The Pursuit of Security and the Militarization of the Persian Gulf:
A study of the Nixon Doctrine and its impact on the Persian Gulf

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An Introduction: Dancing with Disaster

As Richard Nixon ascended into the Presidency of the United States in 1969 it became increasingly clear that energy would be on his agenda. The number of drilling rigs in the U.S. had steadily declined since 1955 and hit its lowest levels between 1970 and 1971. Domestic production of oil was dropping fast and the United States was forced to look to foreign sources to meet their energy needs. Although the United States now imported increasing quantities of petroleum, most notably from the Persian Gulf, the average American believed their country was still largely energy independent and that it was domestic, not foreign, oil driving the future of the country. With the public of the United States unaware of their country’s growing dependence on foreign oil and with large numbers of U.S. troops bogged down in Vietnam, the increasingly energy-dependent United States decided it was in the nations best interest to implement a new policy in the Persian Gulf to protect national investments and future growth, all without the commitment of soldiers on the ground.

Richard Nixon and his administration would implement the Nixon Doctrine in 1969, marking a new era U.S. policy in the Gulf and directly altering the future of the region. The United States became increasingly active and aggressive in the Middle East beginning in the 1970s and continuing through the present day. When

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1 Daniel Yergin, *The Prize*, pg. 571
we examine the success of the Nixon administration policies, as implemented in the region, we can conclude that, despite setbacks, the United States has achieved some of its more basic aims in the region while failing miserably to create a stable environment for the gulf powers to thrive in. The United States may not have been able to bring lasting stability to the region, but it has succeeded in both ensuring a steady supply of oil out of the gulf, and, for a time, reinforcing their own preeminence in the region through the alliances it had put in place. Looked at as a whole, the United States’ policy of establishing proxies in the region under the umbrella of the Nixon Doctrine may have had some short-term success but its failures would see it replaced with the subsequent Carter Doctrine; a policy that can be argued is still in effect to this very day. As Jimmy Carter gave his State of the Union address in January of 1980 he stated, “Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.” With this statement Carter effectively repealed the Nixon Doctrine and plotted a new course for U.S. foreign policy. While there are undoubtedly some victories on the part of the now defunct Nixon Doctrine, the policy established a foundation for failure and with this failure we can weigh the success of the doctrine against the policy’s alarming effect on the region.

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The strategy of arming U.S. “proxies” in a region in order to protect U.S. interests was first implemented in Latin America in the early 1970s to prevent the spread of communism. Vice President under Nixon, Nelson Rockefeller proposed upon his return from his trip to Latin America in December 1969 that, “(the people) are conscious of the more traditional role of the military establishment to defend the nation’s territory, and they possess understandable professional pride which creates equally understandable desires for modern arms.” Rockefeller would go on to suggest the selling of aircraft and other high-tech military equipment to the United States’ Latin American allies. Selling non-NATO allies such sophisticated weapons was an unprecedented measure, yet one the White House soon endorsed not only in South America but also in the Persian Gulf. What became known as the “surrogate strategy,” or “Nixon Doctrine,” began as a fight between the White House and congress over specific sales to specific countries. Soon after though, as explained by arms sale expert Michael Klare, “On June 5, 1973 he (Nixon) invoked section 4 of the Foreign Military Sales Act- which allowed the President to waive congressional restrictions on the transfer of sophisticated items when he determined that such sales were ‘important to the national security of the United States.’” As the President assumed control over arms sales, the Nixon Doctrine crystallized into the form in which we remember it today.

