

Department of Political Sciences

Chair of Geopolitical scenarios and political risk

**The Western interference in Iran
from the 19th century to the present.
History repeats itself**

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Introduction

This study is the result of historiographic research on Iran's history in the last three centuries, starting from the Great Game in the first chapter, namely the conflict characterized by the activities of the secret services and diplomacies of Great Britain and Russia in Central Asia and in the Middle East after the Second World War, to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, known as the Iranian Nuclear Agreement signed on July 14, 2015 in Vienna by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany.

The aim of this study is to examine and highlight the extent to which the decisions and actions taken by Western countries, especially the United States, influenced the Iranian internal politics and social cohesion. For this reason, the second and third chapters will be completely dedicated to the United States and to their foreign policy approach which has changed with the succession of the various Presidents and Administrations. More specifically, the second chapter analyzes the different doctrines that shaped the strategy of USA in the geopolitical scenarios in the last century, while a more in-depth analysis of the USA-Iran relationship is carried out in the third chapter, the relations between the American Presidencies and Iran from the Second World War until the 1979 Revolution are explained in depth.

The analysis of US foreign policy and its influence on the country will stop at the Carter presidency as the 1979 Illuminated Revolution has definitively isolated the country with the rest of the world and especially with the USA. The revolution of 1979 that has reshaped the politics and geopolitical dynamics of the country and that started the era of isolation of Iran from the rest of the countries, including the USA, is described in the fourth chapter.

The fifth and final chapter reconstructs the events and the succession of the various Iranian presidencies of the post-revolutionary period, starting from the legacy of the Supreme Guide Ruhollah Khomeyni, with his death, until Hassan Rouhani one of the fathers of the agreement, almost wrecked, on the nuclear.

However, referring to Iran now, we cannot but think of the murder of the general and head of the Qods, Qasem Soleimani, a hot topic nowadays that will be addressed in the conclusions. Indeed, while the project of this thesis was elaborated, this event had not taken place already. The murder of Soleimani will however be mentioned in the conclusions even though the issue will not be dealt with exhaustively due to the temporal proximity and the difficulty of finding reliable scientific sources.

1. Iran and the West

In this chapter, we are going to analyze the early relationship in the 19th century, among UK, Russia and Persia. The two countries were interested in expanding their power over the Middle East and Asia, and, with the discovery of the oil fields in Iran, their interests of interference grew. As it will be explained below, UK and Russia took advantage of their power to ratify agreements (often not respected) that only harmed Persia. This is described as the so-called “Great Game”, namely the situation where these two powerful empires faced each other in the order to impose their strong influence in the Asian territory at the expenses of the Asian peoples.

1.1 The Great Game

In the 19th century Russia and Great Britain abruptly became part of the Persian political life. In the eyes of Persians, Britain represented science, liberalism, progress and improvement while Russia was seen more as a country that embodied the traditional European order. Both countries had strong interests in Persia, and they seemed to be far more threatening than what they actually claimed to be. It could even be argued that the presence of these two external actors limited their own aims acting often as a counterweight. Sometimes, however, this situation led Britain and Russia to be very fearful whenever there was a reforming spirit in the country that could change the fragile balance, and this brought about the stagnation of the country. In 1871, *Shah* Naser od-Din Qajar appointed Mirza Hosein Khan as Prime Minister, a diplomat who had had the opportunity to see the effects of the Tanzimat Reforms in Istanbul. The latter claimed that Persia should experience the same change and he tried several times to persuade the *Shah* to travel to the West in order to understand how other countries were evolving. A year later, Mirza Hosein Khan managed to convince the *Shah* to accept the Reuter concession¹ which included the construction of a railroad and which gave Von Reuter the mining rights in Persia. Even though the Reuter Concession was meant to bring some progress and innovation, in those years the country suffered from imports, high production cost and the reduced level production of food which all together led to severe famines with the death of thousands of people². The discontent of the population helped fuel Shah's opposition to the Reuter Concession, and, in the end, the *Shah* decided – two years after his appointment – to remove Mirza Hosein Khan from his role. In order to delete the previous concession, the *Shah*

¹ Signed in 1872 by Baron Julius de Reuter, a British banker and businessman

² Amanat, (1997); The Cambridge History of Iran, vol. VII. From Nadir Shah to Islamic Republic.

gave Von Reuter the opportunity to create the Imperial Bank of Persia, which would have had the exclusive right to print money. The unsuccessful attempt to build a railway that could connect the country faster with the neighbouring ones displeased Russia, which was in charge of the construction works. In exchange, however, Russia had the opportunity to create the Persian Cossack Brigade headed by Russian officers that allowed the country a strong influence among the ranks. During the 1870s, given also the Russian conquests in Central Asia, Great Britain had a friendlier attitude with Persia which, from a 'puppet' could have become a reliable ally, encouraging some internal reforms, since Persia still suffered the paralysis of the previous years. It was in the interest and intention of the British to help the *Shah* to consolidate its power and build a stronger Persia, instead of keeping it in a situation of submission.

There were negotiations between the two that merged into thin air given the scarce confidence of the *Shah* Naser od-Din and, when the Liberals succeeded the government in Britain, there was no possibility of reopening the negotiations. In the 1880s, many Prime Ministers followed but no one had full confidence of the *Shah*. For Persia, those were years of many concessions to foreigners such as that on the tobacco, for which a monopoly was created in favour of a British company. This concession to the British overcame the internal competition and annoyed the farmers, landowners and merchants of the bazaars because a fixed sale price was imposed over the market. This mix of interests combined with the *Ulema's*³ lack of willingness to accept foreign presence within the city bazaars led to an expanded protest. In the cities of Tabriz and Tehran the army fired on the crowd, provoking even those who were not part of the protest. At the end of 1891, the *Mojtahed* (jurist), Hajji Mirza Hasan Shirazi, encouraged the people towards a boycott of tobacco, which was also attended by the wives of the *Shah*.⁴

This brought to a situation of increased debt for the country and, at the beginning of the following year, the government withdrew the concession. From that event onwards, Russian interests dominated the Court and the *Shah* decided to limit contacts with other European countries by adopting a much more repressive internal policy. Naser od-Din banned the circulation of foreign newspapers written in Farsi, abruptly curbed the expansion of education which, up to that point, he had tried to encourage, and surrounded himself with Ministers hostile to previous reformism. In 1896, the *Shah* was victim of an attack by Mirza Reza Kermani, who stated during the interrogation that he had previously had the possibility of killing the *Shah* but that he was blocked, since many Jews were present on the site, and he was

³ Guardians, interpreters and transmitters of religious knowledge in Islam

⁴ Axworthy, (2008); Iran: Empire of the Mind: A history from Zoroaster to the present day. Penguin UK

stopped from the fear of claims on a minority that had nothing to do with what happened.⁵ Mirza Reza Kermani was a former prisoner who, a year before the murder, came into contact with the theologian Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, a man opposed to British influences and ambiguous to Russian influences, and among the main inspirers of the 1891 boycott. The premature death of the *Shah* could have caused unrest throughout the country, but the Cossack brigade managed to remain calm in Tehran until the appointment of the successor already previously designated, Mozzafar od-Din, a man already ill when he ascended the throne and surrounded by greedy advisers. The new *Shah* initially chose a Prime Minister prompt to the reformation of the country, Amin od-Dowleh who opened new schools including girls and gave the opportunity to found cultural associations after suspending the censorship. Even though their activities were often independent, the state reserves were drying up. To solve the problem, Amin od-Dowleh had to revert to Russia again, in exchange for a loan to clear the accounts he guaranteed new monopolistic concessions. Among the various cash-making initiatives, Amin od-Dowleh also decided to hire Belgian customs administrators. All these attempts were not sufficient and in 1897, after not being able to snatch a further loan from the British, he was relieved of office. In his place, Amis os-Sultan was appointed. He gave the Belgian Joseph Naus the post of customs Minister and he became then Minister of Finance. The new customs measures taken did not immediately appeal to many traders for two reasons. The first is that the taxes were higher than before and not for foreigners, the second is that it was foreigners who collected these taxes. Loans from Russia were unwelcome and the *Ulema* could not accept the new schools that weakened their figures. The freedom to assembly ⁶and the abolition of censorship made public the criticisms of the government coming from different levels of the society, from socialists to nationalists, from liberals to Islamic reformists, tending to all those who – for the same or different reasons – were contrary to the monarchical structure. In this period of instability, the *Shah* once again committed himself by yielding some rights to the British entrepreneur William Knox d’Arcy who, in 1901, explored the entire country in search of oil. The British were discouraged that they had lost influence and power in the previous round of the 'Great Game' and again became protagonists in the Persian political scenario. In fact, the overseas government helped and financed the revolts through the *Ulema*, but the protests actually took a different turn than the one hoped for: the protesters turned against foreigners or more generally non-Muslims. In

⁵ Levy, (1999); Comprehensive History of the Jews of Iran

⁶ Amanat, (1997); The Cambridge History of Iran, vol. VII. From Nadir Shah to Islamic Republic.

1905, marking year for the future of Persia, the harvests were bad and the Russian defeat in the war against Japan was greeted with enthusiasm by the Persian elites since this *debacle* was the demonstration that the Western countries were not completely unbeatable. In the meantime, the price of sugar increased by more than 30% while that of wheat by almost 90%, customs revenues dropped drastically also due to the conflict and the *Shah* was forced to request a further loan from the Russians, who in exchange for £ 350000 claimed that there had to be Russian heading the Persian Army⁷. Nevertheless, this proposal was unacceptable for the *Shah* and he therefore decided to further raise the pressure on the merchants of the bazaar. In that year, during the *Moharram* – the month of mourning –, hundreds of merchants decided to close their shop in protest against the latest government decisions, while demanding the immediate resignation of the chief of customs Joseph Naus. The *Shah* promised to satisfy these requests but did nothing and in December 1905, after the governor of Tehran punished two merchants with the ‘*falake*’⁸ for raising the price of sugar too much, the protests rekindled, but this time it involved thousands of people demanding for the governor's resignation. After more than a month of protests, the *Shah* accepted the demonstrators' demands by deposing the governor. However, protests continued and protesters, including many theology scholars, went to Qom. The riot became a centre of political discussion and, for the first time, the idea of limiting the power of the *Shah* with the creation of a representative assembly (*Majles*) and a constitution (*Mashruteh*) began to circulate. In 1906, the demonstrators managed to convince the *Shah* to endorse the creation of the *Majles*, who immediately set to work on drafting a constitution.

1.2 Oil and the first global war

At the dawn of the First World War, the European powers renewed their naval fleets, the Germans under William II built increasingly efficient modern ships that threatened the historic British dominance over the seas that had lasted for centuries. In 1912, in order to keep up with the Germans, the British moved from the supply of ships from coal to oil, which burned more efficiently. But while Britain was very rich in coal, Persia had little reserves of oil and this forced it to look elsewhere. If Persia was already important for the British because of the Indian border, at this point it became indispensable for the oil reserves discovered in large quantities thanks to the concession of Arcy in Khuzestan. British influence became even stronger with

⁷ Abrahamian, (1979); The Causes of the constitutional Revolution in Iran.

⁸ With the term “falake” it is meant the punishment inflicted by whipping the feet of the offenders

the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907 that divided Persia into areas of influence: the great North with Russian prerogatives, while the South under the English sphere. With the outbreak of the 1911 revolution, Britain became increasingly the dominant power in the country especially after that the Russian artillery hit the shrine of Imam Reza in the North of the country, in Mashhad, where many demonstrators had fled days before.⁹ It is common knowledge that the revolution ended in 1911 but, in reality, the fruits of the riots such as the Constitution persisted the end of the revolution. Indeed, the revolution had a big effect on the population and on the public opinion, in the sense that people were more interested in politics and the role of the regional assemblies that appointed the delegates to be sent to the *Majles* became decisive.

Despite the explicit non-involvement and neutrality of the conflict, during the First World War Persia was divided between the various parties that maintained troops in their respective areas and although most of the fights were of low intensity, the one between the Ottoman Empire and Russia in the Northwest severely damaged the villages and the local population.¹⁰ After the war, Persia found itself in terrible conditions and experienced a very serious famine due to the dislocation of production in the period of the war. Another element that discouraged the economy of the country was the Russian Revolution: before the outbreak of the war 65% of the international trade took place with the Russians, while after 1918 it represented only 5%. Moreover, a serious pandemic and typhus hit the territory and a difficult famine followed: Persia was on its knees.

In 1919, the British foreign secretary Lord Curzon initially proposed and tried to forcefully impose an agreement between the two countries that would transform Persia into a protectorate. Like any previous agreement, the latter included promises to build infrastructure in Persia, security guarantees and the money that was needed only to pay the salaries of British counsellors and officers. Initially the very young Ahmad *Shah* accepted the agreement by Lord Curzon, but when the details and the figures were made public throughout Persia, all the political parties from liberals to radicals showed their criticism. The situation worsened when rumours began to circulate that the *Shah* had perceived large bribes to facilitate the adoption of the agreement.

The British tried in every way to apply the clauses of an agreement which, however, by constitution had to be approved by the majority of the *Majles*. The British pushes did not favour

⁹ Ansari, (2003); Modern Iran since 1921

¹⁰ Axworthy, (2008); Iran: Empire of the Mind: A history from Zoroaster to the present day. Penguin UK

the situation, on the contrary they deteriorated and further discredited the government, forcing the Prime Minister to resign in 1920.¹¹ While in London the British government was still convinced that it could get the treaty approved with or without the use of force, the commanders sent to Persia suddenly understood that this would have never happened.

British troops, led by the Field Marshal Edmund Ironside since 1920, despite resisting the attacks of the Jangali and their Bolshevik allies, were unwelcome to the Persians. Ironside was given the task of rearranging and rearming the Cossack Brigade. By exceeding the orders that he received, he got rid of the remaining Russian officers accused of anti-Briticism and of the residual Bolshevik infiltrations. The Marshal did not appoint any British soldier in their place, but he appointed a former Persian sergeant, Reza Khan, as leader of the Cossack Brigade. The goal of Ironside, fearing that the Persian Cossacks might somehow have allied with the Bolsheviks, was that of taking away British troops safely from Persia also making it clear to the Cossacks that he and his men would not have intervened if for whatever reason they turned against the government in Tehran. On February 16, 1921, Reza Khan, along with 2,500 Cossacks, marched towards the Capital. Five days later they managed to enter the city without any kind of obstacle and managed to get the job of organizing a new government led by the nationalist journalist Seyyed Zia Tabatabai. Reza Khan was appointed chief of the Army but after a few months the Prime Minister resigned. With the new government formation Reza Khan became Minister of War, surrounding himself more and more with friends or people who supported him. A few months later he had the opportunity to face the Jangali in Gilan who, being now without allies, were swept away and to Kuchek Khan, their leader, the head was cut off and it was exposed as a trophy on the way back to Tehran. Other tribes were fought and defeated, and Reza Khan's fame grew day by day. In 1923, he proclaimed himself Prime Minister and less than three years later, after changing his name to Pahlavi and after Ahmas *Shah* had announced his return from the thirty-month long European trip, he was crowned *Shah* of Persia.

1.3 From Persia to Iran under the rule of Reza Pahlavi

The rise of Reza Khan was certainly facilitated by British officers in Persia, but it cannot be argued that his victory was also British or even that he represented a puppet of the English government. In fact, what Ironside initially supported was that this result was scored thanks to the British policy even though he defined it as failed: there is no evidence that Ironside expected

¹¹ Katouzian, (2000); State and Society in Iran.

that Reza Khan in the future would or could have aligned with British politics. A few days after the installation of the new government, an agreement was signed with the Soviets that eliminated the concessions and financial claims granted to the Tsarist empire. Once the agreement was signed, Soviet troops left the country and left the rebels of the Ghilan region to their fate. In fact, in June 1920 the Soviet Republic of Ghilan was proclaimed after the Red Army overthrew the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan and definitively defeated the British who settled in the Trans-Caspian Republic. Without Soviet support, the new Soviet Republic of Ghilan was repressed and the leader Kucik Khan was forced to flee. In the meantime, the situation of the new government changed: the Prime Minister Tabataba'i was forced to flee following the orders of Reza Khan, who did not tolerate both the inability of the Prime Minister to launch a reform plan and his willingness to let the British interfere in the state affairs. Thus, the post of Prime Minister was given to Qavam al Saltanè and, after six years of suspension of the sessions, the *Majles* resumed its activity. Reza Khan, therefore, took care of the Army reform and he was led no longer by foreign officers, but by Iranians. Subsequently, Ahmad *Shah* appointed Reza Khan as Prime Minister, who already held the post of Minister of War, before returning to Europe. The new Prime Minister began to implement policies aimed at centralizing the state structure following the footsteps of Kemal Atatürk. The first obstacle for a centralized state was the status of tribal areas: they had enjoyed autonomy since the unification of Iran. Therefore, Reza Khan gradually decided to submit the tribes to state authority. Meanwhile in 1923, the fifth *Majles* promulgated the law according to which military service was mandatory. The club of *Ulemas* opposed this law because they were frightened that the conscription would have possibly detached the soldiers from religion due to the emergence of secular ideas. Mandatory conscription also served as a tool for centralising the state: the huge extension of the territory allowed the cohabitation of multiple ethnic groups, languages and religions. It was necessary to encourage the affirmation of an Iranian identity and compulsory military service would have facilitated it by means of the use of a single language, the Farsi. Persian military power grew significantly and with it the modernization works of the country: the construction of a trans-Iranian railway, the abolition of noble titles, reduction of holidays and the use of the Persian pre-Islamic calendar.

In October 1925, after the return from Europe of the ruler Ahmad *Shah* and after his deposition, Reza Khan was appointed Head of State by the *Majles*. A few months later, the Constitution was amended in order to favour a regime change. Sympathizing towards the ideology of Kemal Atatürk, Reza Pahlavi would have supported the transition of the State into a Republic, but he did not have the support of the *Ulema*, so the majority opted for a constitutional monarchy.

