

H-Diplo

H-Diplo Article Reviews

h-diplo.org/reviews/

No. 445

Published on 29 January 2014

Updated, 14 June 2014

H-Diplo Article Review Editors: Thomas Maddux and Diane Labrosse

Web and Production Editor: George Fujii

Commissioned for H-Diplo by Thomas Maddux

Stephen McGlinchey. "Richard Nixon's Road to Tehran: The Making of the U.S.-Iran Arms Agreement of May 1972." *Diplomatic History* 37:4 (September 2013): 841-860. DOI: 10.1093/dh/dht026. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/dh/dht026>

URL: <http://h-diplo.org/reviews/PDF/AR445.pdf>

Reviewed by **Robert W. Murray**, University of Alberta

The ongoing evolution in the nature of American-Iranian relations remains a constant feature of international politics. Intense interest surrounding the Iranian regime, especially its intentions regarding its nuclear program, continues to dominate discussions about how the United States can best engage Iran and whether that country poses a threat to America's national interests or the interests of close U.S. allies, most notably Israel. The changes in the U.S.-Iran relationship throughout the last forty years have been profound, and since the Iranian Revolution in 1979 the two countries have yet to truly reach a stable point of diplomacy.

Though much attention is focused on the actions, and subsequent reactions, of Iran and the U.S. since the revolution, more scholarship is being dedicated to the nature of the relationship between the two states prior to 1979. In this regard, the accepted story to date seems to praise President Richard Nixon for his transformation of the U.S.-Iran relationship upon taking office, with little regard to the story prior to Nixon's time as President. In an effort to delve deeper into the processes that led to Nixon's policy engagement with Iran, and the efforts that culminated with the U.S.-Iran Arms Agreement in 1972, Stephen McGlinchey provides a novel scholarly contribution that clearly demonstrates the need for further explanation in order for scholars to more fully comprehend both the relationship between the two states and what led to the signing of the Agreement.

The core of McGlinchey's argument surrounds Nixon's engagement with Iran throughout his time in office and the factors that ultimately led to his diplomatic triumph with Iran in the early 1970s. Using a variety of primary and credible, if often overlooked, secondary sources, McGlinchey tells a story of an America scrambling to revise its engagement strategies with Iran throughout the 1960s due to a variety of inescapable truths: "The rise of Arab nationalism and a growing Soviet arms trade with pivotal nations such as Egypt,

Iraq, and India introduced volatility into the region. The effects of the Six Day War in 1967 also confirmed that support for Israel was a serious problem in U.S. regional policy. These factors when considered alongside the announcement in January 1968 that Britain would remove its significant military forces from the Gulf in 1971 necessitated a wholesale rethink of U.S. regional policy. The region's oil exports powered Western Europe and Japan. Any prospect of a power vacuum in the wake of the British departure was a serious strategic concern" (842). Those changes initiated by previous Administrations in the 1960s helped set the stage for Nixon upon taking office.

McGlinchey argues that though Nixon is to be credited with maximizing on the relationship with the Shah in terms of arms sales and also regional leadership, he was not solely responsible for the positive relationship that emerged in the 1970s. Instead, the article makes the important point that Nixon was continuing existing policy with an enhanced diplomatic relationship with the Shah, rather than changing or revolutionizing the policy employed to that point. Further, McGlinchey contends that what ultimately led to the 1972 Arms Agreement was not simply an acceptance of the Shah's role in protecting U.S. interests in the region, but also the Nixon Administration's efforts to combat the influx of Soviet arms and influence into neighbouring states. According to McGlinchey: "Regardless of how good an ally the shah was, Iran would still be too weak to successfully repel aggression from the north and prevent sensitive U.S. technology from falling into Soviet hands... Quite simply, the timing of the visit to Tehran was no accident" (856).

With the signing of the Arms Agreement in 1972, Nixon set off a chain of events that saw Iran's regional influence grow, and transformed U.S.-Iran relations. Scholarship on this topic tends to focus primarily on the effects of the signing of the Agreement rather than the processes and variables that led to it. In this regard, McGlinchey fills in an essential gap in comprehending exactly how the relationship became as strong as it did. McGlinchey is also correct to insert the elements of American self-interest that played into Nixon's decision-making. He is also convincing in his argument that Soviet influence necessitated action on the part of the U.S., so that the decision to enhance ties with the Shah and sign the Agreement in 1972 was not simply a natural extension of an existing relationship.

The article could have been made stronger by the inclusion of a clearer description of the theoretical and methodological factors that led to McGlinchey's conclusions. The article is heavily dependent on path dependency, but fails to articulate the body of thought upon which the argument is premised and on the scholarship the author uses to form his own argument. The narrative aspects of the article are certainly impressive on their own, but for scholarly cogency and an enhanced perspective into the construction of the argument, the author would have benefitted greatly by expanding on his theoretical framework. Without it, it becomes difficult to empirically test and verify conclusions. The often superficial justification of *Realpolitik* is insufficient evidence for scholars to understand how McGlinchey establishes his underlying assumptions.

Scholars and policy-makers alike will benefit from the arguments and historical narrative presented in this piece, as much of the story speaks to the contemporary relationship between the U.S. and Iran. So much of the strain, distrust, and overt hatred of the U.S. by

Iran stems from the actions of the U.S. during the period described by McGlinchey and sets the stage for the 1979 Revolution. It becomes difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend the variables impacting the current relationship without understanding its origins.

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