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3 Klare, *American Arms Super Market*, pg. 90
4 Klare, *American Arms Supermarket*, pg. 91
The Nixon Doctrine’s implementation in the Persian Gulf was one that created significantly more interdependence than what emerged in South America. Such interdependence was fueled by a policy that can be loosely summarized by “guns for oil.” Between 1969 and 1979 Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi of Iran ordered arms worth over $23 billion U.S. dollars while the various Saudi Arabian Kings ordered over $3 billion worth of weapons, vehicles and ammunition. All the while the United States sought to retain influence within the two respective monarchies, ensuring that the important alliances held intact and oil flowed as the market dictated it to without the withholding of production that we would see in 1973. The literature on the Nixon Doctrine labeled U.S. policy in the Gulf at this time as a “Twin Pillar,” policy; even a cursory inspection of the total of arms ordered by each of the two Middle-Eastern countries reveals that the “Twin Pillar” label was a misnomer. The policy that emerged instead elevated Iran to the role of gulf enforcer, as it had ordered nearly eight times the arms as Saudi Arabia during the same period. The reasons for such a difference in total figures are threefold. First, while Iran had an established Air Force and Navy by the dawn of the 1970s (not to mention an army of over 150,000 strong), Saudi Arabia did not even harbor a Navy at the time despite its strategic position on the Gulf and was limited to an army of some 30,000. The next reason for the policy tilt towards Iran stemmed from the fact that leadership was centralized, as the Shah was the only one who would need

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6 Klare, American Arms Supermarket, pg 115
consulting from U.S. policymakers for a decision to be made dealing with Iran. In the years following the coup that ousted Mohammed Mossadeq, the Shah had systematically eliminated nearly all of his challengers, leading to a totalitarian state under his rule and his alone. Saudi Arabia, rather, is home to many princes with a say in government meaning that consultation on arms purchases would have taken much longer in the House of Saud than it would have in the case of the Shah. The last reason for the gap in sales deals with the size of the economies of both Iran and Saudi Arabia. In 1969 Iranian Gross Domestic Product reached over $9.4 Billion while in that same year Saudi GDP was less then half at $4.4 Billion. Gross Domestic Product is a measure of all final goods and services produced within a country in a given period of time and is the sum of private consumption, gross investment, government spending and net exports. The fact that Iran’s economy was much larger than that of Saudi Arabia that same year is crucial in understanding why the United States developed a closer relationship with Iran at this time. While it seems rather straightforward after examining these factors that Iran would be the more reliable of the two allies it is important to note that the oil revenue of these two countries were quite similar and that by 1974 the Saudi economy would overtake that of Iran’s as the largest economy in the Gulf. Despite this trend the United States continued to sell exponentially larger quantities of arms to Iran throughout the existence of the Nixon Doctrine. On top of this the CIA estimates Saudi oil reserves at

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7 World Bank, World Development Indicators
8 World Bank, World Development Indicators
about 264.6 billion barrels, while it has Iran’s reserves at about 137.6 billion\textsuperscript{9}.

Despite these being more recent estimates by the CIA, the numbers show the large quantity of reserves prevalent under the two countries’ borders. While it was always important for the United States to align itself with Saudi Arabia due to these large oil reserves, it is clear that while the Nixon Doctrine was in existence the United States took Iran’s economy and military strength more seriously than that of Saudi Arabia.

When examining the SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) registrar of arms transfers to both countries, it is evident that while Iran received combat aircraft from the implementation of the policy, the Saudis received training aircraft, proving that the two countries involved in the policy were thought of quite differently, with Iran ready to take on the burden of Gulf protector while the United States arguably viewed Saudi Arabia as more of a “protector-in-training.”\textsuperscript{10}

In an interview given to Newsweek in 1973 the Iranian Shah remarked, “Not only do we have national and regional responsibilities, but also a world role as guardian and protector of 60 percent of the world’s oil reserves.”\textsuperscript{11} The Iranian Shah proved his allegiance in early 1973 when he crushed a communist rebellion in Oman. With the Shah ready to protect American and capitalist interests in the region and the Saudi military and economy growing at an exponential rate, what could