Thus, on April 25, 1926, Reza Khan crowned himself Reza *Shah* Pahlavi, giving rise to the new dynasty. At this point the change happened: the state of Reza *Shah* became a triad state based on the nation, on the *Shah* and on God. The Army was a pillar of the internal politics of the *Shah*, that is, it was the largest instrument of consensus in the new authoritarian state. Moreover, the Army became the new élite with privileges, which disadvantaged the previous noble and landowner class. The modernization works continued thanks to the expansion of the sectors from which the country's revenue derived: The State made use of the rights to exploit oil, the recovery of back taxes, the new taxation on consumer goods and the raising of duties customs. The state monopolies of tobacco, cement and energy were established, thus affirming the supremacy of the State. As the power of the *Shah* increased, the parliament increasingly assumed a purely symbolic role: the sovereign decided who could join it by promoting the growth of secular seats against the *Ulema*. With the latter, the *Shah* had a contradictory relationship: initially he needed their consent for the consolidation of his power, then he promoted secularism as an instrument of modernization, which tightened ties with the Shiite clergy.¹² Furthermore, the activity of parties and unions was gradually banned, and the Rebirth Party, which had favoured the rise of the Reza Kahn, was replaced with the Hezbe Irane No, the Party of New Iran. Political dissidents, belonging to pro-republican or communist parties, were imprisoned or exiled. Many of the policies implemented by the *Shah* were aimed at filling the deficiencies brought about by the malfunctioning of the Qajar state. For this reason, the transformations implemented by Reza *Shah* changed various aspects of the new nation. From the name of Persia, corresponding to the homonymous region and symbol of the decline of the Qajara era, the state was now called Iran, or land of the free or land of the Aryans, so that a common identity could have been created. The vast extension of the Iranian territory and the shortage of modern communication routes allowed the existence of multiple villages, instead of the concentration of the population in large cities. The decaying and backward feudal system was disrupted and, instead, the regime implemented industrial development policies which resulted in rapid urbanisation. This process allowed the birth of a new middle class together with the improvement of some social classes. The forced secularization and modernization of society provoked an identity crisis within the population. Following Ataturk in Turkey, Reza *Shah* started modernization also in the social field which was made possible – according to them – thanks to the creation of a society free from religion. Indeed, from the year 1925 until the end of his regency, Reza Pahlavi banned the use of the veil for women and the use of

¹² Abrahamian, (2009); A History of a modern Iran

headwear limited to the clergy; he promoted the use of western-styled clothing together with the use of the hat named as "*pahlavi*".¹³

Also Tadj olMolouk – the second wife of the *Shah* and mother of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi – showed herself prone to change: for the first time in Persian history, women of the sovereign dynasty were able to expose themselves to the public without the use of the veil and wearing western-styled cloths. As previously stated, it is necessary to strengthen the sense of identity of the nation in order to mitigate the differences between minorities and ethnicities: multi-ethnicity had to be reduced in favour of the consolidation of the nation-state. Therefore, to reach social heterogeneity, tribal individuality had to be eradicated. Reza *Shah* Pahlavi subdued numerous tribes of the country and subjected the nomads through forced sedentarisation, also by means of armed forces. The oppression of tribal and nomadic identities had long-lasting effects: even after the collapse of the regime they could no longer reassert themselves. The foreign policy was another tool used to impose strong Iranian nationalism. The alliances signed by the Qajaro State made Persia an object from which the foreign powers would benefit. Thus, with a series of measures, Reza Pahlavi managed to reduce the influence of foreign actors present in Iran. He founded the National Bank of Iran, removed the management of tax revenues from the Belgians, banned foreign presence in Iran for those without a permit and dismissed foreign officials. However, despite these measures, British influence was not entirely removed. He attempted to limit the prerogatives of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company; indeed, in 1932 he removed the concessions given since 1901 to Knox D'arcy to explore the soil in search of black gold, which turned into appropriation of the Iranian oil market. The cause of the cancellation resulted in a diplomatic clash, with the appeal by the British government to the League of Nations, whose mediation led to the stipulation of a new concession in 1933.¹⁴ Moreover, threatened by the British fleet on the Persian Gulf, Reza Pahlavi was forced to grant a new pact. The agreement could not be removed unilaterally, since it foresaw a guarantee of payment of one million pounds a year and the limitation of the exploited surface. In order to contain the British interference, which gradually decreased, Reza *Shah* tried to make agreements with other powers: with France, which already had agreements with Syria and Lebanon and with the United States, which were intimidated by the attitude of Britain. The attempt of alliance with Germany was successful: the most important cities were connected by direct flights with Iran and assistance was provided in training the military in the aviation field.

¹³ Abrahamian, (2009); A History of a modern Iran

¹⁴ Amanat, (1997); The Cambridge History of Iran, vol. VII. From Nadir Shah to Islamic Republic

In addition, the antagonism between the Persians and the British escalated following the signing of the Saadabad Pact in 1937, which proclaimed the recognition of borders and solidarity in the event of a foreign attack, between Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Afghanistan. During the years of the Reza the Great, there were certainly signs of internal collapse: the vast extension of Iranian territory and the rapid changes in society produced internal imbalances. The first signs of internal subsidence are attributable to the birth of the new middle class of intellectuals, called intelligentsia, segregated young professionals who, with the development of the educational system, made their way into the new Persian reality, supporting the belief that the Iranian reality was affected by an Eastern despotism.

The opposition by intelligentsia claimed that the *Shah* was corrupt; the signing of the new concession of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company to the British in 1933 revealed the idea that Reza *Shah* Pahlavi was an English puppet. Nevertheless, the intellectuals were not the only ones convinced of the malfunctioning of the state, also the clergy and religious people were annoyed by the results obtained with the social modernization of the country. This was confirmed by an episode: in 1935, the first real sign of rebellion against the *Shah* was externalised. During the Mashhad uprising, some preachers locked themselves in the sanctuary, demonstrated against the sovereign describing him as a heretic. The riot was suppressed in blood, bringing deaths and injuries to civilians. This episode, however, did not have a great impact on public opinion. The real cause of the end of the State of Reza Pahlavi can be traced back to the impact of the Second World War, which constituted only the last element in the dynamics that influenced the Persian soil previously analysed. At the beginning of the Second World War, the Iranian Army was certainly better armed than in the Qajara era, indeed, from 1921 to 1941, military expenditure corresponded to 33.5% of the national budget. The supply of the armed forces was made through agreements with the world powers: some departments of the Army were sent to Russia and France for training, while the Iranian navy was refuelled from Italy, which took charge of the training of the military in the academies of Genoa and Livorno.¹⁵ In 1939, the Ribbentrop Molotov non-aggression Pact entered into force between Germany and the Soviet Union, but in May 1941 German troops invaded the Soviet territory. To cope with the invasion, the supply of the Red Army was needed, and the only way was to cross the Iranian corridor. The fear of the Allies was based on the possibility of blocking the supplies by the *Wehrmacht*, the German Army, which – by then – had reached the Caucasus. Despite the alliance with Germany, which focused on the modernisation and military training by German officials, Reza

¹⁵ Amanat, (1997); The Cambridge History of Iran, vol. VII. From Nadir Shah to Islamic Republic.

Pahlavi was aware of the threat embodied by Hitler. The sovereign, therefore, declared Iran's neutrality. According to some sources, the Anglo-Soviet invasion was caused by Reza's refusal to grant the use of the Trans-Iranian railway which was useful for the transport of supplies to the USSR; according to others, the Persian ruler had already arranged for the use of the railway. In the summer of 1941, British and Russian diplomats asked the allies to intervene to contain the German danger, which could have threatened an attack on the oil fields owned by the Anglo-Iranian Company. Allied forces then gave the ultimatum to Iran which was to implement the immediate breakdown of relations with Germany and the ousting of all German citizens. After the proposal made by the London government to the Kremlin to invade the Iranian state, Persia once again became a fertile ground for foreign interference. Reza *Shah* Pahlavi, having declared neutrality, rejected the ultimatum, demonstrated against the attack by calling upon the US President Roosevelt also appealing to the Atlantic Charter, but he refused any support. The invasion took place between the night of August 24 and 25. Iranian troops had been partially mobilized, but *Shah* himself, aware of the disproportionate forces, was willing to offer only symbolic resistance. He was therefore forced to abdicate, and the act of abdication was read before the *Majles* by the Prime Minister Furughi:

"I, *Shah* of Iran, by the will of God and the Nation, have made the serious decision to withdraw and to abdicate in favour of my beloved son Mohammad Reza Pahlavi". The general was exiled with his wife and children, first to the Mauritius islands, then to the South African province of Transvaal, where he died in 1944. Some sources claim that the allies were in favour of the coronation of a Qajar prince, an officer in the English army; other say that it was convenient to continue the Pahlavi dynasty through the investiture of an inexperienced twenty-two-year-old boy, remembered by history as the last *Shah* of Persia.

1.4 Mohammad Reza Pahlavi

After the departure of Reza *Shah*, the Iranian State faced serious economic difficulties, with an inflation peak of 300% deriving from both the Second World War and the territorial occupation of the allies. The atmosphere that arose immediately after the rise of the son of the general was favourable to the opposition: the young *Shah* indeed granted amnesty to political prisoners. Along with the opposition, the antagonism between the different classes in the cities also grew, while in the rural areas the different ethnic groups or tribes clashed. Mohammad Reza *Shah*, who ascended the throne after his father's abdication, was an inexperienced young man, who had completed his studies in Switzerland, therefore close with the Western reality. Initially, the

Shah followed the father's perspective in the militarisation of the state: the budget for military spending remained unchanged in such a way as to guarantee the loyalty of the armed forces. To ensure the continuity of the Pahlavi dynasty in power, he improved their credibility and image by implementing reforms in accordance with fundamental laws. Therefore, he started an effective process that managed to guarantee the creation of a more democratic state, featured with good relations with more factions belonging to the political scenario. In particular, he established friendly relations with the Shiite clergy, which under his father's regime was an antagonist, through the opening of a theology faculty in Tehran and the return of the lands previously expropriated to them. In addition, he lifted the ban on the use of the veil, making connections with the Marja'eTaqlid. This attitude of reverence with regards to the *Ulema* determined the balance created between the monarchy and Shiism. Since 1941, the state of Mohammad has seen a balance of power between the sovereign, the court, the parliament, the government, the public opinion and foreign powers. In conjunction with the application of the state to the political opposition, he founded in 1941 the *Tudeh Party*, or the party of the masses of Iran, composed of university students and former political prisoners. This party was born in the footsteps of the Communist Party formed in the 1920s and later banned by the Reza Pahlavi regime. This party was led by Elder Soleiman Mohsen MirzaEskandari, a socialist, constitutionalist and statesman, who relied on Soviet forces to "improve the situation in Persia". Official sources witness the close relations between the secretary general of the Eskandari party and the Soviet officers on the spot. The evidence that confirms this version of the facts can be found in the subsequent support in 1946 that the party gave to the regional separatist and pro-Soviet movements. Furthermore, studies conducted by SAVAK, the Iranian secret services operating between 1957 and 1979, attest the substantial financial support provided by the Comintern.

For what concerns the initial relations of the young *Shah* with the foreign powers that occupied the Persian territory, a tripartite treaty was signed in January 1942 between Great Britain, the USSR and Iran which provided the withdrawal of foreign troops within six months from the end of the Second World War and the respect for Iranian sovereignty; in turn, Tehran would have allowed the use of the Trans-Iranian way as a supply route for the Allies.

How to guarantee the integrity and independence of the State with the military occupation of the allies underway? The ineffectiveness of the treaty on the issue of safeguarding state sovereignty highlights what was and will continue to be a constant in the history of Persia: the timeless interference of superpowers in the country's internal affairs.

At the same time, the presence of a new actor was affirmed within this scenario: the United States of America. Even before entering the Second World War, the US already had military control of the Persian corridor in 1941. This was possible thanks to the so-called "Lend and Lease", which included the supply of war material to the Allies with the possibility of paying it at the end of the conflict. The United States was aware, as previously highlighted, of the importance of crude oil and, for this reason, they were functional to the defence of the Germans in the strategic areas for oil extraction.

In addition, the entry of the new power into the country was facilitated by Iranian politicians thanks to the assignment of positions to American officials. The Councillor Arthur Millspaugh, formerly an official in Reza's time and subsequently driven out, was again commissioned to reorganize the Iranian Ministry of Finance. The occupation of the Allies certainly did not benefit the population, as evidenced by the episode of the so-called "bread revolt". In December 1942, students went in the streets, heading the *Majles*, to demonstrate against the government and asked for larger supplies of bread. The revolt, suppressed in blood, was caused by the purchase and confiscation by the Allies of large quantities of food. The focus of the issue was not the lack in food production but the lack of the means to transport the wheat from one part of the country to the other, due to the monopoly of the means of transport by the occupying troops.¹⁶ This led to a large increase in inflation and a subsequent increase in prices, which widened the discontent of the population.

A year after the revolt, the Tehran Conference was held in the capital, a symbol of the importance that Persian territory had on the international scene. Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin together renewed the agreement that implied that Allied troops should have left the country within six months by the end of the war, despite recidivism in ending the occupation by the Soviets and the British for fear of an increased American influence on Iran. At the same time, the USSR was putting pressure on the *Majles* to sign an oil concession in the north of the country that would have guaranteed a 51% profit for the Iranians. The *Majles'* response came in 1944, when it proposed the signing of any concession only after the occupation ended. For this reason, the Soviet Union concentrated on strengthening the *Tudeh Party* and, with it, the independence and separatist tendencies in Northern Iran. This was done mainly through the strengthening of Soviet troops in the areas of interest. Consequently, in 1946, Iran presented itself to the United Nations calling for the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops still present in the Northern area. In May 1946, the USSR carried out the withdrawal of their troops, thanks

¹⁶ Ansari, (2003); *Modern Iran since 1921, the Pahlavi and After*, London

above all to the diplomatic intervention of the new President of the United States Truman, who started a policy of American interference in the internal affairs of several countries (see the coup in Guatemala and later in Chile). The newly elected Prime Minister Ahmad Qavam mediated with the States and tried not to line up with one single power and to show interest on only one side. Namely, the Prime Minister attempted to comply with the demands of the Soviet Union, according to which a new oil concession should have been signed. Qavam also sought to resolve separatist questions democratically by also visiting Soviet diplomats in Moscow. The independence movements, backed by the Soviets, arose in the regions of Azerbaijan, where the leader of the Communist Party Pishevari, affiliated with the *Tudeh Party*, led the rebellion, and of Kurdistan, where the movement was headed by Barzani, leader of the Democratic Party of Kurdistan. For Qavam, the situation would have been solved by allowing the regions to elect provincial governments dependent on the Iranian State. This solution, however, provoked a chain reaction that induced other provinces to demonstrate separatist demands. In fact, in the Southern province of Khuzestan, precisely in Abadan – a strategic area for the extraction of oil belonging to the AIOC – rebel tribes claimed their autonomy. For this reason, Mohammad Reza *Shah*, in 1946, decided to launch a military offensive led by General Razmara against the rebels of the North. Along with this action, the *Shah* expelled the *Tudeh Party* from the *Majles* because it threatened Iran's territorial integrity. After these events, public opinion regained confidence in the *Shah* which was seen as the defender of Iranian sovereignty. Although the Persian Party of the masses could be seen as a threat, already in the years 1944 and 1945 the opposition of the communists was a fragmented reality. There were, precisely, disputes that caused an internal division: The Soviet proposal concerning a possible oil concession found its supporters in the leftist loyalists and its opponents in the traditional nationalists, who subsequently flowed into the National Front, detaching themselves from the *Tudeh Party*.

In the meantime, the right-wing organization of Islamic origin was created under the name “*Fedaiya-ne Islam*”, meaning “Those who sacrifice themselves for Islam”, which was a secret brotherhood that criticized the secularity of the country brought by the Pahlavi dynasty. This secret organisation became increasingly popular by making its way on the political horizon in the late 1950s through the alliance with Ayatollah Kashani. After the Second World War, Mohammad still boasted control of the government, the bureaucracy and the armed forces, thanks – as already pointed out – to the fragmentation of the political opposition. In addition, the concession claimed by the Soviets was not authorized by the *Majles* after the war. The concatenation of events led to the emergence of a new party, which arose from the nationalist movement that had moved away from the now failed *Tudeh Party*. In 1949 Mohammad

Mossadeq, a Qajaro aristocrat supporter of the demands of the middle class, led the nationalist movement towards respect for the constitution and independence from foreign powers. He then founded the National Front, *Jebe'ehe Melli*, also translated as Popular Front, to which former members of the *Tudeh* flowed, and not subject to the directives of the USSR. Initially supported by Kashani, who, as already stated, created ties with the secret sect *Fedaiyan-e Islam*, the National Front soon became a mass movement thanks to numerous petitions and popular demonstrations.¹⁷ The primary objective of the new party was undoubtedly a populist instrument, functional to the consensus of the masses and cantered in the nationalization of oil. This Front was supported by the Workers' Party, representative of the working class and the left in general. The latter was in competition with the *Tudeh Party*, as both, examples of the fragmentation of the political opposition, claimed the representation of the entire left. In 1949, Fakhr Arai attempted the life of the *Shah*, affiliate of the *Tudeh Party*. The *Shah*, supported by the population and by the Shiite clergy, read in the failed attack a divine sign for the continuation of the monarchy, expelled from the *Majles* and banned the *Tudeh Party*. Furthermore, Mohammad Reza *Shah* proclaimed the martial law and from that moment on, he managed to increase his sovereign power. In 1950, the *Majles* passed an amendment to the constitution which gave the *Shah* the opportunity to dissolve parliament. The ruler appointed Ali Razmara as Prime Minister. The new Prime Minister, former adviser to Mohammad and leader of the military offensive in Azerbaijan, undertook reform policies, especially agrarian ones, which were then stepped up during the White Revolution in Mohammad. Although he was improving relations with the USSR, he was accused of being a puppet of the British when he rejected in parliament the Mossadeq proposal for the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), instead of supporting the renewal with new clauses of the 1933 concession signed by Reza *Shah*. To protest the refusal of the proposal, Mossadeq and Ayatollah Kashani went in the streets, supported by the population. He was later assassinated by a follower of *Fedaiyan-e Islam*. Some sources claim that his inefficiency in mediating with the opposition sentenced him to death, others argue that he fell behind a *Shah* conspiracy, others claim that the mistake was in underestimating the terrorist danger of *Fedaiyan-e Islam*. After the brief mandate of Prime Minister Hussein 'Ala in 1951, who resigned due to constant protests and general strikes, the *Majles* approved the decree on the nationalization of the AIOC "because of confusion and turmoil".¹⁸ Britain did not want to give its consent and, for this

¹⁷ Dowlatabadi, (1982); *Hayat-e Yahya*, Teheran.

¹⁸ Elm (1994), *Oil, Power, and Principle. Iran's oil nationalization and its aftermath*, New Yorks

reason, it asked the *Shah* to dissolve the parliament and appoint the pro-British Tabataba'i as Prime Minister. In an effort to mediate, Washington intervened to support the Iranian cause by supporting the self-determination required by the Persian state. This move was viewed by the British as the only way to end the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's monopoly in Persia. The diversity of views on the Iranian issue between the two allies will be a point of contrast that will last for the entire Truman administration. The Americans therefore opposed any British military intervention in Iran, especially for fear of a Soviet invasion of the North of the country which would result in the opening of another front beyond Germany and Korea.

2. US foreign policy in the middle east. The four doctrines

As the aim of this study is to examine how much the decisions and actions of Western countries were influential on Iran politics, in this chapter and the following we are taking a closer look at the USA. In this second chapter, we are going through the different doctrines that shaped the strategy of USA in the geopolitical scenarios, while a more in-depth analysis of the USA-Iran relationship will be carried out in the following chapter.

2.1 Political thought and the doctrines of US external policies

American foreign policy has undergone a profound change in the twentieth century, following the constant strengthening of the State, which has increasingly become a world superpower. The transition from immobility to US foreign policy activism gave the first signs during the First World War under the presidency of Woodrow Wilson.¹⁹ Naturally, this evolution was also reflected in the US relations with the Middle East, in parallel with the strengthening of the role of the USA and the importance of the Middle East in global politics. The evolution of American foreign policy was based on different points of view, which analysts have defined as doctrines, generally referred to by the names of the US presidents who adopted them.²⁰

During the first years of the existence of the USA, American foreign policy was limited to bilateral relations and, in general, to a position of containment towards global crises and events. With the social and economic strengthening of the new state, the positions taken in foreign policy also changed.

The first signs of this change occurred in 1823 with the so-called Monroe Doctrine, which took the name of the fifth President of the USA, James Monroe, who defined his doctrine in his annual message to Congress on December 2, 1823. Monroe proclaimed that from that moment on, the independent nations of the New World "were not to be considered the object of future colonisation by any European power" and that the United States would have considered "any attempt to extend the system of those powers to any part of this dangerous hemisphere" for the peace and security of America.²¹ This doctrine expressed confirmation of the supremacy of the United States on the American continent, which meant that the USA would not tolerate any interference in American affairs by the powers of the old continent, with the exception of the

¹⁹ Kissinger (1994), *Diplomacy*, New York, Simon & Schuster Publisher

²⁰ Crabb (1982), *Doctrines of the American foreign policy*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1982, pp. 37 – 38.

²¹ Transcription of the Seventh Annual Message on December 2, 1823:

<https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/december-2-1823-seventh-annual-message-monroe-doctrine>

European-owned American colonies. In return, it also stated the will of the USA not to interfere in disputes between European powers, or in disputes between European powers and their respective overseas colonies. The Monroe doctrine is now considered to be the first theoretical formulation of US imperialism. Later on the doctrine, initially understood by its creators as a proclamation of the USA against colonialism, was revised by Theodore Roosevelt and intended in the sense of the affirmation by the USA to practice its own form of hegemony on the American continent, including also the protectorate on the Central American and Caribbean area. During the 20th century, the Monroe doctrine was resumed and used as a justification for US political and military interventions during the Cuban crisis and in Central and South America. Regarded as the cornerstone of US diplomacy in the Western Hemisphere for over 100 years, the Monroe Doctrine has remained an intellectual reference for politicians who sought to stabilise the Middle East after 1945.

Indeed, the real change in American foreign policy towards the Middle East emerged following the end of the Second World War, from which the USA came out clearly victorious. The global political scenario was changing radically, with the great European powers having weakened and with the Soviet Union emerging as a very dangerous US enemy, and the consequent division of the world into two political blocs, in constant conflict during all years of the Cold War. The Middle East was also part of this scenario, adding its own peculiar characteristics to the aforementioned factors, including continuous instability, nationalism opposed to colonisation, the Israeli question and the oil issue.

As will be explained later on in this study, during the second half of the twentieth century, the US foreign policy towards the Middle East was based on the so-called four doctrines: Truman doctrine, Eisenhower doctrine, Nixon doctrine and Carter doctrine. Chronologically, the Truman Doctrine, announced in 1947, stated that Britain provided the military apparatus and the United States financed an extended regional security system in the "Northern Tier", from Turkey to Pakistan, passing through Iraq and Iran.

This doctrine was replaced in the late 1950s by the Eisenhower doctrine, after that the Suez crisis showed that the US interests were not identical to British interests and consequently, the US sought to turn Britain into its junior partner in the region.

In the 1960s, following the British decision to liquidate the rests of their colonial empire, Presidents Kennedy and Johnson laid the foundation for what would become the Nixon Doctrine. This doctrine provided for a "twin columns" policy with the use of Iran and Saudi Arabia as regional anti-Soviet prosecutors. But when the Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 revealed the limits of such a strategy, US leaders decided to

remain alone following the Carter Doctrine, a political line that saw the US gaining the role previously played by the Gran Britain.

2.2 Truman doctrine

The Truman doctrine on US foreign policy strategy was presented by the then President of the United States of America, Harry S. Truman on March 12, 1947²², in a speech held in the chambers in joint session. The creator of the doctrine was the Diplomat George Kennan during his service at the American embassy in Moscow. The cause of this doctrine was the separation and antagonism with the communist bloc, led by the Soviet Union. The aim was in fact to counter the expansionist aims of the communist opponent in the world.²³ After the end of the Second World War the relations of the two great former allies had deteriorated. The policy of expansion of the USSR in Eastern Europe, the reluctance during the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Iran and the breakdown of the collaboration of the allies in Germany, were the causes of a strong tension that resulted in the Cold War.

During the Second World War, Iran was under the control of the British and Soviet Union military troops, although it formally declared its neutrality. In 1941 the allies had imposed the abdication of the *Shah* Reza Khan in favour of his son Mohammad Reza and had pledged to guarantee Iran's independence and their withdrawal after the war. Although the return of the Soviets was scheduled to end by early March 1946, their reluctance to withdraw military troops forced Truman to take a critical stance. On January 30, 1946, the United Nations Security Council approved resolution no. 2 on the Soviet withdrawal from Iran, followed by the approval of subsequent resolutions no. 3 and no. 5, approved in April and May 1946.

On March 5, 1946 Churchill gave his famous post-war speech on the Iron Curtain called the "Sinew of Peace", pronouncing the following words "*From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an Iron Curtain has descended across the continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia - all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere*".²⁴ An interesting aspect linked to this event was the fact that Churchill, (no longer Prime Minister of Great Britain, following the victory of the Labor party of Clement Attlee in the elections held nine months earlier, therefore as a private

²² "President Truman announces the Truman Doctrine" by [History.com Editors](https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/truman-doctrine-is-announced), November 13, 2009 available at: <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/truman-doctrine-is-announced>

²³ Truman (1956), *Years of trial and hope*, New York, Doubleday & Company, p. 103.

²⁴ Text of the speech available at: <https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1946-1963-elder-statesman/the-sinews-of-peace/> (International Churchill Society webpage)

citizen) was accompanied and introduced to the public by American President Truman during his speech delivered in front of a crowd of 40,000 people gathered at Westminster College in the small town of Fulton, Missouri.²⁵

The political idea of the Truman doctrine was motivated by the recent cases of Greece and Turkey, which had hinted at the possibility of a surrender in the face of Soviet expansionism. The important geographical positions of the two countries, the control of the Mediterranean and the trade routes to the Middle East were of extreme importance for the Western bloc.²⁶ Truman declared in his speech in March 12, 1947 that the United States would offer support to Greece and Turkey to prevent them from falling under the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. He reiterated that the two countries were, politically and strategically, the northwestern ramparts of the Middle East and the primary responsibility for helping these countries was to the United States.²⁷

In particular, Greece was in the midst of a civil war, which would end only in 1949, in which monarchists and communist rebels clashed.²⁸ The latter were directly supplied by Tito's Yugoslavia and had indirect support from Moscow. Turkey, on the other hand, suffered from Soviet pressure aimed at territorial settlements in the strategic districts of Kars and Ardahan, as well as the revision of the regime of the Straits of the Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmara and the Bosphorus, regulated by the Montreux Convention of 20 July 1936.

The impossibility of Britain to provide Greece with the security they deserved in the name of their traditional relationship of alliance, combined with the difficulty in containing the advance of Moscow, led London to turn to the American ally. On February 21, 1947, the British Embassy in Washington informed the American government that Britain was no longer able to provide financial — and any other kind — of help to Greece and Turkey, suggested the spectre of the assertion of Soviet influence in the two countries. Greek Prime Minister Tsaldaris went on visit to Washington in December 1946 to seek US help.

In that situation, the so-called Domino Theory was affirmed by Undersecretary of State Dean Acheson (who will prove to be one of the architects of the Atlantic Pact and NATO), according to which when communism is affirmed in one State, the other neighbouring States are at risk of becoming communists too.²⁹ In particular, the State and Defence departments suggested that

²⁵ Respinti, (2005) "Ronald W. Reagan. Un americano alla Casa Bianca", Catanzaro, Rubbettino Editore, p. 69.

²⁶ Little (2008). *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*. University of North Carolina Press.

²⁷ "President Truman announces the Truman Doctrine" by [History.com Editors](https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/truman-doctrine-is-announced), November 13, 2009 available at: <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/truman-doctrine-is-announced>

²⁸ Whittner (1982), *American intervention in Greece*, New York, Columbia University Press, pp. 67 – 68.

²⁹ Watson (2002), *U.S. National Security: A Reference Handbook*, Washington, Library of Congress, p.162.

if the Soviet Union had installed in Greece and had reviewed the status of the Dardanelles, most probably both the Middle East and Western Europe could have succumbed to communism. In view of the fact that Greece and Turkey were historical rivals and that disproportionate aid to the two countries would have broken the political balance, it was decided that the US would have helped both States in equal measure. The doctrine was also approved by the Republican majority of Congress and aid amounting to 400 million dollars (corresponding to about four billion dollars of the present time) was allocated. In addition, in 1952 both Greece and Turkey were admitted to NATO's military alliance, in order to guarantee their security. This doctrine started the *containment policy*, which aimed to curb Soviet expansion in Europe and the world. The US would pledge to help — both economically and militarily — any country that found itself under communist pressure. According to historians, this doctrine marked the beginning of the Cold War and placed the USA in the role of a "global policeman". Although the intent was to protect free peoples from the threat of dictatorship, the US did in fact also help undemocratic regimes, having as its priority the sole purpose of countering Soviet hegemony.

The Truman doctrine also had consequences in Western Europe. Governments with powerful communist movements like Italy and France were encouraged to keep communist groups out of government. These moves were made to respond to the actions of the Soviet Union which in Eastern Europe had begun to strengthen its sphere of influence over local governments. Furthermore, the Truman doctrine was the political reason for the creation of the Marshall Plan to support the European countries devastated by the war and the creation of the NATO military alliance, on April 4, 1949. In the United States, internally, the alarm on communism led to the anti-communist phobia and McCarthyism of the 1950s. Internationally, the Truman Doctrine formed the basis of American foreign policy towards the Soviet Union until its definitive defeat in 1991. Although revised and enriched on a practical level by subsequent American administrations, the Truman doctrine sanctioned the definitive abandonment of the Monroe doctrine and the permanent involvement of the United States in world politics.

2.3 Eisenhower doctrine

The Eisenhower Doctrine was announced at the Congress of the United States of America by President Dwight D. Eisenhower on January 5, 1957, in a "special message to Congress on the

situation in the Middle East"³⁰. According to his doctrine, the United States made a commitment to guarantee the territorial integrity and independence of the Middle Eastern States that had been subject to aggression by the Soviet Union or its satellites and therefore had addressed a request for help from the United States. The doctrine was applied following the Suez crisis during 1956, fearing that the Soviet Union would exploit the Suez war as a pretext to intervene in Egypt and more generally, to avoid military aggression by the communist bloc against neutral nations.

Following a period of growing political tensions between Egypt, Great Britain and France, the pro-nationalist Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser announced on July 26, 1956 the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company, the Anglo-French joint venture that had owned and operated the Channel of Suez since its construction in 1869. Although Nasser had offered full economic compensation to society, the British and French governments, suspicious of Nasser's opposition to continuing their political influence in the region, declared themselves outraged by the nationalisation of the channel. The Egyptian leader, in turn, saw the reaction as an effort to perpetuate the colonial rule of the European powers. Concerned about the outbreak of hostilities between its NATO allies with the emerging Middle Eastern power, the Eisenhower administration, fearing a possible intervention by the Soviet Union in the conflict, attempted to mediate a diplomatic solution to the dispute. On 9 September, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles proposed the creation of an international consortium for the management of the Suez Canal, made up of the 18 major maritime nations of the world, in which Great Britain, France and Egypt had a share of equal value. This attempt was unsuccessful, failing to obtain full support from any of the contending states.

In discussions with the United States between August and October, the British government repeatedly hinted that it could resort to force in dealing with Nasser. At the same time, the British and French held secret military consultations with Israel. The latter considered Nasser to be threatening its security, resulting in a common plan to invade Egypt and overthrow the Egyptian President. Following these plans, Israeli forces attacked the Egyptian peninsula of Sinai on October 29, 1956, advancing towards the Suez Canal.³¹ Britain and France, under the pretext of protecting the canal from the two belligerent states, landed their troops in the canal just a few days later. The Eisenhower administration had different points of view from its

³⁰ Presidential speech available at: <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/january-5-1957-eisenhower-doctrine>

³¹ Ciabattini Leonardi (2010), Le premesse della questione del Medio Oriente, in Centro studi difesa sicurezza Cestudis, 5 Maggio <http://www.cestudis.it/archivio/290>

NATO allies: On the one hand it wanted to dissociate the US from British and French colonialism, wanting to liquidate their residual colonial power, and on the other it wanted to avoid the possibility that the Soviets could intervene to assist Nasser, who had assumed a friendly role in dealing with the USSR. It should be noted that the conflict coincided with the Soviet intervention in Hungary and the consequent condemnation of the occupation by the United States. In this vein, the US exerted pressure on Britain and France to accept the ceasefire imposed by the United Nations. In addition, the United States voted for a UN resolution publicly condemning the invasion and proposing the creation of a peacekeeping force under the leadership of the United Nations. This reaction to historical allies led to a cooling of relations with London and Paris and to the resignation of the British Prime Minister Anthony Eden in January 1957.

During this period, the US were able to see the weakness of the political and military power of the European powers in the Middle East, which led to the approval and success of the Eisenhower Doctrine. Faced with the power *vacuum* resulting from the weakening of Great Britain and France, Eisenhower found himself at odds with their positions during the Suez Canal crisis. The President was also worried about the potential complications that could cause Nasser's actions, which, based on the strong desire to strengthen Egypt, played a double game, accepting aid from both the US and the Soviet Union. At regional level, the intent of the doctrine was to help the independent Arab countries to strengthen themselves and, at the same time, to isolate Nasser or other states that could be subject to Soviet influence. The Eisenhower doctrine highlighted the extreme importance that the Middle East represented for American foreign policy: the region contained a sizeable share of the global oil supply, and if those resources had fallen under the control of the Soviet Union, the US and allies would have suffered the consequences. However, it was now that the United States held the political and military weight alone in the region. The first military action based on this doctrine took place the following year, during the Lebanon crisis, when the United States intervened following the request of the Lebanese President Camille Chamoun.³² On March 9, 1957, the American Congress approved the Eisenhower Doctrine on the Middle East, drawn up with Secretary of State Foster Dulles. With that turn in foreign policy, it was shown that every country in the region, in the event of aggression, could count on the economic and military support of the United States. The Eisenhower Doctrine provided for an extension of economic and military

³² Little (2008). American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945. University of North Carolina Press.p. 235

aid to the nations of the Middle East and armed intervention in the event of aggression by a communist country.³³

2.4 Nixon doctrine

The Nixon doctrine is the American foreign policy strategy which initially took its cue from the position of the United States in the Vietnamese conflict. Although the project had been sketched by previous administrations, it was Nixon who named the new US strategic doctrine in the Middle East.

The change in America's political strategy in the Middle East began under the President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, who, in the early days of his presidency, did not view the Middle East as one of his political priorities. Indeed, he had previously been critical of the Eisenhower doctrine while he was member of the Senate Foreign Policy Committee in the late 1950s, and he had become even more critical following the rise of Arab nationalism. Kennedy hoped that the *Shah* of Iran and the House of King Saud in Saudi Arabia could somehow fill the power *vacuum* created by the withdrawal of the British government.³⁴

The need to take action as soon as possible on this issue occurred already in the summer of 1961, when the British decision to close their military installations in Kuwait, awakened old claims by Iraq on the small oil-rich country. It was evident that the British withdrawal and the dissolution of their bond with the sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf meant the beginning of the claims of the neighbouring powers, as the American ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Parker Hart, pointed out to Kennedy.³⁵

Considering the immediacy and the short term, Kennedy had little choice. In fact, Kennedy encouraged Britain to reconfirm its military presence in the Gulf, guaranteeing the British the full political and logistical support of the United States, to avoid an Iraqi attempt to occupy Kuwait. "Forced" to implement a definitive choice of their foreign policy, US politicians opted for the solution of having the Arab countries of the region as permanent allies. This choice was facilitated by the positions taken by Saudi Arabia and Iran. During this period, Saudi Arabia decided to make 700 of its soldiers available to the Kuwaiti government. Definitely grateful for Saudi Arabia's position during the Kuwait crisis, American diplomats feared that this

³³ Little (2008). *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*. University of North Carolina Press. p.232

³⁴ Safran (1985), *Saudi Arabia*, Harvard, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, pp.182 -183.

³⁵ Safran (1985), *Saudi Arabia*, Harvard, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press,, p. 239

country alone would not be strong enough to fill the void resulting from Britain's definitive withdrawal from the Persian Gulf on its own.

In this way, the U.S. administration included a second pillar in this model of local prosecutors: Iran.³⁶

Overcoming the skepticism on the absolutist monarch who sat on the peacock's throne in Tehran, in a kingdom that was in great need of reform and despite persistent internal political problems, consideration was given to the fact that Iran remained an active member of the Baghdad Pact, an agreement signed by Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and UK in 1955. It owned one of the largest armies in the area and intended to play a more important role in regional defence.

In April 1962, the *Shah* himself assured the Secretary of State Dean Rusk that Iran was ready to play this role in exchange for economic and military aid from the United States. Kennedy instructed the Vice President Lyndon Baines Johnson to visit Tehran on his trip to the Middle East. Johnson confirmed that the Iranians resisted communist threats and recommended more financial aid so that they could maintain their armed forces along the border of the Soviet bloc. Johnson told Kennedy on September 10, 1962 that in Iran the Americans must have accepted the *Shah*, with its shortcomings, as a precious commodity and that they should carefully accept the real military potential, present and future, of the *Shah's* forces and assign them military assistance in a context of global interests of US security.³⁷

The choice of the two pillars or two regional prosecutors, precisely Iran and Saudi Arabia, was not simple. The two regimes were looming as undemocratic and intended to exploit American aid above all to strengthen themselves militarily. In the meantime, Johnson, after Kennedy's death, succeeded him in the office of President of the USA and the new administration had begun to face this reality. King Feisal visited the White House in June 1966 and Johnson sought Saudi help to fill the void that the British would leave in the region. Feisal responded to this request by asking for an update of his military arsenal, so Johnson approved the sale of \$ 100 million in military supplies to strengthen the alliance with Saudi Arabia.

The other pillar was considered the Iran of the *Shah* Pahlavi. This monarch also sought to enhance his military arsenal through the high-tech armaments of the United States and financed by wealth from oil in order to have a dominant influence on the Middle East. In 1966, the monarch asked to buy a squadron of F-4 Phantom planes, as a response to the MIG-21s that

³⁶ Safran (1985), Saudi Arabia, Harvard, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, p 240-241

³⁷ Safran (1985), Saudi Arabia, Harvard, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, p 241

the Soviet Union had promised Egypt and Iraq. Even if their high cost reached \$ 50 million, endangering the Iranian budget, considering the withdrawal of the British and the US military involvement in Vietnam, this could have been the best defence choice in the Middle East. The American president overtook himself, as he approved the sale of the Panthoms and also guaranteed a credit line of 200 million to finance future Iranian arms purchases.³⁸

In this scenario, in which Iran and Saudi Arabia wished to play more important roles in regional defense, but were undecided on how to proceed, the United States played the role of stimulators through the supply of military arsenal, so that they could fill the power vacuum created from the English departure from the Middle East. Richard Nixon managed to achieve a narrow victory in the November 1968 election, thanks also to growing popular frustration with the Vietnam war. So, Nixon hoped to reduce U.S. military involvement abroad, relying on pro-Western armed and US-backed prosecutors.³⁹ The doctrine was made official and formally took the name of President Nixon, but was elaborated in detail by his adviser Henry Kissinger. Taking its cue from the Vietnamese conflict, the doctrine foresaw the progressive disengagement of the US military from Vietnam, which consisted of 500,000 men, in favour of a greater commitment of South Vietnamese forces. For this reason, we talk about the "Vietnamization" of the conflict with regard to the Nixon doctrine.

Kissinger's strategy aimed to facilitate negotiations between the parties to the conflict, which began in October 1968, and military aid to reach a solution to the conflict. The peace negotiation was actually concluded in March 1973, although the war between the Vietnamese forces continued and ended only on April 30, 1975 with the occupation of Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, by the communist forces Viet Cong.⁴⁰ The choice of disengagement undertaken by Nixon was certainly influenced by the growing pressure of public opinion and the pacifist movements that demonised the American intervention in Vietnam. The situation had now gotten out of hand in the US after the escalation undertaken by President Johnson, which made American military forces fall into the trap of the Viet Cong guerrilla, financed by the USSR within the international political games of the Cold War. When the staggering numbers of human losses suffered by the United States came to light, public opinion was clearly against the war. Another reason that pushed Nixon to retire was the economic problems that the US was experiencing in those years. In fact, the US budget was heavily affected by huge war expenses and the disengagement was then an economically mandatory choice.

³⁸ Safran (1985), *Saudi Arabia*, Harvard, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, p 245

³⁹ Safran (1985), *Saudi Arabia*, Harvard, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, p 249

⁴⁰ Di Nolfo, (1999), *Storia delle relazioni internazionali*, Bari, Editori Laterza, p. 786

The "Nixon doctrine" provided that the United States would assist the defence and development of allies and friends, but that they would not directly assume the obligation to defend all the free nations of the world. In practice, this meant that each Allied nation was responsible for its own security in general, and that the United States would offer a nuclear shield in case help was requested. In his speech to the nation on the Vietnam War, held on November 3, 1969, Nixon stated that *"First, the United States will keep all of its treaty commitments. Second, we shall provide a shield if a nuclear power threatens the freedom of a nation allied with us or of a nation whose survival we consider vital to our security. Third, in cases involving other types of aggression, we shall furnish military and economic assistance when requested in accordance with our treaty commitments. But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense."*⁴¹

The "Nixon doctrine" was also applied to other Asian countries such as the Philippines, Thailand and South Korea. In the latter conflict alone, during the Nixon presidency, 20,000 of the 61,000 American soldiers were evacuated from Korea until June 1971. However, regards the Persian Gulf region, the Nixon doctrine was applied by the American administration through military aid to Iran and Saudi Arabia.⁴²

The application of the Nixon Doctrine opened the door to US military aid to the allies in the Persian Gulf and helped prepare the ground for the Carter Doctrine and for the subsequent direct military involvement of the United States in the Gulf War and the Iraq war. Of the two regional pillars, the most enthusiastic advocate of the new "Nixon doctrine" in the Middle East was the *Shah*, who had communicated his plans to the US to allocate the growing petrodollar reserves to financing the military. Its ambitions were aimed at confirming Iran as a regional military power, surpassing its rivals on the Gulf, especially Iraq and Saudi Arabia. These ambitions coincided with Washington's desire to shift the costs of regional defense from American taxpayers to well-armed prosecutors in the Middle East. It was the period where the *Shah's* image was best considered in the eyes of American diplomacy. In 1970, the CIA described the *Shah* as "a trusted, powerful autocrat, determined to secure Iran's position of power and supremacy in the Persian Gulf after the British withdrawal." Secretary of State William P. Rogers called the *Shah* "a statesman", called his kingdom "a constructive force in

⁴¹ Presidential speech available at: <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/november-3-1969-address-nation-war-vietnam>

⁴² Litwak(1984), *Détente and the Nixon Doctrine*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 139 – 140

the region" and urged Iran, Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf States to cooperate in promoting stability and progress across the board area.⁴³

The same American President Nixon, returning from Moscow, after a meeting with the Soviet leader Brezhnev, visited the *Shah*, in Tehran, on May 30, 1972, determined to have Iran's role of prosecutor taken to Iran as soon as possible. Considering the military commitment in Vietnam, the White House was happy to know that Iran wanted to play this role. In exchange for supplies from the American arsenal, the *Shah* offered payments from oil revenues. Nixon promised the sale of air fighters, also ensuring that Iranian claims would have to be accepted without objection in the future.⁴⁴ Upon their return, the White House approved an armament package including supersonic planes, laser-guided bombs and combat helicopters, to be delivered to Iran as soon as possible.⁴⁵

During the next five years the *Shah* spent a figure close to \$ 16 billion, which was almost seven times what he had spent in the previous twenty years, for advanced military arsenal.

Thanks to the support of Iran and Saudi Arabia, in the mid-seventies the Nixon Doctrine seemed very effective in the Middle East, even more than in Southeast Asia, the place of its first application. Elected president in 1977, President Carter initially continued on the line of the Nixon doctrine, relying on Iran and Saudi Arabia, now considered two pillars of regional security. His political adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski considered the *Shah* to be a huge US strategic asset following the British withdrawal from the region.⁴⁶ However, the anti-Western revolution that shook Iran and overthrew the Pahlavi dynasty in early 1979 pushed American politicians to seek a new strategy.

2.5 Carter Doctrine

American foreign policy once again changed strategy after the important historical events of the Islamic revolution in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The new line was called the Carter doctrine, when proclaimed by the President of the United States Jimmy Carter in his speech to members of Congress on January 23, 1980.⁴⁷ American activism became

⁴³ Little (2008). *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*. University of North Carolina Press. p. 250

⁴⁴ Little (2008). *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*. University of North Carolina Press. p. 251

⁴⁵ Rogers (2008), *United States Foreign Policy*, London, London School of Economics, pp.85 – 89

⁴⁶ Rogers (2008), *United States Foreign Policy*, London, London School of Economics, pp.254-255

⁴⁷ Klare, (2008) *La politica estera energetica degli Stati Uniti*, Bologna, Comitato internazionale di Bologna per la Cartografia e l'Analisi del Mondo Contemporaneo, Progetto Cartografare il presente", 3 luglio 2008, <http://www.cartografareilpresente.org/article258.html>

even more present and the new doctrine established that the US would use its military force if necessary to defend national interests in the Persian Gulf. The doctrine was devised by National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, based on the Truman Doctrine, to make it clear that the Soviets had to stay away from the Persian Gulf.⁴⁸ The Persian Gulf region had been declared a vital area of interest to the USA as early as 1943 by President Roosevelt, who acknowledging the importance of oil for the U.S. economy, had formally taken the kingdom of Saudi Arabia under the American protectorate, and in 1945, returning from the Yalta conference, he had personally visited the Saudi king Ibn Saud. During his speech, President Carter proclaimed: *"The region which is now threatened by Soviet troops in Afghanistan is of great strategic importance: It contains more than two-thirds of the world's exportable oil. The Soviet effort to dominate Afghanistan has brought Soviet military forces to within 300 miles of the Indian Ocean and close to the Straits of Hormuz, a waterway through which most of the world's oil must flow. The Soviet Union is now attempting to consolidate a strategic position; therefore, that poses a grave threat to the free movement of Middle East oil. This situation demands careful thought, steady nerves, and resolute action, not only for this year but for many years to come. It demands collective efforts to meet this new threat to security in the Persian Gulf and in Southwest Asia. It demands the participation of all those who rely on oil from the Middle East and who are concerned with global peace and stability. And it demands consultation and close cooperation with countries in the area which might be threatened. Meeting this challenge will take national will, diplomatic and political wisdom, economic sacrifice, and, of course, military capability. We must call on the best that is in us to preserve the security of this crucial region."*⁴⁹

The United States, at that time, did not have a significant military presence in the Persian Gulf area, so the Carter administration established the Rapid Deployment Force, a rapid intervention military force capable of transporting American troops by air to the Persian Gulf without notice. In addition, Carter rejected agreements with the Soviet Union on arms control and increased naval presence in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean.

In response to the Soviet intervention, the CIA initiated a support plan for the Afghan mujahideen, through financial aid of nearly three billion dollars and supplies of weapons, transferred through collaboration with the Pakistani secret services.⁵⁰ Bin Laden, who became

⁴⁸ Brzezinski, (1983) *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981*, New York, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, p. 444.

⁴⁹ President James E. Carter Jr.'s speech in January 23, 1980 available: <https://www.airforcemag.com/PDF/MagazineArchive/Documents/2010/April%202010/0410keeperfull.pdf>

⁵⁰ Vance (1983), *Hard Choices*, New York, Simon and Schuster, p. 384.

years after America's number one enemy, also benefited from this aid. The "Carter doctrine" was further extended by President Carter's successor, Ronald Reagan. His choices were named as "Reagan Corollary to the Carter Doctrine" which foresaw US intervention in support of Saudi Arabia, should its security be endangered by the war events of the long war between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s.⁵¹

2.6 Considerations on the four doctrines and on USA foreign policy

How to contain the Soviet Union and how to promote regional security and more metaphorically, how to develop a Monroe Doctrine for the Middle East, was an enigma that beset US politicians for more than fifty years. The four doctrines represent the synthesis of the evolution of American politics in the Middle East. The strategies for changing this policy are named after the presidents of the United States, each of whom has shown particular interest in the Middle East and has applied personal decisions and measures on the policies adopted by the United States in the region. The analysis of the doctrines also allows us to verify the growing role of the United States, which, starting from an initially passive policy, gradually came to play an active role of superpower in the region. In fact, from the Truman doctrine, which aimed to curb Soviet expansion in Europe and in the world and presupposed economic and military aid to individual countries that were under communist pressure, we gradually moved towards increasingly active policies. Eisenhower pressed Britain to limit its responsibilities in the Persian Gulf and embraced a unilateral US military intervention policy to block Soviet progress in the region. Eisenhower doctrine made Washington the most important member of the Anglo-American partnership in the Middle East. Following the Eisenhower Doctrine, the US began practicing an imperialist policy and when, in the late 1960s, Britain's growing financial woes forced the British to liquidate the last colonial outposts on the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf, Kennedy and Johnson turned to regional prosecutors such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, as minority shareholders, to obstacle the opponents backed by the Soviet Union, preparing the ground for what became the Nixon Doctrine. At a time when events in Iran and Afghanistan showed that America's prosecutors were unable to perform this task, Jimmy Carter promulgated his own doctrine and informed the world that the United States had vital security interests in the Middle East worth fighting for, whether or not they had trusted partners. In this way, Washington was left alone against Moscow. From a

⁵¹ Safire (4 Ottobre 1981), Essay; The Reagan Corollary, in The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/10/04/opinion/essay-the-reagan-corollary.html>

certain point of view, the sequence of the four Doctrines seemed to end happily, with the United States replacing Great Britain and the Persian Gulf safely out of reach of the Kremlin. However, in the late nineties, it was clear that the obsession with the Soviet threat had led a generation of politicians to overlook the appeal of revolutionary nationalism and radical Islam among Muslim peoples. The doctrines of containing communism were successful towards Moscow's politics, but on the other hand they proved to be rather ineffective, not only against nationalist subversions, from Cairo through Baghdad to Tehran in the second half of the twentieth century, but also against religious radicalism and terrorist movements such as that led by Osama Bin Laden, who traumatised the United States in the early 21st century. Some analysts also tend to view President George W. Bush's position and his concept of "pre-emptive war" as a new US political doctrine.⁵²

⁵² Sanger (18 Marzo 2003), Bush's Doctrine for War, in The New York Times,.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/18/international/middleeast/18ASSE.html>

3. Foreign Policy of the USA towards Iran

After having analyzed the four doctrines that characterized the foreign policy of the USA in the last century, in this third chapter, we are going to analyze in details the relations between the American Presidencies and Iran from the Second World War until the 1979 Revolution.

The analysis of US foreign policy and its influence on the country will stop at the Carter presidency as the 1979 Illuminated Revolution (minutely reconstructed in the fourth chapter) has definitively isolated the country with the rest of the world and especially with the USA.

3.1 The American interest in Iran

As Douglas Little⁵³ points out; «*Nowhere in the Middle East, after 1945, the United States pushed more consistently for reforms and modernization than in Iran and nowhere else did they fail more dramatically*». ⁵⁴

Indeed, by analyzing the US relations with Iran, we find some of the most significant moments in the history of foreign policy and the decisions taken by the USA towards the Middle East.

The intervention of American intelligence in the overthrow of Mossadeq in 1953 and support for the Shah's dictatorship marked the first step in Washington's active and interventionist foreign policy. Despite this interventionism and despite the granting of huge military aid and attempts to democratize Iranian society in the following years, Iran currently finds itself on the American blacklist of terrorist supporters, one of the strongest opponents of the United States in the Middle East, among the first to wave the flag of anti-Americanism in the Islamic world. According to many analysts and historians, American diplomats have often been unable to understand the political dynamics and nationalist-populist thinking of the Iranians. Douglas Little says that «*The peculiar mixture of ignorance and arrogance characteristic of US politics, in fact, would constantly prevent Americans from truly understanding the region and its people*». ⁵⁵

After having analyzed the characteristics of Iran in the first chapter, we can affirm that it is one of the largest countries in the Middle East - and of the world - and it certainly has had an ancient and glorious history for many centuries. Iran has often been invaded, but never colonized, and

⁵³ History professor at Clark University of Worcester, expert in contemporary history

⁵⁴ Little (2008). *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*. University of North Carolina Press. p. 369.

⁵⁵ Little (2008). *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*. University of North Carolina Press.

thanks to its culture, it has managed to impose its influence on the occupying dynasties as well. Its ruling class has often been formed in the West and has given a significant contribution to the world. Its role in the region has always been instrumental and its oil and gas resources make it a strategic country with a substantial weight in the global economy. Geographically, Iran is in a macro-region in which the majority of its population is Arab, while its national identity is strongly Persian. In addition, the Muslim religion predominates in the region, but in Iran - unlike other Sunni countries - the religious majority is Shiite. All this has contributed over the years to support a feeling of strong national pride and independence, which does not tolerate the interventionism of external factors.

As already discussed in the second chapter on the "four doctrines" and the US foreign policy in the Middle East, the political choices of American diplomacy in the Middle East have also been greatly influenced by the weight of Iran.

The first of the four doctrines, the so-called "Truman doctrine", proclaimed in 1947, found one of its motivations precisely from the Soviet danger in Iran, while the subsequent Nixon doctrine provided for American support on two regional pillars, one of which was precisely Iran.

Iran was already one of the US economic attentions for American commercial companies through the investments of the so-called "seven sisters" in the field of oil extraction, but the first signs of the high-level interest between the two states occurred during the years of the Second World War.

The United States, represented by President Roosevelt at the Tehran conference in 1943, together with Churchill and Stalin assured, in a joint declaration, to guarantee Iran's independence and the withdrawal of allied troops from its territory. However, the Soviets were reluctant to go in this direction and delayed their expected withdrawal in March 1946. This position forced the US to react. This period was the beginning of the Cold War and the division of the areas of influence of the two political blocs were about to be identified.

For the USA and its allies, the protection of the "Northern Tier", that is a dividing line of Western influence extended to the Southern border of the Soviet Union, became extremely important. This line included Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan, united together with Great Britain and the USA through the so-called Baghdad Pact, in the Central Eastern Treaty Organization (also known with the acronym CENTO), a military organization for the defense, built in 1955 on the model of NATO.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Ashton (1993), *Hijacking of a Pact*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 125 – 129.

The gradual introduction of the US as an important factor in Iran's internal dynamics was also motivated by the increasing interest that the US had towards the Middle East. The role of guarantor of full independence of Iran assumed by American diplomacy during the war also had the support of some Iranians worried by the power games played by Great Britain and the Soviet Union against Iran. Indeed, the Soviet Union delayed its military withdrawal from Iran and attempted to influence the country by helping to strengthen the Iranian communist party *Tudeh*, one of the most influential communist parties of the region. For what concerns Britain, it drafted initially a secret plan to include Iran as a British protectorate, taking advantage of the weakness of the newly appointed Shah Mohammad Reza. This move was not appreciated at all by the United States, which called on Britain to respect the rules of transparent diplomacy, and which was appreciated by internal opinion in Iran.

As it also happened later, the diplomatic relations of the USA with the Middle East and consequently with Iran, took place in parallel with two important factors: the relations with the State of Israel and economic needs related to oil.

The proclamation of the establishment of the State of Israel announced on May 15, 1948 was followed only a few minutes after by the recognition by the USA, and the support offered to Israel by the USA had to measure itself against the opposition of the Arab countries which had committed themselves in an armed conflict already in the summer of the same year. The US has since then shown that it has focused heavily on Israel, indicating it as a special ally in the region, but this political choice has always been one of the reasons for the growth of anti-Americanism in the Middle East.

To tell the truth, the situation also went hand in hand with another factor, namely the growth of Arab nationalism, as a consequence first of the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and then of the weakening of the role of the European powers - Great Britain and France - , which for centuries had exercised their influence on the Middle East.⁵⁷ Their withdrawal resulted in the emergence and international recognition of the Arab states in the area, such as Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and others.

The other important factor in the U.S. geopolitical choices was the economic weight of oil. The efforts of the Second World War had highlighted the importance of oil for the economy of the great powers. In the post-war years, the US moved from the position of being an oil-exporting nation to being an importing nation. According to studies conducted on behalf of American diplomacy, the oil resources of the Middle East would have become decisive for industrial

⁵⁷ Mahan (1902), *Persian Gulf and International relations*, London, Robert Theobald, pp. 234 – 237.

development in a few years, also in consideration of the Marshall Plan undertaken by the USA to finance the allied countries of Western Europe. In this perspective, Iran's position became very important to the US because of its enormous oil resources.⁵⁸

3.2 The coup d'état against Mossadeq

However, the move that provoked a devastating and lasting effect in the recent history of US-Iranian relations was the American intervention in favor of the fall of Mossadeq and the reconfirmation of the *Shah* Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. It is no coincidence that the conflict with Mossadeq was caused by a conflict regarding the exploitation of Iranian oil.

The British government had its part in controlling and it was *de facto* the influential shareholder of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), which led the extraction of oil in Iran. The AIOC was making immense profits by paying favorable royalties to the Iranian state.

Taking inspiration also from the example of ARAMCO, the company operating in Saudi Arabia which shared profits with the state at 50 percent, Mohammed Mossadeq, a proud nationalist elected as deputy from the ranks of the National Front, asked for the same method of dividing profits also to Iran. His position was shared by the majority of Iranians. Mossadeq became popular not only because of its opposition to foreign interests in oil but also because of its proposed agrarian reform.

In 1950 Mossadeq, made a speech before Parliament on the need to nationalize the oil industry, declaring that: *"It is necessary to put an end to this unsustainable situation in our country. (...) With the elimination of the power of the English Company, the corruption and intrigues that have so far exercised their harmful influence on the internal politics of our country would be eliminated at the same time. After the end of British protection, Persia will reach its political and economic independence. The Iranian state should take over all oil production. The Company will have nothing else to do but return its property to the rightful owner. (...) Persia with nationalization will not suffer economic losses, even if instead of the 30 million tons of crude oil extracted in 1950 only 10 million tons can be produced. (...) In fact, we would earn 30 million pounds a year and we would also save 20 million tons of oil for the future"*.⁵⁹

Calling Mossadeq's proposal outrageous, British society refused to change the terms of the contract, trusting the support of the *Shah* who would stop the drift toward the nationalisation, but the Shah was paralyzed in front of the broad popular support enjoyed by Mossadeq. When

⁵⁸ Mahan (1902), *Persian Gulf and International relations*, London, Robert Theobald, pp. 98-99

⁵⁹ "Gli anni precedenti la Rivoluzione", in "Il Cannocchiale", 8 novembre 2005, http://ghirone.ilcannocchiale.it/2005/11/08/iran_1_un_po_di_storia.html

AIOC refused to review its concession, Mossadeq prepared a decree to nationalize it, which the Iranian parliament unanimously approved on March 15, 1950, obliging the Shah the following month to appoint Mossadeq as Prime Minister. The decree was approved against the will of the Shah, who however promulgated it without availing himself of his right of veto.

Ignoring the contrary opinion of the Shah, Mossadeq was quick to expropriate AIOC. Mossadeq's actions soon proceeded to a radical drift, with the establishment of a state-owned company in 1951, the expropriation of the AIOC without compensation and the notification to British business and military personnel to leave the country as soon as possible. In 1952, due to the strong contrasts, diplomatic relations between Iran and Great Britain also ceased.⁶⁰

The administration of the American President Harry S. Truman initially decided to remain neutral and encouraged the British to accept nationalization. The British did not change their attitude even after the mediation of the Americans who tried for months to persuade the British that an agreement for the sharing of profits on the Saudi model was inevitable. American diplomacy was disappointed with AIOC's obtuse attitude.

While the British were planning a military intervention in Iran, American diplomacy discouraged this hypothesis, also in consideration of the military commitment made in the meantime with the open front with Korea. Although many American leaders believed that Mossadeq's stubbornness created a climate of political instability that exposed Iran to the risk of going over to the other side of the Iron Curtain, the neutrality stance was maintained until the end of the Truman Administration in January 1953.

However, aware that Mossadeq's iron fist would set a dangerous precedent by jeopardizing oil concessions across the Middle East, diplomats from Washington and London encouraged U.S. and British multinationals to organize a worldwide boycott of Iranian crude oil. As early as 1947, Truman and the largest multinational oil companies had established a kind of implicit collaboration based on a common goal for both US national security and industrial development: the lucrative oil of the Middle East.

This move proved effective, stopping Iranian oil exports which were estimated to have fallen from 666,000 to 20,000 barrels per day in January 1953. Due to the resulting slump in revenue, Mossadeq sought US financial help in the spring of 1953, threatening that the boycott would force him to sell Iranian oil within the Soviet bloc.

⁶⁰ Little (2008). *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*. University of North Carolina Press, p. 106.

The Administration of the newly elected president Dwight D. Eisenhower applied a different policy, rejecting Mossadeq's requests and working in the background to organize the overthrow of the prime minister, through far right-wing soldiers loyal to the Shah.

At the same time Washington tried to gain some time, intervening as an intermediary for the solution of the crisis between AIOC and the Iranian government. The task was entrusted by Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to the oil expert Herbert Hoover Jr. (son of Herbert Hoover, the 31st President of the United States, in office from 1929 to 1933)⁶¹.

After difficult negotiations Hoover managed to negotiate an agreement through which the AIOC would receive \$ 90 million to sell three-fifths of its exclusive concession to American oil companies and to allow the newly created state-owned National Iranian Oil Company to supervise the fields daily. Since Hoover's proposal to transform AIOC's Iranian monopoly into a multinational consortium required the participation of several U.S. oil companies, the Eisenhower Administration had to revise the prohibitive antitrust rules at home in favor of U.S. national security interests focused on Iranian oil. At the end of the negotiations, the Shah formally approved a consortium in which AIOC maintained 40% of the shares, while five American companies (Jersey Standard, Mobil, Socal, Texaco and Gulf) shared another 40 percent, Royal Dutch Shell received 14%, with the remaining 6% going to the French CFP.

