

## Islamic Revolution Challenges: US-Iran Relations and Human Rights

Razieh Mousavyfar\*

DOR: 20.1001.1.26767368.2022.4.13.3.2

Assistant Professor, Political Science, Hakim Sabzevari University, Sabzevar, IRAN.  
(Received: 24 August 2021 - Accepted: 15 January 2022)

### Abstract

US-Iran relations were unique and strategic. After the Islamic revolution and the suspension of diplomatic ties, these relations were replaced by a sustainable enmity and hate even after four decades. This matter is unique in the history of diplomatic relations. Based on the direct negotiations between Iran and the United States regarding nuclear issues in the 11th government, the necessity of the analysis of the factors contributing to the continuous conflicts between two countries has attracted the attention of the researchers and scientists in the field of international relations. The main question is 'Why have the two countries failed to establish rational, logical and free from slogan relations even four decades after the Islamic Revolution?' This question is addressed from various viewpoints, including nuclear deals, terrorism, the Middle East peace process and human rights. The present study aimed to investigate the role of the human rights issue and its effect on the US-Iran relations in a descriptive-analytical manner, hypothesizing that this issue has no noticeable weight and importance in the continuous conflict between two countries. To this aim, human rights situations in the Pahlavi era are considered and compared with similar problems in the Islamic Republic. Then their contribution to the US-Iran relations is analyzed. A historical-analytical method is used to explain the pieces of evidence and findings.

**Keywords:** Islamic Revolution Challenges, Human Rights, Iran, United States (US), Israel, Middle East Peace Process.

---

\*. Corresponding Author: r.mousavyfar@hsu.ac.ir

### Introduction

In the Pahlavi II period, US-Iran relations were unique and special, which doesn't need further explanation in this work. Hence, only a brief review of these relations is provided before concentrating on the main topic.

After the end of WWII and with less influence of Russia and the UK than the growing influence of the US, relations between the two countries entered a new era. Strategic ties of two countries in the 70s resulted in the assignment of the Persian Gulf control to the Shah. For even better performance, Nixon promised to sell Iran All advanced and complex weapons except the nuclear ones. In this way, the "Twin Pillar Policy" of the United States was formed in the region based on Iran and Saudi Arabia as military and political pillars, respectively. Hence, the US government hoped that it could maintain both stability and security of the region and the interests of the West. Furthermore, having Iran as a close friend and ally in OPEC could facilitate the oil policies of the United States, ensuring the oil export to the western countries and creating a solid barrier against expansionist policies of the USSR (Sick, 2018: 237-253).

In this period, Iran was considered a base for air and land attacks against USSR and spying from this country. Iran's Geographic position and control over the Hormuz strait and its oil and other resources prompted the US government to consider it a country with deterministic importance for US national security (Gasiorowski, 1992 AD/1371 SH: 164-166). Nixon's doctrine satisfied Shah's military ambitions so that during 1970-75, he spent about 6.9bn dollars on military equipment and weapons. The presence of more than 40 thousand American military advisors in 1977 represents the depth of the military and security relations of the two countries. US-Iran relations went beyond military-security considerations as economic relations were also of pivotal importance. In addition to the numerous loans provided by the US government for financial plans of Shah, grants such as 1.5mn dollars for the construction of Tehran international hotel, 30.7mn dollars for Shahryar's power plant generators, 29.2mn dollars for telecommunications, among others, were given to the Iranian government (Mousavyfar, 2015 AD/1394 SH: 19).

The unique role of Iran in protecting the regional interests of the United States and its neighborhood with the competing superpower, i.e. USSR, prompted the US to support Shah's regime. This support stimulated the Islamic revolution wave, which ultimately, on March 13, 1979, led to the US losing Iran strategically. Along with the events occurring in the initial stages of the revolution, the old and strategic ally of the United States ultimately turned against it. It became its most ardent enemy in the region.

The Islamic revolution of Iran challenged US regional interests.

Threats against the US's vital interests in the Middle East and fears of the revolution leaking to the other regional allies of the US, such as Saudi Arabia, prompted the US to assume a confrontational policy against the Islamic republic, which is still going on (Pompeo, 2020: 5).

Researchers have attempted to hypothesize and provide various viewpoints in seeing the reasons for the conflicts between two countries after four decades. Recently, a book titled "US-Iran Misperceptions: A Dialogue" has been published in which authors of the various chapters who are all experts of the international relations, alluding to the regretful history of the Iran-US's relations, investigated the reasons as to why the two countries reached to the current point in their concerns and provided a list of possible causes as follows: "The coup against Mosaddegh's government, supporting Pahlavi II, US embassy hostage-taking situation, manipulating the oil price, supporting Saddam Hussain during Iran-Iraq war, demonstrations against great Satan, intimidation, human rights violation, prison and execution, conflicts in Iraq and the Persian Gulf, and frequent sanctions and threats." Moreover, as the name of the book suggests, they believe that the misunderstandings are resolvable and common interests are more important than conflicts and controversies – which are in their opinion based on a misunderstanding (cf: Maleki and Tirman, 2014: chapters 2-6).

Several Persian and English books and articles have been written about the challenges in Iran-US relations and the reasons for continuing this situation. Some of them are as follow:

- 1) A Reflection on US Foreign Policy on Human Rights (with a Look at US Policy toward Iran). Sayyid Davood Aghaei and Reza Bayati (2010 AD/1389 SH);
- 2) The Role of Human Rights as a Soft Power in US Middle East Policy. Mahdi Rouhani (2020 AD/1399 SH);
- 3) Legal Study of American and Iranian Human Rights Challenges. Mohammad Sotoudeh and Hamid Abia (2012 AD/1391 SH);
- 4) Worlds Apart: A Documentary History of US-Iran Relations, 1978-2018. Malcolm Byrne and Kian Byrne (2021);
- 5) Iran: Politics, Human Rights, and US Policy. Kenneth Katzman (2018);
- 6) US-Iran Relations. Avery Elizabeth Hurt (2017);
- 7) The Iran Primer: Power, Politics, and US Policy. Robin B. Wright (2010);
- 8) The Middle East and the United States. Edited by David W. Lesch, Mark L. Haas(2018);
- 9) Iran Politics, Human Rights and US Policy: Congressional by Kenneth Katzman (2016);

- 10) Iran: Politics, Human Rights, and US Policy. Congressional Service (2018);
- 11) Iran and US. Saeid Hosein Mousavian (2015 AD/1394 SH);
- 12) Iran, US and Human Rights. Sohrab Salahi (2017 AD/1396 SH);
- 13) America and Human Rights. Fatemeh Mohammadi (2017 AD/1396 SH).

Scrutinizing the related literature, including the sources above, it was observed that none of the reviewed sources have addressed the why, how, extent of the influence, and the weight of the human rights component in creating the current situation in Iran-US relations. Nor did they use the control group and investigate this issue in a single country (Iran) in two different historical periods. Hence, this article aims to touch upon the existing gap in this area with the goal of putting forward suggestions to tackle the problems.

However, in an overall look at the reasons and factors contributing to the continuous conflict between two countries and the controversies in the US-Iran relations after the Islamic revolution, we can classify these factors into four groups:

- 1) Terrorism;
- 2) Nuclear technology and mass destruction weapons;
- 3) Middle East peace process;
- 4) Human rights.

Confrontation of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the above contexts with the US is an issue that has overshadowed the relations between the two countries after the revolution. However, in Clinton's administration, the above matters became the axis of Middle East policies taken by the US government against the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is said that even the aim of taking a dual containment policy by the US was to change the Islamic republic approaches in the contexts mentioned above (cf: Sick, 1994: 19-20).

US foreign policymakers regarding the Islamic republic say: "There is a critical issue which has determined the policy of the United States about Iran since the revolution uncompromising opposition of Iran with the middle east peace process, specifically explicit and implicit support of Iran for groups committing terroristic attacks and violence, attempts to obtain mass destruction weapons and long-range rockets, incomplete respect to human rights particularly in treating religious minorities." (<https://www.brookings.edu/research/america-and-iran-from-containment-to-coexistence>)

Four disputes are taken as the variables contributing to the continuous conflict between Iran and the US. Each of these poses a hypothesis about the reason for constant hostility between two countries. However, since the

purpose of the present paper is to investigate the role of human rights in US-Iran relations, it is clear that it will not consider other variables in this research.

Issues discussed in the following sections are as follows:

- 1) Islamic republic and human rights;
- 2) Membership of Iran in international mechanisms of human rights;
- 3) The reaction of international institutes to the human rights conditions in Iran;
- 4) Human rights in Pahlavi II period.

### **1. The Islamic Republic and Human Rights**

The human rights issue is of specific importance in the foreign policies of countries and the public opinions about the nations. Attitudes toward human rights from a universality and/or cultural relativity point of view have no contribution to the importance of the issue in countries' foreign policies. Today, the gap between proponents of universality and cultural relativity is diminishing, and a moderate approach to human rights is being highlighted. Human rights are being addressed from a universality point of view, and this issue has become an interdisciplinary topic going beyond the main issues of the national and international relationships. It has overshadowed all of the national and international issues. Today, no government hesitates to show itself as the defender of human rights and promoter of its values. But what makes the difference are the benchmark and the criteria of human rights, which appeared in the discussions about universality and cultural relativity. In the author's opinion, this difference is being diminished, and convergence is being achieved in universal human rights. However, this convergence is mainly about theoretical and academic issues. Human rights in intergovernmental relations are of political theme and used in the governments' foreign policy.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is one of the countries that has been accused of extensively violating human rights and has witnessed the issuance of numerous resolutions of human rights by international human rights watchers.

The Author of "Islamic Republic Strategy about Human Rights in UN" claims that initially, the Islamic republic had a negative attitude toward western human rights and its conventions. He says: "In this period, the approach of the Iranian human rights policy pursues only the human rights which are mentioned in Quran, and doesn't recognize human rights conventions and international rules addressed in the international charter of human rights." (Sharifian, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 347)

With this approach, in the third committee of the general assembly, the former Iranian representative at the UN defines the stance of the Islamic republic about human rights as follows: "UN is a non-religious organization and universal declaration of human rights is a secular tool. The characteristics of the civil and political rights conventions are based on their ambiguous and incorrect perception of religious concepts. For this reason, secular organizations are not deserved to address spiritual issues. They force Muslims to respect the demands of such organizations." (Zakerian, 2002 AD/1381 SH: 61-2)

Remarks of the head of the Iranian board of representatives in the Vienna human rights conference confirm the implicit refusal of the western achievements in the human rights context. By rejecting the universality of human rights claimed by the West and its ethnocentricity, he says: "Iran asks for serious talks about the principles of the human rights since the main problem of the western countries is their misunderstanding about the humans and human rights. For this reason, westerners failed to provide an acceptable and universal pattern west intends to play as the judge, prosecutor and jury in the human rights context. At the same time, it attempts to take responsibility for the law-making and define the rule." (ibid., 62)

However, the Islamic Republic of Iran gradually changed its attitude about the human rights mechanisms and for the first time in 1998 and at the beginning of the 43<sup>rd</sup> general assembly of the United Nations, it declared that this country is ready for collaboration with the special reporter of the commission on human rights (<https://research.un.org/en/docs/ga/quick/regular/43>).

The presidency of Khatami accelerated the positive attitude of the Islamic Republic about human rights. The idea of "Dialogue among Civilizations" and the issue of civil society and novel interpretations of sharia, prophecy, and Mahdism led to an approach based on collective wisdom. This approach tried to adapt the principles of western human rights with that of sharia. By hosting a human rights' workshop in Tehran during February and March in 1998, in which many like-minded countries participated, Iran moved towards the acceptance of the universality of human rights' themes and the mutual relationship among cultures with respect for the differences (cf: Amin, 2002 AD/1381 SH: 182-4).

Of course, this matter did not mean that Iranian officials remained silent about the West's selective treatment of human rights' issues, constantly expressing their concerns about politicizing the human rights concepts. Kharrazi, the foreign minister of the Khatami administration, said:

"To avoid dual standards and to take into account the cultural, moral and religious principles and the legal system of the countries, the critical

importance of the human rights in the modern world necessitates that necessary measures are taken to expand these rights and deepen our understanding of them. The instrumental use of human rights and relying upon it for political ends cannot be compatible with the collective wisdom in the modern world." (Zakerian, 2002 AD/1381 SH: 64-5)

## **2. Membership of the Islamic Republic of Iran in International Mechanisms of Human Rights**

A brief review of Iran's membership in international conventions of human rights and the way of membership and conflicts between national regulations and international conventions is this section's topic.

Currently, according to the United Nations, there are 25 international human rights conventions, some of which are as follows:

- 1) International treaty of civil and political rights (1966);
- 2) International treaty of socioeconomic and cultural rights (1966);
- 3) Convention of racial discrimination elimination (1965);
- 4) Convention of banning mass destruction and its punishment (1948);
- 5) Convention of eliminating discrimination against women (1979);
- 6) Convention of children rights (1989).

From these 25 conventions, Iran signed two patterns of the abolition of slavery and prohibition of selling people during the Pahlavi regime. Moreover, it approved ten more ways, seven dates back to the Pahlavi regime and three after the Islamic revolution. Two of these conventions are accepted conditionally; one is refugees' convention (9551), and the other is the convention of children rights (Sharifian, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 343-48). Some of the essential routines, such as the prohibition of discrimination against women and torture, face severe discussions regarding the membership of the Islamic republic. During the Khatami administration, the Islamic republic prepared membership in the convention of prohibition of discrimination against women with protections, but it didn't succeed. There is not expected to be a way for membership in these conventions in the upcoming governments.

As stated earlier, only two conventions are approved conditionally, and others are entirely approved with no conditions. Therefore, concerning the contractual commitment, the Islamic republic is committed to implementing the contents regardless of them being supported by this government and or the previous one. Anyway, the Islamic republic is the legal representative of the Iranian government and is committed to the commitments of the previous regime. It must adapt its rules to them and report its actions and progress in human rights to international organizations such as the human

rights committee, a socioeconomic and cultural rights committee, and a commission on the human rights that has become the human rights council. The problem is that there are conflicts between some of the regulations of the international system of human rights and that of the Islamic republic, which is the main factor leading to the condemnation of Iran in general assembly and commission on human rights (cf: Sharifian, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 812-22).

On the one hand, the Islamic republic government and the regime are established by the vote of Iran. The government is based on Islamic rules in which all of the rules must be following the Islamic ones. On the other hand, the Iranian government is bound to respect all of the international commitments of previous regimes, which are approved with no exceptions and conditions, while some of the articles of the constitution and common laws are in conflict and contradiction with that of the international charter of human rights (ibid., 812-22).

### **3. The Reaction of International Institutions to the Human Rights Conditions in the Islamic Republic**

A brief review of the reports, statements and resolutions issued against the Islamic republic since the beginning of the Islamic revolution suggests that most of them are similar and make continuous claims about violation of human rights in various contexts. It means that freedom of speech, freedom of thought, newspapers, sexual discrimination, minorities' rights, execution, stoning, whipping, non-compliance with the international standards in jurisdictions, extensive prejudices against women, concerns about Salman Rushdie, violation of democracy, violence against citizens, harassment of Baha'is, and torture among others.

Various reports of international institutions such as the UN Commission on human rights, a high commissioner on human rights, amnesty international and UN Council of Human Rights during 1982-2014 shows that the aforementioned claims about the violation of human rights are frequently repeated, and even the worsening of these situations in Ahmadinejad administration is emphasized. These reports have further added new cases such as forced deportation of Afghan refugees, and testing of HIV medications on patients without their consent, among others.