\textsuperscript{9} CIA Factbook https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2178rank.html
\textsuperscript{10} SIPRI arms registrar, Saudi Arabia and Iran Transfers of major conventional weapons: sorted by supplier. Deals with deliveries or orders made for year range 1969 to 1979
\textsuperscript{11} Shah Interview “Being Strong and Being Wise” Newsweek May 21, 1973
explain the Nixon Doctrines repeal just a few years later? Part of the explanation lies in that by early 1979 revolution was brewing in Tehran and soon after the Shah would flee the country only never to return. The National Security council’s Gary Sick laments, “American security strategy for the Persian Gulf, the Indian Ocean and ultimately all of Southwest Asia, had, over a period of more than a decade, come to be based squarely on the promise that Iran was and would continue to be a strong, stable regional power whose interests coincided with those of the United States.\footnote{Gary Sick, \textit{All Fall Down}, pg. 34-35, 38-41}"

Unfortunately the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1978 coupled with the Shah’s diminishing powerbase left the U.S. scrambling for a new strategy in the region that would soon bring an end to the Nixon Doctrine, the strategy that served as the cornerstone for United States foreign policy in the Persian Gulf for so long.

To effectively analyze the Nixon Doctrine in the Persian Gulf we must develop appropriate criteria which to judge the policy. The first category that must be assessed pertains to the maintenance of United States influence in the Persian Gulf through prevention of Soviet infringement. As the most pressing foreign policy concern of the time, the Cold War was surely on the minds of policy makers when they developed the doctrine. Maintaining hegemony on what were considered the “front lines” of communism was a top priority for the United States and its allies as evinced by military conflict in places like Korea and Vietnam. "We are trying to checkmate Soviet influence wherever it appears and to exhaust them in any
adventures they pursue,” Kissinger explained to the Shah.\textsuperscript{13} The Persian Gulf’s proximity to the Iron Curtain suggested an ominous portent for U.S. policymakers, as it had in previous years in pertaining to Latin America, Korea and Vietnam. The Nixon doctrine was enacted to prevent the spread of communism without the responsibility of having future troops on the ground. The policy’s implementation relied on regional proxies to protect the interests of the western superpower.

A major and lasting interest of the United States pertaining to the Persian Gulf both then and now is assuring that crude oil makes it to market, and for this reason it must be our second category by which to judge the doctrine. In order to keep prices down the United States need to be sure oil hit the open market and therefore would have its price determined by standard market forces. Ensuring that the crude oil flows directly to market ensures a sense of domestic stability as the citizens of the United States have access to a resource that is prevalent in nearly every citizen’s life, whether it be to heat their homes or power their cars. By the start of the 1970s the United States found itself in a new and troubling position. A land long known for its rich oil fields and vast energy reserves was now in a position of increasing dependence on foreign energy sources, notably oil. The American public had no idea of such an alarming trend until the year of 1973, which came with it the Arab oil embargo, a protest against U.S. policy in Israel. The American public was shocked to learn of such dependence and a domestic panic ensued.

\textsuperscript{13} Kissinger, Years of Renewal pg. 582-583
Daniel Yergin writes, “By the summer of 1973, United States imports were 6.2 million barrels per day, compared to 3.2 million barrels per day in 1970 and 4.5 in 1972.\textsuperscript{14}” Such an alarming trend forced policymakers to embrace the Nixon Doctrine. Maintaining alliances with the major oil producing countries was seen as all the more vital, forcing policymakers to embrace the Nixon Doctrine even more deeply than they had before. It became important to cater to the producer’s needs, particularly in the case of arms sales, in pursuit of a stable rate of oil production and exportation. Compounding the United States concern for a steady supply of oil was Europe’s apparent and desperate dependence on foreign oil, making it all the more important for oil to get to the open market. Without access to oil, the greater European continent could have aligned itself with the Soviets, an unfathomable prospect in the tense cold war environment.

The concerns meant it was vital to keep oil flowing out of the region, but without a stable Gulf oil production and exports would be in jeopardy and existing anxiety would only be amplified. Because of this, both facilitating and maintaining a stable Persian Gulf is the next category on which to judge the Nixon Doctrine. The United States believed its proxies were infallible, countries that would only get stronger as their armies became better equipped. Through selling arms to both Saudi Arabia and Iran, the United States saw to it that the governments of these Gulf States could defend themselves from threats and create beacons of stability in an

\textsuperscript{14} Yergin, \textit{The Prize}, pg 573
otherwise tremulous part of the world while all the while maintaining a significant level of dependence to the United States.