At the same time, the United States was concerned about anti-Western demonstrations and signs of growing political influence from the far left in Tehran.⁶² Most of Eisenhower's political advisors believed that a resolute initiative was needed to save the *Shah's* throne. Uncontrolled information spread around suggesting that the Mossadeq National Front allegedly allied itself with the Communist Party Tudeh to overthrow the Shah from power. In fact, the crisis deepened in early June, when Mossadeq signed a trade agreement with the Soviet Union. On March 14, 1953, CIA director Allen Dulles reminded Eisenhower of the domino theory, stating that if Iran succumbed to the communists, there was little doubt that other areas of the Middle East, with 60% of world oil, would have fallen under communist control.

The Shah, in open conflict with Mossadeq but supported by landowners, whose power was threatened by the agrarian reform planned by the prime minister, began planning the fall of Mossadeq. However, the Shah's efforts to weaken Mossadeq were not very successful. A first attempt to create a government crisis following the Prime Minister's resignation in April 1952 was accompanied by serious riots that forced the Shah and his wife Soraya to leave Iran, taking

⁶² Bill (1989), *The Eagle and the Lion*, Yale, Yale University Press, pp. 161 -297.

refuge in Rome. Thanks to a wave of popular demonstrations in his favor, Mossadeq gained full power and stiffened into a position of absolute intransigence, making alliances with the antagonists of the West: Nasser's Egypt, which in the meantime had opened up the international crisis of Suez and the Soviet Union.

At this point, the allies began preparing for the removal of Mossadeq through a coup. As early as November 1952, some senior British leaders proposed to their American counterparts to jointly organize a coup against Mosaddeq. The answer was that the outgoing administration would never undertake such an operation, but the former supreme chief of the allied armed forces in Europe during the Second World War, the hawk "Ike" Eisenhower, who would enter the Oval Office in January, he would probably have accepted, given his determination to intensify the Cold War⁶³.

The official report of the CIA coup was made public many years later, when on June 16, 2000, the *New York Times* published it on its website⁶⁴ and clearly tells how the operation was prepared.

After obtaining the authorization of President Eisenhower in March 1953, CIA officers studied how to organize the coup and began to address the issue of replacing the Prime Minister. Their choice fell immediately on Fazlollah Zahedi, a retired general who had already plotted with the British. In May, a CIA agent and an Iranian expert who worked for the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) spent two weeks in Nicosia, on the island of Cyprus, to fix an early version of the plan. This preparatory draft was later revised by senior officials of the CIA and SIS, who drafted a final version in London in mid-June.

On July 25, the CIA began pressure work and a long series of maneuvers to persuade the Shah to support the coup and accept Zahedi's appointment as Prime Minister. Over the next three weeks, four representatives met the Shah almost every day to convince him to collaborate. On August 12, the latter, despite resistance, ended up accepting and signing the royal decrees that led to the dismissal of Mosaddeq and the appointment of Zahedi in his place.⁶⁵

The plan, called in code TP-AJAX, began on August 16, 1953, when the Shah dismissed the premier and gave the government to Fazollah Zahedi, causing a violent reaction by Mossadeq which provoked a revolt, while a part of the people asked for proclamation of the republic. The

⁶³ Gasiorowski, Rivelazioni sul colpo di stato contro Mossadeq, Iran 1953, il complotto della Cia, in rivista "Fisicamente",

<http://www.fisicamente.net/GUERRA/index-259.htm>

⁶⁴ The New York Times Library, Iran CIA report,

<http://www.nytimes.com/library/world/mideast/iran-cia-intro.pdf>

⁶⁵ Reza Jalali, Il colpo di stato della CIA contro Mosaddeq, in Rivista "Stato & Potenza", 19 agosto 2013. <http://www.statopotenza.eu/8549/il-colpo-di-stato-della-cia-contro-mosaddeq-agosto-1953>

final action to overthrow Mossadeq ended three days later, on August 19, 1953, when General Zahedi along with other officers loyal to the Pahlevi dynasty arrested Mossadeq and his associates. The army, already largely against Mossadeq, sided with the insurgents, eliminating the few departments loyal to the legitimate government and, after some clashes, regained control of Tehran.

The Shah returned to his homeland, immediately suspending constitutional guarantees, and assumed full powers. The Shah thus became the undisputed master of Iran and his power became absolute. By restoring full authority, the Shah suddenly shifted Iran's political compass from left to right.

The role of the CIA in the 1953 coup has clearly emerged in the years ahead. On March 19, 2000, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright admitted for the first time, during an important speech intended to promote the rapprochement between the United States and Iran, the involvement of the American government in the coup, apologizing.⁶⁶ The US coup in Iran has also been publicly considered a mistake by the former US president Bill Clinton.⁶⁷

3.3 Relationships during the Eisenhower administration

During both his terms of office, Eisenhower dealt with the Iranian coup, the Korean War, the antagonism with China, nuclear weapons and the space war with the USSR, the Suez crisis and the mission in Lebanon, while in internal politics he was an opponent of Senator McCarthy and was the protagonist of the end of the McCarthy era.

As soon as the *coup d'état* in Iran ended, the Western allies immediately supported the Shah. The United States granted an emergency loan of over 45 million dollars, while diplomatic relations with Great Britain were restored on December 5, 1953. Thus, they were able to resume negotiations for oil, concluded on August 5, 1954, date on which the agreement was signed for the formation of the consortium which included the seven richest oil companies in the world. Immediately after helping overthrow Mossadeq to counter the revolutionary nationalism in Iran, the Eisenhower Administration worried that the Shah's reactionary policy would not predispose him to further unrest.⁶⁸ Allen Dulles warned "Ike" that he had made little or no progress in the critical area of economic and social reform.

⁶⁶ Gasiorowski, Quand la CIA complotait en Iran, Révélations sur le coup d'Etat de 1953, in "Le Monde", 20 Marzo 2000. <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2000/10/GASIOROWSKI/14360>

⁶⁷ Maddaloni, (2006) A.Modini, L'atomica degli Ayatollah, Roma, Nutrimenti, p. 68.

⁶⁸ Eisenhower (1965), White House Years, Waging Peace, New York, Doubleday & Company, p. 199.

Even later, the Americans tried to persuade the Shah, but Eisenhower and his collaborators really made little progress in Tehran with their reformist agenda. The aid that Washington granted to Tehran to stimulate Iran's economic growth was followed by new requests for military assistance to deal with external dangers such as Iraq, which, according to the Shah, was about to become a basis for new communist party Tudeh against the regime in Iran. In view of his resolute idea against external threats and disinterest in internal problems, intelligence analysts found it unlikely that the Shah would implement a robust program of reforms capable of meeting the growing popular demand and expanding the base of its support so as to ensure the stability of the regime. American attempts to persuade the Shah to implement a satisfactory agrarian policy resulted in the timid intervention of the Shah through the implementation of the so-called White Revolution.

Already in the early 1960s, reports from American diplomacy on Iran had revealed the diagnosis of the Iranian situation. Diplomats concluded that without internal reforms the monarchy was likely to be overthrown, recognizing the Shah's limited willingness to move in this direction with speed. The United States hoped to control Tehran's growing demands in order to buy time to implement peaceful reforms, accelerating economic growth and strengthening the internal security apparatus.

The difficult internal situation was not long in provoking the first signs of popular discontent. On June 3, 1963, Ayatollah Khomeini, a religious man very influential in the Shiite universe, accused the Shah of being an American puppet from his mosque in the holy city of Qom. Khomeini refused initiatives supported by Americans, such as secular education, women's rights and land reform, as initiatives against the Islamic tradition and he soon became the leading symbol of opponents to the Pahlavi dynasty for restless students, oil workers and shopkeepers rioting in the streets of the major cities of Iran. With the support of US diplomats, the Shah ordered a brutal repression that caused more than a thousand victims and put Khomeini under house arrest and later, towards the end of the year, forced him to go into exile first in Turkey and then in Iraq.

[3.4 Relationships during the Kennedy administration](#)

On January 20, 1961, the Republican Eisenhower had left his post in the Oval Office to the Democrat John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

The Kennedy presidency took place during an intense period of internal and external conflicts and in the midst of the Cold War climate. In domestic politics Kennedy had to deal with the racial integration movement of African Americans, while in foreign politics he faced delicate

issues, such as the Cuban missile crisis, the Bay of Pigs invasion, the war of space with the USSR, the construction of the Berlin Wall and the growing American involvement in the Vietnam War.

His administration also encouraged the Shah to continue on the path of reform, but he was unable to fully understand and interpret the implications of the Khomeini movement, dismissing the recent unrest as the product of the demagogic discontent that would have dissolved in the face of a concerted program of land reform, women's suffrage and public education.

During those years, the concentration of American diplomacy was attracted by the developments related to the creation of OPEC and especially towards Iraq.

Towards the end of the 1950s, the discovery of new deposits in Libya and Algeria seemed to diminish the dependence of the West, especially in Europe, on oil from the Middle East. The quality of these deposits, with a smaller quantity of sulfur and the geographical proximity which reduced the distance of the oil pipelines with evident savings in transport, thrilled the big oil companies. The Seven Sisters, who until the establishment of OPEC were estimated to have controlled 85 percent of the world's oil resources, faced with a growing surplus of crude oil, in August 1960 cut prices. This inevitably led to a sharp drop in oil revenues, many of which had the main resource of their revenue in oil.

Outraged by this move, the oil ministers of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq and Venezuela met in Baghdad and in September 14, 1960 founded the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Through the association in the cartel, the producing countries, with a unitary position, intended to decide important aspects of production, such as prices, quantities and relations with oil companies. As will be seen later, this move marked a very important historical moment in world oil production and reversed relations with oil companies, in favor of the producing states.

Without even having had the time to understand and absorb the effects of OPEC decisions, the US found itself faced with a new conflict in the Middle East. On July 14, 1958, the nationalist military Abd al-Karim Kassem, through a coup, succeeded in conquering Baghdad and overthrowing the pro-British monarchy Hashim, who had ruled Iraq since 1921.

The new Prime Minister immediately took a nationalist and anti-Western stance. Kassem withdrew Iraq from the Baghdad Pact and abolished agreements previously signed by Iraq with the great allies, breaking the treaty of mutual aid and bilateral relations with Great Britain and denouncing the agreement for the supply of weapons and military equipment signed with the

United States. At the same time, Kassem established friendly relations with the Soviet Union. British troops on Iraqi territory were forced to withdraw from Iraq by May 1959.

Kassem's nationalism also had an impact on Iraq's oil policy. Kassem asked the Anglo-American Iraqi Petroleum Company (IPC) to transfer 20 percent of the shares and 55 percent of the profits to the Iraqi government. Following the company's negative response, Kassem passed a law that expropriated IPC and formed a national company for the export of Iraqi oil. However, on February 8, 1963 Kassem was overthrown from power following a successful coup organized by the Baatist party and then tried and murdered. The coup was supported by the pan-Arabs of Egypt, intimidated by Kassem's drift, and it had the implicit consent of British intelligence and the CIA.

In the same year, the brief experience of the first Catholic elected to the White House ended abruptly with the assassination of President Kennedy in Dallas on November 22, 1963.

3.5 Relationships during the Johnson administration

The achievements of Lyndon Baines Johnson's presidency were more than significant in domestic politics. The US made huge improvements in major social battles, such as equality of civil rights, a ban on racial discrimination, access to public health through the Medicare and Medicaid programs, the right to study, immigration policies and the war on poverty through the "War on Poverty" program. The American economy of those years was experiencing a period of sound economic development.

However, in foreign policy Johnson got stuck in the conflict in Vietnam, inherited by Kennedy. In fact, American engagement in the Asian country increased. The number of American military personnel in Vietnam increased from an initial number of 16,000 in 1963 to around 550,000 in 1968.

In the midst of a global situation of tension and occupied by the deterioration of the Vietnamese affair, in the summer of 1964 President Johnson considered the Shah one of the few positive points of US foreign policy. Johnson's ambassador to Tehran, Armin Meyer, said that the Shah was making Iran a striking case of modernization in that part of the globe. By enthusiastically building the foundations of the doctrine of the regional pillars, in late 1968 Johnson's collaborators accepted that Iran's rapid economic growth, accompanied by social reform, had provided the Shah with solid foundations for his attempt to succeed the UK as the main pillar of Gulf stability.

It was certainly a phase full of errors of evaluation by the US diplomacy, which followed in the Nixon and Ford administration phases, which culminated during the developments of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, which occurred during the Carter presidency.

3.6 Relationships during the Nixon administration

Richard Nixon will long be remembered for what concerns American foreign policy for being the president who ended the Vietnam war in 1973. In addition, Nixon improved diplomatic ties with China, visiting the country in 1972 and opening commercial channels between the two powers. Nixon was president during the American moon landing and during the oil price crisis caused by OPEC.

Despite political successes, Nixon's name will always be associated with the Watergate scandal, which caused the impeachment procedure to begin and the president's resignation on August 9, 1974.

Nixon had known the Shah since the Eisenhower era, during which he served as Vice President of the United States. Proponent of the doctrine of regional prosecutors, Nixon hoped that his regime could become the United States partner in the Middle East. The Iranian monarch's continued support for US policy in Southeast Asia and the firm refusal to join the Arabs in the oil embargo on the United States reflected a level of personal loyalty much appreciated by Nixon. According to William Safire, author of Nixon's speeches and his confidant, in the early 1970s, the Shah was the President's favorite statesman. Even the national security adviser, the well-known diplomat Henry Alfred Kissinger considered the Shah a stable ally in a turbulent and vital region⁶⁹.

The Shah's internal political problems were underestimated by the short-sightedness of Nixon's diplomatic staff. Nixon himself was convinced that Iran, as soon as it modernized, would become the surrogate of the USA in the Middle East. An information report on Iran, prepared during the summer of 1970, impressed Nixon's Washington. *"The Shah is determined to secure a role of power and supremacy for Iran in the Persian Gulf after the British withdrawal,"* CIA analysts pointed out on September 3, and its ambitious program of land reform, industrialization and education on a large scale, had infused him with great confidence in the stability of his power⁷⁰. Two years later, during a two-day visit to Tehran in May 1972,

⁶⁹ Little (2008). American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945. University of North Carolina Press. p. 380.

⁷⁰ Little (2008). American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945. University of North Carolina Press, p. 380.

President Nixon congratulated the Shah on his progressive interventions with agrarian reform, school education and economic development. Happy with the Shah's enthusiasm for supporting Western interests in the region, Nixon and Kissinger promised to sell him what he wanted of the Pentagon's military arsenal, except nuclear weapons.

While the apparent balance in Iran strengthened Washington's short-sightedness, the Shah continued to devote himself to the creation of his military strength, through multibillion-dollar expenses that caused heavy inflation and that did not allow to dedicate the revenues, produced by the enormous oil resources, to the belt, low and medium population. Furthermore, his close ties to Washington were increasingly justifying the accusations of the mullahs led by Khomeini that he was becoming an American puppet. The regime responded harshly to the new criticisms, imprisoning the main critics and increasing surveillance by the secret police. Few realized in Washington the explosive potential that was accumulating under the surface.

3.7 Relationships during the Ford administration

Nixon's successor to the White House, Gerald Ford, had a curious career in the White House. Appointed Vice President of the USA on December 6, 1973, after the resignation of Spiro Agnew, eight months later he assumed the office of the thirty-eighth US President due to the resignation of President Nixon, overwhelmed by the Watergate scandal, thus becoming the only person to be appointed President and Vice President of the USA without having been voted for any of these offices.

In foreign policy, Ford wanted to maintain the prestige of the United States after the fall of Cambodia and South Vietnam. The prevention of a war in the Middle East remained the primary objective. This was achieved through the aid granted to both Israel and Egypt in order to persuade them to accept a compromise. Ford continued the diplomatic confrontation towards the Soviet Union, agreeing with the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev on new restrictions on nuclear weapons.

Kissinger, also in office during Gerald Ford's administration, continued to accentuate only the positive aspects when he reported to the new president on the eve of the Shah's visit to the White House. By placing the emphasis on the country's economic growth with an average annual GDP growth rate of fifteen percent for several years, Kissinger exalted the agrarian reform and development programs implemented by the Shah. President Ford himself congratulated the Shah for his wise leadership thanks to which Iran had made extraordinary

strides in its economic development in relations with other countries in the region and promised to strengthen the special relationship that the United States enjoyed with Iran.⁷¹

3.8 Relationships during the Carter administration

In November 1976, the Democrat Jimmy Carter defeated Gerald Ford in the election campaign for the US presidency. In foreign policy, Carter initially achieved important successes. Through the Camp David agreement in 1978, the peace agreement between Egypt and Israel was signed. At that time, the agreements on the Panama Canal were ratified and high-level diplomatic relations were established with the People's Republic of China, and SALT II negotiations on the limitations of nuclear weapons with the Soviet Union were also completed. In spite of everything, these initial successes were followed by other negative events, such as the Islamic revolution, the hostage crisis in Iran and the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviets.

The figure of Carter also deserves a particular explanation, regarding the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002; he was rewarded for his efforts to find peaceful solutions to international conflicts, implemented through the foundation he created. In fact, Carter is the only president of the United States to receive this award for actions carried out after the period of his presidency. The other three American presidents who received this award, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson and Barack Obama, won it during their term of office.

During the Carter administration, the US was increasingly receiving signs of a likely internal crisis in Iran. Despite the facade of the white revolution, the Iranians were rejecting the reforms of the Shah, considered as simple actions of appearance and not of substance of political freedom. CIA analysts were beginning to admit that sooner or later, the Shah's opponents would demand real political freedom.⁷²

Carter had made human rights and democracy abroad the basis of his politics, so he encouraged the Iranian monarch to soften his authoritarian regime. Convinced that the Shah's determination to pursue his goals had generated opposition from intellectuals and the masses, in search of greater involvement in the political process, in mid-November 1977, the president asked the monarch to ease the repressive measures against his critics.

However, during his visit to Tehran, on the eve of New Year's Eve 1978, Carter used a much softer tone. The President of the United States considered the Shah's leadership to be "magnificent", having turned Iran into an island of stability in one of the most problematic

⁷¹ Kissinger (1979), *White House Years*, Boston, Little Brown and Company, pp.1262 -1264.

⁷² Little (2008). *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*. University of North Carolina Press. p. 382.

areas of the way. Like Nixon and Ford, Carter also regarded the Shah as a friend of the West, praised the white revolution and recognized the value of good relations between the two countries.

Nothing could ever be further from the truth and this statement could no longer be pronounced a month later.

Mass riots against the regime began in Iran on January 8, 1978. When students and religious devoted to the Khomeini exile gathered in the holy city of Qom to protest the Shah's pro-Western and autocratic policy, government forces opened fire by killing numerous demonstrators and triggering a riot wave across the country. After the first bloody events, Middle Eastern White House expert Gary Sick advised National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski that the reforms carried out by the Shah appeared to be counterproductive.⁷³

While the Shah government continued to indicate communist support and external factors as the leaders of the riots, Sick indicated that the real threat to the regime was the Muslim reactionary right, for which the modernization program was too liberal and far from the traditional values of Iranian society.⁷⁴ It was a truly accurate diagnosis of the situation in Iran, perhaps the first, in contrast to the previous position which ignored the real internal factors of popular discontent in Iran.

During the whole of 1978, Iran was involved in numerous demonstrations, inspired by Khomeini's thoughts and orchestrated by Muslim clerics ready to establish an Islamic Republic. Troops loyal to the Shah, on 8 September, opened fire on 20,000 pro-Khomeinist demonstrators gathered in Jaleh Square in Tehran, killing 400 people and injuring another 4,000. Students, merchants and religious responded by organizing other anti-government protests.