In the US secretary of state reports about the world's human rights situations, a part is permanently assigned to Iran and cases similar to those implied in resolutions and statements are emphasized (e.g. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/iran>).



#### 4. Assassination and Violation of Human Rights

In the case of the assassination of regime opponents, there are always claims against the Islamic republic from western countries, particularly the United States and human rights international institutions, which are always denied by the officials of the Islamic republic demanding proof and documents regarding the claims. The most important claims about assassinations perpetrated by the Islamic republic are briefly mentioned:

- 1) During 1979-96, about 70 anti-regime leaders and activists were killed by Islamic republic agents and /or representatives, dependent on extremist groups and organizations;
- 2) Killed 27 opponents of the Iranian regime in 23 terrorist attacks, which intensified during 1991-6. Thirteen innocent people were also killed and/or injured during these attacks. 70% of these attacks occurred in Germany, France and Turkey;
- 3) The Murder of Abdulrahman Ghassemlou, Iranian democrat party secretary-general on July 13, 1989;
- 4) The assassination of Shapour Bakhtiar, former prime minister of Iran and the leader of one of the main opposition groups of Iran, on August 6, 1991 (cf: Parsi, 2007: 80). The investigations led to the arrest of three Iranians, which included one diplomat related to the Iranian ministry of intelligence. In trials, they stated that various Iranian administrations and centres such as the ministry of intelligence, commercial companies and Iran Air committed this crime;
- 5) The assassination of Muhammad Hossein Naghdi, head of the national council of oppositions in Italy (an organization is supporting Iranian regime opponents), March 16, 1993.

#### 5. Issue of Salman Rushdie and Other Terrorist Attacks Against the West

After the publication of "Satanic Verses" by Salman Rushdie in 1988, the issuance of Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa about his apostasy on March 16, 1989, stimulated a wave of global oppositions by governments and human rights NGOs against this fatwa which was noted as a violating act of human rights supporting and spreading terrorism. Many attempted to take this fatwa back due to their limited knowledge about the issuance of fatwa in Shia.

Some of the terrorist attacks against western countries and Israel were attributed to the Iranian forces and/or their proponents such as Hezbollah, Palestine Islamic Jihad and Hamas:

- 1) A suicide attack on US embassy in Beirut, April 8, 1983, with a 62 death toll and more than 120 injuries;
- 2) A suicide attack against a navy base in Beirut, October 23, 1983, with a 241 death toll and 40 injuries (cf: Parsi, 2007: 111-112);
- 3) A suicide attack on the French army base in Beirut, October 23, 1983, with a 58 death toll and 15 injuries (ibid.);
- 4) The explosion of the US military base in al-Khobar, Saudi Arabia leading to a 19 death toll and 372 injuries. After five years, the Bush administration published an indictment against Hezbollah (Saudi branch) as the agent, and Iran, Lebanese Hezbollah, Kuwait and Bahrain as the supporters and claimed the discovery of a relationship between Iran and Hezbollah groups (Saudi branch) during 1994-5 (cf: Brennan, 2008: 171; Sick, 2003: 83- 88).

These referred cases are some of the claims made by international human rights organizations about the violation of human rights in the Islamic republic. They represent their attitudes toward the level of compliance with human rights in the Islamic republic.

In the last year of his presidency, in response to the US secretary of state's criticisms about human right's situations in Iran, Khatami rejected these claims and accused the US of violating human rights all around the world. He stated that:

Among all states, the US should not be allowed to speak of human rights, and it should be held accountable for its crimes in Abu Ghraib and or massacres it perpetrated in the name of democracy in the world and also for the sufferings of Palestinians as a result of their support of Israel actions. In his first year of presidency, Ahmadinejad proposed that observers were sent to the western countries to assess the human rights' situations in these countries and return. Western countries sent representatives to Iran to evaluate and compare the conditions of prisons, women and children in Iran and the West and then, for the results to be judged by the public opinions of the world. By these propositions, he rejected the charges against the Islamic republic and claimed the circumstances were better in Iran than in the West. Finally, in 2006, the Iranian supreme leader called the US the most hated country. He said: "We saw the US democracy in Guantanamo, Afghanistan and Abu Ghraib.... 'How does a government which has such prisons dare to talk about human rights?'"

The present study's aim is neither to confirm the validity of the claims about the human rights violation by the Islamic republic nor to defend the function of the Iranian authorities. This study intends to investigate whether human rights conditions in the Pahlavi era were better than in today's Iran.

Another goal is to examine how the human rights issue contributed to the US-Iran relations. This topic will be discussed in the following section.

## **6. Human Rights in Pahlavi Era**

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi became the Shah of Iran when the allies in WWII entered Iran. The Iranian people experienced the happiness of Reza Shah being dethroned as a dictator while being devastated due to the country's occupation by the foreigners. However, the presence of foreign forces didn't hinder the political excitement of people suppressed by Reza Shah. Foroughi's policy in the transition period was to help the young Shah reach a compromise with the suppressed people (cf: Behnoud, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 305-25). For many years, the unstable basis of the young Shah governance and the nationalization of the oil industry didn't allow for dictatorship.

However, the transition from the democratic government of Mosaddegh with the help of the United States and then the discovery of an extensive intelligence network of Russians in the Iranian army formed by the Tudeh party could take hundreds of officers to the highest levels of the commandship prompted Shah to establish a strong intelligence organization. To this end, he relied upon his American friends.

In 1957, the CIA proposed an intelligence organization to Shah named SAVAK. SAVAK officials were initially trained in the US. However, Israel became another center for training SAVAK forces (cf: Sullivan and Parsons, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 95).

Initially, SAVAK acted in the same manner as western intelligence organizations. Therefore, following Kennedy's reforms and unity plan for progress in America, the "White Revolution of Shah and Nation" was introduced in Iran. After a turmoil leading to the bloody suppression of people, SAVAK ceased being only an intelligence organization and turned into a secret police organization for confronting political opponents of Shah.

SAVAK was suspicious of any political activity. Hence, arrests, torture to get confessions, and long-term prison sentences became standard intimidation methods in SAVAK (cf: Sullivan and Parsons, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 95).

In this period, particularly in the 60s and 70s, the government ruled utilizing terror and intimidation. The known opposition groups and famous politicians, intellectuals, and prosperous families were safe from SAVAK. Some were mysteriously kidnapped. Torture was a common occurrence in prisons. Some of the prisoners were killed under torture. They cannot deny the kidnapping and imprisonment of the opponents with no legal permission and their torture in SAVAK prisons (cf: Sullivan and Parsons, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 96).

Zunis says: "SAVAK activities initially covered only the political context. However, at the end of the 70s, no context of Iranians' life was not free from the intervention of SAVAK." (cf: Zonis, 1991 AD/1370 SH: 222)

The issue of SAVAK and the dictatorship in Iran was even the reason of shame for some of the agents of the Pahlavi regime so that Parviz Raji, the ambassador of Iran in London, says: "Every time Iran is mentioned, words such as torture, SAVAK, corruption and dictatorship follow.... I feel embarrassed by these situations." (Nejati, 1992 AD/1372 SH: 2, 285)

Remembering the slogans of Carter about human rights and relating the sales of weapons to the compliance with human rights as well as actions of Shah for providing open political space, Antony Parsons, the former ambassador of UK in Iran, says: "I do not doubt that opportunistically, Shah took steps for taking democratic measures so that he can be away from Carter pressure; if elected." (Sullivan and Parsons, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 320)

Here, the policies taken by the US towards Pahlavi II are not to be discussed. However, in the author's opinion, there is no substantial difference between the foreign policy of democrats and republicans of the United States as the primary basis of both parties is naturally national interests. What is different is the policies used for realization of these interests. Later, we will talk about the difference in the policies.

Regarding Iran and the intentions of the Kennedy administration, Bill states that in addition to opening doors for economic and social reforms, the main goal was to maintain the political structure of Iran (cf: Bill, 1992 AD/1371 SH: 1, 245). Kennedy and his advisors believed that the best way to confront communism was to combine reforms with suppression so that if the reforms failed, soldiers, that is, the anti-riot force, could be used. Shah, who was confident about the US support, didn't hesitate to call upon commandos and army Special Forces to suppress the Tehran University protests in January 1962 and Tehran and Qom riots in June 1963 (cf: Bill, 1992 AD/1371 SH: 1, 246-7).

Katouzian emphasizes this issue and says: "Kennedy insisted on political, social and economic reforms in Iran. However, suppression would become acceptable." (cf: Katouzian, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 382)

In this way, in June 1963, military forces opened fire on protesters in Tehran, Qom and Varamin. The prime minister of Iran, Alam, who ordered the shooting later, said: "I had no other way." (cf: Sullivan and Parsons, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 293) After a short time, in the final statement given on Shah's trip to the United States, Kennedy ensured that US political and military supports would continue (cf: Houshang Mahdavi, 1994 AD/1373 SH: 1, 599).

What was important for Nixon was maintaining an alliance with the Shah and ensuring Iran's political stability. Therefore, he overlooked the crimes committed by SAVAK both in and out of Iran. This policy became the main principle of Nixon's doctrine, which was also emphasized and recommended (cf: Gonzalez, 2007: 113). Although the way SAVAK treated political opponents was well-known globally and, during 1971-76, Shah's regime was accused of torturing and violation of human rights, admired Shah's method of governance at the same time by Nixon and Ford and he was praised for his firmness in the government. Hence, it must have appeared to the Shah that they approved SAVAK actions (cf: Shawcross, 1992 AD/1371 SH: 20-21).

Ledeen believed that after the 28 Mordad coup (except for 1959-60), never addressed human rights between countries, particularly during Nixon and Ford administrations, who thought that pressure on Shah for national reforms damaged US strategy (cf: Ledeen and Louis, 1984 AD/1363 SH: 44).

The administration of Carter revealed his commitment to promises to Sullivan. It must be mentioned that US interests always influenced the issue of human rights.

The facts mentioned above imply that the anti-human right nature of the Shah regime was clear and free from ambiguity for both democrats and republicans of the United States, and SAVAK crimes were known to American officials. Sullivan states that:

"Despite global reflection of violence and torture utilized by SAVAK and serious protests that made this organization very unpopular, Carter made the difficult decision to maintain relations with this organization despite his promises to promote human rights in the world." (cf: Sullivan and Parsons, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 96-7)

The continuous support for SAVAK and ignoring its crimes and violations of human rights occurred when amnesty international secretary-general believed that the human rights background of no country in the 1970s was worse than Iran (cf: Zonis, 1991 AD/1370 SH: 458-9; Shawcross, 1992 AD/1371 SH: 124). Furthermore, in its 1974-5 report, amnesty international secretary-general criticized the torturing of prisoners by SAVAK and estimated the number of prisoners to be almost 25-100,000, asking for the attention of the world and taking measures in this regard (Nejati, 1992 AD/1372 SH: 55).

Carter, who has got into power in America, declaring that human rights issues would be the core of his foreign policy (Zibakalam, 1992 AD/1371 SH: 167), did not follow his electoral slogans; instead, what happened was

focusing on the US national interests in The Middle East and the world, paying little regard to human rights concerns.

Referring to the king's concerns about the new US policy, Vance (Carter's secretary of state) says: "The king's concern about the new US policy in Iran was not right resulting from our misunderstanding and lack of knowledge about Iran. Our national interests required to protect the king and allow him to play a constructive role in the politics of the region" (Sullivan and Parsons, 1993 AD/1373 SH: 467) and hence, Carter accepted the king's invitation to spend the New Year's Eve (1978) in Iran. The king, excited by this trip, took the opportunity to show his opponents and critics in Iran and the world that the great American human rights hero had recognized his regime to be worthy of support and innocent of the accusations made against it." (ibid., 126)

The exaggerated remarks of the American human rights hero at Tehran's dinner party about Iran's security and stability and the Iranian nation's regard for the king even surprised the board members, including Salinger, who said: "I was amazed by all of Carter's exaggerations. The day that Carter proclaimed human rights policy, I believed that this policy would conflict with our national interests. I knew that this policy would fall victim to our national interests at the time of a conflict. Carter's speeches at this banquet were a conflict between human rights policy and the need of the United States to maintain a powerful ally in the Middle East, i.e. Iran." (Nejati, 1992 AD/1372 SH: 2, 59)

As we noted in the previous section, in the United States and the West, no one doubted the anti-human rights nature of Iran's government and the use of torture by the king's regime. With the establishment of the Rastakhiz Party, the Shah called on the Iranian people to join this party to reach the gate of the great civilization. Those who chose not to join the party were known to either go to jail or leave the country (cf: Sullivan and Parsons, 1993 AD/1373 SH: 281).

The Western press ridiculed the Iranian regime's human rights and democracy and, at the same time, criticized the words of the king for the crimes and savageries of SAVAK. Interestingly, the king himself stated that we will not allow prisoners to torture from now on (with the declaration of political open space in 1977). Hoveyda did not deny the existence of suffering in Iran, announcing that the way and method of torture were taught to SAVAK by the United States and Britain (cf: Bill, 1992 AD/1371 SH: 1, 300). As a US ambassador in Iran, Sullivan acknowledged the issue of torture in SAVAK and protested the collaboration of SAVAK with the CIA. Parsons, the British Ambassador, in his memoirs "the Pride and

the Fall," explicitly states: "Arbitrary detentions, imprisonment of individuals without trial, torture and mass executions and persecution of students and dissident workers were considered an ordinary affair." (Sullivan and Parsons, 1993 AD/1373 SH: 264)

Furthermore, The Iranian people witnessed that the Carter government, in the events leading to the Islamic Revolution (from January 19, 1979, to February 13, 1978), declared unconditional support for the king's regime and repeatedly demanded the king to show decisiveness and a firm opposition against the revolutionary people of Iran. Let's look at some of these stances and remarks from the language of US foreign policy directors during the last year of the reign of the king.

In a part of his memoir, Carter said, "I, like all previous presidents, considered the king of Iran as one of America's most reliable allies. I commended his decision to continue selling oil to Israel despite the Arab boycott." The authoritarian and arbitrary policies of the king in the government caused the dissatisfaction of the intellectuals and other sections of the society. They created an opposition that fought to establish democracy in Iranian society. SAVAK acted with extreme violence and brutality against the opposition, and I knew that at least 25,000 political prisoners were dying in the prisons of the Shah's regime (ibid., 447). He says that: "Although Iran was in a critical situation, Sullivan, the other advisers and I believed that the Shah was still the best guarantor of maintaining stability in Iran." He also mentions that: "The Shah is worried about his future. He is hesitant to form a temporary military government, resign and withdraw from power. We have advised him to remain as the head of government, ensuring him of our support." (ibid., 451 referring to Carter's memo of November 2, 1978) Carter says: "I sent a message to him, and I emphasized that we would support any decision he made to deal with the crisis, even the formation of a military government." (ibid., 451) He also states that: "There was no doubt that we should support Shah without any conditions ... and continue to back Shah's regime to protect our interests and to help him succeed in his desperate struggle to keep his throne." (ibid., 452)

In his notes on November 10, 1978 (three months before Shah's absolute fall from power Carter writes, "The king was in a very shaky situation. I asked Cyrus Vance to emphasize to the ministry staff to have complete conformity with my position: the king must know that we are with him." (ibid., 253)

Carter's emphasis on the ministry staff conformity to his policies was because Sullivan was trying to force US officials to communicate with the

Shah's opponents, especially Ayatollah Khomeini, in the last few months of the Shah's regime. As Carter points out in his memoirs: "Sullivan also insisted that we must communicate with Ayatollah Khomeini, but Bakhtiar would interpret such an action as complete abandonment. Sullivan went completely off at this stage, and on January 10 (one month before the fall of the Shah), in a telegram to Vance, condemned our actions outrageously and unacceptably (unconditional support of the Shah) and called it as a big and perhaps irreparable mistake." (ibid., 457)

In general, American policy toward the Iranian revolution and the Shah's opponents was based on a strict and firm policy mentioned in the statements of the first rank government officials of the United States without any concealment. With the tragic event of September 17, 1979, in Jaleh Square, thousands of people were shot to death by the royal guards' machine guns (cf: ibid., 345). Per the suggestion of Vance and Brzezinski (Carter national security advisor), Carter left Camp David's crucial meeting. He assured him of his support and friendship in a telephone conversation with the king. He expressed his sympathy and US support for his actions to restore order (ibid., 479 quoted by Vance p. 520 and echoed by Brzezinski). Sullivan worried about the Shah's move to form a military government, sending a telegram to the ministry asking for the United States' opinion. He says: "He was surprised to receive a quick and clear answer." The answer was:

According to the US government, the survival of the Shah is essential, and the United States will support any decision that he (the Shah) will take to consolidate his power and position (ibid., 158).

In a book titled "Power and Principle," Brzezinski rejects the fact that the United States explicitly refused to call for a firm and strict policy against the opposition, saying: "Carter and I repeatedly contacted the Shah directly and encouraged him to adopt a more solid method against his opponents. If the Shah wanted or had the necessary determination to act firmly against his opponents, these same recommendations and encouragements were enough for him. Of course, due to the Shah's doubts, we should have pushed him more to handle what he was not willing to do and to force him into action." (ibid., 514)

It's a pity for Brzezinski to have failed to exercise more power, even though Carter's government sent his four-star general Huyser to assist him in the last months of the political life of the Pahlavi regime. Brzezinski tried his best to prevent the Shah's fall even at the expense of commanding General Huyser to kill Iranian people (cf: Huyser, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 236) and to launch a military coup in the event of Bakhtiar's defeat (cf: Huyser,



1986 AD/1365 SH: introduction by General Haig: 13, 52-95, ...). General Huyser states in his memoir that: "Even after his return to the United States and the victory of the revolutionaries, the US Department of Defense called him on February 11, 1979. Duncan's deputy secretary of defense asked (Huyser) if he knew about the situation in Tehran and asked Huyser if he would return to Tehran to lead the coup." (Huyser, 1986: 303)

Sullivan, as the most informed person in the United States, who had free rein over the White House's policies, also affirmed the above claim, stating that's: "Huyser was asked to prepare Iranian armed forces to counteract and suppress the opposition if necessary." (Sullivan and Parsons, 1993 AD/1373 SH: 217)

At the end of his memoirs, Brzezinski asks several questions, including the possibility of a military coup by the Iranian or American army without the Shah consent. He replies, "I do not doubt that if the Shah acted with strong will in the early stages of the crisis, using the powerful and disciplined army that he possessed, he could well have mastered the situation. Militants in Turkey, Pakistan, Egypt and Brazil, and elsewhere, have taken over power in more or less similar conditions and have proved their ability and capability in the government." (ibid., 567-9)

He also points out that General Huyser had reported on several occasions that the preparations for the coup were complete. When he asked 'whether they should decide instead of the king (for the coup to proceed) in such circumstances?' his response was: "I have come to believe that due to the importance and magnitude of our interests, we should do that." (ibid., 569-570)

## Conclusion

This study reveals that the most important factor shaping the behaviour of the United States around the world, including the critical region of the Middle East, is The US's national interests and foreign policy priorities at each particular time. It is, under no circumstances, separable from Israel's security and interests. It was precisely this behaviour that led to America's disregard for the widespread violation of human rights in Iran, the dismissal of SAVAK's horrible crimes during the Pahlavi era, and withholding any pressure on the regime. Today, what highlights the behaviour of the Islamic Republic of Iran is exerting pressure on the opponents, political prisoners and the general public. Because the Pahlavi regime's survival was in the interest of the United States in the Middle East, the issue of human rights in the relations between the two countries

did not go beyond the speech and, in practice, American human rights defenders resorted to killing people. The Shah's opponents to save the Pahlavi regime even consider enacting a military coup. Even after the fall of the Shah, they blamed themselves for not implementing iron fist policies more decisively. The survival of the Islamic Republic of Iran conflicts with the interests of the United States in the Middle East -especially the security of Israel- and therefore pressuring this regime is in their interest and consistent with their Middle East policy.

Consequently, White House officials will best use this appropriate weapon (human rights) against Iran's government. Finally, human rights are one of the main controversies in the relations between the two countries. Still, it can certainly not be the main reason for the dark ties between the two. The main factor for the current situation is that the Islamic Republic of Iran has targeted the Middle East interests of the United States.

### References

- Aghaei, S; Bayati, R. (2010 AD/1389 SH). "A Reflection on US Foreign Policy on Human Rights (With a Look at US Policy Toward Iran)." *Political Science*. Vol. 40, no. 1. pp. 23-38.
- Amin, H. (2002 AD/1381 SH). "Human Rights; Universalism or Religious-Cultural Relativity." *Political Science*. Vol. 15, no. 19, p. 8.
- Behnoud, M. (1995 AD/1374 SH). *These Three Women (Maryam Firouz, Ashraf Pahlavi, Iran Timur Tash)*. Tehran: Nashr-e Elm.
- Bill, J. (1992 AD/1371 SH). *Eagle and the Lion*. (Gholami, M. Trans). Tehran: Nashr-e Kobe.
- Brennan, J. (2008). "The Conundrum of Iran: Strengthening Moderates without Acquiescing to Belligerence." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Vol. 618, pp. 168-179. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40375783>.
- Byrne, B; Byrne, K. (2021). *Worlds Apart: A Documentary History of US-Iran Relations, 1978-2018*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gasiorowski, M. (1992 AD/1371 SH). *American Foreign Policy and Shah*. (Kazemi, F. Trans). Tehran: Nashr-e Markaz.

- Gonzalez, N. (2007). *Engaging Iran: The Rise of Middle East Powerhouse and America's Strategic Choice*. Westport: Praeger.
- Homa Katouzian, M. (1993 AD/1372 SH). *Iranian Political Economy from Constitution to the End of the Pahlavi Dynasty*. (Nafisi, M; Azizi, K. Trans). Tehran: Nashr-e Markaz.
- Houshang Mahdavi, A. (1994 AD/1373 SH). *Iranian Foreign Policy during the Pahlavi Period*. Tehran: Nashr-e Alborz.
- [http://eeas.europa.eu/human\\_rights/docs/hr\\_report\\_country\\_2012\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/human_rights/docs/hr_report_country_2012_en.pdf)
- <https://research.un.org/en/docs/ga/quick/regular/43>.
- <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/R45795.pdf>.
- <https://www.brookings.edu/research/america-and-iran-from-containment-to-coexistence>.
- <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/iran>.
- Hurt, A. E. (2017). *US-Iran Relations*. New York: Greenhaven.
- Huyser, R. (1984 AD/1365 SH). *Mission in Tehran*. (Rashidi A. Trans). Tehran: Ettelaat Institute.
- Katzman, K. (2018). "Iran: Politics, Human Rights, and US Policy." *Congressional Research Service*: 7-5700. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5a5f83524.pdf>.
- Ledeen, M; Lewis, W. (1984 AD/1363 SH). *Carter and the Fall of the Shah: The Inside Story*. (Irani, N. Trans). Tehran: Nashr-e Amir Kabir.
- Maleki, A; Tirman, J. (2014). *US-Iran Misperceptions: A Dialogue*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Mohamadi, F. (2017 AD/1396 SH). *America and Human Rights*. Tehran: Pezhvak Edalat.

- Mousavian, H. (2015 AD/1394 SH). *Iran and USA*. Tehran: Tisa.
- Mousavyfar, R. (2015 AD/1394 SH). *Iran-US Puzzle*. Tehran: Nashr-e Mizan.
- Nejati, G. (1992 AD/1371 SH). *25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Iran*. Tehran: Rasa Cultural Service Institute.
- Parsi, T. (2007). *Treacherous Alliance the Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the US*. New Haven and London :Yale University Press.
- Rouhani, M. (2020 AD/1399 SH). "The Role of Human Rights as a Soft Power in US Middle East Policy." The Second Festival of the Best Scientific Writings of Islamic Humanities, Allameh Jafari Special Award. Tehran: Ishraq Think Tank of Science and Technology Studies and Seminary Scientific Associations. Available at: <https://civilica.com/doc/1045128>.
- Salahi, S. (2017 AD/1396 SH). *Iran, USA and Human Rights*. Tehran: Pezhvak Edalat.
- Sharifian, J. (2001 AD/1380 SH). *The strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Field of Human Rights at the United Nations*. Tehran: Bureau of Political and International Studies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Shawcross, W. (1992 AD/1371 SH). *The Shah's Last Ride*. (Hooshang Mahdavi, A. Trans). Tehran: Nashr-e Alborz.
- Sick, G. (1994). "US Interests in Iran and US Iran Policy." *US Iran Relations: Areas of Tension and Mutual Interest*. (Amirahmadi, H; Hooglund, E.). Washington DC: Middle East Institute. Available at: [https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/mei\\_library/pdf/5907.pdf](https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/mei_library/pdf/5907.pdf).
- (2003). "Iran: Confronting Terrorism." *The Washington Quarterly*. Vol. 26, no. 4, pp. 83-98.
- (2018). "The United States in the Persian Gulf: From Twin Pillars to Dual Containment." *The Middle East and the United States*. (Part IV, pp. 237-253). (Lesch, D; Hass, M). New York: Routledge.

Sotoudeh, M; Abia, H. (2012 AD/1391 SH). "Legal Study of American and Iranian Human Rights Challenges." *Legal Studies of Islamic State*. Vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 67-105.

Sullivan, W; Parsons, A. (1993 AD/1372 SH). *Memoirs of Two Ambassadors*. (Toloui, M. Trans). Tehran: Elm Publications.

Zakerian, M. (2002 AD/1381 SH). *Human Rights in the New Millennium*. Tehran: Faculty of Law and Political Science, University of Tehran.

Zibakalam, S. (1992 AD/1371 SH). *Introduction to the Islamic Revolution of Iran*. Tehran: Rosaneh Publication.

Zonis, M. (1991 AD/1370 SH). *Majestic Failure*. (Zand, E; Sa'idi, B. Trans). Tehran: Nashr-e No.