The price of oil boomed in 1973 and with this boom came huge increases in oil revenue for the producing countries and the Nixon Doctrine was put to the test. Rapid militarization was the result of increased oil revenues but unfortunately for the U.S. its allies weren’t the only ones involved in this arms race. As other, non-proxy countries, notably Iraq, participated in a rapid buildup of arms it jeopardized the stability of a region so vital to the United States. The Persian Gulf soon became one of the most militarized regions in the world, and it was not devoid of tension. Any wrong move could plunge the states of the Persian Gulf into war, jeopardizing everything the United States sought to gain.

The last criteria to be examined in reviewing the doctrine pertains to the economics of the issue and the proposed effect it would have on the U.S. trade balance. Recovering petrodollars became a major concern of the United States and policymakers saw the Nixon Doctrine as an excellent way to fix what was fast becoming a trade deficit. Domestic production was down and now billions of dollars were being spent to import the energy that drove the United States. By looking at the United States Balance of Payments in the trade of goods and services we can see why this issue was one of critical interest in the early 1970s. The United States had a trade surplus every year up to 1971, finding themselves at a deficit of $1.3 billion at the end of that year. The following year of 1972 saw that deficit rise to $5.4 billion, a
far cry from the nearly $5 billion in surplus it experienced just 7 years earlier in 1965. If the United States was to keep their balance sheets tilted towards a more desirable surplus it was important to recover some of the lost income sent overseas. Returning to the days of a trade surplus was rather important to the United States as we will see in Congressional hearings on the subject, but with imports starting to outweigh exports heavily it became hard to maintain any surplus at all, nonetheless avoid a deficit.

To determine if the United States were successful at any or all of their goals in the Persian Gulf will take a careful examination of how pertinent to success each of these goals were and how central they were to U.S. policy in both the short and long term. Only when the policy is looked at as a whole can we rate it effectively and determine its overall success. While the Nixon Doctrine was successful in the short term it paved the way for future U.S. intervention in the Gulf manifested in the subsequent Carter Doctrine. By the time it was repealed the Nixon Doctrine was responsible for fueling oil dependence at home, all the while militarizing the Persian Gulf. The preservation of the status quo was key; U.S. policymakers never looked for alternative solutions as the doctrine achieved some of its more basic goals and failed to realize the consequences the Nixon Doctrine would have on not only the region, but also the world. Through careful examination of what the Nixon Doctrine sought to achieve in the Persian Gulf and the success of these objectives, we can gauge the

success and shortfalls of the policy and begin to discover how it would forever alter
the landscape of American gulf intervention culminating in the 2003 U.S. led
invasion of Iraq.
Preserving hegemony

The Cold war was a conflict that spanned the globe as the Soviet Union and United States struggled to preserve and acquire both power and influence around the world. The Persian Gulf was no different than places like South America and East Asia in that the regional players all quickly took sides in the struggle. As alliances were soon put to the test, the United States sought to bolster its allies through various policies throughout the world. The years that followed World War II saw the British Empire begin to crumble as colonialism reached its end and the British treasury was left drained. Under the Eisenhower Doctrine, unveiled in 1957\textsuperscript{16}, Washington became the senior partner to the British for the first time in the history of the Middle East. This policy followed the joint British-American coup of Mohammad Mossedeq in 1953 and the dreaded Suez Crisis. The Suez Crisis began in 1956 with Egypt’s Gamel Abdel Nasser and his decision to nationalize the Suez Canal from British control. The British would lose control of the Canal and with it a major source of income for the Empire. These two events highlighted the weakness of the British and it Washington believed that if they did not increase their activity in the Middle East thereby filling the power vacuum created by the British withdrawal, the Soviets soon would exert their influence over the region. Soviet influence meant more communist states, but more importantly it meant that the Soviets would

\textsuperscript{16} Little, \textit{American Orientalism}, pg. 119
control the region that was becoming increasingly more important to meet the increasing energy demands of the industrialized west. As the United States became tangled in the quagmire that was Vietnam though, the public of the United States became disillusioned with fighting wars on foreign soil for complex, sociopolitical reasons. The Nixon Doctrine sought to keep the Soviets at bay in the Middle East through arming regional proxies that would help the United States in preventing the spread of Communism.

The first real test of the American-Iranian alliance came in 1973 when a Soviet-backed uprising broke out in the Dhufar province of Oman. Gulf historian Gregory Gause writes, “With Soviet and Chinese support, the government in Aden encouraged leftist elements to take control of the Dhufari movement... With a secure base across the border and military supplies from the communist powers, the PFLO (popular front for the Liberation of Oman) had effective control of most of the Dhufar province.” The United States and British governments must have been quite concerned by this event as it would, for the first time, test the regional proxy system the United States had only so recently put into place. Douglass Little explains, “The Shah delighted the Nixon administration by using his recently acquired U.S. helicopters to ferry 1,200 Iranian commandos to Southeast Arabia.” Such a use of American made weaponry to crush a Soviet backed threat gave a significant amount of merit to the Nixon Doctrine and seemed to prove its viability

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17 Gause, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, pg. 35
18 Little, *American Orientalism*, pg. 145
as a more modern foreign policy engine. It appeared that for the time being the 
Nixon Doctrine was a splendid little policy and that the Iranian Shah was truly on 
the side of the West in the cold war. In an interview to Newsweek in May, 1973 the 
Iranian Shah stated, “Being strong also means we can afford to be wise. Being wise 
means we can afford to let people know there is a point beyond which they cannot 
monkey with us. What we’re buying is a deterrent that will be credible to all our 
neighbors... The Nixon doctrine says the U.S. will help those who help themselves. 
That’s what we’re doing.” The Shah saw himself as the de facto policeman in the 
gulf and appeared more than happy to step up to the plate against any type of 
communist threat.

To further complicate the regional issues facing U.S. policymakers, the Iraqi 
government nationalized its oil industry in 1972 and in that same year completed a 
friendship treaty with the Soviet Union. Now in control of their own oil and its 
revenue, Iraq’s alignment with the Soviets meant the United States needed their 
chief ally, Iran, more than ever. Iranian resistance to communism was key if the 
United States hoped to see the maximum amount of oil flow out onto the open 
market at the cheapest price possible. Adding to the emerging regional dynamic, the 
Kurdish situation in the north of Iraq had been a very serious issue from the day the 
Iraqi borders were drawn by the 1920 League of Nations Mandate that made Iraq a 
country. The Kurds to the north had long wanted their own autonomous state of

19 Shah Interview “Being Strong and Being Wise” Newsweek May 21, 1973
Kurdistan, but as Iraqi nationalism was the tone of the Ba’ath Party that came to power in 1968, hope for such an autonomous state seemed increasingly futile. As Iran and the United States began to support a Kurdish rebellion following the events of 1972, it only led to ever closer Soviet-Iraqi ties. The United States, along with Iran, supported such a rebellion to seemingly harass the new regime in Baghdad and significantly weaken it. The Iraqis, not to be outdone by Iran, would arm themselves with Soviet weapons, increasing tension in an already militarized region. The following chart compares Soviet arms sales to Iraq and United States arms sales to Iraq’s neighbor, Iran.

All figures expressed in US$ millions, at constant 1990 prices.