Towards the end of September 1978, the American Ambassador to Tehran, William Sullivan, also said that the massive riots directed against the Shah had come to that point due to frustrations, iniquities, corruption and growing expectations generated by the economic development program and by social reforms of the Western kind. The US ambassador was preparing for any scenario. Considering that Khomeini's supporters were about to overthrow the Pahlavi dynasty, Sullivan intended to create a reformist coalition of pro-Western officers, middle class and moderate religious professionals, capable of holding back Islamic extremists. Sullivan suggested to Washington the possibility, in case the Shah had abdicated, of convincing

⁷³ Little (2008). *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*. University of North Carolina Press. p 384.

⁷⁴ Little (2008). *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*. University of North Carolina Press. p. 384

Khomeini to take a political position in the Ghandi style, leaving current affairs to a person acceptable to the military and not to someone like Nasser or Gaddafi, as he would perhaps preferred Ayatollah.⁷⁵

If in Tehran the situation was clear to Sullivan, in Washington they continued to see the situation through diplomatic prejudice. Among Carter's collaborators, very few found the conclusions of the American Ambassador to Iran possible.

Several years later, the National Security Council expert Gary Sick himself pointed out that the President and his major advisors were far from concluding that the Shah was now condemned and wished to avoid at all costs the appearance or reality of abandoning a faithful ally. Consequently, instead of taking the necessary countermeasures, the White House continued to concentrate all its efforts on supporting the Shah and persuading him to act with greater determination.

The White House establishment succeeded for the first time in acknowledging the seriousness of the crisis in Iran, only after the reports of one of the politicians closest to President Carter, the Democrat George Ball, returning from a visit to Tehran. In the report delivered to Carter on December 11, 1978, Ball explained to the president that the Shah was about to fall ruinously and that his regime could not be put back together. The US itself was not prepared for this hypothesis and had no practicable solutions.⁷⁶

Within the US administration there were growing divisions as to what strategy should be adopted towards Iran; despite the indecisions, the voices of those who favored the hypothesis of a transitional government that would provide the opportunity for a dialogue with moderate oppositions became increasingly loud.⁷⁷

A month later Khomeini returned from exile in triumph, denouncing the Shah as a traitor and abolishing the white revolution as an insult to the Muslim tradition. Ayatollah observed that Pahlavi promised economic development and then wasted oil revenues on military supplies. His so-called reforms had ended up creating markets for America by increasing Iran's dependence on the US. Khomeini labeled America as «*The Great Satan, the number one enemy of the oppressed and poor peoples of the world who exploits the peoples of the world through large-scale propaganda campaigns that are coordinated by international Zionism.*

⁷⁵ Little (2008). *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*. University of North Carolina Press., p. 385

⁷⁶ Little (2008). *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*. University of North Carolina Press., p. 386.

⁷⁷ Sick (1985), *All fall down*, New York, I.B. Tauris, pp. 18 – 21.

Through its secret and treacherous agents, America sucks the blood of defenseless peoples as if only she, along with her satellites, had the right to live in this world»⁷⁸.

Applying his thinking, Khomeini stated to work to establish an Islamic Republic capable of threatening US interests even more seriously than previous anti-American leaders, the Egyptian Nasser and the Iraqi Kassem had done years earlier. Towards the end of 1979, a commando group of Islamic students took the employees of the US embassy in Tehran hostage and at the same time, the new government was directing oil revenues to anti-American countries.

3.9 Considerations on American foreign policy in Iran. The prejudices that led to the revolution.

The errors of assessment by diplomacy, even if lasting and unforgivable for not being able to perceive the real risk of the explosive situation in Iran, however, are justified for some factors. The unconditional support offered to the Shah by all the US presidents of that period must be interpreted and included in the political and economic framework of the time.

The main concern of the United States in foreign policy for nearly fifty years had been the Cold War. The antagonism with the Soviet Union resulted in a lasting war to conquer the widest possible geographic areas of influence. In this perspective, the US has been directly or indirectly involved in many conflicts and hot times around the globe. In the role of superpower of the Western bloc, the USA has been the protagonist of almost all tensions, starting from the American continent, to Cuba, Panama, Nicaragua and then moving on to Turkey, Egypt, Libya, Israel, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and eventually China, Taiwan, Korea and Vietnam, not to forget Europe and the crises in Greece, Cyprus, Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

From this point of view, the geographical position of Iran, bordering the USSR and included in the so-called "Northern Tier" seat belt, was of strategic importance for the USA. The Shah had represented a loyal US ally in the Middle East region, an area where anti-Americanism was rampant, both against the Soviets and against the Islamic extremism of many Arab nations. In addition, with what would have been a characteristic feature of twentieth-century US politics, Washington showed its preference for the leadership that guaranteed the status quo, both for economic interests and to prevent the USSR from gaining power in the region. While promising to promote the principles of democracy, the US had already experienced in Iran

⁷⁸ Baxter, Akbarzadeh, (2009), *Le radici dell'antiamericanismo. La politica estera Usa in Medio Oriente*, Bologna, Odoya, p. 122.

during the Mossadeq years that concessions to nationalism could cause serious damage to American politics.

As for the economic factor, the growing role of oil as a supporter of industrial development and the weight that the Middle East had, thanks to its immense low-priced resources, only increased the need to have a strong ally in Iran.

As previously discussed, Iran is the third country in the world for oil resources and the second for gas resources. Industrial dependence on oil and the weight of oil prices on the global economy increased the need for the US to have this country on their side. After the 1953 coup, the United States had the opportunity to increase their presence in the Iranian oil industry.

However, the causes of the 1979 revolution are not to be attributed exclusively to the United States but must be identified within Iran itself.

The 1979 revolution was caused by a combination of factors. The first was the natural discontent that the population felt, exposed to a ferocious dictatorship that could not turn into democracy and that had concentrated the wealth of the country to the monarch class. The same profits from oil were badly spent on military armaments, and not reinvested in the internal economy.

Another factor must be identified in the proud Iranian nationalism, a country often invaded, but never colonized. The Iranians have never tolerated the US intervention in the overthrow of Mossadeq, let alone the political submission of the Shah to the service of the United States of America.

Social reforms encouraged by the Western model also found a strong closure in a country with a settled cultural and religious tradition. The revolution, not surprisingly, was initially a movement in which various forces and strata of the population had gathered, from the communists to the liberals, conservatives and religious. However, it was the latter who won the power war that took place after each revolution.

Certainly, an important role in the revolution must be assigned to the figure of Ayatollah Khomeini. Central figure of this event, Khomeini was a traditional Islamic religious. Khomeini used Islam as a political tool to mobilize the population against the regime, which he dismissed as corrupt and illegitimate. His public image was that of a committed activist, regarded as a deeply devoted and austere anti-Western nationalist, in opposition to the obvious well-being and luxurious lifestyle of the pro-American Iranian élite in government. Although Khomeini's

charismatic power was considerable, his success as a leader was justified by his ability to exploit popular discontent against corruption and arrogance from the Pahlavi regime.⁷⁹

Washington found itself completely unprepared when Khomeini came to power and the government that the US had so much supported fell into the hands of a religious leader who had built a political career on an anti-western position. The characteristics of the 1979 revolution brought a unique example of a theocratic republic to the global scene for the first time.

⁷⁹ Bill (1989), *The Eagle and the Lion*, Yale, Yale University Press, pp 161 -297.

4. The Iranian Revolution of 1979

4.1 The Political Situation before the Revolution

The dictatorship imposed by the Shah and the strong repression of the secret police *Savak* created discontent and growing opposition among the population. The closure of the political system, the repression, in addition to the resentments toward the growth of the Western presence, fueled a series of anti-government protests in 1977 and 1978 which turned into a national revolutionary movement. The ruler Mohammad Reza was unable to respond with a coherent political plan. Even American President Jimmy Carter made no mystery of his disapproval of the brutality of the Iranian system and asked the *Shah* for the application of liberal reforms in the country.

Despite the unsuccessful first revolt of 1963, Ruhollah Khomeini - even from exile - contested the policies of the *Shah* and encouraged the overthrow of power. His position emerged as the spiritual leader of a growing opposition movement which began organizing mass strikes that effectively paralyzed the Iranian economy from the beginning of 1978. Khomeini's ideological thinking spread throughout the Islamic world and of course also in Iran through audio messages recorded in cassettes and distributed clandestinely. A number of different factors and decisions contributed to reinforce its political value, accentuating the political pre-eminence of Khomeini's Islamist movement over other opposition. Indeed, Khomeini's ability to make use of slogans and of reasonings also of different movements of opposition to the *Shah* contributed to favoring the popularity of Ayatollah's thought, in particular related to the themes of social equalization and the fight against the arbitrariness of political power, the defense of Iranian sovereignty against US interference and the opposition against Western culture, labeled as pervasive and distorting. According to Khomeini and the clergy, the *Shah* and his regime were intoxicated by Western culture, and this intoxication risked killing Shi'ism and Iran. Hence the need to fight.

The opposition to the regime's repressive policy did not have Khomeini as its sole voice, but the same was also supported by other important political factors. At the beginning of the protests the guerrillas led the *fedayyin-e khalgh*, volunteers inspired by the Marxist thought, who soon decided to join the Islamic *mujahideen* to involve more and more sections of the population in the fight against the regime, thus widening the protest. The leftist forces mistakenly believed they could manage and limit the power of the clergy in a now secular and modern country, where the application of *sharia* seemed a hypothesis far from being able to actually be achieved, but the Shiite clergy quickly became the only one reference of the revolt, de-authorizing the groups of other political inspirations. The direct impact of the religious

clergy as an opposing force and alternative political proposal has also marked Iranian history throughout the twentieth century.

Even though the emblem of the Iranian revolution was Ayatollah Khomeini, it is wrong to believe that the 1978-1979 Iranian revolution was an "Islamic revolution" or an Islamic one only. It was actually a revolution of the population, within which very different forces acted and moved. Among the most important forces of the revolution we can identify:

- *The National Front:*

The front of the liberal moderates and nationalists was based on the experience of the National Front during the government of Mossadeq in the early fifties, thus being one of the oppositions that had long contrasted the policy of the Shah. The various democratic-liberal souls aspired to a progressive liberalization of society and politics, although divided into various groups and with different ideas. The substantial political idea was not to bring down the *Shah*, but rather to favor its evolution in a democratic sense, creating a complete constitutional monarchy.

- *The communist party:*

The Iranian Communist Party (*Tudeh*) was considered one of the strongest communist parties in the Middle East. The *Tudeh* was created shortly after Reza Khan's forced abdication in 1941 and was very popular among college students, intellectuals, industrial workers and in urban areas. The support provided by the Soviet Union had made this party a force that frightened the *Shah* and the United States itself, favoring authoritarian drift of the government of Tehran.

- *Islamic Socialists:*

In the category of "Islamic socialists" who influenced this movement more than any other was the religious sociologist Ali Shariati. He developed a vision of Islam as an ideology of opposition that played an important role in the revolution. Shariati's Islam thus became an ideology that could be used in the political debate and that theorized a model of state and society that distanced itself from both Western capitalism and Marxism. It was not by chance that he was considered the ideologue of the Iranian revolution. Shariati's ideas are frequently found in the thought of Ayatollah Khomeini.⁸⁰

4.2 The evolution of the protest

The rebellion movement began on January 7, 1978, when Ayatollah Khomeini was publicly and harshly attacked in a government newspaper, accused among other things of being a British spy. The protest demonstration that followed, which took place two days later in Qom, was

⁸⁰ Redaelli (2009), *L'Iran contemporaneo*, Roma, Carocci editore, p. 37.

repressed in blood by the *Shah's* army but began a long cycle of revolts, regulated by the typical Shia commemorations for the dead after forty days.

The protest was further promoted by a tragic episode. On August 19 of the same year, the commemoration day of the 25th anniversary of the coup against Mossadeq, in a poor neighborhood of the town of Abadan, a fire broke out at the Rex cinema while the film *Gavaznha* (the deer) was projected, for a long time censored, causing 377 victims. The massacre was attributed to the Shah and SAVAK. For months there were constant clashes between the police and demonstrators.

On September 7, 1978, the protest hit Tehran for the first time. At the end of the holy month of Ramadan, a crowd went on the streets invoking the expulsion of the *Shah*. The next day, remembered in history as "Black Friday", the army opened fire on the crowd in Jaleh Square causing hundreds of deaths.

Martial law was imposed soon after, further increasing the role of the armed forces as guarantors of the survival of the monarchy.

At this point, the *Shah* was doubtful on the policy to follow, whether to support the hard line by giving free hand to the military, or whether to seek a compromise with the less radical oppositions. Given the failure of the martial law that had not stopped the protests, the *Shah* changed strategy by replacing the Prime Minister and the head of Savak. The new government of Jafar Sharif-Emami (in office from 27 August to 6 November 1978)⁸¹ did encouraged the opposition that started striking – situation that brought to a paralysis of the country, particularly for what concerns oil sector.

Meanwhile, the Shah, fearing the impact of the proximity of his political influence, asked for and obtained from the Iraqi authorities the expulsion of Khomeini. Initially, Khomeini was exiled in Turkey on November 4, 1964 and from the following year he moved to the holy city of Najab, Iraq, until, at the request of Iran, he was forced to move away from the Iraqi vice-president Saddam Hussein. Being refused to entry Kuwait, Ayatollah with the consent of the Shah went to Paris, where he arrived on October 12, 1978. However, this move proved fatal to the regime.

Indeed, the move to France gave Khomeini an international showcase, allowing him to have a more free and efficient communication strategy to Iran where tapes recorded with his speeches soon began to arrive, and then spread by mosques. In Paris, Khomeini had fewer controls and greater visibility thanks to his growing media exposition that the West reserved for him. To

⁸¹ Sharif Emami had previously been prime minister from August 31, 1960 to May 5, 1961

avoid attacks by *Shah* agents, French, British and US special forces installed around his residence in Neauphle le Chateau, on the outskirts of Paris, attracting media attention. Televisions began to follow the story day after day, spreading the image of the elderly Ayatollah all over the world, and in 1979 he was even nominated the the Man of the Year by the American magazine "TIME" for its influence, described as "the image of Islam in culture Western popular".⁸²

Meanwhile in Iran, due to the strikes, industrial and oil production ceased completely in October 1978. On 5 November, the most striking revolt took place, during which the British embassy was attacked, government offices were ransacked along with numerous shops in a commercial district and the statue of the sovereign was demolished in the university of the capital. The new riots shook the capital and led to the resignation of Prime Minister Emami. The *Shah* reacted by appointing a military government led by General Dholam Reza Azhari as a last attempt to use the armed forces to end riots.

However, it was already late because the strikes had stopped both oil production and the supply of electricity. The Tehran bazaar, which has always been closely linked to the clergy, was closed for months, air and rail transport were subject to considerable delays and sometimes suppressed, the goods were stopped at customs. The whole country was paralyzed and the revolt then became unstoppable. In an attempt to regain middle and secular sympathies, the *Shah* persuaded Shahpur Bakhtiyar, a Liberal Democrat linked to Mossadeq, a member of the National Front, on November 29 to accept the post of Prime Minister. In his inauguration speech, the new Prime Minister promised the repeal of martial law, new elections, the cancellation of the order of seven billion dollars of military supplies and the suspension of oil sales in favor of Israel and South Africa. Furthermore, to demonstrate his determination, the prime minister ordered the arrest of some former ministers and freed numerous political prisoners. But even this political move proved useless.

From Paris, Khomeini urged the Iranians to continue the protest, stressing that Bakhtiyar was nothing but a pawn in the hands of the Shah. In fact, the Bakhtiar government, immediately disowned by all oppositions, dissolved in less than a month, overwhelmed by the revolution. Faced with this situation, increasingly disappointed, discouraged and ill, at the end of 1978 Mohammad Reza promised to leave the country "temporarily", hoping to calm the waters.

⁸² Nasr, (2006) *The Shia Reviva. How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, New York, W.W. Norton & Company, p.138.

On January 16, 1979, the Shah and his family boarded on the Imperial Boeing Eagle which had to take them to Egypt, guests of President Sadat and soon after to King Hassan II's Morocco. However, the population did not cease the revolt, considering the departure of the Shah as further evidence of the weakness and imminent collapse of the monarchy. The military refused to act against demonstrators, therefore it was unable to protect the regime. After the *Shah's* departure, the government could not curb the revolutionary wave. The military announced their neutrality in the struggle for power, and this gave the final blow to the monarchy.

Just a few minutes after the take-off, Iranian national radio announced the departure of the Shah and his family. Thousands of people poured into the streets invoking the name of Khomeini. On Pahlavi Square the young people had torn the statue of the Shah and dragged it with an iron cable through the streets of the city until it dangled from an overpass.

The authorities tried to close the capital's airport to try to prevent Khomeini's announced return, but protests resumed and during one of these, between 27 and 28 January 1979, twenty-eight demonstrators were killed. The airport was reopened and Khomeini triumphantly returned to Iran on February 1. According to an estimate made by BBC⁸³, Khomeini was greeted by a crowd of five million Iranians celebrating. On February 12, the army formally announced its disengagement from the fight and Prime Minister Bakhtiar had no choice but to flee.

In the end Mohammad Reza Pahlavi took refuge in the United States, where President Carter welcomed him very well, ending his thirty-seven years of reign.

4.3 Change of Power

From this moment on the figure of the *Shah* was completely canceled by that of Ayatollah Ruhollah Mosavi Khomeini. On January 13, still in exile in Paris, he announced the formation of an Islamic Council of the Revolution, led by himself and dominated by Shiite religious people loyal to him, with the task of coordinating political activities and controlling the action of the revolutionary committees that were forming spontaneously across the country. After returning home after sixteen years of exile, Khomeini assumed effective management of the country.

On February 5, Khomeini entrusted the creation of a new government to the moderate Mehdi Bazargan, head of the Liberation Movement which represented both souls of the revolution, both religious and secular. Bazargan formed an executive dominated by secular and liberal

⁸³ On This Day, 1 February 1979: Exiled Ayatollah Khomeini returns to Iran, in "BBC News", http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/february/1/newsid_2521000/2521003.stm

nationalists, while the Islamic movement and the left were underrepresented compared to their popular following.

Khomeini himself refused any official office.

This strategy was interpreted in many ways by various analysts. For many of them, even analyzing the subsequent political developments, the choice to appoint Bazargan was made by Khomeini in a deliberate and instrumental way, to delegitimize the liberal-nationalist, moderate and pro-Western movements in order to gain time, initiating a radical purge of the armed forces and bureaucratic-administrative structures so as to get to control all the vital departments of the state.⁸⁴

Khomeini's plan was fully successful as in few weeks it became evident that the Bazargan government was practically with no real powers, which were concentrated in the hands of the Islamic Revolutionary Council. The pro-Khomeinist clergy was the only one among the revolutionary forces to pursue a winning strategy of occupation of power, showing that they had clear objectives and a realistic perception of the dynamics. The other political forces seemed surprised by the developments of the revolution and unable to understand the dynamics taking place in the country. Bazargan himself and the group of moderates, which also included Shiite religious not faithful to the concept of the *velayat-e faqih* (protection of law experts), tried in vain to strengthen the power of a government without authority, continually bypassed by Khomeini, while the real important element was the control of the Constitution drafting committee, which was dominated by the radical clergy.

Khomeini also began to control the organization of the judiciary, which, as will be seen later, became a decisive element in eliminating the imperial legacy of the Pahlavi, deleting the resistance of the armed forces, to arrive at the liquidation of the liberal and nationalist forces from the new political scene.

While the men of the old regime were summarily tried and executed by the hundreds, a referendum on March 30 sanctioned the birth of the Islamic Republic of Iran with 98 percent of the vote. On April 24, a liaison officer between the government and the Revolutionary Council was appointed.

Voting was held on August 3 to elect the constituent assembly. The elections saw the affirmation of Khomeinist candidates and religious. On November 28, the Assembly prepared

⁸⁴ Redaelli (2009), *L'Iran contemporaneo*, Roma, Carocci editore, p. 50.

a constitutional text which was approved, through another referendum, in December of the same year.

The text of the new Constitution followed the radical Islamist ideology, sanctioning the subordination of the state to the Shiite clergy and the spiritual leader at its top. The new constitution provided for the parallel existence of two orders of powers: the traditional political one, elected by the people, represented by the President of the Republic and the Parliament, to whom purely managerial tasks were reserved, and that of religious inspiration, non-elective, entrusted to a Supreme Guide (*rahbar, faqih*).

At the top of the pyramid of power there is the Supreme Guide, the highest expression of the *velayat-e faqih*, to which all the other institutions of the Islamic Republic are subordinated. This position was attributed to Khomeini for life. The Supreme Guide is commander in chief of the armed forces and secret services. In his absence, power is exercised by a council of religious leaders, chosen by an assembly of religious leaders on the basis of their curriculum and the degree of esteem enjoyed by the population. The Guide is elected and assisted in his duties by a council of eighty-six theologians, that is, the Assembly of Experts (or Council of Wise Men).

Moreover, the Council of Guardians of the Revolution, made up of twelve members, plays an important role. The Supreme Guide appoints the six religious members, while the other six are proposed by the judiciary and then nominated by parliament.

The new regime was immediately characterized by an even more ferocious repression of dissent than previously implemented by the Shah. The aim was to eliminate any influence from the Western world and at the same time any possible internal opposition to a theocratic-type government. Among the first decisions were the launch of massive expropriations and nationalizations that radically changed Iran's economic-productive structure.

Khomeini's attitude towards the now exiled Shah was always very harsh: when news came to Tehran that Pahlavi had taken refuge in the United States, Ayatollah Khomeini urged all Iranians residing in New York to make his stay difficult. Under the windows of the hospital where he was cured, pickets and garrisons were formed and the US police intervened harshly several times. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi did not survive much after his deposition because he died the following year, in 1980.

As the situation evolved, ethnic conflicts occurred with minorities, especially with the Kurds, who having contributed to the Islamic revolution, demanded their autonomy. Their demands were severely repressed.

With Khomeini, relations between Iran and the United States changed radically; the USA, indeed, suddenly turned from allies into enemies, and they were now called the "Great Satan, symbol of the corruption of Western civilization".

The Iranian revolution of 1979 transformed the millennial Persian monarchy into an Islamic republic, inspired by the Quran law "*sharia*". Contemporary historians agree in considering this event as one of the most important of the twentieth century and, in any case, the most important event in the Arab-Islamic world because, with this event, Islamic fundamentalism came to power for the first time, giving life to a theocratic state (supremacy of religious power over the political and democratic one). Iran's current situation is considered dictatorial and in recent years Iran has been one of the countries with the highest number of death sentences in the world. Furthermore, corruption and bureaucracy classify the country at the bottom positions of the ranking for economic freedom.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ The Heritage Foundation, 2014 Index of Economic Freedom, <http://www.heritage.org/index/country/iran>

5. From The 1979 to today

5.1 The hostages' crises in the US embassy

While the impact of the Iranian Revolution of January 1979 had barely diminished in Washington, American diplomacy (at the time under the direction of President Carter) was still taken by surprise by a series of dramatic events that occurred over the course of a few months. On November 4, 1979, in the wake of the enthusiasm of the revolution, a group of students, followers of Ayatollah Khomeini, entered the American embassy in Tehran and took 52 American diplomats and officials hostage. The embassy crisis lasted 444 days and the international consequences of this situation were significant.

The Carter administration was unable to guarantee the release of US citizens, failing to dialogue with the new Iranian regime at a time when extreme anti-Americanism reigned in Iran. President Carter attempted all possible solutions to obtain the release of the hostages, starting with economic measures, blocking the import of oil from Iran and freezing Iranian activities in the USA.⁸⁶ At the same time, he also embarked on numerous diplomatic initiatives, which were all ineffective. On April 24, 1980, the US military also attempted a military rescue mission that failed miserably, with the killing of eight US marines.⁸⁷

The situation in the region, in the midst of the hostage crisis, became even hotter due to another event. Once again American diplomats were taken by surprise when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan on December 23, 1979. This action was an important evolution in the context of the Cold War, during which Soviet expansionism was viewed as a major threat to US interests in the Middle East.

The occupation of Afghanistan was severely condemned not only by the United States, but also by the Arab and neutral countries. The war ended only in 1989 and was a major failure by the USSR, just as Vietnam had been for the USA.

The defeat of the hostage crisis was a failure that damaged President Carter's reputation both at home and abroad. During the Cold War period, the ability to project an image of power was fundamental and with the continuation of this crisis, the US administration seemed increasingly impotent. The military chaos after the failed mission in the Iranian desert was another strong attack to the public profile of the democratic administration of Carter. With the US in the

⁸⁶ Carter, (1995) *Keeping Faith*, New York, Bantam Books, pp. 254 – 255.

⁸⁷ Baxter, Akbarzadeh, (2009), *Le radici dell'antiamericanismo. La politica estera Usa in Medio Oriente*, Bologna, Odoya, p. 123.

middle of the presidential race, the failure to resolve the crisis contributed to the election of the Republican candidate, Reagan, who had campaigned on a security platform.

5.2 American sanctions against Iran

After the Islamic revolution, American antagonism resulted in severe sanctions against Iran, sanctions that started in 1979 and then were strengthened by the Reagan administration in 1983. During the Clinton presidency, in 1995 the sanctions became even more severe, preventing American companies to invest in the Iranian oil industry. In 1997, all American investment in Iran and trade with the Asian country were banned. The US also exerted pressure on other countries to apply the same measures to Iran.

The sanctions were renewed during the presidencies of George W. Bush and Barack Obama, freezing the capital and assets of people, groups or companies believed to be supporters of terrorism, as well as foreign businesses that dealt with them. Restrictions were also imposed on the main Iranian banks and their partners in the world, such as the National Bank of Venezuela, a country that over the years has become a close ally of Iran.

American foreign policy changed completely after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, happened during the presidency of Bush Jr. The attacks on American soil were carried out by terrorists belonging to the Islamic fundamentalist terrorist organization, Al Qaeda, led by Osama bin Laden.

Nineteen terrorists hijacked four airliners, causing them to crash into chosen targets. Two planes crashed on the skyscrapers of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York. The third airliner was hijacked against the Pentagon. The fourth plane, bound for Washington, failed to reach the target and exploded in a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, after passengers and crew members tried unsuccessfully to regain control of the aircraft. In total, the terrorist attacks of 11 September caused about three thousand victims.

The consequences of the attack had a tremendous impact on the entire globe. America felt heavily attacked on its soil and the American reaction was immediate. President Bush declared "the war on terrorism", considering any country that supported terrorists as an enemy and promising an adequate response to the attacks, considering the right of the USA to undertake a preventive war. The first state to be indicted was Afghanistan that after the Soviet withdrawal was ruled by Taliban radicals, who had supported Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda. Not even a month later, on October 7, 2001, the international coalition, formed under the auspices of the United Nations and led by the USA, began bombing Afghanistan, paving the way for the

landing of military forces the following week. In December of the same year the Taliban regime was overthrown, and new elections were held. However, the conflict in Afghanistan is still open today, as the Taliban still exercise control over certain areas of Afghanistan, and organize frequent military attacks, as the local government is not yet able to guarantee full control over the country. The international armed forces are still present on Afghan soil shortly after the final withdrawal.

After hiding for years after the attack, Bin Laden's hiding ended on May 2, 2011, when his hiding place in Pakistan was discovered and the terrorist was killed during the military blitz of the U.S. Navy Seals special forces.

On January 29, 2002, President Bush made the famous "Axis of Evil" speech, in which he viewed Iraq, Iran and North Korea as nations pro-international terrorism and engaged in the development of weapons of mass destruction.

That same year, the Bush administration denounced Iraq as a chemical weapon holder country. Unlike the case of Afghanistan, however, the will to overthrow Saddam did not have the approval of the United Nations to send a military mission. However, the U.S. created a military alliance with twenty other allies to attack Iraq, where Britain was the main partner. The invasion started on March 20, 2003 and the Iraqi resistance was brought down quickly. On April 9, 2003, American forces conquered Baghdad.

The US this time tried not to repeat the mistake of the previous war with Iraq when they left Saddam in power. The regime was overthrown, and new elections were organized. Following the invasion, Saddam Hussein went into hiding, but was captured in December 2003, to be tried by a special military court and then hanged on December 30, 2006.

Following the terrorist attacks, the USA passed internal legislation restricting some personal freedoms as well. The most famous legislative rule, called the Patriot Act, was approved by Congress just over a month after the September 11, 2001 attacks. The law, in a nutshell, reduces or completely eliminates many of the restrictions to which government agencies were subjected in their interception of telephone and digital communications and in the management of medical and financial data. In addition, discretion and government powers to manage people suspected of terrorism are also increased beyond the American borders and therefore, in fact, limiting certain civil rights and freedoms in the name of security.

The majority of these measures entered into force permanently. Some, on the other hand, due to their exceptional nature, must be periodically reviewed and extended, otherwise they cease to have value. The American reaction was also translated through repression and harsh prison regimes for terrorists captured in Afghanistan at the US base in Guantanamo in Cuba.

In general, American politics during the years of the presidency of G.W. Bush, also due to the 9/11, was an extremely aggressive policy. Military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq raised tension in the Middle East, causing criticism and reactions not only from the Arab world but also from the West. A consequence of this policy is also a growing anti-Americanism which was already present in the Middle East and which has further strengthened in recent years.

During this period, especially under the presidency of Ahmadinejad, Iran was one of the countries that repeatedly condemned the foreign policy of the United States, bringing the political situation to some very high moments of tension between the two countries, also fueled by the issue nuclear power and Iranian political statements towards Israel⁸⁸.

5.3 Khomeini's death and his legacy

Sick of cancer from a long time on June 3, 1989, the now eighty-six year-old Khomeini died of a heart attack, following an operative operation he had undergone a few days before. On June 6, his funeral was followed by an immense crowd of millions of people. The situation became uncontrollable by law enforcement and eight people were killed in the confusion and at least 500 others were injured.

Two days earlier the imam's spiritual testament had been read on the radio: the Iranian revolution was a divine gift that the Muslim faithful had to protect with every care; the US was a state naturally prone to terrorism, while the USSR was a satanic force hostile to Islam.

5.4 Political developments after Khomeini's death. The rise of Khamenei and the Rafsanjani presidencies

The then president of the republic Ali Khamenei was called to succeed the post of "*rahbar*", who was quickly promoted to the rank of *ayatollah*, a position he still holds. His office as President of the Republic passed into the hands of the reformer Akbar Rafsanjani, who had held the office of President of Parliament for nine years since the first post-revolutionary elections.

Khamenei's appointment was initially provisional, given that the constitutional reforms that paved the way for him, admitting even a simple *ayatollah* as leader and not a great *ayatollah* recognized as a "source of imitation", had not yet been ratified by the Majles. The death of the

⁸⁸ Osservatorio Transatlantico n. 13, luglio-agosto-settembre 2005, p. 30, Senato della Repubblica, Istituto Affari Internazionali

old imam had taken place in a phase of constitutional reform, in which forty-five amendments had to be ratified by a popular referendum. This happened without difficulty on July 30, the day chosen for the election of the new President of the Republic, who saw the affirmation of Rafsanjani, with over 90 percent of preferences.

The appointment of Khamenei and the promotion of Rafsanjani from President of Parliament to President of the Republic underlined the ideological continuity and political stability achieved by the Islamic republic. This new diarchy favored a change in the internal structures of power, progressively marginalizing the most radical and dogmatic current, favorable to the Khomeinist movementist and to the continuation of the attempts to export the revolution to the region.

Ali Khamenei was one of the most important figures of the Iranian revolution and an intimate adviser to Ayatollah Khomeini. He was a member and then leader of the Council of Guardians of the Revolution and participated in the establishment of the Islamic Republican Party. However, Khamenei reached the top of power following the Khomeini conflict with his chosen predecessor, the Great Ayatollah Hoseyn Ali Montazeri, who openly criticized Khomeini for his repression policies, which in his opinion had exceeded those previously applied by the *Shah*⁸⁹.

The new president Rafsanjani was a religious man closely linked to the powerful social band of the bazaars, that is, to the trade, as he came from a family of large pistachio producers. At the beginning of his mandate, Rafsanjani exploited with a certain skill the lesser authority of the *rahbar* and the constitutional reforms that had eliminated the figure of the Prime Minister, thus strengthening the role of the president of the Republic as head of the executive, to consolidate his power and to impose a change in government style and goals.

For Rafsanjani it was a priority to guarantee the reconstruction of a country devastated by eight years of war and to encourage development. To start this process, however, it was necessary to improve the foreign relations of the Islamic republic in order to obtain the necessary economic and technical aid. This would not have been possible without the implementation of a more prudent and less agitated policy in rhetoric, which would reassure foreign countries and dispel Iran's image as a country of fanatic supporters of terrorism.

⁸⁹ Baqer,(2000) *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*, New York, Thomas Dunne Books, p. 287.

The "Second Republic" was thus born following the war with Iraq and the Khomeinist period, where there was less mobilization of the masses in favor of political stability and economic reconstruction, even though in the sphere of continuity and a proclaimed loyalty to revolutionary principles. The president surrounded himself with a group of moderate and pragmatic technocrats to start the revival of the economy and productive structures, while the *rahbar* ensured that the revolutionary principles were not affected and, with them, the privileges and power that the members of the clergy Shiite followers of the *velayat* and *faqih* had obtained from the revolution. Both figures of this diarchy were religious, but in reality, their political activity was pre-eminent.

Rafsanjani immediately passed a law by Parliament that reduced the percentage of state participation in the economic affairs of private individuals and included a request for a foreign loan for twenty-seven million dollars. The new president also proposed the reopening of relations with the United States, but this did not get approval from the establishment. But it was important for the consequence it had in the politics of the country because, beside to the inspiring principles of the hard line, there were people who asked for moderation.

The conflict with Iraq was exacerbated, never completely solved, and the first contacts for its resolution took place only in April 1991, at the end of the Gulf War, lost by Iraq. Meanwhile, popular protests against the regime began to be organized in the main cities of the country.

In April 1992, during the political elections, Rafsanjani's moderate wing won. He had plans to modernize the state and open up to the international community. But he was always opposed by radical Islamic fundamentalists who staged numerous serious accidents in big cities in June of the same year. The repression did not take long to reach the troublemakers, many of whom were sentenced to death.

In June 1993 there were presidential elections and Rafsanjani was re-elected, but he had to take note of a strong drop in consensus. In February 1994, while holding a rally in the capital, he was made the subject of an attack, which failed. Also, during the following year there was a succession of protests and unrest against economic policy, which also continued in 1995 when in April of the same year, a revolt broke out in Tehran against the general mark-up of prices. The decision by American President Clinton to implement the total embargo on trade and investment towards Iran was also decisive and had consequences on the economy. This situation of isolation precluded Iran from any access to international credit institutions. At the same time, Iran's foreign policy was also not going through happy moments, as during this

period there were disagreements with neighboring states, with Iraq and with Turkey over the Kurdish issue, which caused a diplomatic crisis in 1997 between the countries.⁹⁰

Rafsanjani's two presidencies are considered to be eight years of economic reconstruction and a progressive opening and normalization of diplomatic relations. Despite these conclusions, this presidency failed to fulfill its promises, coming to disappoint the political and cultural demands and socio-economic needs of a population increasingly disappointed by the results of the post-revolutionary experience.

During this period, the country's economy had fluctuating results. The new government first dedicated itself to restoring an exhausted industrial system for the war effort, promoting the increase in industrial production and trying to accelerate economic growth to reduce rampant unemployment and the worsening of the living conditions of most families. The temporary increase in the price of oil, at the beginning of the first presidency, helped the Rafsanjani government to stimulate a robust growth in gross domestic product, with an increase in industrial production and oil extraction.

However, it must be recognized that in this period the Islamic Republic of Iran began to emerge from its substantial isolation, even though relations with the Arab countries, in particular with the Gulf oil monarchies, were still very tense. But it is precisely in these years that the conditions were created for the rapid improvement of relations that will take place during the first years of government of the reformist President Mohammad Khatami.

Signs of improvement had occurred in the meantime, such as literacy, the development of university education and the active participation of women in the political and social life of the country. But it was precisely this latter voice that initiated protests by women who demanded equal rights for both sexes and a different interpretation of the Koranic texts, contesting that in progress considered too rigid. The Iranian reformists took inspiration from the opinion of women and young people to emerge in some way about conservatives. In fact, in the 1996 elections, the conservatives had to experience an impressive drop in their votes. But the most indicative turning point in the country's life came with the presidential elections of May 1997, when Sayyed Muhammed Khatami, former Minister of Culture, was elected Iranian President,

⁹⁰ "Iran, la sua storia", in "Portale Miraggi".
[http://www.miraggi.it/storia/paesto3.asp?varcer=SI&wcam=NO&paese=Iran&continente=Asia&band=bandiere/bnd iran.JPG&clm=SI&str=SI&tot=0%20](http://www.miraggi.it/storia/paesto3.asp?varcer=SI&wcam=NO&paese=Iran&continente=Asia&band=bandiere/bnd%20iran.JPG&clm=SI&str=SI&tot=0%20)

who in the past had had to abandon his post because he was not in tune with the rigid principles of conservatives.

5.5 Reformists in power under Khatami

The overwhelming electoral victory obtained by Khatami caused great expectations and excessive hopes in the moderate population.

This success also had important repercussions in foreign policy. In fact, Khatami minimized anti-American criticism and pronounced a declaration of esteem for the American people, so much so that Clinton softened his economic policy towards Iran. But the most sensational event occurred in September 1998 when Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi pronounced, in a session at the United Nations, Iran's decision to disassociate itself from the death sentence pronounced at the time by Khomeini towards Salman Rushdie.

The Khatami presidency achieved other successes in foreign policy: there was a rapid rapprochement with the Arab countries and in particular a marked improvement in relations with Saudi Arabia, Iran's main antagonist in the Persian Gulf.

With Europe there was the overcoming of the formula of "critical dialogue", started by Rafsanjani in the early nineties, and the resumption of full diplomatic relations, evidenced by numerous visits to and from Iran, the first since 1979 with countries of the European Union. This growth in Euro-Iranian relations was completed by the reestablishment of full diplomatic relations with Great Britain in 2000. Despite the progresses made in the international sphere, Khatami has always been in an uncomfortable position with his mandate of President because of the dualism in politics, since it could have been deprived of his authority by the spiritual "guide" of the country at any time.

Between November and December 1998, some murders of liberal dissidents and intellectuals were recorded, who had long been preaching the secularization of the country. The conservatives of the powerful Ministry of Information were suspected, a sort of secret service that had always struck the opposition with impunity in the past. In February 1999, municipal council elections saw the overwhelming success of President Khatami's supporters. In July of the same year, Iranian students took to the streets to protest the closure of the Salam newspaper, also supported by the president; the police made a violent assault on the campus of the University of Tehran; the protest soon spread to the squares of the capital, but was firmly repressed.

In February 18, 2000 the town was again called to the polls; this time it was political elections to elect the new Parliament. The reformist candidates obtained about 70% of the seats, 190 out of 290. The size of this victory seemed at first to break the resistance of the conservatives. Many reformists were convinced that by now having control of both the Presidency of the Republic and the Majles, they could finally carry out the political, economic, social and cultural reforms they fought for and that Iranian society had been waiting for some time.

In reality, this sensational victory had paradoxical results. In fact, the proportions of defeat and the new more determined requests for reform of the entire post-revolutionary institutional structure ended up strengthening the cohesion of all elements hostile to change and pushed Ayatollah Khamenei to fight the reformist front with greater decision. The *rahbar* feared the overthrow of Islamic rules and the control of politically active clergy over the country.

Another factor that ended up weighing against reformism in the years to come was the removal by Khatami and the reformists of the former President of the Republic, Rafsanjani, a man who was still very influential and able to mediate very well between the two opposing factions.

5.6 Counter-reaction by conservatives

In the first years of the reformist experience there were still cases of violence, assassinations, intimidations, arrests and threats against the most radical elements of the liberal front, following a strategy of decimation and removing crucial elements for the progress of reforms from the political scene, without touching the president. However, it should be noted that Khamenei never allowed pasdaran and intelligence forces to overcome certain limits, always supporting the legitimacy of the Khatami government. Khatami's own moderation and his decision not to force his hand in confrontation with the conservatives dissuaded Khamenei from ordering the president's dismissal and a bloody repression of the reformist experience.

But it was the victory in the 2000 political elections and the consequent polarization of the fragmented Iranian elite of power that marked the beginning of the definitive attack on the reformist front. Within a few months, in fact, the anti-reformist elements, which controlled the real centers of power of the Iranian republic, unleashed a political and judicial offensive that emptied the recent electoral success of significance.

In this climate of growing popular distrust and heavy political confrontation between the different factions, elections were held for the renewal of the President of the Republic. For weeks, Khatami threatened not to run, thus putting pressure on both the conservatives and the

more radical reformist groups, but in the end, he decided to present himself. The elections were held in June 2001 and turned into a new plebiscite for Khatami. He obtained 78% of the preferences, while conservative candidates were ridiculed by extremely low percentages. The negative result was the sharp drop in voters, which dropped by almost twenty percent, testifying to the increasingly widespread climate of distrust in the country.

During the second term, the president continued to maintain a very low profile, avoiding any open confrontation with his opponents, already considering completing his second and last four-year electoral term without obtaining significant institutional changes, in order to focus on improving the internal economic situation. The experience of the reformists seemed to have come to an end in February 2004, with the elections for the renewal of Parliament. In a political move, the Guardian Council removed many of the most popular reformist candidates from the electoral competition. It is estimated that at least 2300 applications were rejected. In solidarity and protest, many other candidates also withdrew from the election competition. In this political scenario, the elections thus sanctioned the victory of conservatives and theocrats.

5.7 The ultra-radicalism of Ahmadinejad

The coup d'état implemented by the conservatives before the 2004 parliamentary elections, which had eliminated most of the reformist candidates from the competition and had handed the seventh Majles into the hands of conservative movements, highlighted the failure of the democratization attempts initiated by President Khatami.

However, the situation turned towards a somewhat unexpected result. The reformists, whose defeat was taken for granted, failed to propose a unitary line of action, but even the conservatives were unable to present a unitary candidate. All this went in favor of a candidate considered as an outsider, Mahmud Ahmadinejad, who held the office of mayor of Tehran⁹¹. Ahmadinejad was one of the main characters in the so-called Alliance of Builders of Islamic Iran (Abadgaran), an alliance of political parties and conservative organizations. The Alliance was very influential especially in Tehran and had won almost all the seats in the capital in the Iranian elections of 2003 and 2004. Ahmadinejad was considered a religious conservative; before becoming mayor, he was a civil engineer and professor at the Iranian University of Science and Technology.

⁹¹ From 3rd May 2003 to 28 th June 2005

Ahmadinejad was little known outside of capital and was regarded as the least known, least experienced and least convincing from a personal and professional point of view among the seven final candidates accepted by the Guardian Council. This fact played to his advantage, as it allowed him to present himself as an element external to the corrupt system of Iranian power. Actually Ahmadinejad, who had previously also been governor of the Arbedil province, was not a man outside the establishment, but an "invisible" element of the system, linked to the security services and pasdaran forces, from which he had decisive electoral support. In fact, the engineer proclaimed himself a secular conservative, but in reality, it was in line with the religious direction of the Iranian regime.

The group that seemed clearly ahead the race for the presidency of the Republic was that of the so-called technocrats-moderates, who gathered around the figure of the former President of the Republic Rafsanjani. Rafsanjani was not only the best-known candidate abroad and at home, but also the one deemed best able to attract the popular vote and considered a sort of announced winner.

The results of the June 17 elections were different: in fact, Rafsanjani obtained the highest number of votes, about 6,160,000, but failed to reach the quorum necessary to avoid the ballot with the second most voted candidate. And here was the surprise of the name of his challenger, Ahmadinejad, who had secured 19.48 percent of the vote, taking advantage of the divisions between the main political forces. At the ballot Ahmadinejad was able to intercept most of the votes of the other candidates, obtaining a triumphant 61.8 percent of the votes.⁹² His election was contested by the major candidates, who speculated about electoral tricks, as well as the hidden support from Khamenei.

During the years of his presidency, Ahmadinejad has undoubtedly been considered a controversial figure, especially for the aggressive positions he has taken in foreign policy. He has been strongly criticized internationally for his hostility towards some countries, in particular Israel, the United Kingdom and the United States, creating counterweight alliances with states and leaders considered as undemocratic, such as Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua, but above all with Venezuela and the leader, Hugo Chavez. Ahmadinejad however tried to use elastic policy with the US, and often, after strong statements and provocations, political thawing gestures followed, such as the letter of greeting sent on November 6, 2008 to the newly elected American President Barack Obama.

⁹² Redaelli,(2009) *L'Iran contemporaneo*, Roma, Carocci editore, p. 109

Ahmadinejad took a position of extreme antagonism especially against Israel. In a speech on October 26, 2006, in a conference entitled "The world without Zionism", he came to declare that the state of Israel must be wiped off the maps and history pages and that the Holocaust was only a historical invention of the Israelis and the USA.

Furthermore, Ahmadinejad pushed a great deal on the choice to promote the production of nuclear energy, which the West feared could be developed for military purposes, creating frictions with the international community. In this direction, Iran requested and obtained the help of Vladimir Putin's Russia, but has opened a continuous debate with the International Agency for Nuclear Energy.

In internal politics, Ahmadinejad has often been accused of violating human rights, of having strengthened repression policies, of commanding torture of his opponents, often conducted in illegal prisons. Even its economic policies have not kept their promises and have suffered economic sanctions by the US because of its radical foreign policy positions.

Regarding the production and sale of oil, Ahmadinejad's Iran has tried to detach itself from dependence on the US dollar, opening the Iranian oil exchange, in which oil is exchanged for euros or other international currencies.

His election for a second term in 2009 was widely contested due to alleged election fraud and provoked widespread national protests, attracting significant international criticism. During his second term, Ahmadinejad was criticized not only by reformers, but also by traditionalist conservatives. Many corruption scandals have accompanied this period and Ahmadinejad has often been at the center of the power war.

Ahmadinejad became the first president of the Islamic Republic of Iran to be convened by parliament to answer questions regarding the actions taken during his presidency but managed to emerge safely thanks to the implicit support of Ayatollah Khamenei.

Limited by the two presidential terms foreseen by the Iranian constitution, during the last presidential elections, Ahmadinejad supported the campaign of Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei. On June 15, 2013 moderate Hassan Rouhani was elected as Ahmadinejad's successor.

Although starting from a centrist and neutral political position, during the election campaign, his candidacy was supported by previous presidents Mohammad Khatami and Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Iranian reformers. However, the traditionalist clergy did not oppose his candidacy. During his campaign Rouhani promised to try to improve international political relations and to try to implement a country's economic strengthening policy. Rouhani has

expressed himself in favor of equalitarian policies for women and the release of many political prisoners.

During this brief period of the presidency, Rouhani has made progressive steps forward to improve relations with the United States. Rouhani's visit to the United Nations Building in New York in September 2013 is considered to be one of the greatest advances in rapprochement. On September 27, 2013, the day after Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif and US Secretary of State John Kerry held a high-level political meeting Rouhani held a telephone conversation with President Obama, which hadn't happened for thirty-five years.⁹³

5.8 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)

After two years of intense negotiations, the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as the Iranian Nuclear Deal, was announced on July 14, 2015. The agreement was reached by Iran and the 5 + 1 group, or the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States) plus Germany, in addition to the European Union.

The primary objective is to prevent Iran from developing a technology that allows it to build atomic bombs while continuing the program aimed at the production of nuclear energy for civilian uses.

As a consequence of the agreement, the economic sanctions previously imposed by the United States, the European Union⁹⁴ and the UN Security Council (issued with resolution 1747)⁹⁵ were removed in early 2016.

Under this agreement⁹⁶, Iran agreed to eliminate its medium-enriched uranium reserves and to cut low-enriched uranium reserves by 98%, bringing them to 300 kilograms. Iran has also undertaken to reduce its gas centrifuges by more than two thirds for thirteen years, bringing them from 19,000 to 6,104, of which only 5,060 used to enrich uranium for the next 10 years (uranium enrichment it is a necessary step for the construction of the atomic bomb). The

⁹³ *Iran, riprende la trattativa sul nucleare*, in "La Repubblica", 26 settembre 2013.

http://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2013/09/26/news/rohani_iran_usa_26_settembre-67293099/

⁹⁴ European Council, "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and restrictive measures"

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions/iran/jcpoa-restrictive-measures/>

⁹⁵ Resolution S/RES/1747 (2007) adopted by the Security Council at its 5647th meeting on 24 March 2007.

Available at: https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/unsc_res1747-2007.pdf

⁹⁶ "The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) at a Glance" in Arms control Association. Available at: <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/JCPOA-at-a-glance>

remaining centrifuges will have to be only first generation, therefore less efficient and modern. The JCPOA also predicts that for the 15 years following the signature, Iran will be able to enrich uranium at a level not exceeding 3.67% and will not be able to build any heavy water nuclear reactor for the same period.

Uranium enrichment activities, as well as research, will be limited to a single plant, Natanz. No enrichment process will be allowed for at least 15 years in the Fordo site. Other plants will be converted to avoid the risk of nuclear proliferation.

To monitor and verify Iran's compliance with the agreement, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will have regular access to all Iranian nuclear plants. IAEA inspectors will only be able to access sites agreed in the JCPOA. To inspect other sites, they must first obtain Tehran's permission. From 2015 to the present, IAEA inspectors have certified 10 times Iran's adherence to the commitments made in the JCPOA. The inspections also concern uranium mines and yellowcakes (stocks of concentrated uranium, a substance that can be used in the preparation of fuels for nuclear reactors).

The European Union as a whole, but also several heads of state and government separately, have always expressed a compact position in defending the understanding with Iran. The EU High Representative for Foreign Policy, Federica Mogherini, reiterated on several occasions that the United States does not have the right to unilaterally withdraw from the agreement and restore sanctions.⁹⁷ French President Emmanuel Macron sought a compromise with Trump, hinting at potential new European sanctions against the Iranian missile program and arguing for the need for "a new agreement with solid foundations". But he also specified that, at the moment, there is no "plan B" at JCPOA. Trump appears to have rejected Macron's offer.⁹⁸

In 2015, the then American President Barack Obama had hailed the signing of the JCPOA as a "historic agreement", which would have prevented Iran from having a nuclear arsenal making the "world safer".

With the advent of Trump's presidency, things have changed radically. For Trump, who in the election campaign had repeatedly defined the JCPOA as "the worst international agreement

⁹⁷ European Union External Action Service (EEAS), "Share Remarks by HR/VP Mogherini on the statement by US President Trump regarding the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA)". Available at: [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_ka/44238/Remarks%20by%20HR/VP%20Mogherini%20on%20the%20statement%20by%20US%20President%20Trump%20regarding%20the%20Iran%20nuclear%20deal%20\(JCPOA\)](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_ka/44238/Remarks%20by%20HR/VP%20Mogherini%20on%20the%20statement%20by%20US%20President%20Trump%20regarding%20the%20Iran%20nuclear%20deal%20(JCPOA))

⁹⁸ BBC, "Macron sees Trump dropping Iran nuclear deal", <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-43903897>

ever signed by the United States", the agreement is unbalanced in favor of Tehran and represents a threat to the stability of the Middle East. According to the American president, if not in its form, Iran has repeatedly violated the agreement in its spirit.

Conclusions

In the five chapters of this study, we have gone through the salient moments of Iran's recent history, focusing particularly on the influence of Western countries, and of the United States particularly, on Iran's internal policies and on the social dynamics that led to the most important revolutionary event of the last century for the country. Through these chapters we stressed the fundamental points that led us to analyze the topic in the most comprehensive way possible and with the prospect of highlighting how history repeats itself and how unsolved dynamics return in the history of a country. Indeed, what finally seemed to be the international agreement guaranteeing peace and economic development in the Middle East has turned into a time bomb in the hands of Donald Trump.

After threatening the unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA, the American President also targeted the General of Qasem Soleimani on 3 January 2020, the soul and proud face of Persian nationalism, along with seven other men. As often happened between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Iran (Persia, at the time) was hit after signing an international agreement (as we argue in the first chapter), but unlike that time, in the eyes of many experts the choice of Donald Trump appears to be a wrong and hasty move.

From a strategic point of view, there are two errors that explain why the assassination did not produce the results expected by the United States, but rather made the United States' commitment to the Middle East more paradoxically burdensome.

The first mistake originates from the American perception of the role played by Soleimani.

The US tendency to simplify and personalize the Iranian political system lead to believe that the General was the sole architect of Iran's alliance network in the Middle East. Soleimani was the head of the Quds, an entity that operates in the field of intelligence. To this end, this agency controls a formidable network of informants throughout the Middle East, which gives it a clear superiority in this area compared to the other branches of the Iranian Armed Forces. Anyone who controls this organism is in fact powerful.

Therefore, whoever will succeed General Soleimani will soon assume the same importance in decision-making in Tehran.

The second error, closely related to the first, lies in having believed that the Iranian ability to convey strength and power in the Middle East depended heavily on Soleimani, and therefore that it could be compromised with his murder. Some signs show that this American choice may backfire, in fact, with the elimination of Soleimani, the ability to control for example the Shiite

groups by Tehran in Iraq will initially drop and this could start a gang war in order to grab new sympathies to the detriment of the United States. In parallel, the confidence of the Arab Gulf countries in the reliability and credibility offered by the United States is being eroded. These countries depend for their security on the American guarantee, but the crisis with Iran has raised in the Arab leadership the annoying doubt that America completely overlooks the disastrous consequences of its actions. From a strategic point of view, Iranian leaders consider these dynamics an image success for Iran, compared to an America increasingly seen as a source of regional instability.

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Summary

This study concentrates on Iran's history in last three centuries, starting with the analysis of the Great Game in the first chapter, namely the conflict characterized by the activities of the secret services and diplomacies of Great Britain and Russia in Central Asia and in the Middle East after the Second World War, to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

In the first chapter we analyzed the early relationship in the 19th century, among UK, Russia and Persia. The two countries were interested in expanding their power over the Middle East and Asia, and, with the discovery of the oil fields in Iran, their interests of interference grew. UK and Russia took advantage of their power to ratify agreements (often not respected) that only harmed Persia. This is described as the so-called "Great Game", namely the situation where these two powerful empires faced each other in the order to impose their strong influence in the Asian territory at the expenses of the Asian peoples.

As the aim of this study is to examine and highlight the extent to which the decisions and actions taken by Western countries, especially the United States, influenced the Iranian internal politics and social cohesion, the second and third chapters is dedicated to the United States and to their foreign policy approach over Iran. More specifically, the second chapter analyzes the different doctrines that shaped the strategy of USA in the geopolitical scenarios in the last century, while a more in-depth analysis of the USA-Iran relationship is carried out in the third chapter, that examines the relations between the American Presidencies and Iran from the Second World War until the 1979 Revolution.

The analysis of US foreign policy and its influence on the country stops at the Carter presidency as the 1979 Illuminated Revolution has definitively isolated the country with the rest of the world and especially with the USA.

The revolution of 1979 and its consequences at domestic and international level are analyzed in the fourth chapter. It describes the dictatorship imposed by the Shah and the strong repression of the secret police Savak that created discontent and growing opposition among the population. The closure of the political system, the repression, in addition to the resentments toward the growth of the Western presence, fueled a series of anti-government protests in 1977 and 1978 which turned into a national revolutionary movement. The ruler Mohammad Reza was unable to respond with a coherent political plan. Even American President Jimmy Carter made no mystery of his disapproval of the brutality of the Iranian system and asked the Shah for the application of liberal reforms in the country.

Despite the unsuccessful first revolt of 1963, Ruhollah Khomeini - even from exile - contested the policies of the *Shah* and encouraged the overthrow of power. His position emerged as the spiritual leader of a growing opposition movement which began organizing mass strikes that effectively paralyzed the Iranian economy from the beginning of 1978. Khomeini's ideological thinking spread throughout the Islamic world and of course also in Iran through audio messages recorded in cassettes and distributed clandestinely. A number of different factors and decisions contributed to reinforce its political value, accentuating the political pre-eminence of Khomeini's Islamist movement over other opposition. Indeed, Khomeini's ability to make use of slogans and of reasonings also of different movements of opposition to the *Shah* contributed to favoring the popularity of Ayatollah's thought, in particular related to the themes of social equalization and the fight against the arbitrariness of political power, the defense of Iranian sovereignty against US interference and the opposition against Western culture, labeled as pervasive and distorting. According to Khomeini and the clergy, the *Shah* and his regime were intoxicated by Western culture, and this intoxication risked killing Shi'ism and Iran. Hence the need to fight.

The opposition to the regime's repressive policy did not have Khomeini as its sole voice, but the same was also supported by other important political factors. At the beginning of the protests the guerrillas led the *fedayyin-e khalgh*, volunteers inspired by the Marxist thought, who soon decided to join the Islamic *mujahideen* to involve more and more sections of the population in the fight against the regime, thus widening the protest. The leftist forces mistakenly believed they could manage and limit the power of the clergy in a now secular and modern country, where the application of *sharia* seemed a hypothesis far from being able to actually be achieved, but the Shiite clergy quickly became the only one reference of the revolt, de-authorizing the groups of other political inspirations. The direct impact of the religious clergy as an opposing force and alternative political proposal has also marked Iranian history throughout the twentieth century.

Even though the emblem of the Iranian revolution was Ayatollah Khomeini, it is wrong to believe that the 1978-1979 Iranian revolution was an "Islamic revolution" or an Islamic one only. It was actually a revolution of the population, within which very different forces acted and moved.

In the fifth chapter it is described the dynamics that came out after Khomeini death's. Sick of cancer from a long time on June 3, 1989, the now eighty-six year-old Khomeini died of a heart attack, following an operative operation he had undergone a few days before. On June 6, his

funeral was followed by an immense crowd of millions of people. The situation became uncontrollable by law enforcement and eight people were killed in the confusion and at least 500 others were injured.

Two days earlier the imam's spiritual testament had been read on the radio: the Iranian revolution was a divine gift that the Muslim faithful had to protect with every care; the US was a state naturally prone to terrorism, while the USSR was a satanic force hostile to Islam.

At the end of this chapter it is analyzed the JCPOA. After two years of intense negotiations, the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as the Iranian Nuclear Deal, was announced on July 14, 2015. The agreement was reached by Iran and the 5 + 1 group, or the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States) plus Germany, in addition to the European Union.

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In 2015, the then American President Barack Obama had hailed the signing of the JCPOA as a "historic agreement", which would have prevented Iran from having a nuclear arsenal making the "world safer".

With the advent of Trump's presidency, things have changed radically. For Trump, who in the election campaign had repeatedly defined the JCPOA as "the worst international agreement ever signed by the United States", the agreement is unbalanced in favor of Tehran and represents a threat to the stability of the Middle East. According to the American president, if not in its form, Iran has repeatedly violated the agreement in its spirit. . Through these chapters we stressed the fundamental points that led us to analyze the topic in the most comprehensive way possible and with the prospect of highlighting how history repeats itself and how unsolved dynamics return in the history of a country. Indeed, what finally seemed to be the international agreement guaranteeing peace and economic development in the Middle East has turned into a time bomb in the hands of Donald Trump.

After threatening the unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA, the American President also targeted the General of Qasem Soleimani on 3 January 2020, the soul and proud face of Persian nationalism, along with seven other men. As often happened between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Iran (Persia, at the time) was hit after signing an international agreement (as we argue in the first chapter), but unlike that time, in the eyes of many experts the choice of Donald Trump appears to be a wrong and hasty move.

From a strategic point of view, there are two errors that explain why the assassination did not produce the results expected by the United States, but rather made the United States' commitment to the Middle East more paradoxically burdensome.

The first mistake originates from the American perception of the role played by Soleimani.

The US tendency to simplify and personalize the Iranian political system lead to believe that the General was the sole architect of Iran's alliance network in the Middle East. Soleimani was the head of the Quds, an entity that operates in the field of intelligence. To this end, this agency controls a formidable network of informants throughout the Middle East, which gives it a clear superiority in this area compared to the other branches of the Iranian Armed Forces. Anyone who controls this organism is in fact powerful.

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