

BOOK REVIEW

James A. Bill, **The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American Iranian Relations** - (New Haven and London : Yale University Press, 1988) ; pp, 520/xiii

The Eagle and the Lion : The Tragedy of American - Iranian Relations is an attempt of a writer who explores the folders of history in an effort to assess the series of events that culminated in the worsening and then snapping of the U.S.—Iranian links. The author solicits the manner in which the American policy makers handled relations between the two countries. He points towards the uneasy contacts between the two countries that goes way back in history and at the same instance searches for the causes of the artificiality of the “healthy” relationship between the two countries.

The main emphasis of Professor James A. Bill is on the fact that the American policy makers misunderstood those societal dimensions of Iran which play an important part in its foreign policy behavior. For example, the perceptions of the Iranians towards the Europeans/ Americans; the sensitivity of the people of Iran towards their religion and culture and the respect that was given to the dedicated religious leadership. The writer emphasizes the modes adopted by the American foreign policy makers especially in the context of the delicate situations when ever they arose.

In order to reach a logical conclusion of the “mismanagement,” the author is concerned with the deteriorating relations between the two countries,—and for that the book traces out the initial contacts between the Iranians and the Americans which, according to the

author, originated as early as 1940s. During that period, the diversity of American interest groups developed in Iran—ranging from the Para military formation known as the *Persian Gulf Service Command* (PGSC); and Military Assistance Advisory Group to the missionary activities.

It is in this setting that the bond between the two countries was reaffirmed after the American intervention of 1951-53 to bring back the Shah to the throne. The relations however reached its height in the 1970s and then baffled the students of international relations with the events of 1978/1979 and further.

The central theme of the book administers the factors that have been operating in the Iranian society - obstructing the change as well as emanating it for the benefit of the Americans. The so-called reform of 1960s is a glaring example. Yet another example is that of the Majlis-approved law on October 13, 1964 which "provided the American military personnel and their dependents stationed in Iran with full diplomatic immunity."

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini bitterly opposed the immunity law. The Imam said in protest while addressing the Iraian masses that "if a servant of some American or some cook of some American assassinates your marja (the leading religious leader) in the middle of the bazaar or runs over him, the Iranian police do not have the right to apprehend him. Iranian courts do not have the right to try him. The files must be sent to America so that our masters over there can decide what is to be done. They have reduced the Iranian people to a level lower than that of an American dog. If someone runs over a dog belonging to an American, he will be prosecuted. Even if the Shah himself were to run over a dog belonging to an American, he would be prosecuted. But if an American cook runs over the Shah, the head of state, no one will have the right to interfere with him." The Shah exiled the Imam to Turkey on November 4, 1964 for his protests against the enslavement of his people by the Americans.

The study delivers in detail the American side of the Iranian connections as well as pursues the relevant Iranian personalities. The book extensively explains the style, strategy and modus operandi of these actors. It also attempts to examine the reasons which became responsible for the collapse of the apparently "congenial" U.S.-Iranian relations that existed before the Islamic Revolution of 1979. A part of this question has been attempted in the initial chapters of the book. In these pages, the author highlights the lack of coordination between the different American agencies operating in Iran and attributes this to the misconceived and mismanaged policy towards that country before and after the Islamic Revolution.

The arguments emphasized in this lengthy book of more than 520 pages direct towards the deteriorating and the breaking of the relationship which was allowed to go astray even after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. He blames it on the granting of political asylum to the Shah in the United States, which was manoeuvred by the all-powerful Rockefellers and their "client" Henry Kissinger. Professor Bill draws a vital connection between the economic interests of the Rockefellers—both Nelson and David (Chase Manhattan Bank in Iran) and the decision of the American government to allow the Shah to reside in the United States.

James A. Bill exposes the operating forces in the Iranian as well as the American society that contributed towards the mismanaged affairs. Along with that, he extends his arguments exploring the Iranian society and its undercurrents and the factors that held the pre-Revolutionary society together, although with a fragile foundation. The strong denote of the author's analysis is reflected in his detailed psychoanalysis of the personalities who were close to the Shah. However, his study overlooks the comprehensive description of the clergy and its relevancy to the Iranian society—especially when evidently it became the main deriving force during and after the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979. Perhaps the author felt it more convenient to highlight the role of those personalities and

their placement in the Iranian society with whom he was familiar. James A. Bill has already done a study to that effect (*The Politics of Iran: Groups, Classes and Modernization*, 1972)—although in a different connotation.

The author gives an extensive explanation of the American failures in Iran and attributes it to the misinterpretation of the events as they took place in the Iranian society. He points out emphatically that if at all the American officials tried to come in grasp with the real sentiments of the Iranian people, it was through the perception of the westernized Iranian elite. The U.S. interference in the affairs of the Iranian society becomes obvious when the intimate links between the respective U.S. Ambassadors and the Shah relating to the domestic matters and policies are discussed. The Iranian Prime Ministers were replaced due to the pressures of the U.S. Ambassadors.

The author nurtures a vital determinant of the CIA in the Iranian-American relations. Professor Bill traces the close contact between the CIA and SAVAK—the most feared secret Iranian Organization. SAVAK was ruthless in its methods of repression and crushed the views of the government opponents with cold brutality. He also exposes the Shah and the elite with having close alliance with the CIA and other clandestine foreign agencies. The masses of Iran were reduced to the status of mere spectators in the unholy game that was being played by the Americans and their allies in Iran.

In fact, Iran had become a society subservient to the whims of the Shah, his courtiers and the 'Pahlevites' (supporters of the Shah) in U.S which consisted of Congressmen, financial magnets like Nelson and David Rockefeller and their Chase Manhattan Bank in Iran, news media people and like wise. This group of people had begun to play an important influential role on the decision makers especially the Presidents to muster the American support for the Shah. This attitude continued even after the revolution as they provided the world with misguided and distorted information.

about the Islamic revolutionary activities in Iran. We are told that the CIA established contacts with Bani Sadr when he was the President of Iran. This fact was confirmed by the documents found during the take over of the American Embassy by the students. Professor Bill's criticism of the American policy making machines—the State Department, the President, the National Security Council and the Financial Magnates is based on concrete evidence. These elements smoke-screened the realities from the objective decision making process. The Iranian society was saturated with the worst type of bribery, corruption and all that was going on with the American blessings. The concept of modernization was intentionally mingled with that of the westernization of the Iranian society.

One might differ in part from the analysis of the writer and would suggest that the Americans as a deliberate policy option, avoided a long term procedure designs towards Iran. The American policy makers understood well that their only interest in Iran was in the smooth flow of oil to the West and for that the sea lanes of the Persian Gulf must be kept open. For the United States strategists, the Shah's stay in power was closely linked with that of the "future role" of the Iranian military. The American perception was, that with the fall of the Shah, the vacuum created will be filled by the military elite which anyway was pro-United States. This important aspect of the US - Shah relations has been ignored by the author. The real tragedy of the Iranian-American relations was that the US policy makers as well as the vast majority of the intellectuals failed to visualize the real power of Iran—the power of the masses as they were taken for granted. This particular force contains a high dose of self-respect which can also be translated as "Islamic Nationalism". The power of the people as documented in the Iranian history was guided through the channels of the Ulemas. The Americans were taken by surprise by the "hidden" strength of the Clergy. The US reaction to the Iranian demonstrations for change were thought to be

sponsored or at least had the blessings of the Soviets. This single-minded policy analysis had the support of Zbigniew Brzezinski, the National Security Advisor, who at the later stage of the revolutionary movement suggested to prompt a military coup. General Robert Huyser visited Iran in the last days of the Shah to investigate the position and strength of the Iranian armed forces. By that time the military was heading towards disintegration.

The Ulema class of Iran is prudent, honest and above all trusted by the people. The religious class under the guidance of Imam Khomeini originated from the soil of the nation and had the ability to lead the masses or Mustazafin (the oppressed). The Imam's relationship with the people was of a unique nature. He learned from the people and in turn gave guidance to them—thus a cycle of guiding and learning was completed. In this system of communication, the people also attained the role of leadership and at the same instance were followers. Thus the vacuum left by the Shah was not filled by the military but by the oppressed people of Iran.

Concluding, one must give credit to Professor James A. Bill for his understanding of the Iranian society and his analysis with compassion. *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American—Iran Relations* no doubt is an appreciated contribution not only to the literature of US-Iran relations but also to the study of Iranian as well as American decision makers. This is the best book so far written by an American author.

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