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The chart illustrates the arms race that occurred in the 1970s between the two Gulf powers. Historic enemies, Iran and Iraq share a border yet the proximity between the Shiite Iranian government and the then Sunni Iraqi government has only caused

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20 SIPRI database
hostility between the two countries. Especially because of the menace of the Shiite majority in Iraq to the Sunni government, the Iranians have always been seen as a threat to the various Iraqi governments including the Sunni Ba’athist party that ruled Iraq during this time. The more the Soviets armed Iraq, the more the Americans saw to it that Iran could protect itself and the hatred between Iran and Iraq fueled competition in their respective arm purchases. The Shah explains his military renaissance to Newsweek in 1973, “Then there was the Soviet treaty with Iraq a year ago- another alarm bell. Couple this with American’s reluctance to play this role of gendarme even where its vital interests are concerned and anyone with a modicum of geopolitical sense will conclude we didn’t have much choice in the matter.” The Shah obviously felt a strong sense of paranoia here as he saw it as pertinent to the survival of Iran to partake in an arms buildup on a scale never before witnessed by the world. He also exhibited strange feelings towards the United State’s in this quote, seemingly calling them out on their trepidation to commit themselves directly to such an important region. The threat of Iraq would be there for some time and with vast oil revenues at their disposal both countries were able to militarize the Persian Gulf at a historic and alarming pace.

21 Shah Interview “Being Strong and Being Wise” Newsweek May 21, 1973
Petro Problems

It is impossible to discuss the United State’s foreign policy in the Persian Gulf at any point in modern history without discussing the Gulf’s most coveted and precious resource: oil. The Nixon Doctrine was developed at a time before the United States and its public truly grasped how dependent upon foreign oil their country was becoming and such dependence was increasing by the day. OPEC, the organization for petroleum exporting countries, was an ineffective cartel for much of its existence through the 1960s yet, with the early 1970s came the organizations first flexing of their economic power. OPEC was able to gain legitimate power as the oil producing countries began slowly nationalizing their oil fields. The OPEC oil embargo of 1973 forced the population of the United States to think about energy for the first time in the history of the Union and helped drive foreign policy in the gulf, as the now empowered cartel of oil exporting countries evoked controls on both production and pricing of the commodity.

Israel, long the closest ally of the United States in the Middle East, found itself engaged in a conflict with both Sadat’s Egypt and its neighbor to the northeast, Syria. The conflict has since been referred to as the Yom Kippur or October war and took place most of the month of October, 1973. The OPEC countries, under the influence of Sadat, flexed their economic muscles by placing an embargo on oil in response to the United State’s decision to align itself with Israel during the war. The United States was cautious in such an endeavor, as the OPEC countries were vital in
helping the United States meet their energy concerns. Despite their caution, the United States helped Israel supply itself during the war and undeniably helped them to victory. The result of such an alignment meant OPEC withholding oil from market, driving the price of the commodity up an incredible amount. King Faisal of Saudi Arabia would say to America’s National Broadcasting Corporation, “We do not wish to place any restrictions on our oil exports to the United States but, as I mentioned, America’s complete support of Zionism against the Arabs makes it extremely difficult for us to continue to supply the United State’s petroleum needs and to even maintain our friendly relations.” In the three months following the crisis oil prices had quadrupled. The increasing dependence on foreign oil was something widely recognized within the Nixon administration yet there was little decisiveness before the embargo to solve such a problem. Richard Nixon’s energy policy prior to 1973 included price controls on oil, thought of as a tool to fight inflation, that discouraged domestic production while stimulating consumption. Nixon would supplement this move in a Presidential address in spring, 1973 as, in April of that year he delivered the first-ever presidential address on energy. In this speech Nixon announced the abolition of the long-standing import barriers on oil. This meant that the United States could now import any number of crude oil barrels it needed from foreign lands thereby allowing nearly unlimited consumption by the people of the United States. The abolition of quotas coincided with increased cooperation and cronyism

22 New York Times, Robert E. Hunter, “Can the Arabs really blackmail us” Sep 23, 1973 Proquest Historical Newspapers pg 283
23 Gregory Gause, The International Relations of the Persian Gulf, page 30
towards the Iranian Shah and Saudi Arabian King yet also, as Douglass Little puts it, “The United States was now a full-fledged and very thirsty, member of the world oil market. It joined with the other consuming countries in the clamorous call on the Middle East. \(^{24}\) The United States was now in competition with almost all other industrialized countries to secure enough oil not only to support its domestic industries but also for its citizens to power their homes and automobiles.

Everything the American population knew to be true of oil was radically shaken in October 1973 as the word embargo soon slipped in to the vocabulary of every day Americans and the American population became less naïve to their country’s dependence on foreign oil. The withholding of oil, as the New York Time’s Richard Eders explains, “was purposely unclear and flexible. It was designed not simply to punish countries for supporting the Arabs insufficiently, but also to encourage them to change their policies. Countries that adopted a stiffer line toward Israel could find themselves placed in a more favored category.\(^{25}\) The United States though, would not distance itself from Israel during and in the aftermath of the war and this lead to a prolonged crisis. OPEC’s protest to the United States aid to Israel in the withholding of oil is something that severely affected the American population throughout the fall and early winter of 1973.

\(^{24}\) Douglass Little, *American Orientalism*, pg. 573

The American population felt OPEC’s wrath on a few different levels and no one it seemed was immune to the crisis. On October 28th, in the direct aftermath of OPEC’s decision to withhold oil from the United States, the New York Times took the tone that though it may be bad now; the worst is yet to come. Reporter Terry Robards hypothesized, “if the Arab nations are successful in withholding their oil from the market for an extended period, there is no question that the time bomb will go off- perhaps after two or three months- and produce an energy crisis that will affect the entire Western world… Britain is totally dependent on imports for her oil supply and has been getting close to 90 per cent of her imports from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Libya, Iran, Abu Dhabi, Qatar, Iraq and Dubai. Western Europe as a whole gets about 80 per cent of its oil supplies from the Middle East and North Africa.26” We can observe the growing fear in America that this time bomb might not only halt America’s progress and prosperity but may also dissolve many of the alliances that had been in place since World War II through the weakening of the heavily energy dependent European countries. The next couple of months would produce a tense atmosphere in the United States. The situation would only get worse before it showed any improvement as rationing appeared to be the only way to stretch the supply throughout the winter months. The New York Times on Nov. 1, 1973, would read, “With the nation’s oil supplies starting to tighten because of production cutbacks by Arab nations, Washington and the states begin tomorrow a joint

“mandatory allocation” program intended to help the country scrape through the winter without jeopardy to public health or grave damage to the economy and the education of children. The effort, unprecedented in peacetime in the country, is an attempt to spread available heating oil supplies so no region, community, distributor or home runs out of fuel.27 The idea of peacetime rationing brought with it panic at the pumps as people began to line up at gas stations hoping to stock up on the commodity for their weekly needs. Cowan would write in another piece, “The administration is debating whether rationing or a big increase in the Federal excise tax (now 4 cents a gallon) is the best way to curtail gasoline consumption, which runs about 6.6 million barrels a day. At the moment, the odds favor rationing— as deeply distasteful as it is to virtually every senior official in the Administration. It is distasteful, in the main, because is involved creating a large bureaucracy (up to 10,000 persons according to one estimate) that is likely to be around for a long time and that will make decisions affecting the lives of millions of Americans. At the end of 1972, there were 97 million passenger cars in this country, almost one for every other man, woman and child. There were also 407,000 buses and 21 million trucks.28 The American automobile had long been an integral part of the American dream as nearly every American family owned a car and needed to power it with gasoline. Would they be able to?

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28 New York times, Edward Cowan Nov 18, 1973; “Tell me about Gas Rationing, Daddy” ProQuest Historical Newspapers, pg 186
The Nixon Administration took the steps to consolidate the energy needs of the country. The New York Times reported, “As expected, Mr. Nixon said he would prohibit sales of gasoline on Sundays and lower highway speed limits to 50 miles per hour for cars and 55 miles for trucks and buses. Heating oil deliveries will be cut by 15 percent to homes, 25 per cent to stores and other commercial customers and 10 per cent to industrial users. The President banned all outdoor Christmas lights.  

The idea of cutting back on energy needs was one never considered by the American populace but the President asking Christian Americans to turn off their Christmas lights was quite an unprecedented measure and showed how bad this situation was now becoming. Finally it appeared full scale rationing was on the horizon as right before the new year of 1974, “William E. