited. With the USIS presiding over the bi-national centre’s activities from 1953, Wells confined the organisation to limited English language teaching. He refused to expand the Iran-America Society’s remit beyond this, despite greater Iranian interest in American lifestyles and culture. In a quarterly review to the USIS in Washington, Wells justified his position on the grounds of an absence of well-qualified staff, a low budget and that the Iran-America Society’s Tehran office was too small to host cultural events.<sup>11</sup>

Exhibits, likewise, were few and far between. Rather than using these to promote the American way of life in Iran, the limited number of displays organised by the USIS instead showcased Iranian history. The aim behind these exhibits was to underline the US’ respect for Iran. One of the very few events in this field organised by the USIS was the May 1954 Avicenna celebration in Tehran and Hamadan, a city 300 miles southwest of Iran’s capital. The exhibit was to mark the work and opening of the mausoleum of the Iranian polymath Abu Ali Sina. Known as Avicenna in the West, he was a prominent physicist, mathematician and theologian of the Islamic Golden Age, an era from the eighth to the fourteenth centuries

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<sup>10</sup> Monteagle Stearns (Office of Greek, Turkish and Iranian Affairs) to USIA, 26 October 1955, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>11</sup> Iran-America Society Quarterly Review (October – December 1953), 10 April 1954, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Reports on the USIS in Iran.

where great scientific phenomena were discovered, developed and harnessed in the Middle East.<sup>12</sup> Through the Iran-America Society, USIS figures in Iran organised a week-long celebration. Proceedings on the first three days would be held in Tehran, while events would be held in Hamadan in the second half of the week. As well as exhibits of his work, the American agency produced a short film of the inauguration of Avicenna's mausoleum in Hamadan, distributing it to cinemas in Tehran and beyond. In a telegram to the USIA in Washington, Wells estimated that over 500,000 Iranians would view this newsreel. 8000 posters were also placed around Tehran and other cities showing pictures of the Avicenna collection at the Library of Congress.<sup>13</sup>

For the most part, though, Wells confined the USIS' cultural activities to looking at ways to encourage improvements in Iranian quality of life. In particular, he focused on fostering a library culture in Iran. Not only could libraries be stocked with books and magazines critical of Communism, but these facilities could also be made into pillars of Iranian community life. These would be places where people could borrow books, and also where they could attend meetings and talks. Unlike in Europe and North America, Iran's libraries tended not to offer lending services to their members. They were, instead, more commonly used as places for people to acquire information. More pressing to USIS officials, though, was that there were very few libraries in Iran open to the public. Most of the existing facilities were located in prestigious schools and universities, open only to staff and students. The few libraries open to the public tended to be in large cities, under-stocked, neglected and staffed by untrained employees.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> For more information on Iran's contribution to the Islamic Golden Age, please consult Elaheh Kheirandish, *Baghdad and Isfahan: A Dialogue of Two Cities in an Age of Science, C.A 750-1750* (London, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 13 May 1954, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>14</sup> Note on libraries in Iran, 22 March 1954, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Reports on the USIS in Iran.

To resolve this issue, the USIS strove to enhance their own library in Tehran, an annexe off the US Embassy, as well as open up facilities in Esfahan and Shiraz. In so doing, they aimed to make their libraries a model which others in Iran could emulate. While the USIS' Tehran Library had been open since 1950, the number of publications it stocked was limited and very few functions had been organised. Between 1954 and 1955, though, the USIS made a concerted effort to improve and enhance the services provided by this facility. Figures from the agency organised a series of panel workshops throughout 1954. Each event focused on a particular theme, with the USIS inviting Iranian specialists to give talks and answer questions. Panels were organised for one afternoon a month, focusing on topics that underlined the work the US government was doing to help modernise Iran. These included rural development, pedagogical approaches, healthcare systems, farming practices and home economics. Invited by USIS officials, audiences were composed of other experts and enthusiasts in a particular field with the aim of 'swaying them away from the Soviet Union.'<sup>15</sup>

Beyond working to improve their own facilities, USIS officials in Iran strove to modernise and improve public libraries. They regularly supplied libraries with international editions of *Time*, *Life* and *Newsweek*, right-leaning publications supportive of US diplomacy and critical of Soviet-Communism. At the same time, the USIS agreed to provide furniture and training courses for public library employees. They paid significant attention to Mashhad Municipal Library. According to David Nalle, the sole PAO responsible for the city from 1954-1956, the facility had great potential. Iranian schoolteachers from the region already used the library for a monthly workshop where they discussed pedagogical styles and approaches. Due to its place in the local community, the facility could be used as a platform

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<sup>15</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 21 December 1953, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Reports on the USIS in Iran; USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 8 March 1954, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Reports on the USIS in Iran; USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 23 April 1954, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Reports on the USIS in Iran.



from which to combat Communism in Mashhad. Located in north-east Iran, the city was along the country's eastern border with the Soviet Union. Prior to the USIS' involvement, the library was under-stocked, unfurnished and small, with amateur, volunteer staff unaware with how libraries should function and be ordered. To give the facility a modern feel, the USIS donated 1,050 books, 30 mats, 4 colouring sets and 10 wall charts. Nalle also provided the librarians with training in charging, filling and shelving routines, encouraging staff to order books according to the Dewey Decimal system.<sup>16</sup>

Wells' approach to promoting the American way of life in Iran was met with resistance from the USIA in Washington and the State Department's Office of Greek, Turkish and Iranian Affairs. In a joint message to the USIS office in Tehran, they pressurised the agency to undertake more cultural activities. In particular, they requested that the office 'encourage and assist' more American performers to tour Iran. The State Department and the USIA pledged to provide considerable funding to musicians, drama groups and dance troupes willing to visit the country.<sup>17</sup> With regards to the teaching of English, moreover, the USIA and the Office of Greek, Turkish and Iranian Affairs pushed the USIS to take 'full advantage' of the Iranian people's desire to learn the language. The agency's officials in Iran should aim to do more than just instruct willing citizens. They should instead use English teaching as a means to immerse Iranians in the American way of life and to shape Iran's education system. To achieve this, the USIS should establish close ties with the Ministry of

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<sup>16</sup> Note on libraries in Iran, 22 March 1954, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Reports on the USIS in Iran; David Nalle interviewed by Dorothy Robins-Mowry, 12 April 1990, Arlington, Virginia, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, <https://www.adst.org/OHTOCs/Nalle,David.toc.pdf> (accessed 16 May 2019).

<sup>17</sup> Joint State Department–USIA message, 19 March 1955, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Near East, Africa and Asia Area Objectives.

Education, as well as Iranian teachers of the English language.<sup>18</sup> Wells and his subordinates should also look to promote American culture and life through drama productions. As well as organising lectures, displays and play readings, the USIS should work with playwrights and theatres to obtain rights to productions so amateur shows could be performed. The most appropriate plays were those that had been adapted into Hollywood films, as they would be most recognisable to the Iranian public. Such titles include Maxwell Anderson's *The Eve of St Mark*, Truman Capote's *The Grass Harp*, as well as George Abbott and John Hamm's *Three Men on a Horse*.<sup>19</sup>

The American Embassy in Iran, correspondingly, agreed with the Office of Greek, Turkish and Iranian Affairs and the USIA's views. Dismayed with Wells' reluctance to try and promote the American way of life in Iran, they petitioned the USIS' PAO to alter his approach. They called on Wells to stop relying too much on the USIA's generalised programme, which they regarded as not only irrelevant to Iran but something that placed too great an emphasis on the containment of Communism. In particular, underlining the dichotomy between the ideology and the concept of freedom – a key tenet of the USIA's worldwide ideological programme – was something that would not resonate with the Iranian people. The notion of freedom peddled by the USIA was too broad for audiences in Iran, especially as the country was ruled by an authoritarian monarch and there were no free and fair democratic elections.<sup>20</sup>

As such, the USIS needed to do more than just protect the Shah's regime from external and internal threats, instead using cultural policies to promote American norms,

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<sup>18</sup> USIA (Washington) to USIS (Tehran), 9 March 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Near East, Africa and Asia Area Objectives.

<sup>19</sup> USIA (Washington) to USIS (Tehran), 11 December 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Near East, Africa and Asia Area Objectives.

<sup>20</sup> William Rountree (Charge d'Affairs, Iran) to the State Department, 27 June 1955, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

values and lifestyles in Iran. In persuading Iranian people to embrace the American way of life, USIS figures in Iran should 'present these principles as solutions to their problems.' Unlike in other countries, the US' cultural initiatives should not 'talk down to the general public.' Iran had already made considerable progress in this field. The country's leaders, as well as much of its middle-to-upper classes, were already immersed in the Western way of life due to spending their formative years being educated in France, Switzerland, Germany or the UK. With this varied exposure to numerous European cultures, though, a 'unified, dogmatic doctrine of free society' did not exist in Iran. This was where the Embassy believed that the USIS could be at its most effective. In proffering the American alternative – something most Iranians had little prior contact with – the American agency could provide a cultural and moral model that many in Iran could adhere to and emulate. It would also be used to underline the ways in which the American way of life was supposedly superior to European cultures and lifestyles.<sup>21</sup>

The Embassy suggested to Wells that the USIS in Iran should focus on a small number of 'quality projects' rather than a large quantity of initiatives. Due to shortages in funds, facilities and personnel, the latter approach would overstretch USIS officials working the country. An effective way of engaging with Iranians would be through interacting with certain target audiences rather than the population at large. The Embassy doubted whether certain Iranian societal groups would be receptive to US cultural diplomacy. Those residing in rural areas, for example, 'possess an unsophisticated concept of life and living', while the Islamic clergy were very anti-US, opposed to greater American involvement in Iran. It would be pointless, likewise, to focus on engaging government officials. Thanks to the Shah's attempted socio-economic reforms to the agricultural and industrial sectors, they were

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<sup>21</sup> William Rountree (Charge d'Affairs, Iran) to the State Department, 27 June 1955, NAII, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

confident that democracy would develop in the country over time.<sup>22</sup> The US Embassy in Tehran instead recommended that their USIS counterparts engage with Iranian youths and the education system. Such tactics would enable the US to shape the Iranian education system along American lines, fostering pro-US feelings among Iran's impressionable youth in the process. They called on the USIS to engage in particular with universities, appealing to their students through radio, motion pictures, magazines, schoolbooks and cultural exchanges. An increasing number of Iranians were studying in France, Germany or the UK already. While this had a 'somewhat similar influence on them as learning in the United States', it was not effective in promoting American cultures and lifestyles. Greater US-Iran student and scholar exchanges would rectify this issue, while also enhancing US-Iran cohesion and mutual understanding.<sup>23</sup>

USIS Iran's shift towards promoting the American way of life in Iran occurred after Wells' January 1955 departure from Iran. Robert Payne, an official from the American agency who had previously been the PAO for Egypt, replaced him. While in this role, Payne had witnessed the Egyptian Revolution first-hand. In July 1952, the senior military officers Gamal Abdel Nasser and Muhammad Naguib instigated a coup against Egypt's ruler, King Farouk. The monarch had been regarded as a pro-Western puppet. Presiding over the British occupation of his country, he had sympathised with the Germans and Italians in the Second World War, only declaring war on both nations at Britain's behest. His increasing unpopularity, coupled with the emergence of the anti-Western ideology of Arab nationalism, led to the coup that toppled him.<sup>24</sup> Egypt's supposed rejection of American and European values here shocked Payne. Having previously paid little attention to this aspect of US

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<sup>22</sup> William Rountree (Charge d'Affairs, Iran) to the State Department, 27 June 1955, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>23</sup> William Rountree (Charge d'Affairs, Iran) to the State Department, 27 June 1955, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>24</sup> Sherif Younis, *The Call of the People: A Critical History of Nasserite Ideology* (New York, 2015).

cultural diplomacy, he now regarded the promotion of the American way of life as crucial to the role of a PAO. Payne's new position in Iran was a means to amend his past errors.<sup>25</sup>

### **Expansion of USIS Activities in Iran**

Payne's first task was to expand the USIS' cultural activities beyond Tehran. The agency's new PAO, however, was constrained by national restrictions to cultural and information activities. In a conversation, for example, with Abbas Aram, the Director General of Political Affairs for the Iranian government's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he expressed his frustration at how little the USIS could do to promote American values through media publications. While the agency's Tehran library could stock the latest copies of the *New York Times*, *Time* and *Newsweek*, vendors and shops were only allowed to sell international editions, which were considerably less Americanised. Even though Aram maintained that this law was in place to restrict Communist activities in Iran, he claimed that they could not overlook the US' flouting of these rules. It would increase Iran-Soviet tensions and there would be reprisals.<sup>26</sup>

Payne accordingly circumnavigated these rules. Rather than maintain a permanent provincial presence, the new USIS PAO for Iran devised a series of touring exhibits. These would visit Iranian cities via the country's railways, with people boarding the train at each station to view the displays. These aimed to showcase high-brow American culture. Art works from Jackson Pollock, one of the leading figures of the then emerging abstract expressionist movement, were on permanent display. Neighbouring this exhibit, there were a number of biographies of former US Presidents such as Abraham Lincoln and Franklin

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<sup>25</sup> William Weathersby interviewed by Jack O'Brien, 1 August 1989, Arlington, Virginia, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, <https://www.adst.org/OHTOCs/Weathersby,WilliamHenry.toc.pdf> (accessed 15 August 2018).

<sup>26</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 28 June 1956, NAII, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

Delano Roosevelt. The enterprise was a joint effort with Iran's Ministry of Railways. The government department donated train carriages and were responsible for transporting the exhibits to and from each city. USIS officials, in turn, furnished the interiors and paid employees to maintain the carriages.<sup>27</sup> There were seven train units in all. To 'iron out any bugs', the first began operating in January 1957, with the six other units running from April 1957. The carriages visited some of Iran's main cities, including Esfahan, Shiraz, Abadan, Ahwaz, Mashhad and Rasht.<sup>28</sup>

By the time the USIS' railway initiative had commenced, the Iranian government had lifted the restrictions on cultural activities by foreign actors outside Tehran. Buoyed by this development, the Iran-America Society immediately drew up plans to open bi-national centres in Esfahan and Shiraz.<sup>29</sup> John Healy, the American Vice-Consul for the former city, had played a pivotal role in ensuring that the Iran-America Society's first provincial offices would open in these two cities. Since his 1954 appointment, Healy had argued that the US was not doing enough to provide English language teaching to Iranians residing in Iran's two main cultural centres outside Tehran. According to the Vice-Consul, due to both cities' historical and cultural heritage, Iranians paid particular attention to developing trends in Esfahan and Shiraz. If people in these cities began to learn English en masse, then Iranians in other regions would be compelled to follow suit. More specifically, Healy claimed that those residing in Esfahan and Shiraz were too sophisticated to be persuaded by high-pressure propaganda. The cultural approach offered by the Iran-America Society, in

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<sup>27</sup> American Embassy (Tehran) to the State Department, 20 December 1956, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1959).

<sup>28</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 17 May 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Reports on the USIS in Iran.

<sup>29</sup> Report on Iran-America Societies in Esfahan and Shiraz for 1959, 31 December 1959, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

contrast, extolled the virtues of American thinking and way of life to a public who largely did not come into contact with foreigners, let alone anyone from the US.<sup>30</sup>

To ensure that the first Iran-America Society branch outside Tehran would open in Esfahan, Healy drew up a petition. The signatories were mostly composed of influential politicians, business figures and teachers residing in and around the city. The Vice-Consul presented the petition to Payne in a September 1956 meeting in Tehran. The USIS' PAO for Iran used this appeal as a justification to get the State Department and the Embassy to approve the expansion of the agency's activities in the city. In January 1957, Payne appointed Laurence 'Larry' Sharpe as the agency's PAO for Esfahan. Having previously worked to devise and distribute anti-Soviet propaganda in Tehran, Sharpe was aware of the USIS' broader activities in Iran, as well as the importance the agency placed on its activities in the country. While he sought to distribute newsreels and publications in Esfahan, Sharpe helped make the Iran-America Society an 'accepted part of the social and cultural life in the city.' As well as English language teaching, Sharpe aimed to use the centre to host concerts, lectures and exhibitions. He strove to make the branch unique, a place Iranians would be compelled to use, as there were no other alternatives in the vicinity. The library, for example, was the only public lending institution in the city, while the centre provided a much-needed meeting place and social club for Esfahan's intellectuals and youth.<sup>31</sup>

While Payne worked to expand the USIS' presence and activities in Iran, arguably his biggest achievement was his steering of the agency's work into the fields of youth and education. The broad approach stemmed from the recommendations of William Baxter, head of Office of Greek, Turkish and Iranian Affairs and chair of the OCB's Iran Working Group. As one of the individuals most responsible for steering the State Department's

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<sup>30</sup> American Consulate in Esfahan to the State Department, 18 December 1957, NAI1, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>31</sup> American Consulate in Esfahan to the State Department, 18 December 1957, NAI1, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

approach to the country, Baxter had frequently advocated for the US government to work with the Shah to modernise Iran's economy. With regards to the USIS, he recommended to Payne that the agency's figures should work closely with the University of Tehran. He called on the agency to modernise the institution, working with its senior staff to, among other things, boost the exchange programme between the university and US colleges, as well as expand humanities teaching.<sup>32</sup> The institution was one of the most prestigious in the country, renowned across the Islamic World as a centre of learning. The US, though, currently only had a 'slender influence' at the university, with the USIS offering two American scholarships that went largely unfilled. The institution had instead been more influenced by the French educational system, with most of the academic staff having studied in France.<sup>33</sup>

Payne was initially reluctant to heed Baxter's recommendations. In discussions with the OCB's Iran Working Group, Payne outlined two key concerns he had with working with the University of Tehran. First, he did not think the institution was run professionally. Most academics, administrators and management figures held political positions. Chancellor Manoucher Eqbal, for example, was a Cabinet member and had previously combined his role in the institution with a governorship of the Azerbaijan province. Similarly, Lotfali Suratgar and Reza Shafaq, professors in literature and history respectively, combined their academic positions with seats in the Majlis. The political roles these individuals enjoyed meant they had a tendency to treating teaching and research as side jobs or hobbies. They paid little attention to developments in their fields of study, delivered the same lectures for

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<sup>32</sup> Memorandum from the OCB's Ideological Working Group to William Baxter (Office of Greek, Turkish and Iranian Affairs, Chair of the OCB's Iran Working Group), 15 December 1954, DDEL, White House Office, OCB Series.

<sup>33</sup> Memorandum from the OCB's Ideological Working Group to William Baxter (Office of Greek, Turkish and Iranian Affairs, Chair of the OCB's Iran Working Group), 15 December 1954, DDEL, White House Office, OCB Series.



decades and had little contact with their students.<sup>34</sup> Second, Payne was particularly concerned with the ever-increasing tensions between the institution's staff and students. As the university was taking on more undergraduates, classrooms had become over-crowded and there were shortages in accommodation, with many students forced to commute from their family homes. Such issues had compelled undergraduates to express their 'frustration and disgruntlement' towards their poor living, studying and teaching conditions. Not only were they unhappy about university life, but students were also 'bitter, disillusioned and resentful' due to low employment prospects and a society based on patronage and privilege.<sup>35</sup> As a result of this disquiet, many of the institute's students had vociferously proclaimed anti-establishment views and publicly demonstrated against the Iranian government.<sup>36</sup>

It was only when the University of Tehran and Iran's Ministry of Education indicated a willingness to modernise the institution that Payne became keen to work with it. In September 1956, Suratgar and Shafaq, with Education Ministry backing, devised and forwarded a parliamentary bill on university reform passed by the Majlis. To encourage university staff to focus more on their research and teaching, they constructed a law that would double the salaries of academics provided they did not have a second job. To try and alter the institution's culture from within, moreover, both figures had pressurised management figures to permit the lending of books from the University of Tehran library.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 2 September 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>35</sup> Report and survey on students' opinion at the University of Tehran, 29 December 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Country Files, (1956-1960).

<sup>36</sup> American Embassy (Tehran) to State Department, Washington, 29 August 1957, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US Education in Iran (1955-1960).

<sup>37</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 2 September 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

Suratgar and Sadiq's determination to modernise the institution stemmed from their formative experiences of French higher education. Both figures had been undergraduate and PhD students at the Sorbonne University in Paris. They accordingly wished to replicate their quality and standard of the teaching they received at these old, prestigious European universities at the University of Tehran.<sup>38</sup>

Buoyed by the willingness of figures within the University of Tehran to modernise the institution, Payne adhered to Baxter's recommendations. In a telegram to the USIA in Washington, the PAO for Iran outlined the USIS' intended approach towards engaging with the institution. He aimed for the agency to help detach the university and its staff from the Iranian political system, promoting academic freedom; professionalise the institution to placate students as well as to ensure their advancement; and to Americanise the university's culture.<sup>39</sup> To achieve these aims, Payne envisaged that the USIS would work closely with the University of Tehran's Chancellor, Manoucher Eqbal. Born in 1909 to a wealthy Francophile family, he had studied medicine at Dar ul-Funun in Tehran, the first higher education institution in Iran. Eqbal combined his expertise in medicine with his political astuteness and connections, taking on Cabinet positions while also teaching in various French and Iranian universities. By 1954, Eqbal had risen to become Chancellor of the University of Tehran, as well as a close aide of the Shah. Such was his meteoric rise that political commentators and Embassy officials had all tipped Eqbal to be a future Prime Minister of Iran, a role he would be appointed to in 1957.<sup>40</sup> In working with such a prominent,

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<sup>38</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 2 September 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>39</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 2 September 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>40</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 2 September 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

influential figure, the USIS in Iran would not only be able to successfully steer Iranian higher education, but also enjoy privileged access to the Shah and his acolytes.<sup>41</sup>

In a bid to inject American ideas into the University of Tehran, the USIS made great use of the exchange programme between the United States and Iran. It was something that was increasingly becoming a crucial aspect of the US' cultural policy towards the country, with the OCB and the NSC making the expansion of this programme a stated foreign policy objective. Both bodies aimed to capitalise on the favourable attitude of the Iranian government towards the US, expanding the programme to further introduce American attitudes to the country.<sup>42</sup> In February 1957, for example, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles had granted an extra 250,000 dollars funding for the next three years towards the exchange programme. Likewise, in view of how big the programme would be, the US Embassy in Tehran had established an eight-person board comprised of USIS and Embassy figures to approve and accept grantees from either nation.<sup>43</sup> The US-Iran exchange programme was typical of America's arrangements with other countries it shared close relations with. Often in the fields of science and medicine, there were also 'leader grants', where government officials from both countries go on exchange. As the USIS in Iran presided over the programme, Payne aimed to use exchanges as a means to shape the University of Tehran's running and functions. Implementing this from the top-down, Payne organised with the State Department for Eqbal and Suratgar to go on exchange to America,

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<sup>41</sup> Memorandum from the OCB's Ideological Working Group to William Baxter (Office of Greek, Turkish and Iranian Affairs, Chair of the OCB's Iran Working Group), 15 December 1954, DDEL, White House Office, OCB Series.

<sup>42</sup> Progress Report on NSC 5402, United States Policy Towards Iran, 29 March 1954, DDEL, White House Office, NSC Series; Operational Guidance with Respect to Iran in Implementation of NSC 5703/1, 22 May 1957, DDEL, White House Office, OCB Series.

<sup>43</sup> State Department to the American Embassy (Tehran), 24 July 1957, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

formally inviting both figures in March 1955.<sup>44</sup> Taking place between December 1955 and March 1956, Eqbal and Suratgar sampled America's higher education scene. They were taken on tours of various institutions, sat in on classes and were given an insight into the bureaucracy and administration of US universities. Payne hoped that Eqbal and Suratgar would use their observations of proceedings at US universities to improve Iranian higher education.<sup>45</sup>

The success of this initial exchange resulted in the foundation of a teacher education programme. From Eqbal and Suratgar's return, a selection of University of Tehran lecturers, as well as Ministry of Education officials, were invited to the US. The initiative first took place in 1956, with sessions held for Iranian education figures held annually. Grantees were invited to participate in a 100-day course involving 12-15 participants. The first two weeks were spent in Washington DC. Initial sessions focused on orientating grantees and planning their tailored programmes. After this, those on exchange were sent to an area of the United States to be immersed in the fundamentals of American education. As well as meetings with US officials to exchange pedagogical ideas, grantees had to attend 9-10 weeks' worth of seminars, each focusing on a specific area of education. Between all of this, they were also expected to visit universities in the vicinity to where they were staying, as well as participate in non-academic activities. In the final week, grantees were sent to the State Department to evaluate the pros and cons of American and Iranian education systems with its staff.<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, to ensure that education grantees delivered on their observations and experiences in the US, the USIS implemented a returnee programme. These figures, Payne

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<sup>44</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 19 March 1955, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>45</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 25 June 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>46</sup> USIA (Washington) circular, 29 January 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

claimed in a telegram to the USIA in Washington, had seen how things work in the US and were now in a position to be able to implement US-style reforms in Iran. Initiatives should include lectures, field trips and demonstrations.<sup>47</sup> The need to implement a returnee programme was not just a desire confined to Payne and USIS officials. In a meeting between the PAO for Iran and Hassan Jaffari, the then Minister for Education, the latter indicated that many returnees were frustrated. Having learnt so much in the US, their ambitions to improve things in Iran were being thwarted by an inability to circumnavigate the Iranian political system and the vested interests within it.<sup>48</sup> In light of this conversation, both Payne and Jaffari agreed to co-operate to establish a joint USIS-Ministry of Education section dedicated to guiding grantees prior to their departure and on their return.<sup>49</sup>

USIS and Ministry of Education figures therefore worked together to establish a returnee programme. Payne and Jaffari organised a series of meetings with one another to discuss what sort of assistance both bodies would provide to Iranians on exchange returning from the US.<sup>50</sup> As the specifics of this arrangement were being sorted out, the USIS worked with Suratgar and his fellow literature lecturer Ali-Akbar Siassi, who had also been on exchange in the US, to establish a new course at the University of Tehran. The first module to be ever taught in English at the institution, it served as a means to heighten the University of Tehran's global reach and prestige. Not only was the course aimed at attracting American exchange students – most of whom had previously not visited Iran or were aware of its

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<sup>47</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 6 September 1955, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>48</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 24 July 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>49</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 19 March 1955, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>50</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 19 March 1955, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

higher education institutions as they tended to not speak Farsi – but also at Iranians themselves. After encountering foreign students on their travels in the US, Suratgar and Siassi thought that most Iranian students lacked the English language capabilities to study or live in America.<sup>51</sup>

The module accordingly served to try and resolve these issues through teaching Iranian history and culture. Pitched at a high school level, the module was a nine-month course with two hours teaching per week. Topics covered included the history of Iran, the workings of Iranian political institutions, the Farsi language and Persian literature. USIS officials provided Suratgar and Siassi with a template of how the course should be structured and assessed, something that the Iranian academics wholly adhered to. Not only were there numerous assignments and midterm examinations, but also students were informed that they had to attend all classes, something that was not usually deemed mandatory in the Iranian education system of the 1950s. The USIS also played a pivotal role in promoting the course, devising brochures and posters. The agency's officials were instrumental in ensuring that only lecturers who demonstrated pro-US tendencies – and had been on exchange to America – were allowed to teach on the module. As well as Suratgar and Siassi, Hafez Farman, a professor of history, was permitted to run classes.<sup>52</sup>

The University of Tehran was further Americanised by the USIS through the agency organising for many US lecturers to be sent to Iran on exchange. From 1955 to 1958, numerous American academics visited the institution to teach in, among other areas, medicine, science, public health and the humanities. In so doing, USIS officials hoped to modernise the institution, while also encouraging wider socio-economic development in the

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<sup>51</sup> American Embassy (Tehran) to the State Department, Washington, 21 June 1958, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US Education in Iran (1955-1960).

<sup>52</sup> American Embassy (Tehran) to the State Department, 20 November 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Reports on the USIS in Iran.

country.<sup>53</sup> Before the USIS could pursue this policy, though, the agency realised that the University of Tehran required considerable American expertise and assistance in administrative matters. In a March 1956 communiqué with the State Department in Washington, Payne argued that the institution's bureaucracy was 'chaotic to non-existent.' It was only when this was resolved that the university could progress. The PAO for Iran consequently called for the State Department to provide financial incentives to university staff specialising in management and administration to work at the institution for short periods.<sup>54</sup> Acquiescing to Payne's requests, the government department recruited Rufus Fitzgerald, Chancellor Emeritus at the University of Pittsburgh, and Sterling McMurrin, Dean of the University of Utah. Both figures visited Iran between January and March 1957 and February to June 1958 respectively. Fitzgerald worked with the administrative staff to provide guidance on how to construct an effective, efficient bureaucratic structure. McMurrin, on the other hand, focused on pastoral care. Per his recommendations, the University of Tehran created an Office of Students, appointing Dr Ali Kani, who had advised McMurrin during his visit, as its head. The body aimed to provide counselling and guidance to undergraduates facing personal or academic problems.<sup>55</sup>

Once these bureaucratic failings were in the process of being resolved, the USIS strove to assist the University of Tehran in academic matters. A key area in which the agency assisted the institution was to enhance its provision and teaching of arts and humanities subjects. Reports from US science and engineering academics on secondment indicated that the university lecturers' pedagogical practices were largely similar to those at

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<sup>53</sup> Annual report on the exchange programme in Iran (January 1957 – June 1958), 9 August 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Reports on the USIS in Iran.

<sup>54</sup> USIS (Tehran) to the State Department, 7 March 1956, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>55</sup> Annual report on the exchange programme in Iran (January 1957 – June 1958), 9 August 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Reports on the USIS in Iran.

their home institutions. It was in the arts and humanities, however, where teaching provision and standards differed. As the University of Tehran's hierarchy deemed these subjects to be intellectually inferior with no relevance to wider society, they had previously granted them little attention or funding.<sup>56</sup> The USIS consequently helped establish a School of Journalism at the University of Tehran. As well as offering courses related to the press and media, the USIS envisaged that it would have close ties with a counterpart American journalism school. Fostering such links with a 'top-flight' US academic department would not only underline the School of Journalism's prestige, but also enable the US to influence the attitudes and composition of the Iranian media in the long term.<sup>57</sup>

To achieve this, the USIS persuaded Quintus Wilson of the University of Minnesota's School of Journalism to go to Iran to help set up a similar school for the University of Tehran and plan a curriculum for Iranian teachers to follow after he departs. Between January and June 1957 he helped establish an Institute of Journalism in the Faculty of Social Sciences. Wilson's initial courses investigated theory and practice in journalism, as well as ethics.<sup>58</sup> Beyond his academic responsibilities, Wilson also toured other Iranian cities, including Shiraz, Mashhad and Abadan, providing crash courses to journalists in these regions on US-style journalism.<sup>59</sup> Through encouraging Iranian media figures to be more vocal about the teaching of their subject, Wilson persuaded many Iranian journalists to push their government to provide more opportunities for students to study journalism and related

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<sup>56</sup> American Embassy (Tehran) to the State Department, 15 November 1955, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>57</sup> American Embassy (Tehran) to the State Department, 12 December 1955, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>58</sup> American Embassy (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 29 May 1957, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>59</sup> American Embassy (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 29 May 1957, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).



disciplines. Media pressure compelled the Ministry of Education to force various higher education institutions, notably the universities of Shiraz and Tabriz, to provide more history, literature and media courses. These were usually undergraduate classes open to those with advanced English-speaking capabilities. There were roughly 15-20 students per class, taught for four hours weekly.<sup>60</sup>

Moreover, the USIS helped expand the University of Tehran's provision of courses in the arts by enhancing the institution's drama teaching capabilities. Through the State Department's financial incentives, the USIS helped organise the secondment of Frank Davidson, a lecturer from City College in New York, for a five-month trip. Commencing his secondment in January 1956, his remit was to enhance the teaching of drama in the University of Tehran and beyond. Davidson's lectures, usually focused on acting, producing and directing, were undertaken in English with a Farsi interpreter relaying his teachings to students. The City College lecturer's key achievements were the founding of a Department of Dramatic Art at the University of Tehran, as well as a drama workshop at the Iran-America Society branch in the city. The latter involved 60 hours of contact over a ten-week period for students in acting, lighting and directing.<sup>61</sup>

Building on Davidson's achievements, George Quinby, a lecturer in dramatic art at Bowdoin College in Maine, came to Iran on exchange between September 1956 and August 1957. With Iranian staff in the institution now delivering his predecessor's classes, Quinby focused on his lectures on his specialist area, the writing and set design of American drama. Students analysed some of the instructor's favourite Arthur Miller plays, in particular *The*

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<sup>60</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 25 May 1956, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960); American Embassy (Tehran) to State Department, 18 April 1957, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>61</sup> USIS (Tehran) to State Department, 21 February 1956, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960); USIS (Tehran) to State Department, 14 June 1956, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

*Crucible*, *View from a Bridge* and *All my Sons*, with 27 copies of each script to the University of Tehran's library.<sup>62</sup> Alongside his teaching, Quinby also acted as an architectural consultant for the building of the University of Tehran's first theatre. He presided over the construction of modern stages at other auditoriums in Iran's capital city. In a bid to promote US culture beyond Tehran, Quinby devised productions of American plays involving University of Tehran students. He presented one such production, Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, to the Iran-America Society branch in Esfahan.<sup>63</sup>

Indeed, the USIS looked to move beyond promoting the American way of life at the University of Tehran, merely using the higher education institute as a platform to do this on a wider scale. Moving beyond Baxter's recommendations, Payne placed a great emphasis on engaging with Iran's youth. In particular, he aimed to achieve this through boosting the involvement of the Iranian young in extra-curricular activities. Through these initiatives, usually taking place after school, the PAO for Iran aimed to make Iran's youth a key aspect of Iranian modernisation, while also fostering positive impressions of America.<sup>64</sup> According to USIS surveys, many of Iran's young had negative perceptions of US education system. Due to the UK and Russia's historic involvement in Iranian affairs, both countries had previously helped set up schools and shape Iran's education system from afar. Many of the country's young, therefore, had a more positive view of British and Soviet schooling. As both systems placed a far greater emphasis on science, maths and engineering, young Iranians deemed

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<sup>62</sup> American Embassy (Tehran) to State Department, 26 September 1957, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960); George Quinby (US grantee in dramatic art) to Ali Akbar Siassi (Dean, Faculty of Letters, University of Tehran), 1 June 1957, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>63</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 12 September 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>64</sup> Detailed development of major actions relating to policy toward Iran (NSC 5504), 10 July 1956, DDEL, White House Office, OCB Series.

their education systems as more intellectually rigorous. The USIS, accordingly, aimed to counter this perception. They wished to underline to Iran's young, as well as its society at large, that while the US system did not concentrate as much on STEM subjects, it produced individuals that were much more well-rounded, socially aware and worldly.<sup>65</sup>

Payne correspondingly helped organise a youth activities seminar, held in Tehran in May 1957. The event brought together government figures and willing volunteers. It was a means to foster a hitherto unseen culture of extra-curricular activities Iran's youth, while also familiarising politicians with young people's needs and recruiting volunteers to run activities.<sup>66</sup> To generate Iranian government interest in extra-curricular activities for schoolchildren, Payne called on delegates, especially government officials that were present, to understand the views of young people. This was a formative period in people's lives, where their social and political views were shaped. More broadly, he argued that dealing more with Iran's young provides a fresh perspective on matters. According to Payne, the best way to foster ties with Iran's young was through after school clubs and activities. The nature of these can be steered so that they can provide what the country needs for its socio-economic development. Funds, facilities and volunteers, though, were required for activities to run.<sup>67</sup>

Hossein Ala, the then Iranian Prime Minister, attended the seminar and was impressed by Payne's speech. In a letter to the USIS' PAO, he agreed with his arguments,

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<sup>65</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 14 April 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>66</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 22 August 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>67</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 14 May 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

pledging to expand the extra-curricular programme for Iranian youths.<sup>68</sup> What Payne and Ala had overlooked, however, was that Iran's Ministry of Education was already working to improve the provision of extra-curricular activities for Iranian youths. In August 1955, its officials had decided to legally set aside three hours a week for all children between the ages of 11 and 13 and one hour weekly for youths over 13 for such activities. That same month, the Education Ministry had also invited selected school teachers to receive 30 hours training in running scout groups and girl guides, as well as sports clubs.<sup>69</sup> These crash courses culminated in some teachers petitioning the Shah to form a nationwide organisation for Iran's young women to join. It was at this point that the USIS realised the extent to which the Ministry of Education was working to improve the provision of youth activities and began collaborating with the government department. The agency expressed its concern at the lack of recreational facilities for women, as well their 'subservient status in Iranian society.' Justifying its new position, the USIS claimed in telegrams to the USIA in Washington that many in and outside of Iran had shied away from interacting with Iranian women specifically. As there would be no competing influences, USIS figures envisaged that Iran's female population would be much more easily swayed towards adopting American norms and values.<sup>70</sup>

Pressure from both the USIS and Iran's Ministry of Education culminated in the Shah donating land for a campsite outside the town of Ramsar, on the Caspian coast.<sup>71</sup> The girls

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<sup>68</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 17 May 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>69</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 22 August 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>70</sup> American Embassy (Tehran) to the State Department (Washington), 22 August 1957, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1959).

<sup>71</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 22 August 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

from the first camp to take place at this site in 1955 helped form the Soraya Club. Established in 1956 - and named after the Shah's then wife Soraya Esfandiary-Bakhtiary – the organisation offered training and guidance for Iran's young females. The organisation was based along the lines of the US-based Young Women's Christian Association. Through clubs scattered across Iran, the Soraya Club's programmes and initiatives encouraged its members to become 'good wives' along American lines. Writing in the *Ettelat* newspaper, founding member Latifeh Alvieh claimed that the Soraya Club helps prepare girls to be 'mothers of the future.' It complemented the work done by schools in this field but tackled it via different means.<sup>72</sup> Sessions were held on sewing and cooking, as well as the management of a modern household. USIS figures in Iran assisted the organisation in an informal capacity, providing supplementary materials, subsidising residential trips and recommending initiatives. Helping the Soraya Club to flourish and expand, USIS officials supplied advisors, voluntary workers and provided grants for some of Iran's youth leaders to undertake courses in the US. These sessions familiarised workers with the problems facing Iran's young female population, as well as offering suggestions as to how to engage with them.<sup>73</sup> The Soraya Club started with 16 members, rising to 389 by 1960, with a 150-strong university affiliated club, and branches in other major Iranian cities.<sup>74</sup>

### **The USIA and the Plan Organisation**

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<sup>72</sup> Latifeh Alvieh, 'Our Young People Need Recreation', *Ettelat*, 16 May 1957, London, The British Library, Newspaper Collection.

<sup>73</sup> American Embassy (Tehran) to the State Department (Washington), 22 August 1957, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1959).

<sup>74</sup> American Embassy (Tehran) to the State Department (Washington), 22 August 1957, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1959).

Complementing work in youth and education fields, the USIS under Payne also sought to promote programmes that encouraged Iran's socio-economic development. The PAO for Iran regarded such initiatives as pivotal in the struggle to promote the American way of life in the country. If, as Payne claimed in a telegram to his USIA superiors in Washington, we can convince the Iranian people that the US is interested in improving Iran, then they will be much more positive towards America.<sup>75</sup> Much of this public relations campaign centred on the Plan Organisation, an Iranian government backed agency established by the Shah in 1948. Its aim was to both provide funding and undertake socio-economic projects to improve living standards, working conditions and productivity. Heading this organisation was one of the Iranian monarch's close allies, Abolhassan Ebtehaj. Born in 1899 to a wealthy family in Gilan, a province in the north of Iran on the Caspian coast, Ebtehaj was educated in Beirut and Paris. On returning to Iran, he initially pursued a career at UK government-backed Imperial Bank of Persia. Resentment, however, at the fact that only British citizens were permitted to be senior managers in the organisation compelled Ebtehaj to resign in 1935 and join the civil service. It was in this role that Ebtehaj excelled as an economic planner. By 1938 he had risen to be the Governor of Bank Melli, Iran's central bank. After 13 years in this role, Ebtehaj was appointed as the Managing Director of the Plan Organisation due to his prior experience in central planning and his ties with Western nations. Despite his Francophilia - a legacy of his Parisian youth - Ebtehaj was ardently pro-American, deeming close ties between Iran and the US government as pivotal to his country's socio-economic progress.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Joint USIA and State Department message to the USIS (Tehran), 18 June 1957, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>76</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 3 June 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961); Abolhassan Ebtehaj interviewed by Habib Ladjevardi, 30 November 1981, Harvard Iranian Oral History Project, <https://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~iohp/ebtehaj.html> (accessed 11 April 2019);

The USIS were convinced that a comprehensive and sustained public relations programme needed to be implemented to counter popular dissatisfaction towards the Plan Organisation's initiatives. Many Iranians, crucially, were unaware of what its projects were meant to achieve. While schemes sought to improve Iran's infrastructure in the long run, there were no tangible short-term benefits. The disruption of construction work to everyday life, therefore, was something that the public did not appreciate or understand.<sup>77</sup> The USIS' concerns were supported by the views of Soliman Assadi, the director in charge of allocating and running projects for the Plan Organisation. In a March 1956 letter to Payne, he had commented on the views of the 'man on the street in Tehran' and how the Plan Organisation's activities can alter this. Payne deemed the arguments in the letter valid, as it illustrated the importance the USIS must place on publicising the Plan Organisation's activities. According to Assadi, the 'man on the street' was 'very pessimistic.' For most Iranians, there was little job security, a high cost of living and an even wider gap between the richest and poorest in society. More broadly, many were bitter at interventions of recent history, sceptical of power politics. They regarded most of the political class as corrupt, its membership composed of a small number of elites. The exclusionary, unethical nature of Iranian politics made the country a fertile ground for anti-Americanism. As a result, American officials should try and encourage the implementation of socio-economic reforms to bolster Iran's independence and integrity. If the US government were seen to be behind these improvements then there would not only be greater pro-Americanism, but also political stability. The Plan Organisation's work could rectify these issues. Its projects would provide improved facilities; create more jobs; and foster greater economic efficiency, ensuring Iran

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Homa Katouzian, 'Abolhassan Ebtehaj Obituary: Iran's First Technocrat', *The Guardian*, 26 March 1999, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/1999/mar/26/guardianobituaries1> (accessed 11 April 2019).

<sup>77</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 5 August 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

'moves out of the economic doldrums.' Not enough, however, had been done to inform the public about this.<sup>78</sup>

The Iranian government possessed similar views on the plight of the Plan Organisation's information activities. Ebtehaj, in particular, was aware of the need for more public relations initiatives to counter increasing popular criticism. Since boosting their cultural and propaganda activities in Iran since 1953, Ebtehaj had frequently called publicly on the USIS to do more to promote its initiatives. On numerous occasions he had requested that the American agency provide him with a qualified expert to preside over the Plan Organisation's Information Department.<sup>79</sup> It was only by January 1957 that the USIS heeded Ebtehaj's calls. Their acquiescence to his requests stemmed from the demands placed on them by the USIA and the State Department. Both organisations had been taking a greater interest in the need for an information programme for the Plan Organisation. In meetings with White House officials to discuss NSC 5504, the updated US policy document on Iran, they successfully managed to make this a key stated foreign policy goal. Both bodies noted that the Plan Organisation's current public relations campaigns were non-existent. Officials within the Iranian organisation did not see the point of countering popular and media criticism of their activities, convinced that the latter could be countenanced through bribes to journalists.<sup>80</sup>

With regards to promoting technical assistance programmes, the USIS had previously focused on stimulating support for American initiatives in this field. Since 1949,

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<sup>78</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 10 March 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>79</sup> Joint USIA and State Department message to USIS Tehran, 18 June 1957, NAI, US State Department papers (1955-1960).

<sup>80</sup> Outline plan of operations on NSC 5504, 16 June 1955, DDEL, White House Office, OCB Series; USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 9 April 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).



the US Embassy, as well as the USIS from 1953 onwards, had sought to inform the Iranian public and foster popular support for Point Four programmes in Iran. As part of his 1949 inaugural address, President Harry Truman had pledged considerable technical and economic support to 'developing countries' as a key foreign policy objective. Through the Point Four scheme, nations such as Iran would sign bilateral agreements with the US, permitting American officials to visit the country and identify potential projects to improve rural amenities and economic output.<sup>81</sup> The Foreign Operations Administration (FOA) before 1955, and the International Cooperation Administration (ICA) after, ran numerous Point Four projects in Iran. These included projects to improve access to water and sanitation in rural communities, as well as the building of recreation centres for factory workers in Esfahan, Ahwaz and Shiraz.<sup>82</sup>

The USIS worked to publicise FOA and ICA activities. In a January 1956 meeting with Nalle, Healy and the other provincial PAOs in Tehran, Payne remarked on the breakdown of the USIS' operations in the country. He claimed that 50% of publications, 60% of exhibits, 50% of radio broadcasts, and 60% of newsreel content centred on promoting Point Four in Iran.<sup>83</sup> Chuck Waters, a USIS official who liaised with the FOA and ICA, gathered all the information on Point Four projects, passing this to Payne in Tehran. The USIS' PAO subsequently disseminated information on these projects via the press, Radio Tehran or the USIS Library in Tehran. Payne hoped to demonstrate to Iranians that Point Four programmes were achieving results and that the US and Iran can work together for the

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<sup>81</sup> 'President Harry Truman's Inaugural Address', 20 January 1949, <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/50yearchive/inagural20jan1949.htm> (accessed 11 April 2019).

<sup>82</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 31 March 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961); USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 3 June 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>83</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 16 January 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

country's benefit. In particular, though, he sought to alleviate the so-called 'Tehran resentment' sweeping the country. According to reports from provincial PAOs, those residing in rural communities and provincial cities increasingly felt as if their counterparts living in the capital were paid more and had greater access to amenities. USIS publicity of Point Four aimed to alter this perception, 'tying this country together more as a unit.'<sup>84</sup>

Most Point Four programmes were promoted by the USIS at a regional level. In Mashhad, for example, Nalle used local publications to promote its initiatives to literate, prominent figures residing in the city and its surroundings. Monthly bulletins on Point Four programmes were sent to 500 business people, teachers and medical professionals. According to Nalle, it was the upper echelons of Mashhad society that were most ignorant about US technical assistance activities in the area. He also hoped that they would use their influence to distribute and discuss Point Four activities with others.<sup>85</sup> To promote American technical assistance in rural communities, likewise, USIS officials in Iran devised, published and distributed *Land and People* magazine. With a circulation of roughly 25,000, new editions of the publication were released bi-monthly with information on US-backed socio-economic programmes. Articles focused on Point Four work in the agricultural sector. Specifically, they explored how the US government aimed to modernise and improve rural living and working conditions in Iran, bringing them to the same level as that enjoyed by American people.<sup>86</sup> *Land and People* was distributed in provincial cities through third parties.

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<sup>84</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 16 January 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>85</sup> David Nalle's Final Report as PAO for Mashhad, 5 May 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961); David Nalle interviewed by Dorothy Robins-Mowry, 12 April 1990, Arlington, Virginia, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, <https://www.adst.org/OHTOCs/Nalle,David.toc.pdf> (accessed 11 April 2019).

<sup>86</sup> A brief outline of the work undertaken by various sections of the USIS in Iran, 4 September 1954, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Reports on the USIS in Iran.

According to Larry Sharpe, the USIS official in charge of its distribution, copies of the magazine were sent free of charge to teahouses, barbershops and newsvendors in Tehran, Tabriz and beyond.<sup>87</sup>

As the period progressed, however, the USIS began to minimise the promotion of Point Four initiatives. With figures in both the Iranian and American governments presiding over projects, there were too many misunderstandings, disagreements and no clear aims. Schemes were continuously reworked and delayed, with FOA and ICA figures in Washington suspicious that their Iranian counterparts were accepting bribes.<sup>88</sup> As such, public opinion in Iran and the wider Middle East towards Point Four was unfavourable. The adverse reaction towards its projects was illustrated in a July 1956 seminar on the USIS' activities in the wider region, involving representatives from the Iran, Near East, Maghreb, Greece and Turkey. Held at the American University of Beirut, involving the institution's faculty and students, participants labelled Point Four as a failed enterprise, arguing that there were 'too many promises and not enough achievements.'<sup>89</sup> Attempts to rectify this had proved unsuccessful. The USIS launched a campaign through Radio Tehran, using programmes to promote projects on low-cost housing, rural teacher training and Tehran's new reservoirs. The American agency also arranged for *Kayhan* and *Ettelat* journalists to be taken on tours of Point Four projects. Both initiatives, however, did little to reverse the unfavourable Iranian popular opinion towards American technical assistance programmes.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 22 September 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>88</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 22 September 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>89</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 17 September 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>90</sup> USIS (Tehran) bi-weekly report (26 December 1953 – 7 January 1954), NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Reports on the USIS in Iran; USIS (Tehran) bi-weekly report (23 January – 5 February 1954), NAI,

Fearful that the Iranian public would associate Plan Organisation projects with the doomed Point Four initiatives, the USIS in Iran initially sought to influence its public relations operations from afar. They provided the Plan Organisation with a series of suggested recommendations. In an August 1957 letter to Ebtehaj, Payne recommended that signs and plaques be framed in the vicinity of each project demonstrating the Plan Organisation's contribution. To assess progress and keep abreast of projects, moreover, Payne recommended that Ebtehaj obtain progress reports from each project, with accompanying photographs. These would be drip-fed to media outlets, released on different days for maximum impact. Reports, Payne claimed, should be detailed, but in non-technical terms with a conversational touch.' They should highlight achievements, not aims, as it is the latter that resonates with the public. The constant flow of articles would not only foster local pride, but also demonstrate progress, highlighting Plan Organisation successes to the Iranian people on a regular basis. Such endeavours, Payne argued, were integral to the Plan Organisation's successes. Many of these projects would take a long time to build, let alone yield improvements in living standards. Unless spelt out to Iranians, many would become disillusioned with the Plan Organisation.<sup>91</sup>

Impressed with their guidance, Ebtehaj now pushed for the USIS to provide an American public relations expert to direct the Plan Organisation's information section. He used his close relations with the US Ambassador, Selden Chapin, to try and persuade the Embassy to coerce the USIA and USIS to agree to this. Meeting with the American official, Ebtehaj argued that no one in the country has the required experience to undertake this role. Besides, appointing another Iranian would require parliamentary and cabinet approval by

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USIA papers, Iran, Reports on the USIS in Iran; USIS (Tehran) bi-weekly report (26 April – 9 May 1954), NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Reports on the USIS in Iran; USIS (Tehran) bi-weekly report (25 October – 7 November 1954), NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Reports on the USIS in Iran.

<sup>91</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 20 August 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

law. Not only would this be embarrassing, providing Ebtehaj's rivals, such as the Minister of Interior, Asadollah Alam, ammunition to discredit him, but it would also take considerable time. It would not be necessary to publicly identify the USIS officer, and no need to deny their existence either. They would be required to be in post for two years, officially as Ebtehaj's advisor. In this role they would be able to visit all projects, devise an information programme and liaise with the media.<sup>92</sup>

USIS figures were resistant to providing an officer to the Plan Organisation. Despite Embassy and State Department protests, they maintained that such an arrangement would be counterproductive. Once they became aware of American involvement in the Plan Organisation, USIS officials argued that many Iranians would regard its projects as a successor to Point Four.<sup>93</sup> It was only when the agency became aware of the bureaucratic chaos within the Plan Organisation that USIS figures were forced to relent. To placate and circumvent Ebtehaj's requests, USIS Tehran had initially asked the Plan Organisation to provide them with a list of on-going projects, which they would then publicise on their behalf. Ebtehaj gave the USIS a list of eight ventures underway. The American agency, though, could only find three. There were also seven extra projects that its officials uncovered independently. When approached, the Plan Organisation's director blamed his USIS liaison officers for incompetence. Within the space of several months, Ebtehaj went through three in quick succession. The 'revolving door approach' here annoyed USIS figures, persuading them that they had to take a more direct role in the Plan Organisation's public relations

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<sup>92</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 24 August 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>93</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 20 August 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

activities. While Payne claimed that all three lacked experience in information production and dissemination, they displayed considerable enthusiasm to learn and develop.<sup>94</sup>

From December 1957, the USIA seconded Herbert Linnemann to USIS Iran to act as the Plan Organisation's public relations expert. Linneman had previously spent most of his career at the State Department. Prior to taking on this role, he had been a senior figure in the department's Security Division, investigating and checking backgrounds and political affiliations of government staff. This section of the State Department had expanded exponentially in the 1950s, thanks to the accusations of Senator Joseph McCarthy. On 9 February 1950, the Republican representative for Wisconsin made a speech in West Virginia accusing the State Department of being populated with Communists. McCarthy's allegations caused a huge public outcry, with Linnemann and his contemporaries tasked with flushing out possible Soviet sympathisers. The hysteria surrounding McCarthy's claims formed a significant chunk of the Second Red Scare. In the 1940s and 1950s, at the Cold War's outset, a fear of Communism pervaded American society and politics.<sup>95</sup> With McCarthy's declining credibility and the abating of hysteria surrounding the prospect of domestic Communist dissidents from 1953 onwards, Linneman's role was redundant. Working for the USIS on secondment to the Plan Organisation provided not only a job opportunity, but also a chance to distance himself from his association with McCarthyism and the Second Red Scare. Linneman's objectives in his new role were to improve the Plan Organisation's public relations while also developing an information programme to use as a template.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 15 May 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>95</sup> For further details on McCarthyism and the Second Red Scare, please consult: Richard Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective* (New York, 1990) or Earl Latham, *The Meaning of McCarthyism* (Lexington, 1973).

<sup>96</sup> USIS (Tehran) to the USIA (Washington), 6 October 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

In his monthly reports to Payne, Linneman indicated that he disapproved of the Plan Organisation's public relations activities. He complained that its officials did not know how, when and where it was appropriate to make public announcements. More pressingly, Linneman was desperate to stop Ebtehaj making 'gratuitous public statements.' He claimed that these utterances fanned expectations unnecessarily and upset others in the process. One example of this was during a December 1957 tour of the University of Tehran to demonstrate the Plan Organisation's work in modernising the institution's buildings. In discussions with *Kayhan* and *Ettelat* journalists, Ebtehaj claimed that the Plan Organisation was working with the university to expand science and engineering facilities by shutting down the School of Law. The inaccurate remarks upset senior university figures, as well as staff and students in the Faculty of Law.<sup>97</sup> Such incidents had persuaded Linneman that Ebtehaj was ill suited to his leadership role in the Plan Organisation. The American claimed that his Iranian counterpart 'did not understand the basic fundamentals of public relations.' It was only because other senior figures, due to their ambitions and reverence of Ebtehaj, refusal to go against him that this had not been highlighted before.<sup>98</sup>

Despite his reservations towards Ebtehaj, Linneman was able to professionalise certain aspects of the Plan Organisation's activities. He managed to persuade Ebtehaj to brief and give tours of two Plan Organisation projects in Tehran that looked at providing recreational facilities for young women. Attendees included *Kayhan* and *Ettelat* journalists, as well as members of the General Federation of Women's Clubs. The press figures took photos and pledged to produce articles based on what they had seen. Such endeavours were not something that Ebtehaj had previously undertaken. He had usually confined

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<sup>97</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 13 January 1958, NAIL, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>98</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 13 January 1958, NAIL, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961); USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 8 April 1958, NAIL, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

himself to making announcements and not getting involved in daily goings on of Plan Organisation projects.<sup>99</sup> However, Linneman maintained that it would take many months before the Plan Organisation 'has anything resembling a conventional public relations strategy.' Its public relations initiatives were confined only to limited, erratic activities for a considerable period due to a lack of professional staff members and an absence of an overall plan. A special magazine commemorating two years of Plan Organisation activities, for example, was full of spelling, grammatical and factual errors. Likewise, Linneman was unable to persuade project chiefs to send him progress reports. He tried to get Ebtehaj to force them to do this, but to no avail.<sup>100</sup>

Linneman's desperation to persuade Ebtehaj to modernise the Plan Organisation's bureaucracy and activities underlined the importance US officials placed on the promotion of US-style socio-economic development in Iran. Their efforts here formed part of much broader efforts to persuade and attract Iranian people towards American norms, values and ideas. This chapter has highlighted the various means by which USIS figures sought to achieve this aim. Initiatives included increasing the size and scope of the US-Iran exchange programme, the attempted Americanisation of certain Iranian higher education institutions and fostering a culture of extra-curricular activities among Iranian youths. The next section moves beyond US soft power and cultural diplomacy in Iran. It instead considers the British attempts to reassert their policies and programmes in this field in light of the USIS' widescale and comprehensive initiatives.

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<sup>99</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 20 August 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>100</sup> USIS (Tehran) to the USIA (Washington), 12 April 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).



## **Chapter IV – Containing Communism and Maintaining Britain’s Position in Iran: The Information Research Department, SAVAK and Anti-Soviet Propaganda**

*‘Britain’s role and influence in Iran is a fraction of what it was in the past.’<sup>1</sup>*

The above quote encapsulated the key issue that constrained British foreign policy in Iran after 1953. It is an excerpt from a June 1957 letter from Roger Stevens, the then British Ambassador to Iran, to Selwyn Lloyd, the UK’s Foreign Secretary. A diplomat for most of his career, Stevens had worked in many countries, including Argentina, France and the United States, before becoming the UK Ambassador to Sweden in 1951. It was his next position in Iran, though, a role he held between 1954 and 1958, which proved the most formative. During his stint in the country, Stevens fell in love with its art, culture, food and architecture. His interest was such that, after leaving Iran for a position at the Foreign Office in 1958, he wrote two books, *The Land of the Great Sophy* in 1962 and *First View of Persia* in 1964. The former was a record of the sights and cities of Iran, including many of Stevens’ personal photographs from his travels. The latter was written from the perspective of seventeenth-century European travellers visiting the country for the first time.<sup>2</sup> Stevens’ passion for Iranian culture had made him determined to try and strengthen Anglo-Iranian relations. Having experienced a way of life so radically different to his own upper middle-class English private school upbringing, Stevens was convinced the UK had much to learn from the

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), 1 June 1957, Kew, Richmond, The National Archives, BW 49/13, (hereafter document, date, TNA, file reference).

<sup>2</sup> Roger Stevens, *Land of the Great Sophy* (London, 1962); Roger Stevens, *First View of Persia* (London, 1964).

country. While in Tehran, Stevens wrote several letters to Lloyd and the Foreign Office. Each outlined Iran's importance to British diplomatic goals, bemoaning Britain's diminished role and influence in the country compared to what it had enjoyed historically.<sup>3</sup>

While triumphant, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis had considerably weakened Britain's position in Iran. The events of 1951-1953 marked a watershed as the end of the UK's dominance over Iranian affairs. Since the eighteenth century, British officials had been able to intervene unopposed in the country's governmental affairs. The Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis demonstrated that this was no longer the case. It highlighted how the US had taken Britain's place in Iran. Diplomatic discussions to resolve the dispute highlighted the UK's inability to achieve its aims in Iran without US support. A probable American backlash meant that the UK did not respond to this challenge to their economic interests in Iran with military force. It was only with US backing that Britain was able to wrestle control of the Iranian oil industry away from Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossagdeh.<sup>4</sup> In the dispute's aftermath, moreover, the AIOC – now renamed BP - was forced to surrender their monopoly over Iran's oil industry. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, as well as his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, pressured the UK firm into sharing Iranian oilfields with the other major petroleum companies through a holding organisation. As well as BP, this included Gulf Oil, Standard Oil of California, Texaco, Royal Dutch Shell, Standard Oil of New Jersey and Standard Oil of New York.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to the UK Foreign Office, 30 November 1954, TNA, BW 49/13; Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to Anthony Haigh (Foreign Office, Cultural Relations Department), 26 April 1957, TNA, BW 49/24; Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), 1 June 1957, TNA, BW 49/13.

<sup>4</sup> Steve Marsh, 'HMG, and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis: In Defence of Anglo-Iranian', *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 12/4 (2001), 148-153.

<sup>5</sup> Memorandum of conversation between Herbert Hoover Junior (State Department) and Harold Beeley (British Embassy, Iran), 19 January 1954, Oxford, *Foreign Relations of the United States*,

Compounding this was the Iranian public's increasing distrust towards the British government. Since the August 1953 Anglo-American backed coup that toppled Mossaddeh, the image of 'perfidious Albion' had cemented itself in the Iranian popular consciousness. Due to the British government's historic meddling in Iran's political affairs, the notion that Britain was to blame for all unfortunate incidents to befall the country had been oft cited before the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis. The events of August 1953, though, had made this more prevalent, transforming it into a popular Iranian stereotype of the UK. Writing to the Information Research Department (IRD) in 1957, officials from the British Embassy in Tehran's press section underlined the considerable anti-UK feeling in Iran. They noted how numerous articles in mainstream Iranian newspapers were urging their readers to be vigilant towards British political and economic overtures. Such reports, Embassy officials continued, were detrimental to Britain's interest in Iran. These articles would jeopardise future Anglo-Iranian collaborative efforts, culminating in Britain being sidelined in the Middle Eastern country.<sup>6</sup>

The British government's initial attempts to reassert their presence in Iran proved unsuccessful. In 1954, the UK Treasury and Foreign Office loaned £100 million to the Iranian government. Not only was this aimed at boosting an economy near collapse after a two-year British-imposed embargo, but also at repairing Anglo-Iranian diplomatic ties.<sup>7</sup> Britain's offer of financial assistance, however, paled in comparison to the backing provided by the United States, whose standing in the country had been enhanced substantially. The CIA's role in ousting Mosaddeh, combined with the White House and State Department's

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1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954; Steve Marsh, *Anglo-American Relations and Cold War Oil* (Basingstoke, 2003), 128.

<sup>6</sup> Review of press in Baghdad Pact countries, 14 November 1956, TNA, FO 371//121766; Survey of the BBC Persian Service's output in Iran, 17 December 1963, Caversham, Reading, BBC Written Archives Centre, BBC Persian Service papers, E/3/182/1.

<sup>7</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to the Foreign Office, 16 April 1956, TNA, FO 371/120725.

public backing of the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, tied the US and Iran even closer together.<sup>8</sup> As well as considerable military and economic aid, the US had implemented a series of soft power initiatives in Iran. Chapter II highlighted the various means by which American diplomats and officials worked with their Iranian counterparts to produce anti-Soviet audio-visual propaganda. Through working extensively with Radio Tehran, the United States Information Service, hoped to underline to Iranians the supposed perils of Communism. Chapter III, likewise, explored the various ways in which the USIS sought to promote American cultures, norms, values and way of life in Iran. Initiatives included the expanding the US-Iran exchange programme and the encouraging of Iranian youths to partake in extra-curricular activities.<sup>9</sup>

The aim of this chapter is to examine how the British government sought to retain its position in Iran as the dominant Western power. It explores how the UK Foreign Office's IRD worked with SAVAK, the Iranian secret and intelligence service, to combat Soviet subversion in the country. The chapter charts how the IRD and SAVAK initially worked closely with one another through the Baghdad Pact's institutional apparatus. Agreed in 1955, signatories included the UK, Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Pakistan. These nations pledged to share intelligence, collaborate on projects to improve regional infrastructure and promised to support one another if any signatory was attacked by an external force. It proceeds to outline how the February 1958 Iraqi Revolution, which resulted in the country's departure from the non-aggression pact, compelled IRD and SAVAK officials to instead work together bilaterally. Their collaborative efforts here culminated in the arrangement becoming a key

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<sup>8</sup> Mark Gasiorowski, *The United States and the Shah: Building a Client State in Iran* (New York, 1999), 72; Barry Rubin, *Paved With Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran* (London, 1980), 64.

<sup>9</sup> Inspection report on USIS Iran, 28 November 1959, College Park, Maryland, National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter document, date, NAI), USIA papers, Iran, Inspection Reports (1958-1962).

cornerstone of Anglo-Iranian relations in the 1950s. Established in 1948, the IRD strove to combat Communist propaganda, discredit the Soviet Union and promote British values domestically and overseas. Its officials sought to achieve these aims by working with prominent individuals and organisations at home and abroad who shared their concern towards Communism.<sup>10</sup> SAVAK, the Iranian secret and intelligence service, was one such agency. Established in 1957 at the Shah's behest, SAVAK dealt with external intelligence threats and monitored domestic dissidents.<sup>11</sup>

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first explores how and why the UK Foreign Office fostered the Baghdad Pact's creation. It specifically explores the British government department's deliberations and rationale for using the organisation's apparatus to work closely with the Iranians in the field of counter-subversion. The second part examines the IRD and SAVAK's initial collaborative efforts through the Baghdad Pact. The third section, on the other hand, analyses how both bodies increasingly worked bilaterally in the February 1958 Iraqi Revolution's aftermath, circumventing the Baghdad Pact in the process. It proceeds to outline how, with the non-aggression pact no longer being the main conduit for British attempts to combat Soviet subversion in Iran and the wider region, the Americans sought to collaborate with their UK counterparts in this field.

Fears that Arab nationalist and Communist powers sought to envelop and subvert the region compelled UK Foreign Office officials to encourage their Middle Eastern allies to sign the Baghdad Pact. A key foundation of the organisation's functions were its sub-committees that specialised in a certain aspect of the organisation's remit, most notably the Counter-Subversion Committee (CSC). Encompassing military and intelligence figures from

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<sup>10</sup> Darius Wainwright, 'Equal Partners? The Information Research Department, SAVAK and the Dissemination of Anti-Communist Propaganda in Iran, 1956-68', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 46/3 (2019), 409.

<sup>11</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to IRD (Foreign Office, London), 16 November 1962, TNA, FO 1110/1557.

all Baghdad Pact states, as well as IRD officials, it would meet every three months to decide the organisation's wider strategy for combating Soviet propaganda. From its inception, the CSC became a key vehicle that UK Foreign Office and IRD officials relied upon to bolster Anglo-Iranian relations. Through the Counter-Subversion Office (CSO) – which had been established to implement initiatives agreed upon by the CSC – IRD figures worked with their SAVAK counterparts to combat and counter Soviet subversive activities in Iran. As well as helping supply positive news stories about the Shah's government and his socio-economic reforms, the IRD sought to modernise SAVAK's information and propaganda capabilities. They seconded an official to the UK Embassy in Tehran, who would act as an advisor to the Iranian secret and intelligence service. IRD officials hoped that this would make SAVAK's anti-Soviet literature and campaigns much more far-reaching and effective. They envisaged transforming the institution into one not too dissimilar to their own agency. The February 1958 Iraqi Revolution, and Iraq's subsequent departure from the Baghdad Pact, encouraged the IRD to change tack. Instead of dealing with SAVAK through the institution's apparatus, they increasingly worked with the Iranian agency bilaterally. Joint initiatives included the translation of popular European works of fiction, notably Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, for the Iranian market. Now that they were free of the Baghdad Pact, which the US were not full members of, IRD officials also cooperated with their American counterparts in the production and dissemination of anti-Soviet propaganda.

### **Britain, Iran and the Baghdad Pact**

After the August 1953 coup, the British Embassy in Tehran pressurised the UK Foreign Office to restore its presence in Iran to the level it was before the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis. The Ambassador Roger Stevens, along with his successor in 1958, Geoffrey Harrison, were instrumental in persuading the government department here. The latter was a career diplomat, who had worked his way up the Foreign Office ranks. Having been involved in implementing Britain's policy of appeasement towards Germany in the 1930s, followed by a

stint in Whitehall during the Second World War, Harrison had come to see the importance of the British government playing a prominent role on the world stage. In July 1945, for example, he helped author Article XII of the Potsdam Agreement. It stated that all ethnic Germans in Central and Eastern Europe should be relocated to modern day Germany and Austria. Harrison's first overseas post was as the UK Ambassador to Brazil, a role he held between 1956 and 1958, a tumultuous period in Brazilian society and politics. Harrison's time in Brazil coincided with the inauguration of Juscelino Kubitschek as President. Before the former medical doctor had taken office, the country had experienced a series of Presidents, each ruling for a short term with limited political and popular support. Kubitschek's position of strength and his reformist zeal underlined to Harrison the need for countries in the global south to be ruled by leaders with a strong personality and a determination to modernise the countries they ruled.<sup>12</sup>

Harrison, accordingly, pressed the UK Foreign Office to provide considerable backing and support to the Shah. Stevens concurred with Harrison, though he was motivated less by an admiration of Iran's monarch and more by his interest in Iranian society and culture. During their respective stints as Britain's Ambassadors to Iran, both figures played on three key regional developments to persuade the UK Foreign Office to pay greater attention to the country. First, they exploited the government department's fear of Soviet expansionism, in particular the Communist power's supposed designs on Iran. In telegrams to the then Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, Stevens and Harrison discussed the implications of Iran's shift away from Cold War neutrality after 1953. Both ambassadors noted how the Soviet Union had responded to this development by increasingly encroaching on Iranian sovereignty. The Politburo in Moscow was allegedly encouraging separatist and nationalist movements in Iranian Azerbaijan, Khuzestan and Kurdistan. All three regions were home to large Azeri, Arab and Kurdish populations respectively that outnumbered the

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<sup>12</sup> Geoffrey Harrison (British Ambassador, Iran) to Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), 19 February 1959, TNA, FO 371/140706.

ethnic Iranian populace. The Azerbaijan and Kurdistan regions, moreover, neighboured the USSR on Iran's northeast border, while Khuzestan in the southwest of the country was a vital oil source. In fostering resentment towards the Iranian government in these parts, the Soviet Union aimed to destabilise and endanger the Shah's ruling regime.<sup>13</sup>

Second, and linked to the first point, Stevens and Harrison noted to the Foreign Office how the Soviet Union had developed ties with Iran's neighbours as a means to isolate the country regionally. Their letters to Selwyn Lloyd made reference to the 1954 agreement between the USSR and Afghanistan's Prime Minister, Mohammed Daoud Khan. Eager to modernise his country's infrastructure, the Premier had agreed to a series of joint USSR-Afghan development projects. He also proceeded to permit the Afghan armed forces to visit the Soviet Union for extensive military training and educational courses on the merits of Communism. Both ambassadors, though, were seemingly more concerned with proceedings in Syria. Between 1945 and 1956, numerous presidents and governing regimes had ruled the country, each of which had been toppled by a popular or military coup. USSR officials, claimed Stevens and Harrison, exploited Syria's political instability by establishing strong ties with left-leaning figures in the Ba'ath Party, who enjoyed a considerable parliamentary majority and dominated the Syrian cabinet. By November 1956, USSR-Syria ties were so strong that the Arab country permitted Soviet naval vessels to be stationed in ports across its eastern Mediterranean seaboard. A failure to address this, Stevens and Harrison warned, would result in Soviet-style Communism spreading into Iran, 'infecting the Iranian people.' Fearful that this would culminate in his dismissal, the Shah would subsequently seek to improve Irano-Soviet relations. The monarch would sign, amongst other things, non-

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<sup>13</sup> Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), 1 June 1957, TNA, BW 49/13; Geoffrey Harrison (British Ambassador, Iran) to Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), 19 February 1959, TNA, FO 371/140706.



aggression treaties with the Communist power, as well as remove all British and Western interests from the country.<sup>14</sup>

Third, both Stevens and Harrison discussed the nature and extent of the threat posed by the Arab nationalist movement that had emerged, grown and taken hold in some of Iran's neighbours. Its adherents called for pan-Arabism, as well as political and cultural unity among Arab peoples residing in the Near East and Maghreb. The movement rejected Western – especially British – involvement in the region's affairs, perceiving the UK's interest and involvement as a form of colonial imperialism. Originating in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the movement grew exponentially with the introduction of democratic elections across the Middle East by the 1950s. In 1952, the prominent Arab nationalist Gamal Abdel Nasser was elected Egyptian Prime Minister, rising to President in 1956. In 1954, the Syrian electorate had also opted for an Arab nationalist government.<sup>15</sup> As Stevens and Harrison noted, both countries' governments were opposed to the Iranian monarchy. They called for the Shah's removal due to his historic ties with the British government and his reliance on American political and economic aid. As such, they were willing to provide support to Iranian nationalists loyal to the deposed Prime Minister Mohammad Mossagdeh and a 'marriage of convenience' with the USSR. With Soviet support, Arab nationalists had sought to foster unrest in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, with Iran 'next in line.'<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), 1 June 1957, TNA, BW 49/13; Geoffrey Harrison (British Ambassador, Iran) to Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), 19 February 1959, TNA, FO 371/140706.

<sup>15</sup> Special study on the security of the CENTO area of the relationship between international Communism and radical Arab nationalism, 19 February 1959, TNA, FO 371/149746.

<sup>16</sup> Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), 1 June 1957, TNA, BW 49/13; Geoffrey Harrison (British Ambassador, Iran) to Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), 19 February 1959, TNA, FO 371/140706; Special study on the security of the CENTO area of the

Stevens and Harrison's assertions concerned officials in the Foreign Office's Eastern Department. To these London-based figures, Iran was not just a vital oil source, but geopolitically important, too. As the country bordered the Arab world and the Soviet Union, they envisioned relying on the Shah and his government to act as a regional buffer against Communism and Arab nationalism. Iran's role as a bulwark against these anti-British threats was further bolstered by that fact that its population was culturally distinct from its neighbours. As most of its citizens were not Arabs, its leadership was unlikely to be overhauled and replaced by a government supportive of Nasserite ideology. Since his 1953 restoration, moreover, the Shah had taken a tough stance against the Soviet and Egyptian governments, particularly towards their designs on the Middle East. Fearful that the authorities in both countries sought to undermine his rule, the Iranian monarch had displayed increasing willingness to receive UK and US economic and military support. The Shah regarded this as pivotal to not just the modernisation of Iran's infrastructure, but also as a means for the country he ruled to become a prominent power in the Middle East.<sup>17</sup>

The Shah's desire for British military and economic support, combined with Iran's importance to UK Foreign Office diplomatic objectives for the Middle East, culminated in the country joining the Baghdad Pact in November 1955. The agreement here built upon a previous treaty signed by Turkey and Iraq, at the UK government's behest, in February of that year. With this treaty, both countries agreed to cooperate with one another in military, economic and intelligence fields, pledging to defend one another if attacked by Egypt or the Soviet Union.<sup>18</sup> Iran's November 1955 ascension, followed by Pakistan's a few months later,

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relationship between international Communism and radical Arab nationalism, 19 February 1959, TNA, FO 371/149746.

<sup>17</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to Foreign Office, 19 January 1956, TNA, FO 371/120717.

<sup>18</sup> Eastern Department (Foreign Office, London) to British Embassy (Tehran), 14 September 1955, TNA, FO 371/140706; Special study on the security of the CENTO area of the relationship between international Communism and radical Arab nationalism, 19 February 1959, TNA, FO 371/149746.

fostered a collective consensus to transform the agreement from a treaty into an organisation modelled on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). While encouraging this development, the UK Foreign Office's Eastern Department were hesitant to fully involve Iran in this organisation. In an unauthored telegram to the UK Embassy in Tehran, a senior official within the department warned that the Shah would merely regard the Baghdad Pact as a forum in which he could obtain military and economic aid for Iran. The country's representatives in meetings would, therefore, contribute little to discussions and minimise their involvement in collaborative projects. In spite of these reservations, the telegram concluded that there was little the UK Foreign Office, or the Embassy, could do to discourage their approach. Not only had the Iranian government displayed considerable willingness to join the Baghdad Pact, but its presence, as an emerging political and economic power, provided the organisation with greater credibility, fostering a greater sense of collective security.<sup>19</sup>

From the outset, the Baghdad Pact sought to present itself as a defensive line to discourage further Soviet encroachments into the Arab world, Persian Gulf and the Indian Subcontinent. The organisation's strategy and functions were decided at bi-annual summits, involving British, Iranian, Iraqi, Pakistani and Turkish governing elites. The majority of the Baghdad Pact's activities centred on the sharing of intelligence, collaborative socio-economic projects and the countering of Soviet and Arab nationalist propaganda. To ensure the smooth running of these activities, a series of sub-committees were established under the Baghdad Pact's institutional apparatus. These were the Liaison, Economic and Counter-Subversion committees. The latter was particularly crucial, focusing on refuting Soviet propaganda and the dissemination of material that aimed to discourage support for Communist principles among the populace in Baghdad Pact countries. The CSC was comprised of senior intelligence figures from Baghdad Pact member countries. Chaired by

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<sup>19</sup> Eastern Department (Foreign Office, London) to British Embassy (Tehran), 14 September 1955, TNA, FO 371/140706.

senior members of the UK Foreign Office's IRD, they would meet in a separate venue at the same time as the main Baghdad Pact summits to coordinate their activities.<sup>20</sup>

Through discussions and collaborative projects organised via the CSC, the UK Foreign Office's Eastern Department hoped to develop and strengthen the UK's ties to Baghdad Pact members. Anglo-Iranian relations, though, were something that figures from the government department placed a greater emphasis on, considering the US' greater involvement in the country. Since 1953, American support for the Shah had been a key tenet of the Eisenhower administration's policy towards dealing with the Cold War in Asia. Due to its comparative lack of resources, the UK was unable to match the US' economic and military backing of Iran, as well as the United States Information Agency's (USIA) comprehensive cultural diplomacy programme. Projects organised through the Baghdad Pact's institutional apparatus, then, were one of the only ways the Foreign Office could retain a significant presence in a country that had traditionally come under Britain's sphere of influence.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, the UK Foreign Office's attempts to use the Baghdad Pact in other ways to strengthen Anglo-Iranian relations had been unsuccessful. The British diplomats and officials, for example, who presided over the Socio-Economic sub-committee had seen all their proposed policies undermined by both Whitehall figures. Senior Treasury and Foreign Office officials had refused to finance a telecommunications project which would connect Tehran with its fellow Baghdad Pact members. They maintained that, due to Britain's diminished financial means post-1945, they could only justify funding socio-economic projects in Commonwealth countries. These were nations that had formerly been part of the British Empire and where the Treasury and Foreign Office were confident the UK's global

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<sup>20</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to the Foreign Office, 19 April 1956, TNA, FO 371/121253.

<sup>21</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to the Foreign Office, 17 April 1956, TNA, FO 371/121253; Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), 24 April 1956, TNA, FO 371/121256.

presence could be best maintained. Britain's refusal to fund this project resulted in the US State Department hijacking the initiative, undertaking it outside the Baghdad Pact and funding it themselves.<sup>22</sup>

Working closely with Iran in the field of counter-subversion, consequently, would provide the organisation with greater credibility. The US' refusal to join, despite the State Department's involvement in the negotiations, had made Turkish, Iraqi and Pakistani officials unsure of the Baghdad Pact's viability. Foreign Office figures reckoned that America's refusal here was, in part, due to the Eisenhower administration's fear that this decision would not gain Congressional approval, particularly among the influential group of pro-Israeli Senators. Their counterparts in the UK Embassy in Tehran, though, attributed America's reluctance to full Baghdad Pact membership to the US State Department's differing strategies and priorities to the British in Middle East. American diplomats and officials feared antagonising Nasser, presuming that any aggressive actions or uncompromising rhetoric on their part would push the Egyptians and the Soviets closer together. The UK Foreign Office, on the other hand, reckoned that the best way to combat the Arab nationalist threat was to confront it, relying on regional governments opposed to Nasser to do so.<sup>23</sup> To allay the fears of Baghdad Pact members, while also highlighting the benefits of working with Britain, Harrison urged the UK Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, to make Iran the organisation's 'central link.' If it could be demonstrated that there was space for sustained UK involvement

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<sup>22</sup> British Embassy (Washington) to Eastern Department (Foreign Office, London), 3 April 1959, TNA, FO 371/140721.

<sup>23</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to the Foreign Office, 17 April 1956, TNA, FO 371/121253; Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), 24 April 1956, TNA, FO 371/121256.

in a country receiving unprecedented American support, it would compel other nations to make more of an effort with the Baghdad Pact and not lament the US' refusal to sign.<sup>24</sup>

Helping the UK Foreign Office with their objectives here was the Iranian government's willingness to cooperate with the British in counter-subversive activities. While ideologically much more pro-American, Iran's Deputy Prime Minister, Nasser Zolfghari, was willing to engage with the British on limited lines to combat the supposed Communist threat to Iran. He envisaged the collaborative efforts with the UK Foreign Office as supplementing the United States Information Agency's (USIA) work with Radio Tehran. In a January 1956 meeting with Roger Stevens, Zolfghari claimed that the Iranian government wanted to 'respond aggressively' to Soviet propaganda. A 'dignified silence', he argued, would only encourage the USSR further. Initiatives, though, should move beyond just 'refuting nonsense from Moscow.' Literature and radio broadcasts should promote the Baghdad Pact's benefits, particularly how this had assisted Iran's socio-economic development. Coordinated through the organisation, material should be distributed through media outlets, such as the BBC and the Iranian newspaper *Kayhan*, with an 'information centre' coordinating these efforts on behalf of member states.<sup>25</sup>

Iran's representatives on the CSC, likewise, were also keen to work closely with the IRD and the Foreign Office in the creation and distribution of anti-Communist propaganda. The two Iranian delegates in this sub-committee were Teymur Bakhtiar and Hassan Pakravan, the Director and Deputy-Director respectively of SAVAK, the combined Iranian secret police and intelligence service. Bakhtiar and Pakravan hailed from prominent Iranian families, with links to the Shah's family and Iranian aristocracy. They were educated in France, before pursuing military careers. As an ardent Francophile and anti-Communist, Bakhtiar was charged with rounding up Mossagdeh loyalists and known members of the

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<sup>24</sup> Geoffrey Harrison (British Ambassador, Iran) to Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), 19 February 1959, TNA, FO 371/140706.

<sup>25</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to Foreign Office, 24 January 1956, TNA, FO 371/120745.

Tudeh, Iran's Communist party, after the events of August 1953. His efficacy in this role resulted in the Shah asking him to establish and head SAVAK, with the appointment of Pakravan as his deputy.<sup>26</sup> Engaging with prominent Iranian figures and institutions like this was a pivotal tenet of the IRD's approach towards Iran. In forging ties with these 'opinion makers and shapers', the Foreign Office department hoped to create a 'trickle down' effect. Shaped by IRD propaganda, influential academics, media personalities and political elites would in turn seek to affect the views of others. Such tactics were a key aspect of broader British foreign policy in Iran and the wider Middle East in this period. To dissuade foreign publics from turning towards Soviet inspired Communism, British policymakers would engage with local elites, encouraging them to foster favourable views of the UK to their subjects. The motives behind this strategy lay in Britain's lack of resources compared to the United States. The superior financial capabilities of the Americans meant they had the means to engage extensively with the Iranian public, something the Foreign Office lacked.<sup>27</sup>

From their appointment, Bakhtiar and Pakravan immediately sought to use the CSC as a forum in which to secure IRD assistance with the production of effective propaganda and guidance on other ways to combat Soviet subversive activities in Iran. Having already received CIA, SIS and MOSSAD training in surveillance and interrogation techniques, counter-subversion was the one area SAVAK had received little instruction on. In meetings with officials from the British Embassy in Tehran, Pakravan pushed for SAVAK to receive IRD guidance. Convinced that the production and distribution of propaganda should be a key tenet of SAVAK's operations, he argued that it would be mutually beneficial and would strengthen Anglo-Iranian relations. From viewing the IRD's operations from afar, Pakravan

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<sup>26</sup> Record of meeting between Hassan Pakravan and officials from the British Embassy in Tehran, 16 June 1956, TNA, FO 371/120725.

<sup>27</sup> Review of the British Embassy in Tehran's propaganda activities, 6 November 1961, TNA, FO 1110/1383; Wainwright, 'Equal Partners?', 421-423.

was confident that the department's collaborative efforts with SAVAK would be a success.<sup>28</sup> Since its January 1948 inception, the IRD had been instrumental in coordinating anti-Communist propaganda campaigns in the UK and overseas. To achieve this, the IRD had established links with political elites, as well as influential cultural figures, that had displayed anti-Soviet tendencies. IRD officials had even worked with their counterparts in the US State Department to counter Communist propaganda in Europe, Asia and North Africa.<sup>29</sup> To Paul Grey, a senior IRD figure in London, Bakhtiar and Pakravan's requests provided the UK government with a 'unique opportunity' to strengthen Anglo-Iranian ties. While they lacked an understanding of propaganda techniques, both SAVAK officials displayed considerable potential and a willingness to learn. They would, therefore, 'rely heavily on the IRD in the future', enabling the agency to exercise considerable influence 'behind the scenes.' Both figures were also of a 'high standing' in the Iranian government. Their influential position meant they could peddle positive views of Britain to other senior officials.<sup>30</sup>

Stevens, however, did not share the Eastern Department's enthusiasm with these developments. Conceding to the Foreign Office that close relations with a senior government figure like Zolfghari was a coup for Britain, the UK Ambassador to Iran noted how he was new to the Deputy Prime Minister role. While he was a well-intentioned figure amenable to Britain, Zolfghari was young and inexperienced, having only been appointed in the wake of

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<sup>28</sup> Record of meeting between Hassan Pakravan (Deputy Director, SAVAK) and officials from the British Embassy in Tehran, 16 June 1956, TNA, FO 371/120725.

<sup>29</sup> For further information on the role of the IRD in the wider Cold War, please consult: Gary Rawnsley, *Radio Diplomacy and Propaganda: the BBC and VOA in International Politics* (Basingstoke, 1996); Phillip Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century. Selling Democracy* (Edinburgh, 1999), 229; James Vaughan, "'A Certain Idea of Britain": British Cultural Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1945–57', *Contemporary British History*, 19/2 (2005).

<sup>30</sup> Paul Grey (IRD, Foreign Office) to Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran), TNA, FO 1110/791; Paul Grey (IRD, Foreign Office) to the British Embassy (Tehran), 16 April 1956, TNA, FO 371/120725.



the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis.<sup>31</sup> More broadly, the UK Ambassador to Iran was opposed to greater IRD involvement in the country. From his 1954 appointment, Stevens had sought to minimise the Foreign Office department's Iranian activities. In a letter to Paul Grey, Stevens questioned the suitability of using the IRD to work with the Iranian government in the field of counter-subversion. The clandestine nature of its activities would encourage the popular perception in Iran that Britain sought to manipulate internal affairs, proving counter-productive to Anglo-Iranian relations in the long run. Equally, while most of its governing elites were vehemently anti-Communist, the Iranians 'would not utilise IRD material in the way that we would like.' They would be reluctant to antagonise their Soviet neighbours, while also disliking the 'indigestible jargon' and verbose language evident in IRD literature. In the case of Iran, Stevens claimed that the UK Foreign Office should provide the UK Embassy in Tehran's Information Department with the money to publish 'constructive publicity material.' This would highlight the UK's role in Iran's political and economic progress since 1945 'in a clear-cut and easily understandable way.' Such literature would inform the Iranian public of the 'Communist world's shortcomings' and the benefits of allying with Britain.<sup>32</sup>

Stevens' conviction, though, that the IRD should play a minimal role in Iran was a minority view within the UK Embassy in Tehran. Other senior officials, most notably the First Secretary Denis Wright, were keen for the IRD to work closely with the Iranian government to produce and disseminate anti-Communist propaganda. Having had no prior exposure to Iran or the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis, the Foreign Office had sent Wright to the country in September 1953 to reopen the British Embassy. The close affinity he developed towards the country and his people compelled senior figures in the government department to appoint

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<sup>31</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to Eastern Department (Foreign Office, London), 24 January 1956, TNA, FO 371/120745.

<sup>32</sup> Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to Paul Grey (IRD, Foreign Office), 6 July 1955, TNA, FO 1110/791.

him the Ambassador to Iran in 1963, a post he held until 1971.<sup>33</sup> Writing a report on Communist propaganda activities in Iran to the IRD in July 1955, Wright talked of the country's 'first-hand experience' of Soviet subversion. According to the First Secretary, the Soviets were using Farsi-language Radio Moscow news bulletins, as well as covert support for the Tudeh, to undermine the Shah's regime. Wright paid particular attention to the Iranian Communist party's publication, *Mardom* (People), a one-page leaflet produced underground that was printed weekly or monthly depending on the Tudeh's finances. Despite the arrest of many of its contributors and distributors, as well as the seizure of most of its clandestine printing presses, *Mardom* was still being published widely, appealing to more than just Tudeh loyalists. Much of Iran's youth, Wright claimed, were reading the publication, concurring with its attacks on the Shah's supposed un-Islamic behaviour and of the Anglo-American colonialism of Iran by stealth.<sup>34</sup>

Wright was supported by his Embassy colleagues and by senior Foreign Office figures in Whitehall. His contemporary, Hugh Carless, proved a useful ally in the struggle to overcome Stevens' anti-IRD views. With a Farsi-speaking father in the British-Indian Civil Service, Carless was immersed in Iran's history and culture from a young age. As a junior diplomat in the Second World War, he sought to emulate his father, studying Farsi at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London. Following the end of the conflict, Carless enrolled at the University of Cambridge before embarking on his first Foreign Office overseas post in Afghanistan. While there, he spent much of his spare time hiking and travelling around Turkey and Iran, acting as a guide, translator and companion for travel writer Eric Newby's debut novel, the bestselling *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush*. After the events of August 1953, Carless became convinced that the Foreign Office should pay

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<sup>33</sup> Denis Wright (British Embassy, Tehran) to Paul Gore-Booth (Foreign Office, London), 30 May 1968, TNA, FCO 8/56.

<sup>34</sup> Denis Wright (British Embassy, Tehran) to John Rennie (IRD, Foreign Office), 6 July 1955, TNA, FO 1110/791.

greater attention to bolstering the Shah's regime. His lobbying of senior officials resulted in him being posted from Brazil to Iran in 1956 to help with this. He pushed for Iranian adherence to Baghdad Pact, especially the CSC, and joined the IRD in 1958 to act as the UK representative in these sub-committee meetings.<sup>35</sup> More importantly, though, Wright had the support of the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and the most senior civil servant in the Foreign Office, Ivone Kirkpatrick. In a meeting with the then Iranian Ambassador to the UK, Ali Soheili, he claimed that officials in Moscow regarded Iran as the 'big prize.' If Soviet subversive activities in the country were left uncontested, then no military or economic endeavours, UK, US or otherwise, would protect the Shah's regime.<sup>36</sup>

Kirkpatrick's conviction that the UK Embassy in Tehran and the Foreign Office should prioritise the countering of Soviet subversive activities in Iran stemmed from his formative experiences during the Second World War. In April 1940, he was appointed as the Director for the Ministry of Information's Foreign Division, followed by a stint as Controller for the BBC's European Services. These roles underlined to Kirkpatrick the importance of shaping popular opinion, something he stressed in a memo to Stevens. As he pointed out to the UK Ambassador in Iran, work needed to be done to strengthen the Iranian resolve, ensuring the country remained pro-Western and did not shift to Cold War neutrality. While joining the Baghdad Pact was the Shah's decision, there was considerable domestic opposition to

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<sup>35</sup> Hugh Carless, interviewed by Malcolm McBain, 23 February 2002, Churchill College Archive Centre, Cambridge, <https://www.chu.cam.ac.uk/media/uploads/files/Carless.pdf> (accessed 11 April 2019).

<sup>36</sup> Meeting between Ivonne Kirkpatrick (Permanent Under Secretary, Foreign Office) and Ali Soheili (Iranian Ambassador, UK), 7 February 1956, TNA, FO 371/121248.

Iran's membership. Due to their 'deep-seated hankering' for neutrality, most Iranian people were convinced that the Shah's agreement here exacerbated regional tensions.<sup>37</sup>

The views of such a high-ranking Foreign Office figure, complemented by the arguments posited by the UK Ambassador's staff, meant that Stevens' arguments for minimal IRD involvement in Iran were dismissed. Two developments in Iran and the wider region, though, made it more imperative to British diplomats and officials that the IRD collaborate with SAVAK through the Baghdad Pact. The first was the supposed Irano-Soviet rapprochement. In January 1956, the Soviet Union's First Secretary, Nikita Khrushchev, invited the Shah and his wife to Moscow for a one-week audience. Scheduled for June of that year, Embassy and Eastern Department figures feared that Khrushchev would persuade the Shah to sign a non-aggression treaty, negating the Baghdad Pact and pledging Iran to effective Cold War neutrality. These developments, however, did not come to fruition; the Shah and Khrushchev reportedly clashed over the amount of military support the US was providing Iran. Yet the fact that these supposed sworn enemies met for informal talks alerted Foreign Office figures to the possibility that the Iranians could turn to the Soviets in the Cold War unless Britain worked extensively to prevent this.<sup>38</sup>

The second development that unnerved Foreign Office figures was the Suez Crisis. In October 1956, British soldiers seized the Suez Canal in response to Nasser's decision to nationalise this vital shipping route. Just one month later, and after encountering significant diplomatic pressure from the United States, Soviet Union and the United Nations, the UK

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<sup>37</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to Eastern Department (Foreign Office, London), 19 January 1956, TNA, FO 371/140706; British Embassy (Tehran) to Foreign Office, 14 February 1956, TNA, FO 371/120752.

<sup>38</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to Eastern Department (Foreign Office, London), 19 January 1956, TNA, FO 371/140706; British Embassy (Tehran) to Foreign Office, 14 February 1956, TNA, FO 371/120752; British Embassy (Tehran) to Foreign Office, 17 July 1956, TNA, FO 371/120752.

was forced to withdraw its military force.<sup>39</sup> The Suez Crisis harmed elite and popular perceptions of the British in Iran and the Arab world. It cemented the idea that Britain was an imperialist power, willing to intervene in the domestic affairs of other states to achieve its diplomatic goals. The incident strengthened the Soviet Union's position in the region and vindicated the anti-imperialist arguments posited by Arab nationalists. The Iranian public and press were particularly critical. Writing to the IRD in 1957, officials from the British Embassy in Tehran's press section underlined the considerable anti-UK feeling in Iran. They noted how numerous articles in mainstream Iranian newspapers were urging their readers to be vigilant towards British political and economic overtures. Such reports, Embassy officials continued, were detrimental to Britain's interests in Iran. These articles would jeopardise future Anglo-Iranian collaborative efforts, culminating in Britain being sidelined in the Middle Eastern country.<sup>40</sup> At an elite level, in contrast, the Suez Crisis inadvertently brought the UK and Iran closer together, necessitating the need to strengthen Anglo-Iranian relations. From the Suez Canal's seizure, the other Baghdad Pact nations had taken a tougher stance towards Britain. In November 1956, the four other members held an emergency meeting in Tehran, excluding the UK at the request of the Iraqi and Pakistani delegations. From the furore caused by this decision, Eastern Department officials realised that, as Iran was not an Arab nation, the country was less vulnerable to the lure of the nationalist ideals espoused by Nasser. While adhering to Britain's exclusion, the Iranian delegation did not encourage it, and kept the Foreign Office informed of the meeting's discussions.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> For more on the Suez Crisis, please consult: Keith Kyle, *Suez: Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* (London, 1991); George Peden, 'Suez and Britain's Decline as a World Power', *The Historical Journal*, 55/4 (2012); William Wallace, 'The Collapse of British Foreign Policy', *International Affairs*, 81/1 (2005), 55.

<sup>40</sup> Review of press in Baghdad Pact countries, 14 November 1956, TNA, FO 371/121766.

<sup>41</sup> Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), 19 November 1956, TNA, FO 371/121256.

## IRD-SAVAK Collaboration

Before the establishing of the Baghdad Pact's institutional apparatus, the IRD's activities in Iran were minimal. Due to Stevens' assertions that its activities would hinder, rather than help, Anglo-Iranian relations, the department's initiatives were confined to basic outputs that were distributed through UK embassies worldwide. Transmitted to Tehran in monthly intervals were three publications, *The Asian Analyst*; *Communism and Underdeveloped Countries*; and *Facts About Communist Front Organisations*. They would usually be distributed to vendors, academics and government officials as basic papers or booklets, outlining 'facts about Communism in dispassionate language.' Articles would, accordingly, appear considered, neutral and factual. Writings would focus on, among other things, the use of forced labour in the USSR, Communist agriculture, the plight of Soviet youth and the perils of neutralism. Complementing these pamphlets was *The Interpreter*. Aimed at the 'the more informed reader', this explored Soviet foreign policy in more detail, examining its supposedly expansionist nature and the implications for the stability of the global system.<sup>42</sup>

It was only from the CSC's April 1956 founding that the IRD was able to play a more pronounced role in the containment of Communism in Iran. At the first meeting in Tehran, the Turkish, Iraqi, Iranian and Pakistani representatives agreed to collective action to combat Soviet subversion. They pledged to monitor the broadcasts of Communist countries, distributing this data with other Baghdad Pact signatories; promote programmes and initiatives concerning the culture and economy of member organisations; share audience research; distribute anti-Communist publications; and provide technical assistance to one another. To monitor the extent to which they were working towards these objectives, the

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<sup>42</sup> A note for the guidance of information officers, January 1953, TNA, FO 1110/676; IRD (Foreign Office, London) to Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran), 11 August 1954, TNA, FO 1110/676; Report on IRD material sent to Iran, 11 July 1955, TNA FO 1110/791.

CSC agreed to meet once every three months.<sup>43</sup> At the insistence of Denis Wright and Hugh Carless, who represented the UK's interests in these discussions, the other members agreed to establish the CSO. Situated in Baghdad with a full-time staff, this would manage, implement and coordinate the initiatives agreed upon in CSC meetings. In creating the CSO, Wright and Carless claimed the organisation's activities would enjoy a greater degree of autonomy and secrecy, outside the Baghdad Pact's auspices. Not only would the organisation's Secretary General be unable to intervene in its activities, but the media and the public would also be unaware of its existence. If the CSO's functions became widely known, they were convinced that this would undermine the production and dissemination of anti-Communist propaganda.<sup>44</sup>

Enthused with the use of the CSC and the CSO as a vehicle to ensure geopolitical stability in Iran and the wider Middle East, the UK Foreign Office gave this arrangement their 'full support.' Officials in its Eastern Department envisaged that they could use the committee and organisation respectively to coordinate the countering of 'hostile Soviet propaganda' in the region. The arrangement here also allowed Eastern Department figures to utilise the IRD and its material more in Iran and its neighbours. To demonstrate to the Baghdad Pact members that 'we mean business', they recommended the secondment of an IRD official to sit in on CSC meetings and coordinate all CSO activities.<sup>45</sup> The agency and

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<sup>43</sup> British Embassy (Baghdad) to Foreign Office, 27 January 1956, TNA, FO 371/121283; Brief for the UK representative on the Liaison Committee, 16 March 1956, TNA, FO 371/121283; Speech by Awni Khalidy (Baghdad Pact Secretary General at 1956 Tehran conference of the Baghdad Pact, 17 April 1956, TNA, FO 371/121253; Draft statute of CSO, 25 June 1956, TNA, FO 371/121285.

<sup>44</sup> British Embassy (Ankara) to Foreign Office, 9 January 1956, TNA, FO 371/121243; British Embassy (Iran) to Foreign Office, 4 April 1956, TNA, FO 371/121283; British Embassy (Tehran) to Foreign Office, 24 May 1956, TNA, FO 371/121284.

<sup>45</sup> Foreign Office to British Embassy (Tehran), 14 April 1956, TNA, FO 371/121283; British Embassy (Tehran) to Foreign Office, 16 April 1956, 14 April 1956, TNA, FO 371/121283.

the Foreign Office, though, found it difficult to choose whom to send to represent British interests. The Eastern Department wanted to send Phillip Adams, who headed the Regional Information Office in Beirut. As his role was to coordinate UK-led propaganda and publicity campaigns in the Arab world, the Eastern Department were convinced he was the best candidate for the job. As the other CSC representatives were security officers and policemen from authoritarian nations, many would possess 'a dictatorial and physical view of counter-subversion.' With his experience, then, Adams would be able to sway these figures from this type of thinking, fostering a more nuanced approach to the countering of Soviet propaganda.<sup>46</sup> The IRD, however, disagreed, arguing that, as Adams' brief was already considerable, he would not have the time or energy to fully dedicate himself to the CSC and CSO. The department's officials eventually compromised, agreeing to the secondment of Adams' deputy, Leonard Figg, to sit in on the sub-committee meetings and run the office from Baghdad.<sup>47</sup>

The CSC and the CSO sought to combat Soviet subversion in all Baghdad Pact member countries. At the March, June and September meetings of the former, Figg encouraged the other representatives to propose initiatives and assess their feasibility. As well as the establishing of networks between the CSC and domestic intelligence agencies, the delegations considered how to use audio and visual media to highlight the Soviet Union's harmful activities. They commissioned a report on the use of the printed press, radio stations and films 'in a necessary and desirable way.' The CSC's June 1956 report concluded that the sub-committee should monitor Soviet and Eastern Bloc broadcasts to the Middle East, while also using their own television and radio outlets to promote the Baghdad Pact. It proceeded to urge the CSO's staff to develop links with Turkish, Iraqi, Iranian and

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<sup>46</sup> Phillip Adams (Regional Information Office, Beirut) to Levant Department (Foreign Office, London), 10 May 1956, TNA, FO 371/121283.

<sup>47</sup> IRD (Foreign Office, London) to Phillip Adams (Regional Information Office, Beirut), 14 May 1956, TNA, FO 371/121283.



Pakistani journalists, supplying them with stories critical of the Soviet Union and highlighting 'tangible examples of underhand Communist penetration.'<sup>48</sup> Examples of stories and campaigns implemented by the CSC and CSO here include the distribution of stories to the press in Iraq, Turkey and Iran of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1917 Russian Revolution, as well as radio programmes documenting the October 1956 Hungarian Uprising.<sup>49</sup>

Despite the CSC's meetings covering the countering of Soviet subversion in all Baghdad Pact member states, Iran's geopolitical importance meant that much of the CSO's work focused on this country in particular. Most of its initial activities saw the organisation act as a conduit for collaborative projects undertaken by the IRD and SAVAK. These initiatives concentrated on the combating of Soviet criticism of the Iranian regime. In discussions between Figg and Bakhtiar and Pakravan, the IRD official reinforced to Iranian officials the importance of countering Communist propaganda through 'positive means.' Instead of criticising the foreign and domestic policies of the USSR, it was important to use newspaper reports to promote positive aspects of the Shah's regime. Such reports would make the Iranian public more optimistic about Iran's future prospects and less inclined towards adopting a more pro-Soviet stance on domestic and foreign affairs.<sup>50</sup> With these aims in mind, Figg and Bakhtiar launched a joint publicity campaign. Exploiting the latter's close ties with the editors of the state-run *Ettelat*, they drip-fed various stories into the Iranian press. Some articles, for example, extolled the virtues of the Shah's socio-economic reforms, complementing the work undertaken by the USIA and the Iran government-backed Plan Organisation in this field. Reports highlighted the Shah's determination to combat the inferior

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<sup>48</sup> CSC short-term proposals, 29 June 1956, TNA, FO 371/121284; Report of the CSC to the Baghdad Pact Council, 29 June 1956, TNA, FO 371/121286; British Embassy (Baghdad) to Leonard Figg (CSO, Baghdad), 1 October 1956, TNA, FO 371/121288.

<sup>49</sup> Report of activities of the Baghdad Pact CSO, 7 October 1957, TNA, FO 1110/972.

<sup>50</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to the Foreign Office, 8 November 1956, TNA, FO 371/121266; Notes on agenda for meeting of the coordinating committee on 12 September, undated, TNA, FO 1110/1016.

living standards of those in rural areas compared to their urban-dwelling counterparts. They discussed the allocation of considerable sums of money to the modernisation of Iran's agricultural sector, the building of schools and the provision of local amenities in villages across the country. Articles would also underline the Shah's concerns for his subjects and his determination to see them progress. They demonstrated how these initiatives would benefit, not simply those in the countryside, but also future generations and Iran as a whole.<sup>51</sup>

Articles on the Shah's socio-economic reforms, however, were produced by the IRD in London. According to the UK Embassy in Tehran, SAVAK would be unable to undertake these activities without substantial British monitoring and support. The propaganda they produced in-house was 'poor and ineffectual.' There was no coordination between writers, distributors and senior SAVAK figures, with little understanding of effective information techniques.<sup>52</sup> Eager to overcome these issues, Figg and the CSO dedicated most of their energies between 1956 and 1958 to improving SAVAK's propaganda peddling capabilities. At an August 1957 CSC summit in Damascus, the Figg urged Bakhtiar and Pakravan to establish a second CSC office in Tehran under their remit. Not only would this reflect the importance of Anglo-Iranian counter-subversion to the wider operations of the CSC, but also encourage the Iranian agency to be more organised. In improving its bureaucratic capabilities, SAVAK would be regarded as more reliable, more adept and in a position to 'fulfil its potential as the next IRD.'<sup>53</sup> To help with this aim, Figg persuaded the UK Foreign Office to send George Bozman, an IRD official, to Tehran. Situated in the British Embassy

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<sup>51</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to IRD (Foreign Office, London), 17 November 1956, TNA, FO 371/121266; Latifeh Alvieh, 'Our Young People Need Recreation', *Ettelat*, 16 May 1957, London, The British Library, Newspaper Collection.

<sup>52</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to IRD (Foreign Office, London), 30 August 1957, TNA, FO 1110/1016.

<sup>53</sup> Record of the 1957 Damascus Conference of Baghdad Pact member states, 17 March 1957, TNA, FO 371/175633.

between October and December 1957, his role was to liaise with Bakhtiar and Pakravan on all propaganda and information work matters. Figg hoped that Bozman's presence in an advisory capacity here would oblige SAVAK to rely heavily on the IRD official's expertise, resulting in an institution organised and run on British lines that produced propaganda that tied in to UK foreign policy interests.<sup>54</sup>

From his October 1957 secondment, Bozman found dealing with SAVAK a 'frustrating experience.' From the literature and material used by the Iranian agency as anti-Communist propaganda, it was difficult to 'discern any consistent thought.' Bozman struggled to persuade SAVAK to streamline their operations and focus their efforts on certain stock themes and messages. According to the IRD official, the Iranian agency would be better placed producing literature highlighting the Soviet Union's supposed hostility towards Islam, as well as how agents of the USSR were allegedly shaping the views of Iran's students and intellectuals. SAVAK's 'inadequate and incompetent staff', combined with a chaotic bureaucracy and filing system, meant that Bozman's recommendations did not resound with Bakhtiar and Pakravan.<sup>55</sup> Once his secondment came to an end, regardless, SAVAK's two senior officials pushed the UK Embassy in Tehran to send a permanent replacement for Bozman. Bakhtiar and Pakravan argued that only the foundational work had been completed and much more was needed to instruct the Iranians in their shortcomings in this field. Despite Bozman's assertions to the contrary, they claimed that many of his recommendations had been implemented 'in theory' and that the IRD's work here was a 'great measure of security' against Soviet propaganda in Iran. They finished by claiming that this was 'an exceptional opportunity' to strengthen Anglo-Iranian relations.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to IRD (Foreign Office, London), 30 August 1957, TNA, FO 1110/1016.

<sup>55</sup> George Bozman to Leonard Figg (CSO, Baghdad), 5 October 1957, TNA, FO 1110/1016.

<sup>56</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to IRD (Foreign Office, London), 2 November 1957, TNA, FO 1110/972; Minute from the IRD, undated, TNA, FO 1110/972.

## The Expansion of British Propaganda Activities in Iran

Before the UK Foreign Office and the IRD could decide how to proceed with Bakhtiar and Pakravan's recommendations, events in the Middle East weakened the Baghdad Pact. In July 1958, Iraqi military figures loyal to the Arab nationalist cause toppled the monarchy in a popular coup. They executed the pro-British King, Faisal I, and his anglophile Prime Minister, Nuri Al-Said. In its place now stood a new Iraqi government closely aligned with Nasser's Arab nationalist regime in Egypt.<sup>57</sup> Adopting a neutral stance towards the Cold War in the Middle East, the ruling Baath Party in Iraq withdrew itself from the Baghdad Pact. Their removal destabilised the fledgling organisation. Al-Said had previously been one of its most prominent advocates. He had devised and advocated projects such as the construction of a Middle Eastern railway line, which sought to foster political, social and economic ties between member states.<sup>58</sup>

Having lost a key supporter, the Foreign Office no longer regarded the Baghdad Pact as an effective regional buffer against Soviet Middle Eastern incursions. Renaming the organisation, the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO), its members continued to interact with one another. Their initiatives from the late 1950s, however, were inconsequential, undertaken with little enthusiasm from all parties involved. In telegrams to the Foreign Office in London, officials in the IRD's new regional office in Ankara argued that any future initiatives in the Middle East should be undertaken on a bilateral basis. The instability of governments in the region meant that regimes were prone to change. As this would likely lead to their withdrawal, the commitment of Middle Eastern nations to organisations such as the Baghdad Pact could not be relied on. By working with states bilaterally, the IRD would

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<sup>57</sup> Wainwright, 'Equal Partners?', 415.

<sup>58</sup> Record of meeting between Foreign Office and Baghdad Pact officials in Ankara, 11 September 1957, TNA, FO 371/127848.

have more room to manoeuvre. Officials would not be hamstrung by institutional norms and conventions and could withdraw from collaborative projects with ease.<sup>59</sup>

Compounding this, was Bakhtiar and Pakravan's increasing dislike towards how the CSO operated. At the March 1959 CENTO summit in Karachi, where the CSC reconvened to reactivate and decide its future activities, the Iranian delegates bemoaned the direction the organisation had taken. They claimed its meetings were an 'inconsequential talking-shop', which paid too much attention to administrative matters. Consequently, no 'positive proposals' to combat Soviet subversive activities had been mooted, with discussions quickly turning into disagreements. As the representatives from each member country operated in various roles, they all had different experiences and perspectives. Bakhtiar and Pakravan instead suggested that the CSC 'should be rationalised', with one professional intelligence officer from each country. Only then could the committee 'understand the problems of subversion' and come up with solutions. Possible initiatives they suggested included the production and dissemination of topical, high-brow news articles; fiction and factual book translations; and anti-Soviet teaching material so that teachers could persuade their students away from Communist ideals.<sup>60</sup>

IRD and Eastern Department officials conceded that there was 'some truth' to these criticisms. Carless suggested turning the CSC and the CSO into a counter-propaganda 'research office' staffed by experienced IRD personnel. The Eastern Department, while not dismissing Carless' proposal outright, recommended that they needed to do more to

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<sup>59</sup> Hugh Carless (IRD, Foreign Office) to Eastern Department (Foreign Office, London), 21 October 1959, TNA, FO 1110/1251; British Embassy (Tehran) to British Embassy (Ankara), 10 November 1959, TNA, FO 1110/1251.

<sup>60</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to IRD (Foreign Office, London), 1 October 1959, TNA, FO 1110/1251; British Embassy (Tehran) to IRD (Foreign Office, London), 4 January 1960, TNA, FO 1110/1353; IRD (Foreign Office, London) to Eastern Department (Foreign Office, London), 4 February 1960, TNA, FO 1110/1353.

demonstrate to the Iranians that they were determined to combat Soviet subversion in Iran.<sup>61</sup> The UK Embassy in Tehran, was more defensive. While they admitted that the CSO's achievements in the three years since it was established 'have not been great', they claimed that this was not the fault of its staff. The majority of these personnel were good at their jobs but had received no adequate direction. Many of their superiors, in the Foreign Office and the IRD, possessed little understanding of the Soviet Union's aims for Iran and the wider region. As the CSO did not and were unable to understand this, then it was unsurprising that CSC delegates like Bakhtiar and Pakravan were critical of its operations.<sup>62</sup>

Accordingly, the IRD moved away from using the Baghdad Pact's institutional apparatus as the main forum for collaborating with SAVAK. Renamed the CENTO Counter Subversion Office (CENTO CSO), with a new headquarters in Ankara, Turkey, the committee still advised and sponsored member states' propaganda initiatives. To IRD and SAVAK officials, though, the CENTO CSO's activities were of a lower priority. SAVAK, in particular, were especially receptive to the IRD's greater willingness to bilaterally assist in the production and dissemination of propaganda. The use of the Baghdad Pact as the main forum of these activities was something that 'genuinely frustrated' Bakhtiar. While the output had been of a far superior quality than what SAVAK could have produced by itself, the then Director was convinced that the propaganda could be even better. Moreover, a bilateral arrangement would give the Iranian agency greater control over the type and nature of the propaganda produced and disseminated.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Minute by Hugh Carless (IRD, Foreign Office), 1 October 1959, TNA, FO 1110/1251; Minute by Stephen Whitwell (Eastern Department, Foreign Office), 26 October 1959, TNA, FO 1110/1251.

<sup>62</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to Hugh Carless (IRD, Foreign Office), 8 October 1959, TNA, FO 1110/1251.

<sup>63</sup> IRD (Foreign Office, London) to British Embassy (Ankara), 10 November 1959, TNA, FO 1110/1251; British Embassy (Tehran) to Foreign Office, 1 October 1959, TNA, FO 1110/1251; Wainwright, 'Equal Partners?', 415-417.

Key to this was the joint IRD-SAVAK book translation programme. Taking Bakhtiar and Pakravan's recommendation on board, Carless persuaded his IRD superiors to authorise the allocation of funds to publish renowned Western fiction and non-fiction serialised stories in the Iranian press. Even if the plots of these books were not directly anti-Communist, it would demonstrate Britain's supposed superior cultural traditions to that of the Soviet Union.<sup>64</sup> The first success here was the November 1958 publication of the Soviet-national Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* across 17 days in *Ettelat*. The Farsi translation that appeared in the newspaper was based on a daily serial of the novel that had appeared in the *Liverpool Daily Echo*. The IRD, through the Foreign Office, paid the latter for the rights to this, ordering officials in the UK Embassy in Iran to do the translating for them. *Ettelat*'s increasing sales across these 17 days, compelled Carless to authorise the translation and publication of 25,000 copies of an abridged version of *Doctor Zhivago* for the Iranian market. This edition of the celebrated novel contained a foreword detailing Pasternak's plight. Set between the 1905 Russian Revolution and the Second World War, his book was not wholly enthusiastic about Communism and Soviet rule, leading USSR officials to bar its publication domestically. Its subsequent success across North America and Europe, though, ultimately led to Pasternak being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, which he was forced to turn down by Soviet authorities.<sup>65</sup>

With the success of the Farsi edition of *Dr Zhivago*, Carless and the IRD quickly moved to translate popular works of fiction in the West. Publications selected by the agency included Bernard Newman's *The Blue Ants* and Tibor Déry's *The Enemy*. The former novel's plot had an anti-Communist message, while the author of the latter had been incarcerated

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<sup>64</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to Hugh Carless (IRD, London), 12 November 1958, TNA, FO 1110/1128.

<sup>65</sup> Hugh Carless (IRD, London) to British Embassy (Tehran), 17 November 1958, TNA, FO 1110/1128.

for speaking out in support of the October 1956 Hungarian Uprising.<sup>66</sup> At the same time as they were working with SAVAK to translate these novels, the IRD were increasingly working with their USIA counterparts. As the American government had refused to become full members of the Baghdad Pact, the US State Department had minimal involvement in the organisation's activities. In the case of the CSC, a delegation from the State Department merely sat in on meetings, contributing little to the discussions. Now that the UK Foreign Office's activities to counter Soviet propaganda in Iran were no longer undertaken through the Baghdad Pact, the USIA indicated a greater willingness to work with their British counterparts here. Much of their collaborative efforts, though, were minimal, occurring only when it was in their mutual interests to do so. The USIA, additionally, was reluctant to work with the IRD. In meetings with British Embassy officials, figures from the United States Information Service (USIS), who undertook the USIA's work in Iran, criticised the IRD. They claimed its presence in the country would be counterproductive in the long term, fanning popular speculation that the US and the UK sought to covertly steer Iran from afar.<sup>67</sup>

Anglo-American collaboration, therefore, centred on counteracting Soviet efforts to highlight divergent US-UK interests and policies. In promoting this united front, the USIS worked with the UK Embassy's Information Department to emphasise the importance of the 'special relationship' in propaganda broadcasts and publications. In November 1955 for example, Edward Wells, the USIS' Public Affairs Officer in Iran, agreed with Reginald Burrows, his counterpart in the UK Embassy's Information Department, to stress in daily press releases that the Baghdad Pact was an Anglo-American collaborative project, despite America not signing the agreement. The USIS, in return, pledged to minimise coverage of Iran's claims to Bahrain.<sup>68</sup> While it had agreed to attend meetings and contribute to

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<sup>66</sup> Hugh Carless (IRD, London) to British Embassy (Tehran), 21 May 1959, TNA, FO 1110/1094.

<sup>67</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to IRD (Foreign Office, London), 8 April 1959, TNA, FO 1110/1251.

<sup>68</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 14 November 1955, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).



discussions, the US had rejected formal membership as they were convinced a defence pact would destabilise the region. State Department figures also deemed the arrangement a means by which the British government could reassert its imperial dominance in the Middle East.<sup>69</sup> Bahrain, on the other hand, had belonged to Iran from the days of the Persian Empire through to 1792, when a British-backed local uprising forced the Iranians off the island. Since it had become a British protectorate in 1820, successive monarchs had called on the UK government to cede Bahrain back to Iran.<sup>70</sup>

Moreover, USIS officials deemed it imperative that they cooperate with their British counterparts to combat Communism in Iran. As figures from the American agency were desperate to prevent the ideology from taking hold in the country, they approved of any foreign state-led initiative to counteract Soviet activities in Iran.<sup>71</sup> Supplementing this was the UK's unwillingness to compete with USIS figures in this field. Short-staffed, ineffectual and distrusted by most Iranians, the British Embassy in Tehran's Information Department was confined to producing and distributing anti-Communist daily press releases. Its 'discreet' undertakings, accordingly, did not clash with the USIS' activities.<sup>72</sup> Much of the American agency's efforts in working with the British to disseminate anti-Communist propaganda in Iran centred on the supplying of material to the BBC Persian Service. According to USIS

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<sup>69</sup> For more on this, please consult: Nigel Ashton, 'The Hijacking of a Pact: The Formation of the Baghdad Pact and Anglo-American Tensions in the Middle East, 1955-58', *Review of International Studies* 19 (1993), 123-125.

<sup>70</sup> For more on Iran's territorial claims to Bahrain, please consult: Steve Smith, *Britain's Revival and Fall in the Gulf: Kuwait, Bahrain and the Trucial States, 1950-1971* (Abingdon, 2013) and Roham Alvandi, 'Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and the Bahrain Question, 1968-1970' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 37/2 (2010), 159-177.

<sup>71</sup> Memo from Edward Wells (PAO, USIS Tehran) to USIS (Tehran), 11 January 1954, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>72</sup> American Embassy (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 14 December 1954, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

figures, the British broadcaster was of 'insurmountable value.' It was perfectly placed to counter Radio Moscow and Radio Cairo transmissions. Broadcasts from the latter two stations did not differentiate between the United States and Britain, arguing that both Western powers sought to undermine the Iranian regime and territorial sovereignty for their own interests. Farsi transmissions from both Radio Moscow and Radio Cairo referred to the Shah as a US-UK puppet and the country a de facto Anglo-American colony.<sup>73</sup> As its news content was so popular among Iranians, USIS figures in Iran relied on the BBC Persian Service to refute these assertions. They deemed it unnecessary for the US to fund a similar Farsi language radio station of its own, claiming that this would dilute both broadcasters' listening figures and the impact of their messages. They therefore supplied the BBC Persian Service with anti-Communist propaganda to disseminate across the airwaves.<sup>74</sup>

These collaborative efforts, however, marked the limit of joint Anglo-American efforts to contain Communism in Iran. The bulk of the UK Foreign Office's work in this field remained the IRD's collaboration with SAVAK. Beginning in the mid-1950s, with the fledgling Baghdad Pact's institutional apparatus acting as the main conduit, both agencies aimed to use audio-visual media to move Iranians away from Communist ideals. The 1958 Iraqi Revolution, though, diminished the Baghdad Pact's credibility, compelling the IRD and SAVAK to increasingly work together bilaterally. Officials from both agencies built on their pre-1958 proposals to produce and distribute anti-Soviet films, leaflets and radio broadcasts. They devised, in particular, a book translation programme that provided Iranians with Farsi editions of popular Western and anti-Communist publications. In approving the implementation of such initiatives, UK Foreign Office figures hoped that they would help reassert Britain's place as the dominant Western power in Iran. These policies, however,

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<sup>73</sup> USIS (Tehran) to the USIA (Washington), 9 September 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>74</sup> USIS (Tehran) to the USIA (Washington), 9 September 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

only composed a fraction of the Foreign Office's attempts to achieve this objective. Even more significant was the work of the British Council. From their 1955 return to the country, they relied on English language teaching to persuade and attract Iranians towards Britain's norms, values, cultures and ideas, as the following chapter explores.

## **Chapter V – Anglicising Iranian Society and Culture Through Education: The UK Foreign Office and the British Council**

*'I can't emphasise enough the importance we attach to our relations with Persia at this significant moment and our disappointment on political grounds at being prevented from starting operations there without delay.'*<sup>1</sup>

After the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis, British cultural diplomacy in Iran considerably diminished. Anthony Haigh, the head of the UK Foreign Office's Cultural Relations Department from 1952 to 1962, frequently bemoaned these developments. In an October 1954 letter to the then British Ambassador to Iran, Roger Stevens, Haigh called on the UK Embassy in Tehran to do more to promote Britain's culture and values to Iranian people. With the Foreign Office and British government's inability to sustain a cultural diplomacy programme in the country, Haigh was convinced it was up to Stevens and his subordinates to fill the gap, something he underlined in the above quote. Before the August 1953 US-UK sanctioned coup that toppled Prime Minister Mohammad Mossagdeh, the British Council and the BBC Persian Service were chiefly responsible for Britain's cultural diplomacy in the country. With Foreign Office funding and support, the former had operated in major Iranian cities since 1934, organising exhibitions and providing English language teaching to school and university students. The latter was also answerable to the UK government department, forming a constituent part of the BBC foreign language services. Catering for Farsi speakers in Iran and Afghanistan, the Persian Service was broadcast twice daily, once between 7.30-8am and again from 10-

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Haigh (Foreign Office, Cultural Relations Department) to Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran), 2 October 1954, Kew, Richmond, The National Archives, BW 49/24 (hereafter document, date, TNA, file reference).

10.30pm. Its content was predominantly news and current affairs, yet a significant chunk of its programming was dedicated to talks on art and culture, as well as the educational *English by Radio*.<sup>2</sup>

The 1951-1953 Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis, however, hampered both the BBC Persian Service and the British Council's operations. The UK government's refusal to accept Mossagdeh's nationalisation of the Iranian oil industry resulted in a marked increase in Anglophobia among Iran's populace. The Persian Service, previously renowned for its supposed impartial reporting of world news, was increasingly discredited by Mossagdeh and his allies as a UK government propaganda tool. The radio broadcaster was also facing Foreign Office pressure to criticise Mossagdeh in news reports and praise Britain's handling of the diplomatic dispute.<sup>3</sup> The British Council's offices, likewise, were being increasingly vandalised by Iranian protestors, and the number of students signing up for their English language teaching courses had radically plummeted. Both of these issues culminated in the British Council leaving Iran in November 1952.<sup>4</sup>

As the Anglo-Iranian Crisis had been resolved, with a consortium of Western petroleum companies taking control of Iran's oil industry from the UK government backed Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), Haigh was determined to restore Britain's cultural diplomacy programme in Iran. He was keenly aware of the country's geostrategic importance in the Cold War, neighbouring the Soviet Union and straddling the Arab world, Persian Gulf and Indian Subcontinent. Haigh had also been made aware by the UK Embassy in Tehran of the growing anti-British popular sentiment and of America's growing

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<sup>2</sup> Minute on the History of the BBC Persian Service, undated, Caversham, Reading, BBC Written Archives Centre, E 40/272/1 (hereafter document, date, BBC WAC, file reference).

<sup>3</sup> Survey of the BBC Persian Service's output in Iran, 17 December 1963, BBC WAC, E/3/182/1.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Wakelin (British Council, Iran) to British Council Head Office (London), 26 October 1952, TNA, BW 49/14.

role in Iran, a nation previously regarded as being in Britain's sphere of influence.<sup>5</sup> More broadly, Haigh was determined to ensure that the UK retained its prominent position on the world stage. Before becoming head of the Foreign Office's Cultural Relations Department, he had served as a diplomat in the Belgian, Brazilian and Japanese embassies. These formative positions in radically different places had made Haigh aware of Britain's global reach and influence, particularly in economic and cultural fields.<sup>6</sup>

The previous chapter covered how the UK Foreign Office had responded to the above developments by working with SAVAK, the Iranian secret and intelligence service, to disseminate anti-Communist propaganda across Iran. Through the efforts of the UK Embassy and the Information Research Department (IRD), Foreign Office figures hoped to reassert Britain's place as the dominant Western power in Iran. To help achieve this objective, the government department concurrently aimed to promote British culture and way of life to Iranian people. UK diplomats and officials hoped to combat the negative perception of Britain as an imperialist, meddling power that had festered during the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to examine how the UK Foreign Office sought to promote Britain's values and way of life in Iran, while also fostering social progress and development along British lines. It explores how the government department largely relied on the British Council to achieve these aims, proceeding to outline how the US State Department and USIS responded to the UK's cultural diplomacy programme. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first part examines how and why the Foreign Office relied on the British Council to foster Anglo-Iranian cultural ties. The second analyses the UK

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<sup>5</sup> Anthony Haigh (Foreign Office, Cultural Relations Department) to Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran), 2 October 1954, TNA, BW 49/24; American Embassy (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 14 December 1954, College Park, Maryland, National Archives II (hereafter document, date, NAI), USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>6</sup> Colin Mackie, *A Directory of British Diplomats* (London, 2014), 216.

institution's initiatives. The third section discusses how and why the State Department and the USIS sought to undermine the British Council's activities in Iran.

Figures in the UK Embassy in Tehran and the Foreign Office's Cultural Relations Department in London instantly realised that they could not compete with the USIS' comprehensive cultural diplomacy programme in Iran. They did not possess adequate financial resources or the required number of personnel to match the American agency's promotion of US values and socio-economic development programmes. Initially relying on the Persian Service, Embassy and Foreign Office officials realised that its audio transmissions were an ineffective means by which to culturally connect with Iranians. The Soviet Union intermittently jammed the Persian Service's frequency, making it difficult for many in Iran to pick up the signal. Moreover, while most Iranian listeners appreciated the BBC's news content, they were less keen on its cultural offerings. Many complained about the Persian Service's plays and talks, claiming they were stuffy and high-brow.

At the Embassy's behest, the Foreign Office relied on the British Council to foster Anglo-Iranian cultural ties. Affiliated to the UK government department, the agency was able to have a physical presence in Iran. It engaged with the public daily when it reopened its offices in Tehran and other major provincial cities. Thanks to their comparative lack of resources, the British Council, through focusing on English language teaching, sought to plug the gaps left by US cultural initiatives. The qualifications offered by the agency in this field were much more rigorous than their American equivalents, and their courses for Iranian teachers of the English language were something the USIS had neglected to do.

US Embassy and State Department figures were initially unsure how to approach British cultural diplomacy in Iran. On a broader level, both countries had similar motives for seeking to foster ties with the Iranian public. Both governments were concerned that many in the country had a propensity towards Soviet-inspired Communism. In the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis' wake, moreover, they were also aware that many Iranians possessed unfavourable views of the United States and Britain. Yet USIS officials in Iran were aware that the UK Foreign Office sought to compete with America, aiming to reassert Britain as the dominant

Western cultural power in Iran. They accordingly distanced themselves from the British Council, undermining the agency wherever possible, and only dealt with the institution when it was overwhelmingly in their interests to do so.

### **The BBC Persian Service's Failings and the British Council's Return to Iran**

With the British Council's November 1952 departure, the Foreign Office initially relied on the UK Embassy in Tehran's Information Department to take over the agency's cultural activities. Composed of three staff members, however, this small team could only undertake a fraction of the British Council's work in Tehran, let alone its operations in other major Iranian cities. The Information Department was inundated with requests from parents of schoolchildren who sought for their offspring to work or study in the UK. These appeals left little time and resources for staff to devise and run English language teaching courses. The Information Department's attempts to move beyond dealing with parental questions and queries proved unsuccessful. During 1954 and at the Foreign Office's behest, staff attempted to organise cultural exhibitions that would showcase British literature to the Iranian people. However, due to historic British meddling in Iranian affairs, many Iranians, at both a popular and elite level, were distrustful of UK political institutions. Suspicious of the Embassy's motives behind these cultural exhibitions, government officials refused to provide any assistance in publicising these events or providing a venue. Such uncooperative behaviour meant that none of the Information Department's proposed exhibitions went beyond the planning stage.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, while the BBC Persian Service was still broadcasting to Iran, various factors undermined its effectiveness as a tool to promote Britain and British values. UK

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<sup>7</sup> Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to the UK Foreign Office, 30 November 1954, TNA, BW 49/13; Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), 1 June 1957, TNA, BW 49/13.



Foreign Office figures were initially convinced that the absence of a US Farsi language broadcaster provided them with a distinct advantage. The Voice of America's reliance on its English language service to connect with Iranians – a policy that remained in place until 1978 – meant that the BBC could potentially carve out a cultural niche for itself in Iran. Yet crucially, both the broadcaster and the Foreign Office found it incredibly difficult to identify the Persian Service's listening figures and the demographics of its audience. They had no idea who had tuned in, from where, and what Iranian social groups were more likely to be attracted to BBC broadcasts. From his 1942 coronation, the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, had outlawed the monitoring of audio and visual transmissions by actors residing outside of Iran. The only way that the BBC could discern Iranian listening habits was through the letters sent to the broadcaster in London by the country's citizens. Many of these suggested that the Persian Service was incredibly popular in Iran, with correspondents' anecdotes noting their discussion of its programmes with family and friends. Letters also praised the Persian Service's news content, citing its impartiality and balanced reporting. One even referred to the broadcaster's current affairs programming as a 'fairy godmother' to most Iranians.<sup>8</sup>

Letters, however, were not the most accurate way of gathering feedback. As BBC Persian Service producers noted in their quarterly reports, they only represented the views of those who felt compelled to write in. It was highly unlikely that correspondents' views were representative of the Iranian listeners at large.<sup>9</sup> Equally, while many of the letters were positive, a significant number were critical of the Persian Service. Writers complained that its radio broadcasts promoted Britain too obviously and too much. They bemoaned that many of its plays, most notably a production of the nineteenth century British novel *Ivanhoe*, were

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<sup>8</sup> BBC Persian Service quarterly audience research report, 15 January 1956, BBC WAC, E 3/181/1; BBC Persian Service quarterly audience research report, 15 April 1956, BBC WAC, E 3/181/1; BBC Persian Service quarterly audience research report, 23 November 1956, BBC WAC, E 3/181/1.

<sup>9</sup> BBC Persian Service quarterly audience research report, 15 January 1956, BBC WAC, E 3/181/1.

mundane and boring. British audio, clearly, could not compete with the more supposedly progressive American films and magazines, with Iranian correspondents to the BBC instead indicated a preference for US culture and fashion. Even aspects of BBC Persian Service's content that listeners liked – news and *English by Radio* – were for practical reasons. Iranians tuned into the Persian Service as they deemed its news content trustworthy, while *English by Radio* was popular with schoolchildren and teachers keen to develop their understanding of the English language. Many in Iran regarded the BBC Persian Service as serving a functional purpose and did not want to engross themselves in British culture.<sup>10</sup>

Equally significant was the Soviet Union's intermittent jamming of the BBC Persian Service's radio frequency. The unpredictability of this made it difficult for many Iranians to regularly tune in. Soviet jamming of the BBC's broadcasts began in the days after the August 1953 coup. It briefly halted in April 1956 after the visit of First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev and Premier Nikolai Bulganin's to the UK, only to restart in October 1956 with the onset of the Hungarian and Suez crises. According to a BBC Persian Service report, intermittent Soviet jamming has more than likely had a 'cramming effect' on listener figures. As many Iranians were unable to regularly listen, many were no longer tuning in. The potential audience, therefore, 'could be significantly larger than the present one.'<sup>11</sup> The Foreign Office were concerned by these developments, calling on the BBC to find solutions to circumvent Soviet jamming of the Persian Service.<sup>12</sup> Yet there was no clear resolution of this issue. The BBC claimed that broadcasting on the more secure medium wave would alleviate this problem, but that this was not feasible in practice. It was not in this period technologically possible to transmit medium wave signals from the UK to countries such as Iran. For Iranian listeners to pick up the Persian Service on this wavelength it would require

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<sup>10</sup> BBC Persian Service quarterly audience research report, 15 January 1956, BBC WAC, E 3/181/1.

<sup>11</sup> Minute on the History of the BBC Persian Service, undated, BBC WAC, E 40/272/1.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Peters (Foreign Office) to Gordon Wakefield (BBC, Head of Eastern Services), 3 December 1958, BBC WAC, E 1/2.082/1.

the building of transmitters in countries allied to Britain that were closer to Iran, something the BBC and Foreign Office deemed unlikely.<sup>13</sup> There was also the possibility of strengthening the Persian Service's current signal to overpower the Soviet jamming. This, though, could potentially have repercussions for Britain's other cultural and geostrategic objectives in the Middle East and beyond. The BBC's other foreign language radio stations, such as the Arab Service, used the same transmitters. Any improvement to the Persian Service's signal would adversely affect the reception of these other radio stations.<sup>14</sup>

More broadly, the BBC had increasingly antagonised the Iranian government. Such developments made it increasingly difficult for the Foreign Office to rely on the broadcaster to foster Anglo-Iranian cultural ties. The Persian Service frequently referred to the country as 'Persia' and its peoples as 'Persians.' Iranians had never used these terms to describe themselves or their nation. The Ancient Athenians had applied these phrases in the fifth century BC to refer to the peoples residing on the Iranian Plateau. Other subsequent European civilisations had, in turn, borrowed these terms to refer to Iran and its peoples. In 1935, the then Iranian monarch, Reza Khan, requested that other nations to refer to the country he ruled as Iran, as this is what its citizens have always called their country.<sup>15</sup> The BBC's failure to comply with this demand, despite the Shah's repeated requests, angered the Iranian monarch and his acolytes.<sup>16</sup> Cementing the Iranian government's dislike of the BBC was the broadcast of an edition of the current affairs programme *Behind the Headlines* that examined proceedings in Iran. Hosted by television journalist Douglas Stuart, the show

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<sup>13</sup> Minute on the History of the BBC Persian Service, undated BBC WAC, E 40/272/1.

<sup>14</sup> Gordon Wakefield (BBC, Head of Eastern Services) to Thomas Peters (Foreign Office), 18 December 1958, BBC WAC, E 1/2.082/1.

<sup>15</sup> Mohammad-Taqi Imanpour, 'Re-establishment of Achaemenid History and its Development in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', *Iranian Studies*, 48/4 (2015), 515-517.

<sup>16</sup> James Thitchener (Foreign Office) to John Clark (BBC, Broadcasting House), 8 January 1957, BBC WAC, E 1/2.082/1.

looked in-depth at particular issues. Its episode on 11 March 1957 sought to inform UK viewers of Iran's on-going economic modernisation programme. Eager to showcase their country to the British public, the Iranian government assisted with the filming and production of the programme. Writing to the then BBC Director General, Ian Jacob, in a personal capacity, Roger Stevens claimed that the Iranian government was unhappy with the final edit. He argued that this episode of *Behind the Headlines* had 'adversely affected relations.' There were frequent references to the 1941 deposition of the Shah's father by the British and Soviets, an event that still upset the Iranian monarch. The episode also allegedly implied that Iran was a 'backward and poor country.'<sup>17</sup>

With the absence of substantial UK cultural diplomacy programmes in Iran after August 1953, the US had become the dominant Western influence in this field. In the British Council's absence, the USIS had become 'deeply entrenched' in the Iranian education system. The agency's initiatives had sought to instruct and inform Iranians on, among other things, science, technology and the English language.<sup>18</sup> As a result of this, there had been a shift away from French pedagogical practices in Iran – something that had been engrained in the Iranian education system since the early nineteenth century – and a greater appreciation of American teaching practices.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, the USIS had expanded beyond Tehran. Encroaching on what was previously the British Council's domain, the American agency had opened offices in Esfahan, Mashhad, Tabriz, Shiraz and Khorramshahr. From afar, British Council officials in London were ashamed that the USIS had taken its place in Iran. 'Visitors, tourists and Iranians themselves relying on the USIS for

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<sup>17</sup> Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to Ian Jacob (BBC, Director General), 16 March 1957, BBC WAC, E 1/2.078/1.

<sup>18</sup> Derek Riches (Foreign Office, Head of Eastern Department) to Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran), 1 June 1957, TNA, BW 49/13.

<sup>19</sup> Minutes of Beirut Conference of the British Council's Middle East Representatives, 20-21 March 1955, TNA, BW 49/14.

information on Western culture... this is embarrassing. We need to fill this lamentable gap without delay.'<sup>20</sup>

Foreign Office figures, more broadly, had become increasingly concerned at the 'undue influence' the US State Department and Embassy in Tehran possessed over the Iranian government and people. This had enabled them to shape and mould proceedings in the country to their own vision. Not only would this make it harder for Britain to influence Iranian affairs, but it could also lead to many in Iran turning against the US and the West. Annoyed that America loomed over their country, Iranian citizens could accuse them of distrusting Iran or of seeking to turn their nation into an American colony.<sup>21</sup> Foreign Office figures were convinced that it was only through forging a British alternative to US cultural diplomacy that these events would not occur. UK programmes and initiatives in this field would dilute the omnipotence of the American equivalent, alleviating the prospect of a popular Iranian backlash.<sup>22</sup> However, the Foreign Office and the UK Embassy in Tehran were loath to raise these concerns with their American counterparts. Despite the importance both countries placed on Iranian geopolitical stability, the US government were contributing far more to Iran in terms of finance and personnel than the Foreign Office were capable of doing. British officials did not, accordingly, want to appear overly critical or jealous and they did not want to be shut out of the shaping of US policy in Iran.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to Anthony Haigh (Foreign Office, Cultural Relations Department), 26 April 1957, TNA, BW 49/24; Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), 1 June 1957, TNA, BW 49/13.

<sup>21</sup> John Russell (UK Embassy, Iran) to George Hillier (Foreign Office, Eastern Department), 13 August 1959, TNA, FO 371/140818.

<sup>22</sup> George Hillier (Foreign Office, Eastern Department) to John Russell (UK Embassy, Iran), 26 August 1959, TNA, FO 371/140818.

<sup>23</sup> Roger Jackling (UK Embassy, Washington) to Frederick Brown (Foreign Office, Eastern Department), 31 December 1958, TNA, FO 371/140817.

Still, Foreign Office figures remained convinced that the most effective way to compete with US cultural diplomacy in Iran was to plug the gaps left by their American counterparts. Even with the USIS' comprehensive educational initiatives, the Foreign Office maintained that 'there was plenty of room for us.'<sup>24</sup> Due to Britain's comparative lack of resources, officials in its Cultural Relations Department asserted that this was the only way to match the USIS' comprehensive programmes and initiatives in the country. In adopting this approach, the Foreign Office would not be crowded out in Iran by American competition. While the Cultural Relations Department's aims remained the same, the means by which to achieve these objectives were adjusted. Its officials shelved the use of the BBC Persian Service as a tool to foster UK-Iran cultural ties, leaving the broadcaster to function independently with minimal interference. From September 1954, they instead turned to the British Council, solely relying on the agency as the main conduit for British cultural diplomacy in Iran until the end of the decade.<sup>25</sup>

The Cultural Relations Department was not alone in seeing the potential of the British Council's reinstatement in Iran for Anglo-Iranian cultural relations. From January 1954, the UK Ambassador in Iran had pushed for the institution's return. The country, according to Stevens, was undergoing a process of socio-economic development. As well as the modernisation of Iran's infrastructure, the Iranian government sought to enhance their population's technical knowledge and critical thinking by widening access to education. The USIS had already provided significant assistance with this. Its exchange programme had offered educational, commercial and cultural trips to the US for a whole host of Iranian business and political figures. Complementing this, the State Department sponsored Point Four initiatives sought to educate ordinary Iranians on, among other things, agricultural

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<sup>24</sup> Report by George Biddulph (Director of Studies for British Council in Iran) from his visit to Esfahan and Shiraz, 20-25 January 1959, TNA, BW 49/33.

<sup>25</sup> Derek Riches (Foreign Office, Head of Eastern Department) to Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran), 1 June 1957, TNA, BW 49/13.

practices, engineering processes and the running of hospitals. Iran's government now expected the UK to also assist with its modernisation initiatives. A failure to comply could potentially anger the Shah and his government, resulting in Britain being 'cut out' of Iran altogether.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, many in the Iranian government were increasingly willing to engage culturally with Britain. The resolution of the 1951-53 Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis enhanced the Shah's position. It granted him the authority to purge his government and civil service of nationalists opposed to British involvement in Iranian affairs. The Shah's allies, in particular figures that possessed similar political views to the Iranian monarch, had replaced these individuals. They were much more pro-Western, less Anglophobic and therefore more amenable to dealings with Britain.<sup>27</sup> In telegrams to the Foreign Office in London, Embassy figures in Tehran noted how this new generation of Iranian government officials placed a great value on the UK's education system. Despite considerable American involvement in the field of English language teaching, there was a 'widespread preference' for the British equivalent. Many Iranians deemed qualifications from Britain as more academically rigorous and prestigious, while those from the US were seen to be more straightforward to obtain.<sup>28</sup>

The Foreign Office and the Embassy judged the British Council to be the institution best placed to satisfy Iranian demands for British English language teaching and qualifications. Convinced that the institution should have returned to Iran in the wake of the

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<sup>26</sup> Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), 1 June 1957, TNA, BW 49/13; Memorandum from Robert Bowie (State Department representative on the NSC Planning Board) to Robert Cutler (President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs), 1 August 1957, Oxford, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957, Near East Region; Iran; Iraq, Volume XII*.

<sup>27</sup> Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to Paul Grey (Foreign Office, Political Department), 13 November 1955, TNA, BW 49/24.

<sup>28</sup> Mohammad Sanai (Iranian Embassy, UK) to Richard Highwood (British Council, Director of Middle East), 18 January 1955, TNA, BW 49/13.

Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis' resolution, Embassy and Foreign Office figures argued that this should be a 'high priority.'<sup>29</sup> The provision of English language teaching, crucially, was the British Council's specialist function. Yet Foreign Office and Embassy officials envisaged that the agency would use this as a platform to achieve broader British diplomatic goals in Iran. Through the teaching of English, the institution's staff could promote Britain's culture, values and way of life to Iranian students, fostering a greater mutual understanding. Improved popular perceptions of the UK in Iran, Embassy officials claimed, would lead to 'greater collaboration in all fields.' It would prompt Iranian businesses to deal more with their British counterparts, while also encouraging more of Iran's students to attend UK universities.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, in spite of being openly accountable to the Foreign Office, the British Council conveyed the impression of being independent and politically neutral. As the Embassy's Information Department's failed attempts to promote Britain in Iran illustrated, many Iranians distrusted cultural initiatives devised and promoted by the UK government. The British Council, conversely, would be better placed to promote Britain in Iran. Most Iranians would be much more amenable towards its programmes, deeming the institution politically neutral and 'not an instrument of politics and propaganda.'<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Foreign Office's Press Section to Foreign Office's Cultural Relations Department, 20 October 1954, TNA, BW 49/13; Richard Burrows (Foreign Office, Press Section) to Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) 1 November 1954, TNA, BW 49/13.

<sup>30</sup> Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), 1 June 1957, TNA, BW 49/13; Minutes of meeting held in the British Council's boardroom to discuss the British Council's return to Iran, 27 August 1954, TNA, BW 49/13.

<sup>31</sup> British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1955-56, TNA, BW 49/17; Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), 11 May 1957; TNA, BW 49/17; Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to Paul Grey (Foreign Office, Political Department), 31 August 1956, TNA, BW 49/24.



Concurring with the Foreign Office and the UK Embassy in Tehran, the British Council sought to return to Iran as soon as possible. Derek Traversi, the agency's Chief Representative in the country from 1955 to 1958, argued that the British Council could play a vital role in Iran's transition from a neutral state to an Anglo-American Cold War ally. While a novice to Iran and the Middle East more generally, Traversi was well travelled by the time he arrived in Tehran in 1955. Born to an Italian father and a Welsh mother, he had spent much of his youth in Milan, moving with his parents to London in 1922 at the outset of Benito Mussolini's fascist regime. While in the UK, Traversi obtained an English language and literature degree from the University of Oxford, where he excelled as a scholar in the works of William Shakespeare. A career in academia beckoned, yet Traversi chose a more unconventional pathway into the profession. Rather than take a university position, he instead obtained posts in the British Institutes in Rome and Madrid, followed by a British Council position in Chile.<sup>32</sup>

With each posting, Traversi sought to ingratiate himself in local customs and society. He had some specific observations about Iran's people from his time there. Many Iranians, he noted, were inclined towards isolationism, wary of engaging with Western powers. They were unhappy with Iran's shift towards the UK and US in the Cold War, suspecting that both countries' governments merely sought to use Iran to further their own interests. By immersing the country's people in Britain's culture, values and way of life, the British Council could challenge these negative perceptions of the UK and its government in Iran.<sup>33</sup> Equally pressing for the institution was the need to stem the flow of Iranian children boarding at UK schools. Convinced of the prestige and value of British public-school education, an

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<sup>32</sup> 'Derek Traversi Obituary', 15 September 2005, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2005/sep/15/guardianobituaries.books> (accessed 11 April 2019).

<sup>33</sup> Richard Highwood (British Council, Director of Middle East), to Derek Traversi (British Council Representative, Iran), 6 January 1955, TNA, BW 49/24; British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1955-56, TNA, BW 49/17.

increasing number of middle and upper-class Iranian parents were sending their offspring to be educated in Britain. This phenomenon, the British Council claimed, was self-defeating. Many of these children had unhappy experiences in the UK, suffering from homesickness and the shock of living in a country alien to their own. It was only through the British Council's return to Iran that this worrying trend could be reversed. The provision of UK-style education and qualifications within their borders would disincline Iranians from sending their children to be educated in Britain. They could instead be immersed in British culture and values in their home environment.<sup>34</sup>

### **The British Council and the Anglo-Iranian Cultural Convention: Promoting UK Cultures, Values and Societal Progress in Iran**

From their 1955 return, the British Council's approach to fostering Anglo-Iranian cultural ties differed from the tactics they employed prior to their 1952 departure. Previously, the institution had 'tried to satisfy everyone.' Staff had offered a range of English language courses according to students' abilities and requirements, as well as catering for all social demographics. They shifted away from this approach for three reasons. First, the British Council lacked the money to effectively pursue this policy. Second, the approach had also failed to distinguish between friends and enemies of Britain in Iran. Leading British Council figures in both London and the Middle East argued that the institution's support should be used as a reward for supporting and siding with Britain.<sup>35</sup> Third, the British Council thought their initiatives would be much more effective if they plugged the gaps left by the USIS. They paid particular attention to boosting ties with prominent individuals, notably those who had

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<sup>34</sup> Richard Highwood (British Council, Director of Middle East), to Derek Traversi (British Council Representative, Iran), 6 January 1955, TNA, BW 49/24.

<sup>35</sup> Minutes of Beirut Conference of Middle Eastern Representatives, 20-21 March 1955, TNA, BW 49/14.

made the 'biggest contribution' to Iranian society or who would 'one day matter'.<sup>36</sup> This included government officials, cultural figures, business leaders, civil servants and teachers. Traversi judged that the best way of engaging with these types of individuals was through English language teaching. Many would possess an advanced knowledge of the English language anyway, while others would be in occupations where they would require a better grasp of the language for professional reasons.<sup>37</sup> Complementing this English language teaching would be concerts, exhibits, plays and book readings that showcased British culture. These figures would subsequently use their privileged position in society to disseminate their newfound positive perception of Britain to the wider Iranian populace.<sup>38</sup>

The Foreign Office's Press Section and Cultural Relations Department approved of this approach. Aiming for the agency's Tehran office to reopen in early 1955, they asked the Iranian Ministry of Education and the University of Tehran to formally invite the British Council back to Iran.<sup>39</sup> Concurrently, the Cultural Relations Department and the Press

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<sup>36</sup> Minutes of Beirut Conference of Middle Eastern Representatives, 20-21 March 1955, TNA, BW 49/14; British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1955-56, TNA, BW 49/17.

<sup>37</sup> British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1956-57, TNA, BW 49/17; Richard Highwood (British Council, Director of Middle East) to the British Council's Director General, 7 May 1957, TNA, BW 49/17.

<sup>38</sup> Minute on UK policy in the Middle East, 6 January 1955, TNA, BW 49/24; British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1955-56, TNA, BW 49/17; British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1956-57, TNA, BW 49/17; Mohammad Sanai (Iranian Embassy, UK) to Richard Highwood (British Council, Director of Middle East), 18 January 1955, TNA, BW 49/13.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Highwood (British Council, Director of Middle East), to John Grant (Foreign Office, Political Department), 31 March 1954, TNA, BW 49/13; Richard Highwood (British Council, Director of Middle East), to British Council Overseas Controller B (Controller for Asia, Africa and South America), 22 September 1954, TNA, BW 49/24; Anthony Haigh (Foreign Office, Cultural Relations Department) to Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran), 14 September 1954, TNA, BW 49/24; British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1955-56, TNA, BW 49/17; Mohammad Sanai (Iranian

Section also pushed the Treasury to provide significant financial backing to the British Council in Iran. Citing Iran's geostrategic importance to wider UK foreign policy goals, they argued that the agency's Tehran office should have an annual budget of £30,000. Such an amount was significantly higher than the funds provided to British Council institutions in Turkey and the Arab world.<sup>40</sup> While agreeing with the Foreign Office that Iran was integral to the UK's diplomatic goals, the Treasury claimed that they could not provide such a significant amount of money to the British Council's Tehran office. Not only was it financially unsustainable, but it could also set a dangerous precedent with other British Council offices in geopolitically important countries requesting similar amounts. Circumventing these issues, the Treasury agreed to give the British Council in Iran a significant £10,000 per annum.<sup>41</sup> To avoid accusations of unfavourable treatment, the government department linked this to the British Council's wider expansion in the Middle East. The rising Arab nationalist threat, as well as a need to counter the budget cuts of the early 1950s, had compelled the British Council to try and bolster its Middle Eastern presence. There had been an increase in finance and staff levels allocated to the British Council's Iraqi and Egyptian offices, as well as a rise in the number of scholarships offered to students residing in the Near East and Arab world.<sup>42</sup>

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Embassy, UK) to Richard Highwood (British Council, Director of Middle East), 18 January 1955, TNA, BW 49/13.

<sup>40</sup> Anthony Haigh (Foreign Office, Cultural Relations Department) to British Council Director General, 30 August 1954, TNA, BW 49/24.

<sup>41</sup> Jack Nichols (Foreign Office, Press Section) to Andrew Johnston (Treasury), 4 June 1954, TNA, BW 49/24; Controller Overseas Division B (Controller for Asia, Africa and South America) to Derek Traversi (British Council Representative, Iran), 27 January 1956, TNA, BW 49/14.

<sup>42</sup> Controller Overseas Division B (Controller for Asia, Africa and South America) to Derek Traversi (British Council Representative, Iran), 29 November 1955, TNA, BW 49/14; Suggestions for the British Council's Middle Eastern expansion between 1956 and 1959, 5 November 1955, TNA, BW 49/14.

The British Council reopened its Tehran office in February 1955. From its return, the agency sought to compete with American English language teaching by providing a more elitist alternative. Counteracting the UK Foreign Office's wishes, the British Council focused solely on teaching the English language to Iranians, doing little to promote the British way of life in the country. Unlike their USIS counterparts, the UK agency did not organise any exhibits or establish a sustained, comprehensive exchange programme. Writing in 1962, reflecting on his time as head of the British Council's activities in Iran for most of the 1950s, Traversi attempted to justify the agency's approach. Due to budget and personnel shortages, the direct teaching of Iranian students was one of the only effective means by which the British Council could promote Britain's culture and values in Iran. They did not possess the resources to compete or match the USIS' efforts in fostering, among other things, a university exchange programme or a culture of extra-curricular activities among secondary school students. There was no room, moreover, for the British Council in the promotion of Iran's socio-economic development. According to Traversi, the USIS had left no gaps for the agency to fill. There was also no UK government alternative to the Point Four programme for the British Council to exploit or promote.<sup>43</sup>

English language teaching, then, was one of the few means by which the British Council could match or compete with their American counterparts. To ensure it received well-connected students, who either possessed an advanced knowledge of English or needed to learn the language for professional reasons, the British Council made all applicants sit for an admissions exam. They justified the setting of this assessment on the unprecedented demand for the agency's services. On the office's opening day, a 3000-long queue had developed outside the centre, with the police called to maintain order.<sup>44</sup> With two British Council staff and a £10,000 budget, the agency claimed that they did not have the resources to cater for this many Iranians. The initial cohort of 750 students consisted of

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<sup>43</sup> Hand-over notes, 25 May 1962, TNA, BW 49/34.

<sup>44</sup> British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1955-56, TNA, BW 49/17.

higher ability pupils. Yet those who were not of the required standard but possessed social and familial ties to the Shah and the Iranian government were accepted on to the course.<sup>45</sup> All students were required to sit for the Cambridge Certificate in Advanced English. To make their offerings appear more academically rigorous than equivalent American qualifications, the syllabus and exams had been set by the University of Cambridge. British Council officials envisaged that the prestige of this qualification's ties to this renowned higher education institution would deter prospective students from taking similar USIS courses.<sup>46</sup>

Complementing the Cambridge Certificate in Advanced English was the British Council in Iran's cultural activities. These supplemented the agency's teaching courses. They were used to not only improve students' language skills and aid with their professional development, but to also immerse pupils in British culture. The Tehran office showed numerous films and documentaries. These were mainly technical, aimed at the British Council's English language students who needed the Cambridge qualification to pursue higher education in the UK. As many of these pupils were aspiring medics and engineers, films and documentaries were accordingly aimed at these individuals. These included showings of programmes that explored the workings of UK hospitals, British engineering feats and farming practices.<sup>47</sup> Alongside this, British Council officials invited prominent figures from the UK to give talks to their students. Many of these lectures aimed to foster a greater Anglo-Iranian cultural understanding. Speakers included Valery Hovenden, a theatrical actor, director and tutor at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, as well as

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<sup>45</sup> British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1955-56, TNA, BW 49/17.

<sup>46</sup> British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1955-56, TNA, BW 49/17.

<sup>47</sup> British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1956-57, TNA, BW 49/17.

Laurence Lockhart, an Iran expert from the University of Oxford's Persian Studies Department.<sup>48</sup>

Within two to three years of reopening their Tehran office, the British Council aimed to reassert their presence in other major Iranian cities. Prior to their 1952 departure, the agency also had sites in the cities of Esfahan, Mashhad, Tabriz, Shiraz and Rasht.<sup>49</sup> As with their centre in Iran's capital, the other offices in the country would focus on English language teaching. A year after the British Council's return, the then Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, claimed that he had received written correspondence from the Iranian Education Ministry. These letters had urged him to use his ministerial position to compel the British Council to reopen its offices in Iran's provincial cities.<sup>50</sup> As the reopening of the agency's offices outside of Tehran had been a long-term goal, both the UK Embassy and the British Council exploited this development. They had frequently pushed the Foreign Office to get the Treasury's approval for funds for this, even if the budget could only stretch to one officer stationed in each centre.<sup>51</sup> Embassy and British Council officials envisioned the agency's activities and officers 'forming the bulk' of UK diplomatic representation outside Tehran. Khorramshahr, a geopolitically unstable city near the Iraqi border with a large Arab population, aside, they did not see the need for UK consulates in Iran's provincial cities. Embassy officials were convinced that British Council centres would be more useful and better received by the local population. Consulates, they claimed, would be regarded with suspicion, an 'instrument of the UK state.' Their presence would therefore not help to

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<sup>48</sup> British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1955-56, TNA, BW 49/17; Anthony Haigh (Foreign Office, Cultural Relations Department) to John White (British Council, London), 29 October 1958, TNA, BW 49/24.

<sup>49</sup> Memo on the British Council's operations in Iran before 1952, 11 January 1955, TNA, BW 49/13.

<sup>50</sup> Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary) to Paul Grey (Foreign Office, Political Relations Department), 11 June 1956, TNA, BW 49/24.

<sup>51</sup> British Council minute on UK policy in the Middle East, undated, TNA, BW 49/24.

improve Anglo-Iranian relations, cultural or otherwise. In contrast, with its English language teaching and propensity for organising cultural exhibitions, those residing in Iran's provinces would view the British Council as having 'something important to offer.'<sup>52</sup>

The UK Embassy in Iran prioritised the reopening of the Esfahan, Shiraz and Tabriz centres. Its officials were nonplussed about re-establishing the British Council's presence in Rasht and Mashhad. The former was situated in the north, a coastal city on the Caspian Sea far removed from the rest of Iran. The latter was a religious city in the east, deemed to possess little economic or political value.<sup>53</sup> Esfahan, in comparison, was a culturally significant city, second only in size to Tehran. Once the country's capital, the Anglican Church had enjoyed a significant presence there since the eighteenth century. British Council officials hoped that this would boost the potential and reach of its cultural activities.<sup>54</sup> Shiraz, similarly, was deemed to have an equally strong cultural and historical heritage. As it was one of the only Iranian cities outside of Tehran with a university and medical school, British Council officials judged it to be 'much more progressive and advanced' than Iran's other provincial cities. It was, however, the re-establishing of the British Council centre in Tabriz that was the highest priority. The capital of the north-Western Iranian province of Azerbaijan, the city was close to the Soviet border. Both Embassy and British Council officials argued that the city's 300,000 population were susceptible to Communist subversion and influence. Tabriz was isolated geographically, but also culturally and linguistically. The

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<sup>52</sup> Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to Anthony Haigh (Foreign Office, Cultural Relations Department), 26 April 1957, TNA, BW 49/24; Derek Traversi (British Council Representative, Iran) to British Council Overseas Controller B (Controller for Asia, Africa and South America), 1 May 1957, TNA, BW 49/24.

<sup>53</sup> Derek Traversi (British Council Representative, Iran) to Richard Highwood (British Council, Director for Middle East), 15 May 1956, TNA, BW 49/13.

<sup>54</sup> For more on the Anglican Church in Esfahan and Iran more widely please consult: Robin Waterfield, *Christians in Persia* (London, 1973).



majority of its people were Azeri, not Iranian, and unlike the rest of Iran, Farsi was not widely spoken here. The city was also soon to be a major station on the Istanbul-Karachi railway line proposed by Baghdad Pact signatories, with a university on the cusp of expansion.<sup>55</sup>

Due to budget constraints, the UK Embassy in Tehran's initial plan was to approve the opening of British Council centres in Tabriz and one of Esfahan and Shiraz. A full-time staff member, supported by someone on a part time contract, would operate both these centres.<sup>56</sup> Yet the Foreign Office's Political Relations Department deemed it 'extremely important' that all three British Council centres should open in Iran. To ease the financial burden, they successfully pushed for this to occur over several fiscal years. The Tabriz centre opened in January 1957, with the Esfahan and Shiraz offices following in February 1958 and 1959 respectively.<sup>57</sup> Figures from the Foreign Office's Political Relations Department argued that not doing this would be 'highly unsatisfactory.' The city without an office would get upset – not least because of a historical cultural rivalry between Esfahan and Shiraz – but it could also potentially hamper Anglo-Iranian relations. Thanks to the Baghdad Pact, Iran was now a vital UK ally. With the growing prevalence of the anti-British Arab nationalist movement in Egypt, Iraq and Syria, the Shah was one of the only few leaders in the region with a friendly stance towards Britain. It was therefore imperative for

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<sup>55</sup> Derek Traversi (British Council Representative, Iran) to Richard Highwood (British Council, Director for Middle East), 15 May 1956, TNA, BW 49/13; Derek Traversi (British Council Representative, Iran) to Richard Highwood (British Council, Director for Middle East), 20 June 1956, TNA, BW 49/13.

<sup>56</sup> Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to Anthony Haigh (Foreign Office, Cultural Relations Department), 26 April 1957, TNA, BW 49/24.

<sup>57</sup> Greg Warr (Foreign Office, Eastern Department) to British Council (London), 26 November 1956, TNA, BW 49/13; Paul Grey (Foreign Office, Political Relations Department) to Derek Traversi (British Council Representative, Iran), 8 January 1957, TNA, BW 49/13.

British diplomats and officials to compensate for this Anglo-Arab rift by 'redoubling efforts with Iran.'<sup>58</sup>

Through establishing centres in Tehran and other major Iranian cities, the British Council sought to Anglicise Iran's education system. Ties with the Ministry of Education were pivotal here. The agency's figures invited officials from the Iranian government department, as well as schoolteachers deemed supportive of the Shah's regime, to visit the UK and look at the British school system. Impressed with the teaching methods and intellectual rigour of the students, Council officials hoped that these individuals would seek to implement similar practices and policies on their return to Iran. One such visit involved the Head of the Ministry of Education, Ali Mehran. Arriving in the UK for a four-week visit between April and May 1958, British Council officials in London gave him a tour of various schools and universities. Throughout this expedition, figures from the agency invited various senior officials from the UK Ministry of Education to provide him with assistance and advice.<sup>59</sup>

Moreover, the British Council aimed to make British English, as opposed to the American conception peddled by the USIS, Iran's main second language.<sup>60</sup> Seeking to achieve this from within the system, the British Council helped organise residential crash courses in the summer vacation period for Iranian teachers of the English language. They successfully managed to receive support and funding for this from Iran's Ministry of Education. In meetings with their Iranian counterparts, British Council officials justified these sessions on the grounds of a shortage of qualified teachers and the supposed low standard

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<sup>58</sup> Paul Grey (Foreign Office, Political Relations Department) to Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran), 13 November 1956, TNA, BW 49/13.

<sup>59</sup> British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1957-58, TNA, BW 49/17; British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1958-59, TNA, BW 49/17.

<sup>60</sup> Report by George Biddulph (Director of Studies for British Council in Iran) from his visit to Esfahan and Shiraz, 20-25 January 1959, TNA, BW 49/33.

of English teaching.<sup>61</sup> The first summer school was organised for 20-26 June 1957. Taking place in Tehran, it involved 68 teachers from across the country. Daily sessions included a four-hour intensive language class, followed by specialist lectures given by British Council staff, play-readings and wider class discussions. The aim of the latter was to encourage dialogue and debate about the state of English language teaching in Iran. Council officials aimed to dissuade teachers from using the 'direct method' with their students, teaching English by speaking only in this language with no emphasis on spelling and grammar. The British Council in Iran were convinced that teaching the more technical aspects of English was crucial to students' understanding of the language. They deemed it imperative that spelling and grammar should be a pivotal tenet of the English syllabus in Iran.<sup>62</sup>

Further summer schools were held in Esfahan and Shiraz in 1958 and 1959 respectively. The success of these crash courses compelled Iran's Ministry of Education to collaborate further with the British Council, specifically in the new, emerging field of educational television. Capitalising on the apparent success of the BBC Persian Service's *English by Radio*, the Iranian government department wanted the UK agency to produce a similar programme for terrestrial television. In June 1958, the Shah had established TVI, the country's first terrestrial channel. The broadcaster's newly installed executives had immediately petitioned the Ministry of Education for 'educational yet entertaining programmes' broadcast twice weekly that taught viewers. As television usage had increased exponentially in Iran since the beginning of the 1950s, they desired, in particular, a twice-weekly primetime show that instructed viewers on the English language. Recommending the British Council to undertake this activity on their behalf, Education Ministry officials claimed that the UK agency had the means, resources and willingness to do this.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1958-59, TNA, BW 49/17.

<sup>62</sup> British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1957-58, TNA, BW 49/17.

<sup>63</sup> Derek Traversi (British Council Representative, Iran) to the British Council's Education Department, 8 April 1958, TNA, BW 49/15.

British Council officials in Iran concurred with the Ministry of Education's views. While they maintained that such a programme would not be an effective teaching tool, the show could be used as a vehicle to showcase and promote the UK in Iran.<sup>64</sup> Again, they aimed to plug a gap left by the Americans. The use of television as a pedagogical and soft power tool was something the USIS had not pursued in Iran. Teaching English by television, British Council officials were convinced that they could promote UK accents and spellings, helping to ensure that these dominated over American equivalents.<sup>65</sup> More broadly, senior British Council figures in London argued that the programme provided a 'unique opportunity' for the agency. It was the first project of its kind for the British Council. Not only did this initiative have the potential to build ties between the agency and Iranian television broadcasters, but it could also be used as an experiment. Should the programme be a resounding success, its programming and production could be amended and rolled out to other countries.<sup>66</sup>

With these considerations in mind, British Council officials in both London and Tehran proceeded to develop the programme. Entitled *English by Television*, they aimed for it to be broadcast twice a week. Appealing to both adults and children, the first part of the programme targeted beginners, with elementary teaching sessions. The second half focused on more conversational and fluent speakers. It was often composed of short 12-15-minute

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<sup>64</sup> Richard Highwood (British Council, Director of Middle East) to the British Council Education Department (London), 18 July 1958, TNA, BW 49/15; Annabelle Knatchbull-Hugessen (British Council, Iran) to Derek Morgan (British Council, linguistic adviser to the Education Division), 24 November 1958, TNA, BW 49/15; Robert Close (British Council, London) to British Council Education Division, 27 November 1958, TNA, BW 49/15.

<sup>65</sup> Derek Traversi (British Council Representative, Iran) to the British Council's Education Department (London), 8 April 1958, TNA, BW 49/15; Record of British Council memo to all British Council offices, 20 March 1958, TNA, BW 49/15.

<sup>66</sup> Richard Highwood (British Council, Director of Middle East) to the British Council Personnel Department, 23 July 1958, TNA, BW 49/15.

films that showcased life in the UK, introducing new vocabulary to viewers in the process.<sup>67</sup> From the outset, British Council officials in Iran were beset with budgetary problems. Prior to the transmission of the first episode, staff salaries and the cost of promoting the programme had forced the agency to take money away from the British Council's Turkey offices.<sup>68</sup> They did not feel that they were in a position to request financial assistance from the Iranian government, either. British Council officials suspected that this would antagonise Ministry of Education officials, compelling them to turn to the Americans, who could offer a similar programme for free.<sup>69</sup> Compounding this was the BBC's unwillingness to assist the agency with this television programme. *English by Television* was not received well by the broadcaster, who claimed that the British Council had 'invaded their territory.'<sup>70</sup> With the BBC refusing to provide technical advice and assistance, the British Council in Iran were forced to rely on their own staff and contacts, many of which had little-to-no prior experience of working in television.<sup>71</sup>

Yet figures from both the UK Embassy in Tehran and the Foreign Office's Press Section were nonetheless enthusiastic at the prospect of broadcasting an English language-teaching programme to Iranian viewers. Despite the meagre resources at their disposal,

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<sup>67</sup> Annabelle Knatchbull-Hugessen (British Council, Iran) to Derek Morgan (British Council, linguistic adviser to the Education Division), 24 November 1958, TNA, BW 49/15.

<sup>68</sup> British Council Middle East Department (London) to British Council in Iran, 11 June 1958, TNA, BW 49/15; Richard Highwood (British Council, Director of Middle East) to the British Council Personnel Department (London), 23 July 1958, TNA, BW 49/15.

<sup>69</sup> Derek Traversi (British Council Representative, Iran) to the British Council's Education Department, 25 May 1958, TNA, BW 49/15.

<sup>70</sup> Richard Highwood (British Council, Director of Middle East) to Charles Wilmott (British Council, Iran), 31 August 1959, TNA, BW 49/15.

<sup>71</sup> Simon Stevens (*English by Radio* producer, BBC) to David Speares (British Embassy, Tehran), 5 June 1958, TNA, BW 49/15; George Biddulph (Director of Studies for British Council in Iran) to the British Council Middle East Department (London), 30 October 1958, TNA, BW 49/15.

both pledged to assist the British Council in 'any way they can.'<sup>72</sup> The Embassy approached officials they deemed best suited to write, produce and present *English by Television* on the British Council's behalf. Due to his previous experience working on a similar show in West Germany, they employed a visiting UK English Literature lecturer at the University of Tehran, Allan Grant, to produce the programme. Professor John Mills, likewise, was employed to present *English by Television* and work on devising scripts. He was an English Language lecturer about to spend a year at the University of Shiraz.<sup>73</sup>

While the Embassy focused on securing staff, the Foreign Office's Press Section paid attention to the content of *English by Television* episodes. They were determined to make this programme 'as attractive as possible' despite its comparatively low budget of £5000 per annum for a television show. Episodes should emphasise and extol the virtues of life in the UK, especially in London, as this is what most Iranians would be most familiar with. In this vein, *English by Television's* titles and credits should therefore showcase Britain's capital city.<sup>74</sup> Both of these displayed stills of Westminster Bridge, the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey, Buckingham Palace, a stereotypical London police officer, and a London bus driving across Piccadilly Circus.<sup>75</sup>

Starting on 4 October 1958, one day after TVI began transmitting to the public, *English by Television* was shown on Saturday and Tuesday evenings from 7.30-8pm.<sup>76</sup> The

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<sup>72</sup> David Speares (British Embassy, Tehran) to Simon Stevens (*English by Radio* producer, BBC), 31 May 1958, TNA, BW 49/15.

<sup>73</sup> Richard Highwood (British Council, Director of Middle East) to the British Council Personnel Department, 23 July 1958, TNA, BW 49/15.

<sup>74</sup> Press Section, Foreign Office to British Embassy (Tehran), 10 June 1958, TNA, BW 49/15.

<sup>75</sup> Titling film for *English by Television* presented by Television Iran by arrangement with the British Council in Iran, 14 July 1958, TNA, BW 49/15.

<sup>76</sup> John Mills (British Council, *English by Television*) to British Council Education Department (London), 30 September 1958, TNA, BW 49/15.

first series ran for 9 months, until June 1959. There was then a three-month hiatus where TVI would show reruns of the most popular episodes, followed by the airing of the second series from September 1959. The break was used as an opportunity by *English by Television* staff to plan, write and produce more episodes.<sup>77</sup> These would usually discuss grammatical rules, structure and intricacies of the English language. Programmes would be dedicated to tenses, vowels, consonants and the difficult *th* sound, with diagrams and visual cues used to assist viewers with this.<sup>78</sup> To showcase British norms, cultures, values and way of life, each *English by Television* would have a particular theme. There were editions dedicated to the works and life of both William Shakespeare and Charles Dickens, as well as programmes centred on life in Wales and Scotland and Northern Ireland.<sup>79</sup>

To cement the British Council's activities in Iran, the Foreign Office sought to formalise Anglo-Iranian cultural relations through the signing of a cultural convention. This agreement would pledge both countries to undertake cultural, scientific and educational exchanges, as well as organise exhibitions, concerts and shows. Arranging all of this would be an Anglo-Iranian 'special commission.' Meeting bi-annually – once a year in each country - this would be comprised of high-level government and cultural officials.<sup>80</sup> The agreement was signed at the Iranian Embassy in London on 6 May 1959, during the Shah's state visit to the UK. The signatories included the Iranian monarch, Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd,

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<sup>77</sup> John Mills (British Council, *English by Television*) to Richard Highwood (British Council, Director for the Middle East), 5 October 1958, TNA, BW 49/15.

<sup>78</sup> Derek Traversi (British Council Representative, Iran) to Richard Highwood (British Council, Director for the Middle East), 7 December 1958, TNA, BW 49/15.

<sup>79</sup> John Mills (British Council, *English by Television*) to Robert Curling (British Council, Films Department), 10 December 1958, TNA, BW 49/15.

<sup>80</sup> Telegram from the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Foreign Office's Cultural Relations Department, 30 August 1958, TNA, FO 924/1235.

Iran's then Prime Minister Manoucher Eqbal and the then Iranian Ambassador to the UK, Hossein Ghods-Nakhai.<sup>81</sup>

The impetus to sign such a bilateral cultural convention initially came from the Iranian government. Officials from the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs initially approached their counterparts in the UK Foreign Office to request that such an agreement should be devised, negotiated and signed. It formed part of their broader efforts to arrange similar pacts with other countries. By 1958, Iran had already reached agreements with, among others, India, Brazil and Japan. Iranian officials were also in the process of negotiating agreements with Sweden and Spain.<sup>82</sup> The British Embassy in Iran urged the Foreign Office to agree to the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' request. Iran had already signed similar agreements with other 'free world' nations and as a Baghdad Pact ally it would be 'politically invidious if Britain did not follow suit.'<sup>83</sup> Officials from the Foreign Office's Political Relations and Eastern departments, however, were convinced that an Anglo-Iranian Cultural Convention would not have any benefits for UK-Iran cultural ties in practice. The British Council played a prominent role in Iran anyway and there was no need to formalise this. Such conventions were only needed to ratify cultural initiatives that were in the planning stages.<sup>84</sup> These agreements therefore did little to improve Anglo-Iranian Cultural Relations.'<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Minute from Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), 14 May 1959, TNA, FO 924/1235.

<sup>82</sup> Geoffrey Harrison (British Ambassador, Iran) to Anthony Haigh (Foreign Office, Cultural Relations Department), 17 November 1958, TNA, FO 924/1235.

<sup>83</sup> George Hillier British Embassy, Tehran) to David West (Foreign Office, Cultural Relations Department), 5 September 1958, TNA, FO 924/1235; British Council Overseas Controller B (Controller for Asia, Africa and South America) to Greg Warr (Foreign Office, Eastern Department), 11 November 1958, TNA, FO 924/1235.

<sup>84</sup> Greg Warr (Foreign Office, Eastern Department) to George Hillier (British Embassy, Tehran), 3 September 1958, TNA, FO 924/1235.

<sup>85</sup> David West (Foreign Office, Cultural Relations Department) to George Hillier (British Embassy, Tehran), 3 September 1958, TNA, FO 924/1235.



Yet both departments, as well as British Council and Embassy figures in Tehran, conceded that an Anglo-Iranian Cultural Convention would be politically beneficial. Since 1955, the British Council's presence in Iran had exponentially increased. Such an agreement would make it much more difficult for the agency to leave Iran again.<sup>86</sup> Likewise, the signing of the Anglo-Iranian Cultural Convention would help the British government with their wider aim of improving UK-Iran relations at all levels. The commission would bring together high-ranking political and cultural figures from both countries, boosting elite-level links.<sup>87</sup> The Convention, in particular, would appease the Shah. Since his 1942 coronation, the monarch had placed a great importance on cultural matters as a means of promoting national unity and Iran abroad. As well as 'getting one over the Americans' – who the Iranians had not approached to sign a similar agreement – the proposed pact gave the Foreign Office the opportunity to help shape Iranian nationalism. Signing the Anglo-Iranian Cultural Convention would make the Iranians feel like 'partners' with Britain. This would improve popular perceptions of the UK in the country, while also ensuring geopolitical stability, making it less likely in the near future that the Shah would accept Soviet support.<sup>88</sup>

### **The State Department and the USIS' Response to British Cultural Diplomacy in Iran**

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<sup>86</sup> Derek Traversi (British Council Representative, Iran) to Richard Highwood (British Council, Director of Middle East), 31 December 1958, TNA, FO 924/1258.

<sup>87</sup> Geoffrey Harrison (British Ambassador, Iran) to Anthony Haigh (Foreign Office, Cultural Relations Department), 31 December 1958, TNA, FO 924/1258.

<sup>88</sup> Geoffrey Harrison (British Ambassador, Iran) to Anthony Haigh (Foreign Office, Cultural Relations Department), 31 December 1958, TNA, FO 924/1258; Derek Traversi (British Council Representative, Iran) to Richard Highwood (British Council, Director of Middle East), 31 December 1958, TNA, FO 924/1258.

From the 1953 expansion of US cultural diplomacy in Iran, the USIS were wary of British initiatives in this field. Not only did they fear that they would diminish America's newly found prominent role and influence in Iran, but they could also antagonise the Iranian public and destabilise the regime. Many in the country still resented the British government for its historical meddling in Iran. Should the UK become an influential force in Iran again, USIS figures were convinced that this would compel many Iranians to turn towards Soviet-inspired Communism.<sup>89</sup> Yet to USIS figures, it was imperative that both countries maintained the mirage of a united front to the Iranians and the Soviet Union. If they became aware of any Anglo-American divisions, USIS figures suspected that the Shah and his allies would exploit these tensions. To exploit the two Western powers, Iran's elite would play both countries off against each other. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, could use the rivalry within the 'special relationship' to drive a wedge between the Cold War allies in the Middle East, undermining economic interests and regional stability in tandem. While the UK placed a great value on the region as an oil source, the US was more focused on preventing Middle Eastern nations from succumbing to Communism.<sup>90</sup>

With regards to cultural diplomacy in Iran, therefore, the USIS in Iran sought to negate the effect of Britain's initiatives. From the British Council's 1955 reopening of its Tehran office, figures from the American agency sought to counteract the UK institute's attempts to mould and shape the Iranian education system. In discussions with their USIS counterparts, the British Council had claimed that they did not want to compete with them. They maintained that their cultural diplomacy efforts in Iran now operated on a similar level to those of France and West Germany. While both these European nations had focused on the promotion of their respective fashions and music, the British Council, from its 1955

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<sup>89</sup> American Embassy (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 14 December 1954, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>90</sup> Edward Wells (PAO, USIS Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 9 May 1955, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

return, had confined itself to the teaching of the English language. This paled in comparison to their activities from its 1934 arrival to its 1952 departure.<sup>91</sup>

Regardless, the USIS still feared that the British Council's return to Iran was motivated by the UK Foreign Office's determination to supplant American cultural diplomacy in the country. Despite claims to the contrary, the USIS suspected the UK agency of seeking to encroach on their territory. It was charging the same price as the American institute for English language teaching. The British Council was also offering more advanced and prestigious qualifications, such as the Cambridge Certificate, that the USIS was unable to match and provide. Having seen a reduction in their average class size in Tehran from 90 to 25 from the British Council's return, the USIS conceded that the UK agency possessed 'excellent personnel with even better ideas.' Compounding this was their fear of what would happen to their English language teaching initiatives when the British Council expanded. As well as seeking to reopen its offices in some of Iran's other main cities, it was also looking to develop its Tehran centre, catering for up to 800 students at any one time.<sup>92</sup> The British Council's return was 'unhelpful yet stimulating' for the USIS in Iran. As illustrated by the significant reduction in the average class size, many Iranians would go to the British Council instead of the USIS and its affiliate, the Iran-America Society. At the same time, though, the American agency welcomed the competition, convinced it would prevent them from becoming complacent. Officials were now doubly determined to do their utmost to positively promote US values, cultures and lifestyles at the expense of the British equivalent.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> USIS (Tehran) to the State Department, 26 October 1955, NAII, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>92</sup> USIS (Tehran) to the State Department, 26 October 1955, NAII, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>93</sup> USIS (Tehran) to the State Department, 26 October 1955, NAII, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

Originally, USIS figures in Iran adopted a tentative approach towards dealing with the British Council's return to the country. They began by seeking to discourage the UK agency from expanding beyond Tehran. In November 1954, the USIS announced that it would close its libraries and reading rooms in the cities of Shiraz, Ahwaz, Kerman, Babolsar and Mashhad. The American agency's decision here stemmed from their determination to prevent the British Council from using the presence of these American libraries as a precedent to open their own. USIS figures feared that if their UK counterparts re-established its activities outside Tehran that it would have a detrimental effect on the activities of the Iran-America Society in the provinces. As there was not enough space in many of these cities for both UK and US cultural institutions, there was a risk that the American bi-national centres would be 'crowded out.'<sup>94</sup> Cementing this further, officials from the US Embassy in Tehran, at the USIS' behest, informed their British counterparts that Iranian laws would hinder UK cultural initiatives beyond Iran's capital. During the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis, Mossagdeh had imposed legislation limiting foreign activities beyond Tehran. As these laws had supposedly not been repealed, USIS figures claimed that British cultural programmes would require tacit local and national government permission, which would take considerable time to be granted.<sup>95</sup>

Such scaremongering by the USIS, however, proved ineffective. Questioning the legality of cultural activities by overseas agents beyond Tehran, officials from the British Council in Iran were informed that any such anti-foreign laws imposed by Mossagdeh had been repealed.<sup>96</sup> These guarantees compelled the UK agency to re-open their Esfahan,

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<sup>94</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 14 November 1955, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>95</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 3 March 1959, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>96</sup> Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to Anthony Haigh (Foreign Office, Cultural Relations Department), 26 April 1957, TNA, BW 49/24.

Shiraz and Tabriz offices.<sup>97</sup> The USIS, accordingly, adopted a tougher stance towards dealing with the British Council. They made a concerted effort to nullify the UK agency's attempts to engage with Iran's older, more advanced students. Seeking to supersede the British Council's efforts to influence the Iranian education system, the USIS sought to expand the provision of technical and vocational learning in Iran. The American agency focused their efforts on the Abadan Technical College. With a small intake of 110 students, it was a place of learning that specialised in engineering and technical drawing courses. The college was also in the vicinity of Iran's oilfields, making it perfectly placed to ensure students' future employment prospects.<sup>98</sup> The USIS hoped to expand the institution, providing it with the financial means and equipment to cater for 650 pupils per annum. The American agency was also relying on the consortium of Western petroleum companies - especially the US-based Standard Oil of New Jersey - controlling Iran's oil industry to subsidise the running of the college. In exchange for \$500,000 over a five-year period, the USIS argued that they would have a steady supply of much-needed Iranian engineers.<sup>99</sup> Cementing the American influence over Abadan Technical College would be a board of 12 governors appointed by the USIS to run the institution. Its officials aimed to appoint between

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<sup>97</sup> Derek Traversi (British Council Representative, Iran) to Richard Highwood (British Council, Director for Middle East), 15 May 1956, TNA, BW 49/13; Derek Traversi (British Council Representative, Iran) to Richard Highwood (British Council, Director for Middle East), 20 June 1956, TNA, BW 49/13.

<sup>98</sup> William Rountree (Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs) to Loy Henderson (US Ambassador, Iran), 24 March 1958, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US Education in Iran (1955-1960).

<sup>99</sup> William Rountree (Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs) to Loy Henderson (US Ambassador, Iran), 24 March 1958, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US Education in Iran (1955-1960).

6 and 8 prominent US educational and cultural figures, along with 4 to 6 pro-Western Iranians.<sup>100</sup>

The expansion and shaping of Abadan Technical College 'along American lines' was part of a broader effort to appease the Shah. To combat the shortage of technical skills in the country, the Iranian monarch had vociferously petitioned the USIS for an American-style college and university in Iran. With US support and assistance, he was confident that the institution could quickly gain significant prestige, shaping and influencing how people were taught across the whole region. Preceding the Shah's reign there had been a US government endowed institution, Alborz College, in Mashhad. Despite being closed by the Iranian monarch's father, Reza Khan, in 1940, many of the institute's alumni now occupied prominent roles in business, politics and medicine in and around the city. Many of these individuals were much more enlightened, pro-Western and keen for Iran to develop, and the Shah regarded their US-style education as being the main determinant behind their viewpoint.<sup>101</sup> Yet USIS officials in Iran also regarded the expansion and moulding of Abadan Technical College as a 'strategic opportunity' to undermine British cultural diplomacy in Iran. The college would act as an instrument of social mobility, empowering Iranians residing in Abadan to progress and improve. When the oil industry was under the control of the UK government-backed Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, those living in the region were deprived of technical and engineering training. British and overseas workers were instead instructed and employed in these roles. Many Iranians resented the UK government for this unfavourable treatment, arguing that this made them second-class citizens in their own region. Gifting

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<sup>100</sup> Memo of conversation between Loy Henderson (US Ambassador, Iran), Ralph Hutchinson (educational advisor to the Iranian oil consortium) and Grant Mouser (Officer in Charge of Iranian Affairs), 8 February 1958, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US Education in Iran (1955-1960).

<sup>101</sup> American Consulate (Mashhad) to State Department, 18 October 1956, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US Education in Iran (1955-1960).

local people what they had been previously deprived of, then, would create considerable goodwill towards the US at Britain's expense.<sup>102</sup>

USIS officials in Iran, likewise, sought to counteract the British Council's activities through working more extensively than before with the University of Tehran. Having seen the success of the USIS' efforts to modernise the institution, the UK agency had made initial steps to establish links with the higher education institution's Teacher Training College. It had offered to provide instructors and guest lectures to its students, immersing them in the British education system and teaching techniques.<sup>103</sup> The USIS responded to this by working with the UK agency on an 'informal, friendly, but official basis.' In so doing, they hoped to get themselves in a position where they could peddle negative perceptions of Britain among Iranian students. The American agency would then seek to continue engaging with the University of Tehran on its own terms, fostering favourable views and goodwill towards the US in the process.<sup>104</sup> USIS figures in Iran encouraged their British counterparts to provide a course on Public Relations and Journalism from 1957 onwards. Aimed at undergraduates, the course covered information activities as a whole. Students were expected to study, among other things, journalism theory, radio script writing, studio engineering, photography and motion pictures. While the USIS said they would assist, pledging to provide four teachers over two years, they insisted that the British Council take the lead on employing

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<sup>102</sup> Memo of conversation between Loy Henderson (US Ambassador, Iran), Ralph Hutchinson (educational advisor to the Iranian oil consortium) and Grant Mouser (Officer in Charge of Iranian Affairs), 8 February 1958, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US Education in Iran (1955-1960); William Rountree (Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs) to Loy Henderson (US Ambassador, Iran), 24 March 1958, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US Education in Iran (1955-1960).

<sup>103</sup> British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1956-57, TNA, BW 49/17.

<sup>104</sup> USIS (Tehran) to the State Department, 26 October 1955, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960); USIS (Tehran) to State Department, 24 January 1956, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

teachers and shaping the syllabus. The American agency's support 'in spirit' stemmed from its desire to dissociate itself from the initiative. The USIS sought to use the course's blatant counter-subversive tone and content as a means of reminding and cementing the notion of 'perfidious Albion' in Iranian peoples' minds. It wanted to underline to Iran's citizens that the British government still sought to influence and meddle in their country's political affairs.<sup>105</sup>

In promoting Britain's culture, values and way of life in Iran, the British Council, clearly, played a subordinate role to the USIS in Iran. Despite this secondary role, the UK agency was successfully able to carve out a distinct space for itself, specifically in the field of English language teaching. In so doing, the British Council was able to implement policies and initiatives that its vastly better funded American counterpart, the USIS, was unwilling or unable to do. Its officials focused on educating proficient Iranian speakers in Tehran and other major Iranian cities, instructing Iranian teachers of the English language in modern pedagogical practices, and produced a bi-weekly educational programme, *English by Television*. Broadcast on the terrestrial TVI channel, the latter showcased British culture and taught viewers the basic fundamentals of the English language. This chapter, as well as preceding sections, has highlighted the numerous, vast and comprehensive soft power initiatives implemented by American and British policymakers between 1953 and 1960. All of these have sought to persuade and attract Iranians away from Communism and more towards their respective norms, values, cultures and ways of life. The following chapter will bring all of these key themes and arguments together, assessing the impact of these initiatives.

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<sup>105</sup> USIS (Tehran) to State Department, 6 July 1956, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US Education in Iran (1955-1960).



## **Chapter VI: The Impact of American and British Soft Power in Iran**

*'The USIS is by far the largest foreign information programme in Iran, a fact which, in itself, constitutes a certain evidence of effectiveness.'*<sup>1</sup>

Roughly once per decade, USIA officials in Washington visited Iran to inspect the USIS' operations in the country. The reviews provided them with the means to assess how effective the USIS had been in achieving their wider objectives in Iran, as well as the extent to which the agency had engaged with the Iranian government and citizenry at large. The quote at the top of the page was an excerpt taken from the USIA's October 1959 inspection. The report was correct in asserting that the USIS was conducting the largest cultural diplomacy programme of any foreign power in Iran. Since August 1953, the agency had implemented a series of initiatives to contain and combat the Communist threat while also promoting the American way of life.

As demonstrated in chapters II and III of this thesis, USIS officials collaborated extensively with their Iranian government counterparts in the Department of Press and Broadcasting (DPB) to achieve this goal. Its senior figures were responsible for running the state-run broadcaster Radio Tehran. Together with the DPB, the USIS helped form the Information Council. Composed of American and Iranian members, the advisory group strove to boost Radio Tehran's capabilities. They approved the secondment of officials from the broadcaster to be sent to the US for training; organised the building of a new studio and transmitter to improve Radio Tehran's reach and quality of programmes; and permitted the USIS to have a significant editorial say over the broadcaster's programming. Promoting the

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<sup>1</sup> Inspection report on USIS Iran, 28 November 1959, College Park, Maryland, National Archives II (hereafter document, date, NAII), USIA papers, Iran, Inspection Reports (1958-1962).

American way of life in Iran only emerged as a key USIS objective with the January 1955 installation of Robert Payne as PAO. From his appointment, the agency worked increasingly with the Iranian higher education sector – most notably the University of Tehran – to shape the country's education system. An exchange programme was put in place to encourage American and Iranian academics to visit Iran and the US respectively. Such endeavours, the USIS hoped, would encourage Iran's universities to modernise. Beyond higher education, figures from the American agency implemented a series of initiatives to foster a culture of extra-curricular activities among the Iranian youth, while also promoting US and Iranian technical assistance programmes. With regards to the latter, the USIS aimed to showcase the United States' willingness to improve and modernise Iran to the Iranian people.

Second in size and scope to the USIS' cultural diplomacy and propaganda initiatives in Iran was Britain's soft power programme. Chapter IV focused specifically on the UK Foreign Office's Information Research Department's attempts to work with SAVAK, the Iranian secret and intelligence service, to produce and disseminate anti-Communist propaganda across Iran. Chapter V, on the other hand, highlighted how the British Council undertook the bulk of the UK's cultural diplomacy in the country. After departing Iran in November 1952, the organisation reopened its Tehran office in February 1955. Budget constraints forced its officials to focus its English language teaching specifically on advanced speakers; those with governmental connections; and career people who needed to develop their language skills for professional reasons. In a bid to make UK English, as opposed to the American equivalent, Iran's main second language, the British Council opened offices in Esfahan, Shiraz and Tabriz. Using their presence in these cities as a springboard, it helped organise residential crash courses in the summer vacation period for Iranian teachers of the English language. These sessions sought to shape the pedagogical approach taken by these educators, recommending modern teaching practices and the need to emphasise grammar and sentence structure in lessons. The success of these crash courses compelled Iran's Ministry of Education to collaborate further with the British Council, specifically in the new, emerging field of educational television.

The aim of this chapter is to assess the impact of American and British soft power initiatives in Iran.<sup>2</sup> It highlights how British and American diplomats and officials judged whether their nations' respective cultural diplomacy and propaganda programmes were successful. In so doing it assesses how these views shaped subsequent UK and US soft power initiatives in the country. The chapter is divided into four sections. Tackling their two main aims in turn – namely the containment of Communism and the promotion of the American way of life - the first two cover the USIS and the USIA's perceptions of American cultural diplomacy in Iran. The third and fourth sections consider the UK Foreign Office and British Council views on UK cultural diplomacy in Iran and the extent to which their initiatives matched those of their American counterparts.

Both the USIS and the British Council were convinced that their initiatives had made some progress in enhancing their respective countries' cultural and mutual understanding with Iran. While, however, their schemes were largely met well by Iranian government elites, it is difficult to decipher the reception they received among the Iranian public. Both agencies did not do enough to accurately engage popular views. Not only did the USIS and the British Council presume that the government's perspectives were identical to the public's, both bodies also encountered barriers to uncovering popular views. Crucially, the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, had outlawed the monitoring of audio and visual broadcasts by foreign powers. This impinged on the feedback the USIS and the British Council were able to receive on their work with Radio Tehran and *English by Television* respectively. Both agencies were therefore forced to rely on listener and viewer letters, an unrepresentative, self-selecting measure of gauging popular views.

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<sup>2</sup> There are certain methodological challenges to assessing the impact of cultural diplomacy. As these types of policies are abstract and intangible, there is no clear way to specifically measure their effectiveness. For a more in-depth analysis on the difficulties of researching soft power more broadly, please refer to pages 14-16 in the introductory chapter.

The USIS' initiatives were further constrained by the Iranian government's actions. The Shah and his acolytes were happy to cooperate with the agency to protect the regime and contain the Communist threat. Yet they prevented the USIS from operating independently to achieve these objectives, suspecting the agency of seeking to destabilise the Iranian government. Throughout the 1950s, moreover, USIS activities were limited by its budget. As the decade drew to a close, congressional pressure, along with the whims of USIA figures in Washington, culminated in the USIS having its budget slashed. These austerity measures resulted in the agency's officials in Iran reducing the scale and scope of initiatives that sought to promote the American way of life in Iran. The British Council's activities, similarly, were beset by financial troubles, albeit on a worse scale than the USIS. It meant that limited scripts and poor production values plagued their flagship initiative, the broadcasting of the bi-weekly *English by Television*. Senior British Council figures in London rejected requests for money by the Tehran office to professionalise the programme and employ more staff. They deemed the initiative to not be in the organisation's broader remit and called for the agency to stick to English language teaching and promoting British culture. Both of these objectives were also limited by the British Council's low budget. It meant that the UK agency could not compete or match the initiatives undertaken by their American counterparts. From the British Council's absence before 1955 and its smaller-scale return, the USIS was now the dominant Western exponent of cultural diplomacy in Iran.

### **The USIA, USIS and the Containment of Communism in Iran**

Despite regarding their cultural diplomacy programme in Iran as being in its formative stage, USIA officials in Washington were convinced that the USIS had made considerable progress. The agency had played a substantial role in easing Iran's transition from its 'feudal and Islamic roots' into the 'modern world.' Through the USIS' initiatives, USIA figures maintained that they had helped 'foster an understanding of American and Western objectives.' In spite of the high levels of Soviet propaganda, and compared to its position

several years previously, Iran had made a 'remarkable comeback.' Their activities in the country were supported by the regime's willingness to engage with the US. Eager to receive American military and economic aid, as well as become the US' key regional ally, the Iranian government were only too happy to assist the USIS with their activities.<sup>3</sup> Officials from the American Embassy in Tehran concurred. In a telegram to the State Department, they argued that Iran's increasingly pro-Western stance in the Cold War was down to the US engaging the Iranian public. Thanks to the USIS' collaborative efforts with Radio Tehran, the country's people were now more sceptical towards Tudeh propaganda, aware of its close links with the Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup>

Arguably one of the USIS' biggest successes was its work with Radio Tehran and its provincial satellite stations. According to a memo sent to Washington, each station by the late 1950s was carrying 136 hours of content produced or authorised by the agency per month on average.<sup>5</sup> Complementing this was the increasing closeness and collusion between USIS and DPB officials. One such collaborative project was the show *Fahrnabaz*, a children's programme set in Antiquity about an Iranian hero fighting the invading Macedonian forces led by Alexander the Great. In writing and producing *Fahrnabaz*, USIS and DPB figures aimed to promote Iranian national identity and independence, deterring the country's youth from advocating Communist ideals.<sup>6</sup> The USIS, though, had even greater

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<sup>3</sup> Inspection report on USIS Iran, 28 November 1959, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Inspection Reports (1958-1962).

<sup>4</sup> American Embassy (Tehran) to the State Department, 23 March 1955, Oxford, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1955-1957, Near East Region; Iran; Iraq, Volume XII (hereafter document, date, *FRUS*, year, volume).

<sup>5</sup> USIS (Tehran) to the USIA (Washington), 1 July 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>6</sup> Monthly highlights report of USIS Iran operations for August 1958, 15 September 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

influence after the DPB's 1959 restructuring of Iranian radio. Instead of focusing its efforts on Radio Tehran, the government department opted to give more prominence to provincial stations. These satellite broadcasters were no longer just in the larger cities of Esfahan, Mashhad and Shiraz, with stations increasingly established in smaller settlements such as Rasht, Resiah and Kerman. Compared to previously, the DPB provided greater autonomy to these satellite broadcasters to provide more specialised regional news programming. Per the Iranian government department's recommendation, USIS-funded-or-produced shows complemented this local content. As well as programmes like *Fahrnabaz*, the American agency peddled programming that aimed to foster unfavourable views towards the Soviet Union and praised the Shah's regime.<sup>7</sup>

The DPB clearly enjoyed working with the USIS. In a letter from its head of department, Nosratollah Moinian, to the American agency's Tehran office, the DPB chief praised the actions of his USIS counterparts. He claimed that the American organisation had 'directed the Iranian public towards a better life, furthering their desire for cooperation and progress.'<sup>8</sup> Such views were supported by the observations made by the USIA's inspection team. They noted how the DPB was relying extensively on USIS material to such an extent that it was difficult to distinguish between US and Iranian-produced content.<sup>9</sup> Yet despite the USIA and Moinian's praise, the USIS found it difficult to judge the impact of their initiatives. The Shah had outlawed the monitoring of all audio-visual content in Iran out of fear that this information could be used to influence and endanger his regime. As such, there was no effective, independent means for the USIS to gauge listener views or the popularity of its

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<sup>7</sup> Monthly highlights report of USIS Iran operations for December 1958, 19 January 1959, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>8</sup> Monthly highlights report of USIS Iran operations for April 1959, 27 May 1959, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>9</sup> Inspection report on USIS Iran, 28 November 1959, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Inspection Reports (1958-1962).

programming. The agency, accordingly, turned to listener letters as a key performance indicator, despite the fact that correspondents' views might not be representative of the wider listener base. The USIS' attempts at accessing these, however, were blighted by the DPB. Despite repeated requests, the American agency was not permitted access to listener letters, with no explanation given for this policy. USIS officials were instead provided with selected letters and DPB assurances that correspondence praised USIS radio shows.<sup>10</sup> One such example was a note congratulating producers on broadcasting *Khosh-Ghadam Family*. Broadcast bi-weekly, this was a comedy devised and produced with considerable USIS input and one, which the DPB claimed, received more fan mail than any other show. The letter in question stated that all of the writer's family sit down to listen and that the programme acts as a template on how to live life.<sup>11</sup>

The only survey the USIS was allowed to undertake regarding radio programming in Iran was a limited one on listening habits. This, though, was constrained by the fact that the agency was only permitted to ask visitors to the USIS libraries or Iran-America Society offices to participate. Out of 420 respondents – all literate, urban and middle class - 88% claimed that they only listen to Radio Tehran. Excluding respondents from the nation's capital, this figure rose to 97%. Likewise, 67% claimed that they relied on Radio Tehran for news, with roughly a third of respondents stating that they relied on print journalism. More concerning for the USIS, though, was that only 28% claimed they regularly listened to the American agency's programmes on Radio Tehran, compared to 83% who listen to DPB content. While a gulf here was to be expected – the USIS' programming was much more highbrow – figures from the American agency were concerned that this gap was too high. Compounding these concerns was the survey's focus on middle-class literate men who

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<sup>10</sup> Monthly highlights report of USIS Iran operations for November 1958, 15 December 1958, NAIL, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>11</sup> Monthly highlights report of USIS Iran operations for November 1958, 15 December 1958, NAIL, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

attended USIS centres. Members of this societal group tended to be more pro-US anyway. Taken on a larger scale – with the incorporation of, among others, women and the working classes – it was more than likely that the USIS' programming on Iranian radio was not particularly popular with society at large.<sup>12</sup>

Outside of Iranian radio, however, the USIS found it difficult to promote the broader American foreign policy goal of containing Communism. In their 1959 inspection report, USIA figures had noted the absence of other initiatives to combat the threat of Soviet-inspired Communism in Iran. Besides working with DPB, the showing of newsreels in Iranian cinemas nationwide was the only continuing operation undertaken by the USIS in Iran in this field. These promoted American progress, criticised Soviet policies and praised the Shah's attempts at modernising Iran.<sup>13</sup> Inspectors accordingly questioned the lack of policies to counter Communism in Iran that did not involve the Iranian government in some way. They bemoaned the lack of, among other things, a sustained, coordinated book translation programme, as well as a scarcity of mobile units touring the country with anti-Soviet materials and exhibits. Such initiatives had been cornerstones of America's cultural diplomacy programme in 1952, the year of the last inspection. During this period, it had been the US Embassy, not the USIS, which had devised and presided over these initiatives. USIA inspectors dismissed the USIS' claims that they did not have the budget to pursue these or similar policies. Instead, they deemed the agency's officials in Iran unenthused by these initiatives or doubtful of their effectiveness.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Survey on radio listening habits in Iran, 3 March 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, International Surveys and Research Reports (1951-1970).

<sup>13</sup> Inspection report on USIS Iran, 28 November 1959, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Inspection Reports (1958-1962).

<sup>14</sup> Inspection report on USIS Iran, 28 November 1959, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Inspection Reports (1958-1962).



Despite USIA pressure to implement other longstanding initiatives to counter Communism in Iran, the USIS feared that such policies would antagonise Iranian government officials. Protesting to the USIA office in Washington, they argued that they could only implement such initiatives through collaborating with the Iranian government. On occasions when the USIS sought to work independently, they had been met with government opposition and accusations that they sought to undermine the regime. Such paranoia was a consequence of the August 1953 US-backed coup. As the Americans had worked clandestinely with the British to topple Mohammad Mossagdeh's regime, current Iranian government officials, while largely pro-US, feared the same could happen to them.<sup>15</sup> Attempts to try and promote the Eisenhower Doctrine in Iran, for example, failed due to this paranoia. In January 1957, the then US President, Dwight D. Eisenhower, made a speech to Congress outlining the US' approach to the Middle East. With the decline in Britain and France's standing in the region in the wake of the Suez Crisis, combined with the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's increasing prominence, Eisenhower was convinced that the US should take a bolder stance towards Middle Eastern proceedings. He feared that, with Britain's and France's shrinking regional presence after the 1956 Suez Crisis, Nasser's pan-Arab ideals would spread across the Middle East. While maintaining Cold War neutrality, governments like Egypt's that was ruled by an Arab nationalist would willingly accept considerable Soviet aid. In his speech, the US President pledged to provide American economic assistance and military support towards any governmental regime in the region that faced Communist or nationalist threats.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Monthly highlights report of USIS Iran operations for June 1958, 10 July 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961); Monthly highlights report of USIS Iran operations for September 1958, 13 October 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>16</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, 'Special Message to Congress on the Situation in the Middle East', 5 January 1957, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=11007> (accessed 11 April 2019); Salim

The USIS in Iran were keen to promote the content of Eisenhower's ideas, both to the government and the public. Due to the Shah's vehement opposition to Communism, as well as the monarch's growing ties with the US, the American agency was eager to publicise US support and assistance available to the country. Newsreels were produced and distributed to cinemas that promoted this message, while pamphlets were also published.<sup>17</sup> The Iranian government, however, halted the campaign. According to Qolam Abas Aram, the Director of Political Division in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Eisenhower Doctrine infringed upon the territorial sovereignty of Iran and its neighbours. Aram regarded the pledge as a means by which for the US to peddle American imperialism in the country. In a January 1957 meeting with USIS officials, he forbade the American agency from promoting the speech in Iran, despite their protestations that they only sought to contain Communism in the country.<sup>18</sup>

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, moreover, halted the USIS' distribution of 'freedom fighter' posters that sought to tap into the global outcry over the Hungarian Uprising. Between October and November 1956, there was a domestic popular uprising against the Soviet-puppet government ruling the country. The USSR responded by sending in the army, crushing the revolt. The Soviet Union's actions were condemned internationally and the USIS hoped to exploit this in Iran. The American agency's officials invented characters involved in the uprising, giving them typical Hungarian names. They placed pictures and descriptions of these freedom fighters, most notably the 'everyday hero' Peter Szanto, in

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Yaqub, *Containing Arab nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> USIS (Tehran) to the USIA (Washington), 12 January 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>18</sup> USIS (Tehran) to the USIA (Washington), 12 January 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

window displays of bookstores across Tehran.<sup>19</sup> On the premise that it would damage Iran's relations with the Soviets and the Hungarians, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ordered the removal and disposal of all these displays. Despite USIS protestations, the Ministry informed the American agency that they could only pursue such anti-Communist initiatives in the confines of their own centre and library.<sup>20</sup>

Iranian paranoia towards the USIS' activities in Iran worsened after the February 1958 arrest of Valiollah Qarani, the commander of the Iranian army's intelligence staff. The military official had been detained for allegedly conspiring with the US to destabilise the Shah's regime. On 22 January 1958, Qarani and his subordinates approached US Embassy officials in Tehran, as well as Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and his deputy William Rountree, who had stopped over in Iran during a tour of the Middle East. Qarani had called on the US to persuade the Shah to relax his authoritarian rule and encourage the Iranian parliament to undertake necessary socio-economic reforms that the monarch was refusing to implement. While vehemently pro-monarchist, Qarani was opposed to the cronyism and corruption blighting the Iranian government, deeming the modernisation of Iran the best way to combat this. He had passed information to CIA previously about the Shah's rule, so as to encourage US to rein him in. On this occasion, though, Qarani had approached members of the American government in person with recommendations bolder than those he had proposed before.<sup>21</sup> The Eisenhower administration was unsure about how to approach this development. As the Shah was sensitive to criticism anyway, they knew they could not approach him directly about this. White House officials also feared, irritated with what he

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<sup>19</sup> USIS (Tehran) to the USIA (Washington), 27 August 1957, NAIL, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>20</sup> USIS (Tehran) to the USIA (Washington), 27 August 1957, NAIL, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>21</sup> Despatch from the Embassy in Iran to the State Department, 10 February 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, Volume XII.

perceived as American pressure, that the Iranian monarch would adopt Cold War neutrality and accept Soviet aid. Overthrowing the Shah was not a feasible option since there was no credible Western alternative.<sup>22</sup>

Regarding Qarani as a threat, SAVAK, the Iranian secret police and intelligence service, had been monitoring him. They arrested the military figure on 27 February 1958. Immediately after his incarceration, the Iranian press and parliament publicly accused the US of conspiring with Qarani. Aware that American officials shared his views, the affair made Iran's government increasingly paranoid towards the United States. Indeed, as the 1950s had progressed, figures within the Eisenhower administration and the State Department had objected to the Shah's increasingly personalised regime. Their expectations of reform in Iran had not been achieved and they were appalled at the high levels of incompetence and corruption. White House officials had also become increasingly aware that many middle-class Iranians, an expanding demographic, were increasingly outspoken towards the Shah's oppressive rule. Fear that his position could be placed in jeopardy meant the Iranian monarch had banned political opposition. Aware that the Tudeh could exploit this middle-class discontent and destabilise the country, the Eisenhower administration had lobbied the Shah to relax his authoritarian stance and impose reforms more rapidly. These calls, on the grounds it would destabilise the status quo enjoyed by the upper classes who supported the Shah, had gone unheeded.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Telegram from the State Department to the Embassy in Iran, 28 February 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, Volume XII; NSC paper on US policy towards Iran (NSC 5821/1), 15 November 1958, Abilene, Kansas, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library (hereafter document, date, DDEL), White House Office, NSC Series, Policy Papers.

<sup>23</sup> Progress report on US policy towards Iran (NSC 5504), 16 June 1956, DDEL, White House Office, NSC Staff, OCB Series; OCB Memorandum on Problems in Iran, 22 August 1956, DDEL, White House Office, NSC Staff, OCB Series; NSC paper on US policy towards Iran (NSC 5821/1), 15 November 1958, DDEL, White House Office, NSC Series, Policy Papers.

Despite having grown weary of the Shah's approach to government, the USIS had distanced itself from the Qarani Affair for two reasons. First, the Iranian monarch's constant changing of prime ministers irked officials from the American agency. Between 1953 and 1960, the Shah had appointed and dismissed Fazlollah Zahedi, Hossein Ala and the former Chancellor of the University of Tehran, Manoucher Eqbal. As the USIS maintained in a June 1955 report to their USIA superiors, the Iranian people had grown weary of the Shah's shuffling of prime ministers. Such indecision and instability had therefore made it difficult for the USIS to try and foster favourable impressions of the regime's competence to the Iranian people.<sup>24</sup> Second, the USIA had previously reprimanded the agency for being too closely tied to the Iranian government. As surmised in its 1959 inspection report, senior figures in Washington had been opposed to the idea that the USIS should protect and bolster the regime, commenting frequently on this in telegrams to Tehran.<sup>25</sup> The report had concluded that the Iranian government were 'embarrassingly cooperative', noting how the USIS were able to freely engage with government, military and business figures. Yet, they urged the USIS to find a middle ground between collaborating with the government and working independently. In other words, 'engage with the regime, not maintain its power.' Failure to do so could lead to an increasing number of Iranians disaffected with the Shah's regime becoming increasingly opposed to the USIS' presence in Iran, regarding the agency as a tool of the monarch.<sup>26</sup>

In spite of having nothing to do with Qarani, his arrest and the fallout surrounding the incident damaged USIS relations with Iranian government officials at all levels, impeding

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<sup>24</sup> USIS Semi-annual Evaluation Report, 30 June 1955, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Reports on the USIS in Iran.

<sup>25</sup> Inspection report on USIS Iran, 28 November 1959, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Inspection Reports (1958-1962).

<sup>26</sup> Inspection report on USIS Iran, 28 November 1959, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Inspection Reports (1958-1962).

their activities. In Tabriz and the wider Azerbaijan province, for example, local government paranoia towards the agency's activities increased immeasurably. In the period before, during and after the Qarani Affair, USIS officials in the region had been in the process of campaigning to appease the local Kurdish population. With the assistance of their counterparts in Tehran, they had produced an 18-minute film entitled *Khaneh*. The short was about a heroic fictional local Kurdish chief in a bid to foster regional and ethnic pride. The film's release deliberately coincided with the Iranian military's announcement that they were planning to build part of their northeastern defence line against the Soviets through Kurdish settlements. The movie, along with a series of posters promoting it, had been distributed in villages on or in the vicinity of this proposed defence line.<sup>27</sup> However, the Governor General of Tabriz, Ibrahim Zand, objecting to the posters and the film, had banned them. Citing the Qarani affair when confronted about this by USIS officials, he claimed that both materials aimed to foster unrest in the local Kurdish population, culminating in protests that served to destabilise and remove the local government. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tehran had also got involved, arguing that the US was deliberately promoting interests of a third country, Kurdistan, in Iran to break up the nation and weaken the Shah's rule, something they had sought to do previously by cooperating with Qarani.<sup>28</sup>

### **The USIA, USIS and the Promotion of the American Way of Life in Iran**

Beyond gauging government and media views on their activities, USIS officials in Iran did little to discover the reception of their initiatives among the general public. The agency's officials possessed a largely homogenised view of Iran. They assumed that, if Iranian

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<sup>27</sup> American Consulate (Tabriz) to the State Department, 15 August 1958, NAII, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>28</sup> American Consulate (Tabriz) to the State Department, 15 August 1958, NAII, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

political elites and their journalist counterparts - linked because of the former's control over the media - liked USIS initiatives, the Iranian public would, too. There was no understanding of the various ethnic and societal groups living within Iran's borders, their differing views on America, as well as their various motives and aspirations. Due to their superior living standards and access to education, those higher up the social order, in particular political elites and urban middle classes, held largely favourable views towards America anyway. They could afford consumer products and electrical items, an emerging, burgeoning market in 1950s Iran and elsewhere, and possessed a greater awareness and appreciation of cultures beyond their borders.

As they were preaching to the converted, USIS policies to promote the American way of life in Iran were certainly received well by Iranians at an elite level. Indeed, Robert Payne's determination to strengthen US-Iranian friendship in his role as the USIS' PAO caught the attention of sections of the country's media. The 28 June 1956 edition of the Francophile newspaper *Farman*, for example, wrote a piece profiling Payne and his work with the USIS. The article claimed that since Payne's appointment in Iran... all sections of the USIS have been expanded.' This had greatly contributed to ever-improving US-Iran relations, bringing the country into the free world.<sup>29</sup> The Iranian government, likewise, frequently praised the 'great part' the USIS played in promoting America in Iran. Officials in particular commended the work of the Iran-America Society in teaching the English language, as well as their attempts to inform and promote the United States through their lessons, talks and lectures.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> 'Strengthening US-Iran Friendship Will Help Maintenance of Peace', *Farman*, 28 June 1956, London, The British Library, Newspaper Collection; USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 29 June 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>30</sup> Lewis Jones (American Embassy, Tehran) to C. Huntingdon Damon (Assistant Director for the Near East, South Asia and Africa, USIA), 16 February 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Public Affairs Correspondence (1953-1959); C. Huntingdon Damon (Assistant Director for the Near East, South

The Embassy and the USIA, on the other hand, were increasingly concerned with the USIS' increasing autonomy from America's other diplomatic activities in Iran. The former accused Payne of freezing them out of initiatives. The Embassy's frustration with this seeming disconnect from the USIS was exacerbated by the agency's February 1957 move to new quarters on Tehran's outskirts, a considerable distance from the Embassy's city centre offices. Refuting these assertions to his USIA superiors in Washington, who the Embassy had complained to, Payne argued that the USIS needed greater autonomy to expand and thrive. Failure to permit this, he claimed, would result in many Iranians tying the USIS' initiatives with interventionist American foreign policy.<sup>31</sup> Both bodies, equally, were alarmed with Payne's concentration of power in his role as PAO for Iran. The incumbent, as well as his predecessor Edward Wells, did not delegate enough tasks and responsibilities to their 23-strong staff, with both figures taking on too much work. Most of Payne and Wells' subordinates were instead limited to their primary functions. The PAOs were disparaging of their staff's capabilities, deeming their work sub-standard.<sup>32</sup>

Despite these concerns, the USIA largely praised the USIS' promotion of the American way of life in Iran, in particular their work to expand the exchange programme. Iranians with exposure to or experience with the scheme, USIA inspectors noted, had a 'favourable positive attitude' towards it. More than that, though, the programme had

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Asia and Africa, USIA) to Selden Chapin (American Ambassador, Iran), 4 April 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Public Affairs Correspondence (1953-1959).

<sup>31</sup> Lewis Jones (American Embassy, Tehran) to C. Huntingdon Damon (Assistant Director for the Near East, South Asia and Africa, USIA), 16 February 1957, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Public Affairs Correspondence (1953-1959); C. Huntingdon Damon (Assistant Director for the Near East, South Asia and Africa, USIA) to Selden Chapin (American Ambassador, Iran), 4 April 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Public Affairs Correspondence (1953-1959).

<sup>32</sup> Summary of actions taken on inspection of USIS Iran, 17 April 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Inspection Reports (1958-1962).



'heightened US-Iran mutual understanding and enabled the shaping of Iranian society along American lines.'<sup>33</sup> During Payne's tenure as the USIS' PAO for Iran, the exchange programme had expanded on an unprecedented scale. It was a one-way scheme in 1953, with only two American lecturers visiting Iran for six months and no visits from students or teachers. By the end of the decade this had increased to, on average, 10 lecturers and 6 teachers visiting from the US for the whole academic year and 24 teachers and 19 students going from Iran to America for the same amount of time.<sup>34</sup> USIA inspectors were also impressed with the returnee programme, established in 1957, to help Iranians returning from the US to utilise what they had learnt from their travels to better Iranian society. They were convinced it had the potential to be 'exceedingly effective', encouraging and fostering societal change in Iran long-term.<sup>35</sup> The potential of these initiatives to further US-Iran mutual understanding compelled the State Department and the USIA to reinstate the Fulbright programme. This had been defunct since the height of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis in 1952. The initial scheme involved selecting key Iranian education figures to go to the US. While there, they would commence eight weeks of work studying contemporary pedagogical approaches, followed by a two-day evaluation.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Burnett Anderson (PAO, USIS Tehran) to the State Department, 5 June 1958, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960); Inspection report on USIS Iran, 28 November 1959, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Inspection Reports (1958-1962).

<sup>34</sup> American Embassy (Tehran) to the State Department, 9 August 1958, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>35</sup> American Embassy (Tehran) to the State Department, 1 February 1955, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960); Inspection report on USIS Iran, 28 November 1959, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Inspection Reports (1958-1962).

<sup>36</sup> Inspection report on USIS Iran, 28 November 1959, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Inspection Reports (1958-1962).

While the USIA largely praised the exchange programme in Iran, its inspectors recognised that the scheme possessed considerable flaws. Most US and Iranian grantees, they noted, were from the arts and humanities, with only a handful from a science and engineering background. They called on the USIS to redress this balance, fearing that a failure to do so would convey the impression to the Iranian people that the United States had a poor STEM tradition.<sup>37</sup> More pressingly, the USIA's inspectors were concerned with the number of US grantees who did not understand Farsi. This issue was not just confined to individuals on the exchange programme. The problem also afflicted 99% of Americans going to Iran and was endemic among the USIS' staff. Aside from David Nalle, the PAO for Mashhad, no other official was able to speak the language. As illustrated by the plight of George Quinby, a drama lecturer grantee between 1956 and 1957, such deficiencies blighted US cultural initiatives. Due to his inability to speak Farsi, Quinby required a translator in his lectures and small group seminars. With two voices speaking at one time, students complained that classes were chaotic and confusing. Despite being aware of these and similar issues since the mid-1950s, the USIS had overlooked this problem. They had not placed grantees or their staff on courses, nor had they imposed a comprehension of Farsi as a prerequisite for working in Iran.<sup>38</sup>

Likewise, many Iranians who had visited the US via this scheme did not share the American agency's conviction that it was a success in its current guise. According to a January 1956 survey, 39% of the 284 respondents claimed that they needed longer in Iran to prepare for their American sojourn and wished they were invited to American homes more

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<sup>37</sup> Burnett Anderson (PAO, USIS Tehran) to the State Department, 5 June 1958, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>38</sup> American Embassy (Tehran) to the State Department, 1 October 1956, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960); Summary of actions taken on inspection of USIS Iran, 17 April 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Inspection Reports (1958-1962); Inspection report on USIS Iran, 28 November 1959, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Inspection Reports (1958-1962).

often than they were. While the respondents near unanimously believed they learned and developed as people, half of those surveyed did not think their newfound experiences were valued or utilised effectively on their return to Iran. They had experienced no change in salary, any career progression, and their superiors never sought their advice.<sup>39</sup> Iranian dissatisfaction with the USIS' exchange programme was not just confined to grantees, either. Students of US lecturers on secondment in Iran often commented that their teachers lacked the appropriate equipment to do their jobs properly. In Quinby's case, the drama grantee lacked the apparatus to run sessions on lighting, producing and directing. The failure here was commented on by 60% of respondents to a survey Quinby compiled and distributed to his students at the end of his time in Iran. It contributed to only 40% of Quinby's students claiming that they now had a better understanding of America, US theatre and that what they had learnt would help bolster Iranian theatrical scene.<sup>40</sup>

Similar limitations were apparent with the USIS' public relations work with the Plan Organisation. In aiming to promote Iran's socio-economic development, Herbert Linneman, on secondment from the USIS, bemoaned how the Plan Organisation's Information Department operated. He complained that members of its staff were unaware of the intricacies of public relations, possessing a flawed conception of how the profession operated. One such example was the department's emphasis on providing stories to *Kayhan* and *Ettelat*, the two biggest newspapers in Iran, to the detriment of other media outlets. Ignoring Linneman's protestations, the Plan Organisation refused to send information on projects to other, 'less important' publications, despite their combined readership

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<sup>39</sup> Evaluation study of Iranian participants on exchange in the United States between 1951 and 1955, January 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, International Surveys and Research Reports (1951-1970).

<sup>40</sup> George Quinby (US grantee in dramatic art) to Ali Akbar Siassi (Dean, Faculty of Letters, University of Tehran), 15 June 1957, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

outnumbering that of *Kayhan* and *Ettelat*.<sup>41</sup> More vexing for Linneman, though, was the Information Department staff's refusal to undertake tasks given to them by their superiors, as well as their misguided conception of public relations. Instead of seeking to establish links with media figures, they offered cash bribes in return for favourable stories, to embellish articles or to shelve negative news. In spite of Linneman arguing that such a policy was immoral and expensive long-term, he was unable to halt this practice.<sup>42</sup>

Linneman, moreover, was frustrated at his inability to curb the influence and actions of Abolhassan Ebtehaj, the Plan Organisation's Director. The American official was primarily concerned that Ebtehaj possessed vision but demonstrated a disregard for planning, logistics and how to translate these visions into tangible achievements. Linneman had already noted from inspecting the Plan Organisation's socio-economic development projects that no research or preparation had gone into them. The ensuing mistakes and delays were a public relations nightmare, especially as these had not been clearly communicated to the press or public at large.<sup>43</sup> One such failure that stemmed from Ebtehaj's failings was the 'fiasco' surrounding the August 1958 re-opening of Tehran Mehrabad International Airport. An air force base since 1938, the Plan Organisation had rebuilt it so the facility could cater for commercial airliners and their passengers. The Information Department, under Linneman's supervision, had devised a brochure for the grand re-opening commemorating this event. On the day prior to its commencement, though, Ebtehaj shelved the booklet, claiming he did not like the language in the English edition. There was, as a result, no

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<sup>41</sup> USIS (Tehran) to the USIA (Washington), 6 October 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>42</sup> USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 8 March 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961); USIS (Tehran) to USIA (Washington), 8 April 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>43</sup> USIS (Tehran) to the USIA (Washington), 12 April 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

brochure to give to the guests on the night.<sup>44</sup> Another incident that angered Linneman regarding Ebtehaj was when Hal Lehrman, a journalist for the *New York Times Magazine*, interviewed the Plan Organisation's Director. Sitting in on the discussion, Linneman saw that Ebtehaj lacked any detailed knowledge of his department's activities, responding to questions abruptly and in a monosyllabic tone. In a conversation with Linneman in the interview's aftermath, Lehrman claimed that talking to Ebtehaj was 'a frustrating experience' and that he would no longer be writing a piece on the Plan Organisation.<sup>45</sup>

Linneman's irritation with Ebtehaj and the Plan Organisation's Information Department, though, was short-lived. From the late 1950s, the Shah took less interest in seeking to foster Iran's socio-economic development through the Plan Organisation's projects. Rather than delegating this task to a government department, the Iranian monarch sought greater personal involvement in planning and implementing these types of projects. Compounding this were the simmering tensions between the Shah and Ebtehaj. The latter was opposed to the Shah's autocratic, personal style of rule, convinced governmental power should be diluted. He also did not get along with the Shah's acolytes, notably his Minister of Interior Asadollah Alam and the former University of Tehran Chancellor Manoucher Eqbal. In protest at the cronyism and corruption evident in the ruling regime, Ebtehaj resigned his Plan Organisation directorship in February 1959. With the loss of such a charismatic, pro-American figurehead, combined with the Shah's increasing ambivalence towards it, the scale and scope of the Plan Organisation's activities decreased dramatically. It was now merely supplying funds for government projects, not undertaking any of its volition. Ebtehaj's replacement, Khosrow Hedayat, was simply a 'yes man' to higher authorities, presiding over a shell organisation and lacking his predecessor's initiative and vitality. With no more

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<sup>44</sup> USIS (Tehran) to the USIA (Washington), 10 September 1958, NAIL, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>45</sup> USIS (Tehran) to the USIA (Washington), 15 October 1958, NAIL, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

schemes being devised and launched, USIS figures reckoned that there was no longer any need to involve themselves in promoting socio-economic development projects in Iran.<sup>46</sup>

The USIS' management and supervision of the Iran-America Society, in comparison, was much more longstanding. It carried on through to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, with the organisation disbanding in the immediate aftermath of the November 1979 storming of the US Embassy in Tehran.<sup>47</sup> The Iran-America Society's functions and initiatives were certainly received well by Iranian government elites. Hekmat Shirazi, a veteran diplomat and politician who served as the Shah's Minister of Foreign Affairs and later Ambassador to India, held the Iran-America Society in high esteem. At a February 1959 event held by the philanthropic Rockefeller Foundation, Shirazi informed the then US Ambassador to Iran Edward Wailes that the society was 'a fine instrument.'<sup>48</sup> The Minister of Foreign Affairs' views were backed by the Iran-America Society's exponential growth. By the end of the decade, 3,267 families were members and 5,910 students were enrolled on its English language courses, up from 1,900 in 1952.<sup>49</sup> The expansion beyond Tehran into Esfahan and Shiraz, as well as the 1959 opening of a student centre in Iran's capital, help explain the society's burgeoning membership. Catering for Iranians between 18 and 21 years old, the latter had 350 members and 1,600 regular users by the end of its first year. The Iran-America Society's

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<sup>46</sup> USIS (Tehran) to the USIA (Washington), 11 June 1959, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>47</sup> Gordon Winkler interviewed by Dorothy Robins Mowry, 23 March 1989, Arlington, Virginia, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, <https://www.adst.org/OHTOCs/Winkler,Gordon.toc.pdf> (accessed 11 April 2019).

<sup>48</sup> Monthly highlights report of USIS Iran operations for February 1959, 19 March 1959, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Telegram Messages (1952-1961).

<sup>49</sup> Report on the Iran-America Society, 19 May 1953, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1950-1954); Inspection report on USIS Iran, 28 November 1959, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Inspection Reports (1958-1962).

student centre was the only overseas organisation of its kind permitted by Iranian government in Iran. It had a library, showed films and provided recreational facilities for young Iranian adults.<sup>50</sup>

Gauging the views of Iran-America Society users towards the organisation's activities, however, is much more difficult. While between 1953 and 1960 the USIS launched several surveys to assess the reception of Iran-America Society activities among its membership, all but one of these appraisals had to be shelved. Most of its English language students, as well as many who attended concerts, lectures and exhibitions, did not bother to fill out the surveys, despite pressure from staff to do so.<sup>51</sup> USIS figures attributed this to what they deemed a collective lack of community spirit and the individualist nature of Iranian society. As historically they viewed most people in Iran to have lived tribal and nomadic lifestyles, the American agency's officials presumed that many of its citizens would be focused on themselves. This supposedly selfish Iranian way of living was in direct contrast to the more 'communitarian lifestyles' of Europe and North America. Had such surveys been devised and undertaken in similar clubs in Western nations, USIS officials presumed that a collective urge towards societal improvement, combined with a more 'altruistic culture', would result in a greater number of respondents.<sup>52</sup> It was only a March 1959 questionnaire that achieved a quorum of 46 respondents. Half of these judged the Iran-America Society's English language teaching as valuable and enjoyable, with no respondents disagreeing with

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<sup>50</sup> Inspection report on USIS Iran, 28 November 1959, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Inspection Reports (1958-1962).

<sup>51</sup> Opinion survey conducted among students of Iran-America Society, 6 April 1959, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, International Surveys and Research Reports (1951-1970).

<sup>52</sup> Inspection report on USIS Iran, 28 November 1959, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Inspection Reports (1958-1962).

this statement. One third claimed that they had learnt more about America thanks to the organisation's activities, with 37% describing the United States as a peace-loving nation.<sup>53</sup>

Tensions between the wishes of the Iran-America Society's staff and the broader membership were not just confined to surveys. They were much broader, causing serious issues in the inaugural year of the Iran-America Society opening their centre in Esfahan. As explained in the office's first annual report in December 1958, the Iranian members treated the society as a 'closed club.' Most were middle or upper-class males who all knew or were acquainted with one another and were keen to keep membership of the club between themselves. The local branch, consequently, had not flourished in the way that USIS figures in Tehran envisaged when they approved for it to be established.<sup>54</sup> Impacting on this 'closed club' further were budgetary restraints. To go beyond just providing English language teaching, Iran-America Society branches in cities such as Esfahan and Shiraz required more money.<sup>55</sup> This would enable these cities to be able to attract speakers and acts to present and perform respectively, as well as provide them with the means to employ more staff. Personnel shortages meant that both branches, in their formative years, were forced to rely on volunteers from the small pool of Americans who lived in the vicinity of either city. As well as there not being that many of them, many of these expatriates or visitors to Iran were unwilling or unable to help the Iran-America Society with its activities.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Opinion survey conducted among students of Iran-America Society, 6 April 1959, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, International Surveys and Research Reports (1951-1970).

<sup>54</sup> American Consulate (Esfahan) to the State Department, 18 December 1958, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>55</sup> American Consulate (Esfahan) to the State Department, 31 December 1959, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).

<sup>56</sup> American Consulate (Esfahan) to the State Department, 18 December 1958, NAI, US State Department papers, Iran, US-Iran Cultural Relations (1955-1960).



The Iran-America Society's budget issues worsened as the 1950s progressed. While the USIS provided the organisation with \$20,000 p/year, the society required \$28,000 extra to break even. Most of this extra finance was for the student centre in Tehran. Starting off as a \$10,000 p/annum project, high demand for its facilities meant that it needed at least \$24,500 a year to function effectively. Such additional funds were difficult to obtain. To resolve this issue, figures within the Iran-America Society opted to reduce the number of schemes and extra-curricular activities. They made the 'difficult decision' to stick solely to English language teaching.<sup>57</sup> An April 1959 fair at the Iran-America Society's Tehran branch did little to alleviate this issue. Attracting 100,000 Iranians, with all visitors encouraged to donate, the monies raised were not enough to cover the costs of attracting performers, or of buying new furniture and equipment.<sup>58</sup>

The organisation was not alone in facing budgetary troubles. Throughout the 1950s, the USIS' operations in Iran were undermined by financial shortfalls, despite the agency's officials in Iran making repeated requests to the USIA for more money. Writing to C. Huntingdon Damon, the USIS' Assistant Director for the Near East, in August 1954, Nalle complained that he did not have enough money to hire staff to support his activities in Mashhad. He argued that this rendered him 'virtually useless.' Nalle was instead forced to rely on consul officials to help, unpaid, in their own free time.<sup>59</sup> Payne, similarly, protested to the USIA on numerous occasions about this. He asserted that, as per the American

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<sup>57</sup> William King (Assistant Director for Near East, South Asia and Africa, USIA), to Burnett Anderson (PAO, USIS Tehran), 22 November 1960, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Country Files (1956-1960).

<sup>58</sup> Herbert Linneman (Cultural Affairs Officer, USIS Tehran) to William King (Assistant Director for Near East, South Asia and Africa, USIA), 12 May 1960, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Country Files (1956-1960).

<sup>59</sup> David Nalle (Branch PAO, USIS Mashhad) to C. Huntingdon Damon (Assistant Director for the Near East, South Asia and Africa, USIA), 6 August 1954, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Public Affairs Correspondence (1953-1959).

agency's demands, he was expanding the programme in Iran, but could not do so effectively with inadequate staffing. Despite possessing a number of ideas, Payne maintained that he could not put them into action unless personnel levels were 'beefed up.' There was not enough staff in the new provincial branches for these offices to be effective, an adequate level of administrative personnel to avert bureaucratic inefficiencies and no cultural officer to specialise in the exchange programme.<sup>60</sup> The USIA's response to these complaints was curt, ordering the PAO to make the most of the resources available to him. The agency's inspectors also recommended that these financial shortfalls could be alleviated through further specialising its initiatives. Instead of seeking to engage with the broader urban middle classes, the USIS should look to connect with a particular group within this social stratum, such as government officials or business figures.<sup>61</sup>

Such budgetary troubles worsened from Burnett Anderson's December 1957 appointment as PAO for Iran. A close ally of Damon, Anderson also possessed extensive media experience. Between 1943 and 1947 he was a journalist for the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, reporting on state and federal politics. His next role took him to Stockholm, where he became the Scandinavian correspondent for *Look* magazine. Published bi-weekly as a competitor to *Life* magazine, it placed more of an emphasis on images rather than articles.<sup>62</sup> Travelling through the region, Anderson became increasingly aware of the Soviet Union's supposed threat to northern Europe, particularly Finland. It was this that compelled him to join the governmental ranks. In 1951, Anderson was appointed the press officer for the

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<sup>60</sup> Robert Payne (PAO, USIS Iran) to Milton Welch (Personnel Department, USIA), 9 April 1956, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Public Affairs Correspondence (1953-1959).

<sup>61</sup> Clary Thompson (Deputy Assistant Director for the Near East, South Asia and Africa, USIA) to John Lund (Acting PAO, USIS Tehran), 27 December 1954, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Public Affairs Correspondence (1953-1959); Inspection report on USIS Iran, 28 November 1959, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Inspection Reports (1958-1962).

<sup>62</sup> Not to be confused with the discontinued British publication, *Look* magazine.

Marshall Plan Organisation in West Germany, holding this role until 1954. From then he was brought into the USIA's Washington office, appointed Deputy Director for Press and Publications. A desire to see the world, though, resulted in Anderson pushing Damon to appoint him as PAO for Iran.<sup>63</sup>

From his initial posting to Tehran, Anderson was aware that the USIS branch was spending more than it could afford. In a telegram to William Handley, the agency's PAO for Turkey, Anderson conceded that 'things were tough financially' and that 'major surgery was required.' The chiefs of the USIS' operations in Tehran and Ankara were close, having worked together in the State Department. As Handley had a greater number of years in post, Anderson often turned to him for advice.<sup>64</sup> From Anderson's appointment, the USIS' budgetary situation had worsened. In the November 1958 midterm elections, the Democratic Party made considerable congressional gains, taking 48 seats from the Republicans in the House of Representatives and 13 in the Senate. The former's takeover of both houses meant that there was greater scrutiny on how the USIA spent its money. Many of these Democrats, representing seats in northern states, were opposed to considerable government-sanctioned cultural activities in Asia and Africa. They were instead convinced the USIA should do more to promote the US in the Americas.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, the USIA's new Director, George Allen, was sceptical of the need to promote the American way of life in Iran. Having previously served as US Ambassador to Iran during the 1946 Azerbaijan Crisis, he was more concerned with containing the spread of Communism. Allen was accordingly

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<sup>63</sup> Burnett Anderson interviewed by Jack O'Brien, 5 January 1990, Arlington, Virginia, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, <https://www.adst.org/OHTOCs/Anderson,Burnett.toc.pdf> (accessed 11 April 2019).

<sup>64</sup> Burnett Anderson (PAO, USIS Tehran) to William Handley (PAO, USIS Ankara), 18 August 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Country Files (1956-1960).

<sup>65</sup> William Weathersby (Acting Assistant Director, USIA) to all PAOs in the Near East region, 20 November 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Country Files (1956-1960).

unimpressed with the work done by Payne, Anderson's predecessor, to promote the American way of life in the country, deeming this unnecessary. By making Iranians see the pitfalls of Soviet-inspired Communism, he was convinced that they would be more attracted towards American norms, values and ideas anyway. Allen therefore ordered Anderson to find ways to cut USIS Iran's budget and staffing levels.<sup>66</sup>

Anderson subsequently sought to reduce the scale and number of the American agency's activities in Iran. Prior to undertaking this task, the PAO expressed some reservations. Conceding to Handley that the USIS Iran's activities were expensive, 'its initiatives were still extensive and impressive.' Anderson already deemed the budget surplus to requirements and was at a loss as to how the USIS would cope after this further reduction.<sup>67</sup> Anderson's initial forays into cost cutting focused on making piecemeal reductions to staffing levels in the USIS' Tehran office. The agency's publications officer Maynard Fournier, for instance, was urged to follow his interest in Chinese culture by taking a position at the agency's Hong Kong Office. Likewise, George Loudon, the exhibits officer, was promoted and sent to South Vietnam. Both figures were not replaced and their roles were morphed into one job. Their successor was a junior figure, on a significantly lower pay grade, called Henry Stephen. Having only served in the USIS' office in the Congo, Anderson was not happy at being given someone of Stephen's limited experience. The PAO for Iran did concede though that this new arrangement saved a lot of money, easing budgetary pressure.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> George Allen (Director, USIA) to Burnett Anderson (PAO, USIS Tehran), 21 April 1958, NAIL, USIA papers, Iran, Country Files (1956-1960); George Allen (Director, USIA) to Evan Fotos (USIS Branch Officer, Tabriz), 30 May 1958, NAIL, USIA papers, Iran, Country Files (1956-1960).

<sup>67</sup> Burnett Anderson (PAO, USIS Tehran) to William Handley (PAO, USIS Ankara), 12 September 1959, NAIL, USIA papers, Iran, Country Files (1956-1960).

<sup>68</sup> Burnett Anderson (PAO, USIS Tehran) to John Esterline (Head of Personnel, USIA), 19 January 1958, NAIL, USIA papers, Iran, Country Files (1956-1960); John Esterline (Head of Personnel, USIA)

Anderson's other attempts to cut costs in a similar vein, however, were ill fated. To remain within his shrinking budget, as well as to meet the USIA inspectors' requests that he dilutes his own power, Anderson asked permission to appoint an Assistant PAO. The incumbent in this new position would liaise with the Iranian government and preside over the exchange programme. They would also cover for the USIS' chief officer in Iran when they were away or unavailable. In so doing, the Assistant PAO would do a job currently being undertaken by 8 people.<sup>69</sup> Anderson wanted to appoint Phil Dorman to this role. Since joining the USIA in 1953, he had experienced a number of overseas roles, impressing his superiors everywhere he went. Dorman would later become the USIA's Chief Officer for Zambia and the Sudan.<sup>70</sup>

Despite the amount of money this arrangement would save, the USIA was resistant to the idea of appointing an Assistant PAO for Iran. William Handley, in particular, protested against this, with senior agency figures in Washington supporting his claims. Handley did not think it was fair that the USIS' office in Iran would be able to employ an Assistant PAO, while his centre in Turkey would not be allowed to have one.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, he deemed the dilution of Anderson's position unnecessary, warning that it could set a dangerous precedent. Despite Iran's importance to US foreign policy goals, the situation in the country was not complicated enough to warrant an Assistant PAO. USIS offices in nations of India's size – or

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to Burnett Anderson (PAO, USIS Tehran), 5 February 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Country Files (1956-1960).

<sup>69</sup> Clary Thompson (Assistant Director, Office of Greek, Turkish and Iranian Affairs) to Herbert Linneman (Cultural Affairs Officer, USIS Tehran), 23 April 1960, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Country Files (1956-1960).

<sup>70</sup> Burnett Anderson (PAO, USIS Tehran) to John Esterline (Head of Personnel, USIA), 5 March 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Country Files (1956-1960).

<sup>71</sup> William Handley (PAO, USIS Ankara) to Burnett Anderson (PAO, USIS Tehran), 24 April 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Country Files (1956-1960).

even those on the Cold War's frontline such as West Germany – did not employ someone in this role. The centre in Iran was certainly organisationally chaotic with a 'top-heavy' power structure that needed alleviating. But the dilution of the PAO's role would not resolve this, leading to future clashes between Anderson and Dorman over what was in either person's remit.<sup>72</sup> Handley instead recommended to his contemporary in Iran that he revise the bureaucratic structure and staffing. Rather than the PAO overseeing branches and departments, Anderson should devise both a cultural and an information section. An officer, appointed internally, would preside over each section, providing these branches with greater autonomy and reducing Anderson's workload.<sup>73</sup>

In April 1960, Anderson was offered a place at the prestigious US Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. As the institution prepared its students for taking on senior governmental and military roles, the USIA urged Anderson to accept the War College's offer.<sup>74</sup> Anderson's replacement was Linneman. After leaving his secondment with the Plan Organisation, he had stayed in Iran at the USIS' Tehran office, working to produce and distribute anti-Communist propaganda for the agency's library in Iran's capital.<sup>75</sup> Linneman continued Anderson's cost cutting endeavours. His first austerity measures were to cease

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<sup>72</sup> William Handley (PAO, USIS Ankara) to Burnett Anderson (PAO, USIS Tehran), 24 April 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Country Files (1956-1960).

<sup>73</sup> William Handley (PAO, USIS Ankara) to Burnett Anderson (PAO, USIS Tehran), 14 May 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Country Files (1956-1960); William Handley (PAO, USIS Ankara) to Burnett Anderson (PAO, USIS Tehran), 26 June 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Country Files (1956-1960).

<sup>74</sup> Burnett Anderson interviewed by Jack O'Brien, 5 January 1990, Arlington, Virginia, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, <https://www.adst.org/OHTOCs/Anderson,Burnett.toc.pdf> (accessed 11 April 2019).

<sup>75</sup> Herbert Linneman (Cultural Affairs Officer, USIS Tehran) to William King (Assistant Director for Near East, South Asia and Africa, USIA), 6 December 1960, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Country Files (1956-1960).

the showing of USIS newsreels in Iranian cinemas and halting the publication of the agricultural magazine *Land and People*. The weekly Farsi language journal *Akbar Hafte* (weekly news) was also turned into a bi-monthly publication. Linneman's emphasis on reducing the scale of the USIS' publications initiatives in Iran was due to the USIA's reduction in the amount of paper allocated to the American agency in Tehran. If they had wished to publish pamphlets, newspapers and periodicals on the same scale, the USIS would have needed to spend an extra \$50,000 on paper. Alongside this expense, USIS officials knew they had other priorities. Budget shortfalls meant that savings needed to be made so as to continue the USIS' work with Radio Tehran, an initiative their USIA superiors in Washington heartily approved of. Linneman needed to keep them on side. With the Eisenhower administration leaving office, he was unsure as to how the new President, John F. Kennedy, would approach Iran, let alone overseas US cultural diplomacy.<sup>76</sup>

### **The Foreign Office and the Containment of Communism in Iran**

As the 1950s drew to a close, the UK Foreign Office's IRD and SAVAK, the Iranian secret service, worked even more closely together than before. The initial success of the book translation programme, which had resulted in a Farsi translation of *Doctor Zhivago*, proved hugely popular with the Iranian public, compelled the British and Iranian agencies to work together in other fields. As a sign of these solidified ties, the IRD seconded Donald Makinson, an operative in the Foreign Office department, to the British Embassy in Tehran. The IRD had two reasons for deploying him to Iran. First, as a fluent Farsi speaker, Makinson was able to translate and edit anti-Communist literature sent by the IRD in London

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<sup>76</sup> William Handley (PAO, USIS Ankara) to Burnett Anderson (PAO, USIS Tehran), 26 June 1958, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Country Files (1956-1960); Herbert Linneman (Cultural Affairs Officer, USIS Tehran) to William King (Assistant Director for Near East, South Asia and Africa, USIA), 6 December 1960, NAI, USIA papers, Iran, Country Files (1956-1960).

to make it appropriate for distribution in Iran.<sup>77</sup> Dubbed 'Transmission X', officials in London had been producing generic news content for Middle Eastern audiences that negatively depicted the Soviet Union. This would be transmitted to the Regional Information Office in Beirut, who would translate this content and distribute it across the region. 'Transmission X' items, however, were 'unsuitable for Iranian consumption.' Budgetary constraints meant that its content catered more for the Arab world. Reports, for instance, would highlight the alleged links between Nasser, the UAR and the USSR.<sup>78</sup> Makinson, then, was not only required to translate 'Transmission X' items into Farsi, but to also make these pieces relevant, newsworthy items for Iranians. Second – and more importantly to the IRD – was Makinson's close rapport with SAVAK's Deputy Director, Hassan Pakravan. Since SAVAK's 1957 conception, both figures had frequently corresponded with one another regarding the production and dissemination of propaganda. This relationship with a prominent Iranian elite took on even greater importance to IRD officials in 1961. Suspecting the then Director, Teymur Bakhtiar, of divulging Iranian state secrets to the then US President John F. Kennedy, the Shah dismissed Bakhtiar as SAVAK's Director, replacing him with Pakravan.<sup>79</sup>

Within months of Makinson's February 1962 secondment in Iran, the IRD and SAVAK were instrumental in establishing a writers' panel in Tehran. Composed of prominent, influential journalists, editors and columnists from Iran's three largest newspaper publications – *The Tehran Times*, *Kayhan* and *Ettelat* - the panel met monthly. SAVAK officials would provide these journalists with stories and information that extolled the virtues

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<sup>77</sup> Review of the British Embassy in Tehran's propaganda activities, 6 November 1961, Kew, Richmond, The National Archives, FO 1110/1383 (hereafter document, date, TNA, file reference); Donald Makinson (British Embassy, Tehran) to IRD, (Foreign Office, London), TNA, FO 1110/1383.

<sup>78</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to British Embassy (Ankara), 10 November 1959, TNA, FO 1110/1251.

<sup>79</sup> Review of the British Embassy in Tehran's propaganda activities, 6 November 1961, TNA, FO 1110/1383; Donald Makinson (British Embassy, Tehran) to IRD, (Foreign Office, London), TNA, FO 1110/1383.



of the Shah's regime. Figures who attended these monthly meetings would receive 'snappy and informative' 10-12 page booklets that would provide suggestions for possible stories, as well as potential angles to take on these reports.<sup>80</sup> Loosely based on 'Transmission X' content, typical news reports that stemmed from the booklets at these monthly writers' panel meetings were unsurprisingly critical of the USSR. Between November and December 1964, for example, articles appeared in the Farsi and English editions of *The Tehran Times* and *Kayhan*. In Iran, newspapers would be published in the former language in the morning, while editions in the latter edition would be published in the afternoon or evening. These articles warned readers of the Soviet Union's dissemination of pro-Communist propaganda across Iran and the wider Middle East. In particular, both newspapers' readerships were urged to watch out for Farsi translations of Russian books and films.<sup>81</sup>

Moreover, Makinson was instrumental in persuading Pakravan to send SAVAK officials to Britain to attend training sessions on the production and dissemination of propaganda. Makinson argued that this was the most effective way of ensuring that middle and high-ranking SAVAK figures would be adept at producing propaganda with little IRD input in the long run.<sup>82</sup> In May 1963, selected officials from the agency were flown over to the UK to commence a two-week training course. Figures were initially given a tour of both IRD offices and BBC Monitoring in Caversham to illustrate how a counter-subversion office should function and be structured. IRD officials proceeded to teach the Iranians how to construct and publish effective propaganda. Sessions were given on the importance of persuasive techniques, the importance of translating Western novels and the distribution of

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<sup>80</sup> Report on IRD work in Iran for the quarter ending 31 December 1963, TNA, FO 1110/1770.

<sup>81</sup> Overview of IRD articles published in the Iranian press between November and December 1964, 17 February 1965, TNA, FO 1110/1514.

<sup>82</sup> Donald Makinson (British Embassy, Tehran) to IRD (Foreign Office, London), 3 August 1962, TNA, FO 1110/1557.

books, leaflets and other literature through third parties.<sup>83</sup> Clearly, the IRD were attempting to underline to SAVAK the importance of distancing themselves from counter-subversive propaganda. To IRD officials, close government association with anti-Communist propaganda would render the material ineffective. By appearing independent, news articles, books, pamphlets and films would seem more authentic to the general public. At the same time, SAVAK endeavoured to cement the support of Iran's military figures behind the Shah and anti-Communist efforts. They sought to reduce complacency towards the USSR, encouraging the armed forces to be mindful of attempted clandestine Soviet incursions in Iran. With the IRD's help, officials from the Iranian agency produced a series of films for army figures. One such production was entitled *Interests of Protective Security*. Premiering at a May 1964 military convention in Tehran, the film detailed a fictional Soviet espionage operation in a secret government department that was foiled by figures in Iran's army.<sup>84</sup>

Beyond solidifying individual ties, the IRD and SAVAK also sought to establish links with Iranian broadcasters. Officials from the department, confident that they were now in a position to compete with their US counterparts, worked extensively with the government-run Radio Iran. Formerly called Radio Tehran, the station now had two channels. The first broadcast nationwide in Farsi from Tehran. The other was more localised, transmitting Arab language programmes in the oil rich region of Khuzestan. Concern at the high level of Radio Moscow broadcasts aimed at this area of southwest Iran compelled IRD and SAVAK officials to prioritise assisting broadcasts from the latter.<sup>85</sup> According to figures from both departments, the material Radio Iran were using in this region to counter Communist propaganda was insufficient and of a low quality. IRD and SAVAK officials recommended to Radio Iran's producers that they dedicate a daily segment to criticising the Soviet Union.

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<sup>83</sup> IRD minute, 28 May 1963, TNA, FO 1110/1557.

<sup>84</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to IRD (Foreign Office, London), 13 July 1960, TNA, FO 1110/1287.

<sup>85</sup> Report on Communist radio broadcasts to Middle Eastern countries, 15 August 1958, TNA, FO 1110/1094.

Selecting the morning radio show - when the number of listeners was typically at its peak - Radio Iran sought to provide a 'factual account' of the USSR's actions. Daily segments would underline how both Russian and Soviet officials were determined to meddle in Iranian affairs. Broadcasts would point to the proceedings outlined above, as well as other past events, to suggest that expanding into Iran was a key foreign policy goal of the USSR and Imperial Russia.<sup>86</sup>

The fostering of an IRD-SAVAK two-way relationship, however, meant that officials from the Iranian agency were able to influence the actions of their British counterparts. SAVAK frequently asked the IRD to place positive stories about Iran in the European and American press. The agency was 'particularly bitter' about 'unfriendly comments' regarding the Iranian government's flouting of human rights in Western left-of-centre, liberal leaning newspapers and magazines. Convinced these articles were damaging the perception of Iran overseas, SAVAK feared that the Soviet Union and its allies could use this information to destabilise the Shah's regime. The IRD deemed it imperative that this concern was addressed. In relaying the content and nature of his meetings with Pakravan to the London office, Makinson claimed that the SAVAK Director suspected the IRD of supplying media outlets with negative information about Iran.<sup>87</sup> To maintain the fledgling relationship between the agencies, the Foreign Office department used their ties with the Anglo-American media to supply friendly journalists with positive stories about Iran. Articles from the *Financial Times*, for example, paid significant attention to the 'White Revolution', a programme initiated by the Shah to modernise his country's economy and infrastructure.<sup>88</sup> With content supplied from the IRD, reports underlined the commercial and financial potential of investing

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<sup>86</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to IRD (Foreign Office, London), 10 June 1964, TNA, FO 1110/1855.

<sup>87</sup> Donald Makinson (British Embassy, Tehran) to Foreign Office, 6 November 1961, TNA, FO 1110/1383.

<sup>88</sup> Overview of IRD articles published in the Iranian press between May and September 1963, 14 November 1965, TNA, FO 1110/1514.

in Iran in this period. Claiming that the Iranians were 'undergoing an Industrial Revolution of their own', articles urged readers to stay ahead of financial trends by investing in Iran now. Similarly, pieces that the IRD contributed to in other newspapers highlighted the Middle Eastern country's attractiveness as a tourist destination. Articles would play on Iran's past as the centre of the Persian Empire, suggesting that it was culturally and politically on a par with Ancient Rome and Athens. Articles would cite the numerous historical sites dotted around Iran from this period and their accessibility to tourists.<sup>89</sup>

More crucially, though, SAVAK was instrumental in persuading the IRD to assist them with the countering of Arab nationalist propaganda. The desire to remain neutral in the Cold War proposed by Nasser and the Baathist governments in Iraq and Syria particularly concerned Pakravan. Having lived through the Mossagdeh government of 1951-53, the SAVAK Director realised that such ideas resonated with the Iranian people. Should they spread to Iran, a public backlash could constrain Iran's attempts to engage with the US, UK and other Western powers.<sup>90</sup> Attempts by the Iranian agency to request assistance in this field through the CENTO Counter Subversion Office (CSO) had proved futile. The organisation's terms of reference stipulated that it could only help in the fight against Soviet inspired Communist propaganda.<sup>91</sup> Maintaining that Arab nationalism and third force neutralism were 'more significant threats than Communism', Pakravan used his meetings with Makinson to stress the need to be 'hard headed' against Egypt. Failing to combat the

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<sup>89</sup> Overview of IRD articles published in the Iranian press between May and September 1963, 14 November 1965, TNA, FO 1110/1514.

<sup>90</sup> Minutes of meeting between Donald Makinson and Hassan Pakravan, 15 November 1963, TNA, FO 1110/1353.

<sup>91</sup> Record of Baghdad Pact terms of reference, 27 March 1956, TNA, FO 371/121253; Speech by Awni Khalidy (Baghdad Pact Secretary General at 1956 Tehran conference of the Baghdad Pact, 17 April 1956, TNA, FO 371/121253.

propaganda peddled by Arab nationalist regimes, he argued, would lead to Nasser forcing the British out of the Middle East.<sup>92</sup>

SAVAK's request for IRD assistance to combat Arab nationalist propaganda placed the Foreign Office department in an awkward position. As this request did not pertain to anti-Communist propaganda, it went beyond what the agency was established to do. More broadly, key to British foreign policy in the Middle East during this period was the need to ensure geopolitical stability in the region. Foreign Office officials were convinced that assisting SAVAK in this way would heighten tensions between Arab nationalist states and the pro-Western nations such as Iran and Jordan.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, Anglo-Egyptian relations in the 1960s had considerably improved from their 1956 nadir. Since the Suez Crisis, the British approach to Nasser had been to limit the Egyptian President's influence in the Middle East and to avoid directly confronting him. Such tactics had resulted in Britain militarily intervening in Jordan and Kuwait in 1958 and 1961 respectively. In both cases, British policymakers feared that internal Arab nationalist forces, funded by Nasser, were threatening the pro-Western Jordanian and Kuwaiti ruling regimes.<sup>94</sup>

Despite the Foreign Office's reluctance to endanger Anglo-Egyptian relations, the IRD acquiesced to SAVAK's requests. Makinson and officials in London feared that a failure to consent to the Iranian agency's demands would result in a dilution of IRD-SAVAK collaboration. Pakravan would not be persuaded to adopt a more consensual approach towards Egypt. Dismissing Makinson's argument that appeasing Nasser would be beneficial

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<sup>92</sup> Minutes of meeting between Donald Makinson and Hassan Pakravan, 15 November 1963, TNA, FO 1110/1353.

<sup>93</sup> Report on the IRD in Iran, 14 September 1962, TNA, FO 1110/1490.

<sup>94</sup> Darius Wainwright, 'Equal Partners? The Information Research Department, SAVAK and the Dissemination of Anti-Communist Propaganda in Iran, 1956-68', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 46/3 (2019), 409.

to Anglo-Iranian interests, he threatened to request assistance from other Western powers.<sup>95</sup> While recommending that the IRD assist SAVAK in the production of anti-Arab nationalist material, the Foreign Office urged the department to keep their distance. To avoid heightening Anglo-Egyptian tensions, officials in Whitehall ordered Makinson to 'ensure deniability.' They instead called for the IRD official to 'consider and recommend' measures for SAVAK to pursue.<sup>96</sup> In his meetings with Pakravan, Makinson was successful in helping to shape the Iranian agency's new approach to counter-subversion. Exploiting the SAVAK Director's scepticism of Communism as an ideology, Makinson persuaded Pakravan that Arab nationalism was closely entwined with this left-wing thinking.<sup>97</sup> Through the writers' panel, SAVAK provided Iranian journalists with stories suggesting that Nasser was a closet Communist. Reports, for instance, would discuss his nationalisation of Egyptian industries and how the President's meddling in the markets was constraining the earning potential of his subjects.<sup>98</sup> The IRD, moreover, provided SAVAK with BBC technicians to help the Iranian agency jam radio transmissions from Arab nationalist broadcasters. Officials from the Iranian agency were convinced that these ideals were filtering into Iran through the Nasser backed Radio Baghdad and Voice of Arabs. As well as technical assistance, officials from the BBC

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<sup>95</sup> Donald Makinson (British Embassy, Tehran) to the Foreign Office, 22 June 1963, TNA, FO 1110/944.

<sup>96</sup> IRD (Foreign Office, London) to Donald Makinson (British Embassy, Tehran), 17 July 1961, TNA, FO 1110/1557.

<sup>97</sup> Minutes of meeting between Donald Makinson and Hassan Pakravan, 15 November 1963, TNA, FO 1110/1353.

<sup>98</sup> Overview of IRD articles published in the Iranian press between November and December 1964, 17 February 1965, TNA, FO 1110/1514.

provided SAVAK with the latest equipment to sporadically block short wave transmissions from Arab nationalist countries.<sup>99</sup>

The two-way nature of IRD-SAVAK collaboration masked the issues blighting the propaganda material produced and disseminated. Many of the books both agencies selected for translation and publication in Iran were not commercially viable. Their lack of mainstream appeal meant that most Iranians – in particular the literate middle classes – did not read or purchase this literature. In a 1963 review of IRD work in Iran, officials in London referred to the books made available to Iranians through collaboration with SAVAK as ‘turgid.’ Expressing a lack of surprise that these novels and monographs were failing to sell, they called for the translation and publication of literature of a ‘lighter vein.’ IRD officials claimed that it was only through the promotion of these popular Western works – which instead of criticising Communism promoted British values – that the policy of book translation and publication would yield any success.<sup>100</sup> IRD-SAVAK collaborative efforts were also constrained by staff and budgetary shortages. Writing to the Foreign Office department’s Whitehall office, Makinson claimed that these issues meant that there was a ‘very distinct limit... to what we can absorb and utilise effectively.’<sup>101</sup> Instead of producing news content relevant to the Iranian public a lack of personnel meant that Makinson was instead forced to translate Transmission X material designed for Arab nations.<sup>102</sup> Likewise, staff shortages meant that the booklets handed out to Iranian journalists in the writers’ panel meetings were

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<sup>99</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to IRD (Foreign Office, London), 10 June 1964, TNA, FO 1110/1855; Donald Makinson (British Embassy, Tehran) to IRD (Foreign Office, London), 17 July 1964, TNA, FO 1110/1855.

<sup>100</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to Hugh Carless (IRD, Foreign Office), 26 January 1960, TNA, FO 1110/1353.

<sup>101</sup> Denis Wright (British Ambassador, Tehran) to Foreign Office, 27 July 1966, TNA, FO 1110/2031.

<sup>102</sup> Regional Information Office (Beirut) to IRD (Foreign Office, London), 13 October 1959, TNA, FO 1110/1220.

often not of the required standard. Many of the articles produced from information supplied from these meetings were poorly written and uninspiring, doing little to harden the views of readers towards Soviet-style Communism.<sup>103</sup> Not only was there a shortage in the quantity and quality of propaganda produced, but also many potential projects, while discussed in depth, were never pursued. Despite possessing the monetary means, attempts to establish an IRD and SAVAK-backed publishing house in Tehran were unsuccessful due to a lack of personnel with expertise in this industry.<sup>104</sup>

More broadly, IRD-SAVAK collaborative efforts were undermined by the United States. US State Department officials were not wholly supportive of the IRD and SAVAK working together. In their own dealings with the Iranian agency – who had requested American intelligence and surveillance assistance – State Department figures discouraged SAVAK from sustained collaboration with the IRD. Arguing that the propaganda produced was provocative, they claimed that these projects would antagonise Arab nationalist regimes in the Middle East, attracting them more towards the Soviets. Iran, they claimed, would be more isolated, left with fewer regional allies. Having assisted the IRD in its counter-subversive projects in other regions, the State Department's opposition towards IRD-SAVAK collaboration surprised and disappointed British officials. In a May 1963 letter to the US Embassy in Tehran, Makinson accused the then Ambassador, Julius Holmes, of pursuing 'the worst of all courses.' The IRD official proceeded to claim that the American's 'lukewarm approach' to IRD-SAVAK collaboration indicated that the US appeared to favour allowing the Iranian agency to die on its feet.' This, Makinson claimed, would result in the UK 'taking the blame for this failure', reducing Britain's standing in Iran in the process.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to IRD (Foreign Office, London), 22 October 1964, TNA, FO 1110/1770.

<sup>104</sup> IRD (Foreign Office, London) to Levant Department (IRD Regional Office, Beirut), 14 May 1958, TNA, FO 1110/1094.

<sup>105</sup> Donald Makinson (British Embassy, Tehran) to Julius Holmes (American Ambassador, Tehran), 22 May 1963, TNA, FO 1110/1557.



Such an agency-led approach meant that IRD-SAVAK collaboration was short-lived. In 1965, Makinson was promoted to a more senior position in the Foreign Office in London, with no other IRD official willing or able to succeed him. In 1966, the Shah appointed Pakravan as his Minister of Information. His successor, Nematollah Nassiri, was suspicious of IRD motives in Iran, convinced the department was seeking to meddle in Iranian affairs.<sup>106</sup> From his appointment, Nassiri sent his deputy, General Ali Sobhani, to discuss issues with IRD figures. According to members of the Foreign Office department, the SAVAK official 'deliberately caused problems' in these meetings. Refusing to minute these discussions, he would veto any IRD suggestions, filibustering during deliberations to ensure nothing would get decided or achieved. During a December 1966 meeting in Beirut, he also declared to officials from the Foreign Office department that SAVAK would no longer help fund these collaborative efforts. The Iranian agency expected the British to pay for all future projects, something it was unwilling and unable to do. After 1966, therefore, IRD-SAVAK bilateral collaboration dramatically reduced. In the next two years, IRD officials gradually phased out their collaborative projects with the Iranian agency.<sup>107</sup>

### **The Foreign Office, the British Council and UK Cultural Diplomacy in Iran**

According to the British Council in Iran's annual reports, the institution had made 'a major contribution' to Anglo-Iranian relations, engaging Iran's middle classes in ways that the Embassy would never be able to do. The February 1955 reopening of its Tehran office had been received well by Iranians. Unlike in the early 1950s, when it had to depart Iran when the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis escalated, the British Council were now unaffected by political

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<sup>106</sup> British Embassy (Ankara) to IRD (Foreign Office, London), 19 September 1967, TNA, FO 1110/2064.

<sup>107</sup> British Embassy (Tehran) to IRD (Foreign Office, London), 30 January 1967, TNA, FO 1110/2064; British Embassy (Ankara) to IRD (Foreign Office, London), 10 December 1968, TNA, FCO 95/644.

proceedings in Iran and the wider region.<sup>108</sup> The institution's officials deemed its ties with the Iranian Ministry of Education as the 'most important feature of their work in Iran.' The seminars for secondary school teachers organised and run in collaboration with this government department had changed how the English language was being taught in the country. Through a greater emphasis on spelling, grammar and punctuation, the English skills of Iranian students nationwide had considerably improved. Supplementing this was the work undertaken by British Council centres in Esfahan, Shiraz and Tabriz. On top of the summer seminars for Iranian teachers, these branches were also offering English language courses to students. British Council officials claimed that the sessions they put on were 'good adverts for the UK system', providing solid examples of how schools and lessons should be run.<sup>109</sup>

British Council officials were also 'immensely impressed' with the impact of their television programme *English by Television*. While aware of the 'great difficulties' its staff members work under, senior figures in London praised the quality of the scripts. They were even so magnanimous to claim that their fears that this endeavour would be disastrous had 'proved quite groundless.' What pleased these individuals the most, though, was that there was no similar initiative to *English by Television* that the Americans were undertaking. It meant that the UK institution was ahead of its US counterparts in this field.<sup>110</sup> Similarly, Derek Traversi, the head of the British Council's operations in Iran, was delighted with the

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<sup>108</sup> British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1955-56, 29 April 1956, TNA, BW 49/17; British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1956-57, 7 May 1957, TNA, BW 49/17; British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1958-59, 9 May 1959, TNA, BW 49/17.

<sup>109</sup> British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1957-58, 30 April 1958, TNA, BW 49/17.

<sup>110</sup> Roger Close (Deputy Controller, Education Division, British Council) to Derek Traversi (Controller, British Council Iran), 20 March 1959, TNA, BW 49/15; Dean Morgan (Linguistic Advisor for the Education Division, British Council) to Roger Close (Deputy Controller, Education Division, British Council), 24 May 1959, TNA, BW 49/15.

praiseworthy letters sent in by *English by Television's* viewers. One correspondent judged it to be a 'superior programme'; another declared that it had 'helped the Iranian people so much with English.' There was even one secondary school pupil that claimed that the Iranian people 'learn English more from this than from books or classroom lessons.'<sup>111</sup>

In a similar vein to how the Americans gauged the impact of their own cultural initiatives, the British Council also relied on letters from Iranian people. Again, this was not the most accurate way of garnering reception, with correspondents' views not being representative of the public at large. Just like with the USIS and the DPB, the channel TVI, which broadcast *English by Television* bi-weekly, did not allow foreign organisations to monitor its broadcasts. It accordingly made it 'difficult to assess viewer reaction accurately', with the British Council forced to rely on TVI's uncorroborated claims that 5-7 million viewers regularly tuned in. The UK organisation's officials presumed though that, as the broadcaster relies on advertisements for revenue, it was not in their interests to broadcast unpopular programmes. From discussions with TVI officials, the agency suspected that there was a considerable amount of group viewing, particularly among teachers and secondary school students, of *English by Television*. As televisions were luxury items in Iran in this period, the British Council had been under the impression that only the wealthy and educated, as well as students in schools, would be able to watch.<sup>112</sup>

In the absence of accurate viewer perspectives on *English by Television*, British Council officials relied on their own intuition when evaluating the programme. Inspectors from the London office claimed in November 1959 that *English by Television* was good for bolstering the prestige of Britain in Iran. As English was superseding French as the country's second language, the programme was 'a valuable medium from which to exploit this.' The first half of the show was well devised and presented. The parts where formal lessons in grammar, sentence structure and vocabulary took place can be used as a model if a similar

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<sup>111</sup> Report on *English by Television*, 17 March 1959, TNA, BW 49/15.

<sup>112</sup> Report on *English by Television*, 17 March 1959, TNA, BW 49/15.

initiative were implemented in another country. The second part of the programme, however, which aimed to promote British culture, history or geography, required considerable improvement. Such showcases 'varied in quality and were in need of fuller direction and supervision.' They suffered from poor camera work and no rehearsals, something that was illustrated in the final product. The inspectors blamed this issue on *English by Television's* 'shoestring budget.' Giving the programme more money would improve the second half of the show for two reasons. First it would enable extra staff to be recruited. *English by Television* suffered from a shortage of scriptwriters and backstage personnel. Several extras employed on a casual basis aside, there were currently three people involved, all taking a part in producing, directing and starring in *English by Television*. Second, more money would enable more equipment to be sourced. All the second half of the show needed were a greater number of scriptwriters and appropriate apparatus such as telecoders and autocues. These additions would make *English by Television* programmes appear much more professional, reducing the number of mistakes and blunders.<sup>113</sup>

Charles Wilmot, Derek Traversi's successor as head of the British Council in Iran, was eager to meet the inspectors' recommendations. To professionalise *English by Television's* production and resolve its budgetary issues, he requested for more films, photos and auto prompts from London, as well as extra staff.<sup>114</sup> Wilmot arrived in Tehran in May 1959, when Traversi went back to UK higher education. Formerly the British Council representative for Australia, he had been behind unsuccessful attempts to get Australians to establish their own institution to promote their nation's culture overseas. Wilmot attributed

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<sup>113</sup> Report on a visit to Tehran to study the British Council's *English by Television* programme, 28 November 1959, TNA, BW 49/15.

<sup>114</sup> Charles Wilmot (Controller, British Council Iran) to the British Council (London), 29 July 1959, TNA, BW 49/15.

his failure here to the lack of political will and appetite for such an agency in Australia.<sup>115</sup>

Taking over from Traversi in May 1959, Wilmot asserted in a memo to the British Council's Education Division that *English by Television* was 'an absorbing experiment.' Despite its low budget, first-year teething problems and inexperienced staff, the programme should be regarded as a success. The enterprise would only get stronger provided it could be more professionalised. The current reliance on volunteers and a small, under-paid team would not work long term. The British Council needed to regard *English by Television* as an endeavour in its own right, formally appointing someone to oversee this. The role would require someone to write, direct and act, as well as liaise, with the head office in London.<sup>116</sup>

The British Council in London, however, was resistant to Wilmot's requests, deeming them 'out of proportion to the relative importance of this activity.' While they were happy with *English by Television*, they did not envisage it as key to broader UK cultural diplomacy in Iran. Replying to Wilmot, the British Council claimed that they could not justify the money and time Wilmot demanded for this. They were also convinced that such initiatives should be in the BBC's remit, as they produced similar programmes for East Asian and South American audiences. As the broadcaster had already informed the British Council, they were much more adept and efficient at producing these shows. The agency in Iran should instead focus on its strength, English language teaching.<sup>117</sup> The tensions between Wilmot and his superiors in London surrounding this issue came to a head in 1961 when TVI took control of *English by Television* away from the British Council. As the broadcaster developed, its

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<sup>115</sup> Roger Close (Deputy Controller, Education Division, British Council) to the British Council (London), 24 May 1959, TNA, BW 49/15.

<sup>116</sup> Charles Wilmot (Controller, British Council Iran) to the British Council's Education Division (London), 13 July 1959, TNA, BW 49/15; Charles Wilmot (Controller, British Council Iran) to the British Council (London), 29 July 1959, TNA, BW 49/15.

<sup>117</sup> Victor Bloomfield (Middle East Department Controller, British Council) to Charles Wilmot (Controller, British Council Iran), 7 September 1959, TNA, BW 49/15.

producers became bolder, more eager to have a greater editorial say over profitable programmes. They began steering script content and invested in studios and facilities. Due to the British Council's relative lack of investment in the programme compared to TVI, the UK agency's staff confined themselves to writing the scripts.<sup>118</sup>

*English by Television* was not alone in suffering from a lack of staff and resources. Monetary, personnel and equipment shortages were issues blighting British cultural diplomacy in Iran as a whole. These problems were frequently mentioned in the British Council's annual reviews. Every April since its 1955 return, the organisation's officials in Iran were required to compile a progress report. In each evaluation, Traversi – and latterly Wilmot – complained about staff and money shortages. The latter point proved particularly damaging to the British Council in Iran, with demand for its English language teaching outstripping the supply of teachers and classroom spaces. It was as a result of this that, despite English language teaching being its primary function, the British Council's contribution 'was a mere drop in the ocean.'<sup>119</sup>

Budgetary issues, moreover, meant that the British Council could not expand beyond English language teaching and promote the UK's culture in Iran. Lack of funding meant that the agency's officials were unable to attract exhibits, concerts and lectures, something branches in other countries were able to do more freely. The British Council in Iran was accordingly forced to operate within a 'small part of their remit' here. Outside of instructing Iranian students and teachers in the English language, the agency just showed technical films to aspiring engineers. Such programmes were technical and instructional, doing little to promote Britain's culture and way of life to viewers. Compounding this predicament for the

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<sup>118</sup> British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1960-61, 8 May 1961, TNA, BW 49/17.

<sup>119</sup> British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1955-56, 29 April 1956, TNA, BW 49/17; British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1956-57, 7 May 1957, TNA, BW 49/17; British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1957-58, 30 April 1958, TNA, BW 49/17; British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1958-59, 9 May 1959, TNA, BW 49/17.

British Council was the demand among Iranians for British-style initiatives in this field. Since reopening in 1956, the UK agency's library had been organising film showings of movies and documentaries on topics such as British art, history and music. During these events, the centre's cinema room had been 'uncomfortably full', with the library experiencing a significantly above average footfall.<sup>120</sup>

British Council officials in Iran were consequently frustrated that they were not in a position to compete or match the better-funded initiatives of the USIS. With the absence of substantial UK cultural diplomacy programmes in Iran after August 1953 and before February 1955, the US had become the dominant Western influence in this field. Despite complaining about financial shortages themselves, the American agency's initiatives were much more comprehensive. Not only had they had a significant impact on shaping Iran's education system, but also, they had a stranglehold on Iran's state-run radio stations. Equally, the Iran-America Society, whose functions were similar to the British Council, possessed a far superior building, had the resources to teach more students than the UK agency, and could attract musicians and lecturers. The organisation, as such, was not only able to reach students and teachers, but educators, government officials and middle-class professionals, too. Such policies had resulted in the US becoming the dominant Western culture in Iran, at a time when the country was becoming a key political and economic ally to the United States. Both of these roles had been enjoyed by Britain since the eighteenth century, yet America had taken the UK's place.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1955-56, 29 April 1956, TNA, BW 49/17; British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1956-57, TNA, BW 49/17; British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1957-58, TNA, BW 49/17; British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1958-59, TNA, BW 49/17.

<sup>121</sup> Inspection report on USIS Iran, 28 November 1959, NAII, USIA papers, Iran, Inspection Reports (1958-1962).

The Foreign Office and the British Council's annoyance at this turn of events were compounded by the USIS' attempts to ensure that UK cultural diplomacy in Iran did not supersede its American equivalent. To dissuade Iranian people and institutions from working with the British, American officials played on popular perceptions of the UK in Iran. Due to Britain's historic meddling in Iranian affairs, most of its people were suspicious of British motives and interactions. This notion of 'perfidious Albion' had manifested itself in the Iranian popular consciousness, with many blaming the UK whenever an unfortunate incident or event befell their country.<sup>122</sup> The USIS invested significantly in Abadan Technical College, an institution in the oil-rich Khuzestan region where Britain had historically exploited its resources and people. The USIS had also established a journalism and public relations course in the University of Tehran that demonstrated the tactics employed by the Foreign Office when it had meddled in Iranian affairs.<sup>123</sup> Both initiatives had clearly been successful. Despite the British Council's overtures, Iranian universities were unwilling to work with the institution, fearing that the UK agency sought to meddle and destabilise its operations. The University of Tehran, in particular, refused to respond to the British Council's requests for meetings, citing communication failures when pressed.<sup>124</sup> Even the May 1959 signing of the Anglo-Iranian Cultural Convention did little to improve Anglo-Iranian relations in this field. Despite pledging in writing to collaborate with one another through cultural exchanges, there

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<sup>122</sup> Review of press in Baghdad Pact countries, 14 November 1956, TNA, FO 371/121766; Survey of the BBC Persian Service's output in Iran, 17 December 1963, Caversham, Reading, BBC Written Archives Centre, E/3/182/1.

<sup>123</sup> Joint USIA-State Department message, 25 August 1956, NAIL, US State Department papers, Iran, US Education in Iran (1955-1960); American Embassy (Tehran) to State Department, 29 August 1957, NAIL, US State Department papers, Iran, US Education in Iran (1955-1960).

<sup>124</sup> British Council Representative in Iran's annual report, 1958-59, 9 May 1959, TNA, BW 49/17; David West (Foreign Office, Eastern Department) to the Foreign Office, 1 April 1959, TNA, FO 924/1251.



were no extra initiatives devised or suggested. As figures in the Foreign Office's Eastern Department predicted, the Iranians had no interest in acting on the pledges stated in the treaty. They had simply pushed for the agreement with Britain and other nations in the developed world as a means to formalise relations with these countries.<sup>125</sup>

Budget and personnel shortages – as well as the prevalent 'perfidious Albion' view among Iranian people – resulted in the British Council acting as a 'junior partner' to the USIS. By the end of the 1950s, both Foreign Office and British Council officials had come to accept this subservient role. They were resigned to the USIS' undermining of British cultural diplomacy, citing it as typical American behaviour. With regards to broader Anglo-American foreign policy towards Iran, figures from both departments conceded that US officials in Iran were treating their counterparts from the UK Embassy much better than they were during the 1951-53 Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis. To wrestle control of the industry away from the British – as well as to usurp Britain as the dominant Western power in the country – US officials had initially supported Mossagdeh's attempts to nationalise the cultivation and exporting of Iranian oil.<sup>126</sup> Now, though, the Americans had sought to 'smooth over' the UK's return to Iran, no one more so than the then US Ambassador, Loy Henderson. He, in particular, had helped break down popular and elite Iranian suspicion towards the British government and its initiatives, underlining how the UK now wanted a different type of relationship with Iran. The country no longer desired to 'imperially meddle' in Iranian affairs or sought to be the dominant political and economic foreign power. While this negative perception was going to

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<sup>125</sup> Geoffrey Harrison (British Ambassador, Iran) to Anthony Haigh (Foreign Office, Cultural Relations Department), 17 November 1958, TNA, FO 924/1235.

<sup>126</sup> Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to the Foreign Office, 13 December 1956, TNA, FO 371/120724.

take time to completely alter, the British Ambassador to Iran, Roger Stevens, maintained that the US had helped the UK Embassy make significant progress here.<sup>127</sup>

Despite this, the Foreign Office and the UK Embassy in Tehran were aware that their American counterparts were unwilling to 'yield their priority to the UK in any sphere.' From experiencing the USIS' reaction to British cultural diplomacy in Iran, they realised that attempts to foster greater Anglo-Iranian mutual understanding would be hindered by the US. As they would deem these initiatives a challenge to their interests and programmes in Iran, the Americans would seek to challenge and undermine the British Council's activities where possible. As the UK agency's attempts to establish ties with the University of Tehran illustrated, the American Embassy and the USIS were adept at promoting popular anti-British feeling among Iranians when they felt threatened by Britain.<sup>128</sup> Foreign Office and UK Embassy officials, consequently, settled for the role that the Americans wanted them to play in Iran, that of the 'junior partner.' They argued that, despite the 'lack of full reciprocity' and the fact that 'we have to do all the running', it was the only way British assessments of the Iranian situation could be taken into account in the shaping of American policy on Iran.<sup>129</sup>

Even though the UK was now content to play a 'junior' role in Iran to the US, it was still one of the main exponents of soft power in the country, second only to America. As this chapter demonstrates, the implementation of cultural and anti-Soviet propaganda policies was a pivotal aspect of 1950s Anglo-American foreign policy in Iran. Three key themes, moreover, can be ascertained from this section. First, that both US and UK officials perceived their programmes and policies as being successful, despite their failure and

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<sup>127</sup> Roger Stevens (British Ambassador, Iran) to Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), 7 December 1956, TNA, FO 371/120724.

<sup>128</sup> David West (Foreign Office, Eastern Department) to the Foreign Office, 1 January 1957, TNA, FO 371/120724.

<sup>129</sup> Roger Jackling (UK Embassy, Washington) to Frederick Brown (Foreign Office, Eastern Department), 31 December 1958, TNA, FO 371/140817.

inability to accurately assess their reception among the Iranian public. Second, was the Shah's resistance towards American and British soft power initiatives that promoted US and UK culture rather than tackled the supposed Communist threat. Despite being a key Western ally in the region, the Iranian monarch still feared that American and British policymakers sought to replace him, deeming US and UK cultural policies as a means to do this. The Shah and his acolytes, therefore, sought to limit and constrain these initiatives at every turn. The third and final key theme is that both American and British soft power policies were beset by staffing issues and limited budgets. In the cases of the USIS and the British Council, both agencies did not have the required personnel or the financial capabilities to fully implement their policies and programmes, leading to these initiatives not being as effective as initially envisaged. These points, among others, will be explored more depth in the following concluding section.

## **Conclusion**

*'As the time passed in Tehran, I felt more and more bearish about the ability of USIS to do much with anyone who was not already converted and proposed that there be a significant reduction in the USIS operation.'*<sup>1</sup>

The above quote is taken from an interview of Jack Shellenberger, a United States Information Agency (USIA) officer in Iran between February 1977 and July 1979. While in this role, Shellenberger presided over the reduction of the agency's staff and activities in the country. As this thesis demonstrates, the USIA, through the USIS, established itself in Iran between 1953 and 1960. Following this, the agency carried on its activities for the next 17 years, promoting American norms, values and ideas, while also seeking to dissuade Iranians from supporting Communist ideas. Increasing popular opposition, however, towards the regime of the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, compelled Shellenberger to minimise the USIA's involvement in Iran. Many Iranians, crucially, had allegedly come to regard the US government and the American agency as being too closely entwined with the Iranian monarch. Presidential administrations from Dwight D. Eisenhower to Gerald Ford had authorised the provision of extensive military and economic support to the Shah. The USIS, at the same time, had been implementing policies that sought to protect and foster popular support for the ruling regime. Shellenberger, then, sought to dissociate the agency from the

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Shellenberger interviewed by G. Lewis Schmidt, 21 April 1990, Arlington, Virginia, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, <https://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Shellenberger,%20Jack.toc.pdf> (accessed 1 May 2019).

American government and the Shah, minimising the USIS' presence in Iran before public opposition and protests towards the Iranian government escalated.<sup>2</sup>

Fearful that cutting back the USIS' provision in Iran would hinder America's cultural ties with the country, US State Department officials resisted Shellenberger's recommendations. Events in the country, though, rendered their protestations redundant. In February 1978, left-wing and religious activists began demonstrating against the Shah in major Iranian cities. As the year unfolded, an increasing number of citizens joined these protests, culminating in national unrest. By September 1978, the Iranian monarch declared martial law and ordered the military to open fire on protestors in Tehran. In response to the 64 demonstrators that lost their lives, as well as increasing public antagonism towards the Shah's rule, activists declared a general strike. By January 1979, the Iranian monarch's position was untenable, forcing him to leave Iran. Throughout this period of instability in the country, the USIS was unable to function effectively. The agency's inability to implement its cultural and propaganda initiatives did not change in the wake of the Shah's departure. With the April 1979 founding of the Islamic Republic, USIS officials were confident that they could resume their activities. Yet the Iranian public's increasing antagonism towards the US, fuelled by the new Iranian government's depiction of America as the 'Great Satan', limited the effectiveness and reach of USIS initiatives. By November 1979, though, the agency's presence in Iran came to an abrupt end. The storming of the US Embassy in Tehran and the

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<sup>2</sup> Jack Shellenberger interviewed by G. Lewis Schmidt, 21 April 1990, Arlington, Virginia, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, <https://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Shellenberger,%20Jack.toc.pdf> (accessed 1 May 2019); Theodore Boyd interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, 29 November 2005, Arlington, Virginia, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, <https://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Boyd,%20Theodore%20A.toc.pdf> (accessed 1 May 2019).

taking of 52 hostages, several of whom were USIS officials, compelled USIA figures in Washington to discontinue their attempts to culturally engage with Iran.<sup>3</sup>

The UK's soft power initiatives in Iran came to a close at the same time as their American equivalent. In October 1978, the British Council withdrew from all major Iranian cities aside from Tehran in response to the growing protests against the Shah. Just one year later, and after witnessing the storming of the US Embassy, the UK agency left Iran's capital.<sup>4</sup> Unlike the USIS, the British Council was invited to return, reopening its Tehran office in January 2001. In February 2009, however, it was again forced to vacate its premises. The Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, suspected the organisation's English language teaching activities of encouraging domestic opposition towards the ruling Islamic regime.<sup>5</sup> Proceedings here, and with the USIS, illustrate the importance of soft power policies to US and UK diplomacy in Iran during the Shah's reign and beyond. From the August 1953 coup that toppled Prime Minister Mohammad Mossagdeh to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, seeking to engage with Iranians on a cultural level was certainly a pivotal aspect of American and British foreign policy in the country. The foundations of this diplomatic approach stemmed from the propaganda and cultural initiatives considered, devised and implemented between 1953 and 1960.

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Reinhardt (Director of the International Communication Agency) to Zbigniew Brzezinski (President James E. Carter's Assistant for National Security Affairs), 14 November 1979, Oxford, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980, Public Diplomacy, Volume XXX*.

<sup>4</sup> British Council (Iran) to the Foreign Office (London), 28 October 1978, Kew, Richmond, The National Archives, BW 49/27.

<sup>5</sup> 'British Council in Iran "Illegal"', *BBC News*, 5 February 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middleeast/7872525.stm> (accessed 1 May 2019); Julian Borger, 'British Council Suspends Operations in Iran After Local Staff "Intimidated"', *The Guardian*, 5 February 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/feb/05/british-council-iran> (accessed 1 May 2019).

The concluding chapter of this thesis evaluates American and British soft power in Iran during this period. This PhD set out to answer the following five questions. First, what were American and British policymakers' motives for seeking to improve diplomatic relations with Iran via soft power initiatives? Second, how did the UK Foreign Office and the US State Department use cultural and propaganda initiatives to achieve their diplomatic goals in Iran? Third, what was the nature of the policies implemented by the British Council and the United States Information Service? How successful were the UK and US here? Fourth, what consequences did Anglo-American cultural diplomacy in Iran between 1953 and 1960 have on the UK-US 'special relationship' in the Middle East? Fifth, what implications did it have on the wider Cold War?

In answering these research questions, this thesis contends that cultural diplomacy and propaganda initiatives formed a key part of the US and UK's foreign policy approach towards Iran. The analysis also argues that this was an area in which American and British diplomats and officials sought to compete with one another to be the dominant Western power in the country. The US government, through the State Department-backed USIS, prevailed over their UK counterparts here. Soft power policies formed part of much broader American political and economic efforts to strengthen diplomatic ties with Iran and its Shah. Despite the USIS' attempts to undermine the UK Foreign Office and the British Council's operations, the latter was able to create a niche for itself in Iran through the teaching of the English language. The initiatives in this field by both countries, though, were undermined by the high financial cost, inadequate staffing and the Iranian government's paranoia. While happy to work with the US and UK to contain Communism in Iran, they feared that policies promoting American and British norms, values and ideas sought to destabilise the Shah's government.

To US State Department and UK Foreign Office figures, strengthening and developing diplomatic ties with Iran were a high priority post-1945. A vital oil source that neighboured the Soviet Union, the country straddled numerous countries and regions. American and British officials feared that the USSR would exploit Iran's geographic position.

Once the Soviets had helped replace the Shah with a Communist government, they could then use the country as a platform to make inroads into the Persian Gulf, Indian Subcontinent and Arab world. After August 1953, however, Iran became even more geopolitically vital to American and British foreign policy interests. The 1951-53 Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis demonstrated that the Iranian monarch's grip on power was precarious. The recently deposed Nationalist Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossagdeh, had proved popular among the Iranian people, as did the left-wing ideals espoused by the underground Soviet-backed Tudeh Party. These Nationalist and Communist arguments had increasingly resonated with Iran's educated middle classes, a burgeoning societal group in 1950s Iran both in terms of size and prominence. At the same time, many Iranian people increasingly held unfavourable views towards the US and UK. To prevent the nationalisation of Iran's oil industry, the American Central Intelligence Agency and the British Secret Intelligence Service had helped instigate a coup in August 1953 against Mossagdeh. The United States' involvement here persuaded many Iranians that America aspired to imperially meddle in Iran's affairs, in a similar way that Britain had for nearly two centuries. Since the 1790s, the British government had intermittently intervened in Iranian politics. UK Foreign Office figures had imposed treaties, seized assets and helped replace rulers who were not conducive to their interests.

The US State Department and the UK Foreign Office had different motives for implementing soft power policies in Iran. For the former, initiatives in this field formed part of a much broader effort to strengthen ties with the country and its people after 1953. Initiatives in this field complemented considerable American political, economic and military support, and were a pivotal aspect of US foreign policy towards the country. The USIA, through its constituent USIS office in Tehran, were the main conduit, devising and implementing programmes and initiatives. The US State Department, as well as senior Eisenhower administration officials, concerned themselves with the policies to contain Communism in Iran. They both feared that the Tudeh's clandestine activities, in conjunction with Radio Moscow's Farsi broadcasts, were undermining the Shah's regime. They were also under the



impression that these agents of Soviet policy were engaging and encouraging Arab nationalist governments, especially Egypt, to adopt similar tactics. White House and State Department figures, therefore, used National Security Council meetings to make the combating of Soviet subversive activities a mainstay of the USIS' activities in Iran.

Initiatives promoting American values and culture in Iran, likewise, were advocated by US Embassy officials in Tehran. While the supposed Soviet threat to the country concerned them, they placed greater emphasis on the need to counter increasing popular anti-Americanism in Iran. The coining and placing of the phrase 'Yankee go home' into the popular Iranian vernacular particularly concerned Embassy officials. They feared that, if left unchecked, this would undermine US-led political, economic and military initiatives. For USIS figures, these cultural diplomacy policies had initially been a low priority, with the fostering of a US-style library culture the only tangible policy. This changed with the January 1955 appointment of Robert Payne as the chief USIS officer in Iran. Unlike his predecessor, Edward Wells, Payne was convinced that the promotion of the American way of life was the only effective way to ensure that Iran remains pro-Western. Having witnessed first-hand the rise of President Gamel Abdel Nasser in Egypt, he feared that Iran would go the same way unless the USIS concentrated its efforts on cultural diplomacy.

UK Foreign Office officials shared their American counterparts' concern with the apparent emerging subversive Communist threat in Iran. British diplomats and officials were also more determined to ensure the safe supply of Iranian oil. Propaganda initiatives and cultural diplomacy, with the latter undertaken through the British Council, were a means for the UK to retain its presence in the country. Iran had previously been regarded as being an integral part of the UK's informal empire. With the United States' growing political, economic and cultural involvement with Iran and its Shah, though, this was no longer the case. The UK government's attempts to rely on soft power to strengthen Anglo-Iranian relations focused on engaging with political elites and prominent individuals. Foreign Office figures presumed this would lead to a 'trickle-down effect', with these officials, in turn, shaping the views of ordinary Iranians towards Communism and Britain. Cultural and propaganda initiatives, then,

were employed as a means to compete with the US in Iran. Unable to match or afford the American government's military and economic support to the Shah, soft power policies could be used to fill the gaps left by the US. With regards to the British Council's English language teaching provision, officials could play on Britain's supposed prestige of its education system, persuading and attracting Iranians towards the UK as a result.

The US and UK's respective rationales accordingly shaped the types and nature of the propaganda and cultural policies both countries implemented. In seeking to counter Soviet subversive activities, American and British officials exploited the Iranian government's willingness to receive assistance and support. The USIS initially supplied anti-Communist articles to the Iranian press, proceeding to work with Department of Press and Broadcasting (DPB) to shape Radio Tehran's programming and its reach outside the Iranian capital. As well as the Deputy Prime Minister, Nasser Zolfghari, officials from the American agency established close links with Nosratollah Moinian, the DPB's head. Their overall aim was to make the government department, which ran Radio Tehran, an anti-Communist bulwark in its own right. The UK Foreign Office adopted a similar approach. Their Information Research Department (IRD) worked with SAVAK, the Iranian secret and intelligence service. In particular, they worked extensively with Teymur Bakhtiar and Hassan Pakravan, SAVAK's Director and Deputy-Director respectively, to produce and disseminate anti-Communist propaganda.

USIS officials, moreover, worked with certain educational institutions to promote the American way of life. The US agency relied on these political elites and organisations as a platform from which to spread the norms, values and ideas of the United States. The USIS collaborated extensively with the University of Tehran. They helped establish a wide-reaching staff and student exchange programme between the Iranian institution and American universities, as well as seeking to improve the University of Tehran's arts and humanities provision. USIS officials also strove to foster a culture of extra-curricular activities among Iran's youths. Through encouraging after-school activities, they hoped to promote the idea that the US' education system, unlike its British or Soviet counterparts, produced more

mature, well-balanced individuals. As well as organising youth-activity seminars, USIS officials also encouraged Iran's Education Ministry to provide courses for Iran's schoolteachers on running extra-curricular programmes. Beyond its work in the fields of youth activities and higher education, the USIS attempted to promote Iran's socio-economic modernisation. In so doing, they hoped to underline to the Iranian people the US' role in their country's rejuvenation, fostering positive perceptions of America in the process. Much of the American agency's work here focused on promoting the projects of the Iranian government-backed Plan Organisation. Having been charged by the Shah with improving Iran's infrastructure, none of its initiatives had proved successful. Most of its schemes, both in rural and urban areas, were incomplete and were facing long delays. The increasing public backlash towards these developments induced USIS officials to promote the Plan Organisation's activities and work with its senior management to modernise its practices and bureaucracy.

Despite its smaller budget, staffing and resources, the British Council sought to compete with the USIS in Iran. It focused much of its energy on English language teaching, something British Council officials were confident they could deliver to a higher standard than their American counterparts. Before undertaking this approach, the British Council had to reopen its offices in Tehran and other major Iranian cities, having been forced to depart in 1952 during the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis. From their 1955 return, the UK agency focused most of their efforts on the teaching of the English language, offering advanced courses to educated elites and government officials. To attract these individuals, the British Council played on the popular perception that the UK education system was more rigorous than its American equivalent. Having reasserted itself, the agency's senior figures in Iran, most notably its chief of operations, Derek Traversi, sought to shape the broader teaching of English in the country. Offering pedagogical courses to Iranian teachers of the language, the British Council also worked with the Iranian broadcaster Television Iran in the production and broadcast of *English by Television*. The delivery of this programme on terrestrial Iranian television was novel, the first time the British Council had used the medium to promote

Britain's values and ideas in any of their overseas posts. As well as audio-visual lessons on spelling, grammar and punctuation, the programme informed viewers of British culture, norms, ideas and geography.

Even before the British Council's February 1955 return to the country, American figures had worked with their UK counterparts to achieve shared goals. Notably, officials from both countries were keen to promote a united front to both the Soviet Union and the Iranian government. US and UK Embassy figures, as well as their respective State Department and Foreign Office superiors, feared that a failure to do so would lead to either power seeking to 'divide and rule' America and Britain. Joint US-UK propaganda, for example, stressed how both countries worked together to establish the Baghdad Pact. Radio broadcasts and literature distributed across Iran highlighted how both countries envisioned the organisation as a vehicle for ensuring geopolitical stability across the region. At the same time, US and UK officials worked together to subvert the Communist threat in Iran. USIS figures supplied the British-based Farsi-language BBC Persian Service radio station with unfavourable stories regarding the Soviet Union, with staff from both embassies collaborating to produce anti-Communist press releases.

Yet, when it came to the promotion of their respective cultures and way of life in Iran, USIS officials sought to undermine Britain's efforts in this field. Senior figures within the American agency suspected the British Council of seeking to usurp the USIS as the dominant exponent of Western values in Iran. Its officials, accordingly, aimed to sabotage the UK institution's ventures into Iranian education. To negate the impact of the British Council's delivery of English language courses to proficient speakers, the USIS expanded their provision and support of Iranian technical and vocational education. They approved the opening of a new technical college in Abadan, a city in the oil-rich Khuzestan province that the British government had historically been heavily involved in. Officials from the American agency hoped to demonstrate to the college's students and the city's inhabitants the US' greater interest in their personal and economic development. When the British government-backed Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) had been the region's main employer, the

organisation had taken little interest in developing the area. USIS figures, moreover, also sought to remind Iranians of the negative popular perceptions of Britain in the country. Encouraging the British Council to establish a journalism course at the University of Tehran, the USIS quickly distanced themselves from the initiative. They aimed to illustrate to the Iranian government and people how the subversive nature of this course's content indicated that Britain still sought to meddle in the country's affairs from afar.

US State Department and UK Foreign Office officials were convinced that their soft power policies had helped make some progress towards their wider goals. Soviet and Tudeh activities, while not totally quashed, had been constrained. An increasing number of middle-class Iranians, likewise, had become increasingly enamoured with American and British cultures, norms and values. Senior USIA figures, in their report on the USIS' activities in Iran, had even proclaimed that the agency's initiatives had undoubtedly helped improve elite-level relations between the US and Shah's government. The extent to which, though, the USIS and the British Council had shaped popular perceptions of the Soviet Union and Communism, let alone US and UK culture, is unclear and would be a fruitful area for further research. Neither agency, crucially, were willing or able to accurately monitor the reception of their endeavours or initiatives. This can be attributed in part to the Iranian government outlawing the monitoring of views and broadcasts in Iran by external powers. Equally pressing, though, was that the USIS and the British Council assumed that the views of the Shah's regime and the country's people were synonymous. As the Iranian monarch and his acolytes had approved the US and UK's cultural and propaganda initiatives, USIS and British Council figures presumed that the Iranian people were equally enthused. Severely undermining these US-UK cultural and propaganda initiatives, however, was both countries' shortage of staff and resources. The activities of the USIS and the British Council were particularly blighted by these finance and personnel issues. The former was forced to make budget cuts by the end of the 1950s due to austerity measures imposed by the USIA and the State Department. The latter was unable to spend the money required to match and compete with the USIS' initiatives in Iran.

Indeed, the analysis of US and UK soft power in this dissertation highlights certain tensions, as well as the competitive element, within the Anglo-American 'special relationship.' Both countries, while collaborating in many fields, had similar aims but different regional priorities in the Middle East. The British government, lacking their own domestic supplies of the resource, were desperate to ensure the safe supply of oil from the region. Their American counterparts, in contrast, were more concerned with halting the spread of Communism. Exacerbating Anglo-US tensions were both countries' contrasting fortunes of the world stage. Britain, post-1945, was a fading international force, relinquishing many of its overseas colonies and reducing its global commitments. The US, in comparison, had emerged from the Second World War as a political and economic superpower, making and shaping the world order. Its diplomats and officials were now taking a greater interest in the struggle against Communism in regions such as the Middle East. This thesis highlights how these developments caused friction with the Anglo-American 'special relationship.' Iran, historically, had constituted part of Britain's 'informal empire', with the UK Foreign Office dictating political proceedings from afar. Its wider decline, though, reduced its capabilities to maintain this influence, culminating in the British government's loss of control over Iran's petroleum industry in the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis' aftermath. Exploiting Britain's diminished standing in the country, the US had taken its place as the dominant Western power after 1953, something the UK Foreign Office were determined to reverse. Their reliance on soft power policies to achieve this, however, failed, due to their comparative lack of resources and the USIS' surreptitious sabotaging of their activities. By the end of the 1950s, the British government were resigned to playing the role of 'junior partner' to the US in Iran.

More broadly, this dissertation suggests that the implementation of American and British soft power initiatives in Iran between 1953 and 1960 had implications for the wider Cold War. Indeed, the analysis here makes four key contributions to the study of US-UK foreign policy in this period. First, it views Anglo-American relations with Iran through the prism of soft power. This is an original take on the topic. Previous research has emphasised economic and military interactions between the UK, US and Iran. This dissertation

supplements the considerable body of literature already produced on the cultural Cold War. Many of these histories have considered the use and employment of soft power by the two main superpowers to reassert their position on the world stage. Second, it explores the role of individuals in the making and shaping of foreign policy initiatives in the Cold War era. The soft power policies of both countries in Iran were formulated and delivered by figures within the US and UK embassies in Tehran, or by USIS and British Council officials. The USIS' Robert Payne, for instance, was integral to ensuring that the American agency sought to promote the American way of life to Iranian people. Similarly, the British Council's chief of operations in Iran, Derek Traversi, was key to the British Council's return to Tehran, its expansion into other Iranian cities and the televisual broadcast of *English by Television*. The role played by individuals within the Shah's regime cannot be ignored here, either. As Deputy Prime Minister, Zolfghari helped encourage the US State Department and UK Foreign Office to work with the Iranian government to combat Soviet subversive activities. His subordinates, Moinian and Bakhtiar, also worked with the Americans and British respectively to contain the spread of Communism in Iran.

Third, the dissertation illustrates that there was more to American and British diplomacy in the Cold War than the containment of Communism. While the need to combat supposed Soviet expansion was a key foreign policy concern, equally important to US and UK officials was the promotion of their respective cultures overseas. In seeking to expand and maintain their prominent positions on the world stage, American and British governing elites strove to persuade and attract foreign publics to their respective norms, values and ideas. Fourth, and linked to the third point, this PhD demonstrates not just Iran's importance to Anglo-American foreign policy goals, but also soft power's key role in cementing diplomatic ties with the country in the 1950s and beyond. Cultural and propaganda policies, clearly, were not just employed as a solution to short-term issues. Rather, they were implemented by US and UK officials in the 1950s as part of a broader attempt to cement diplomatic ties with a country that was, and remains, geopolitically vital to American and British foreign policy goals.

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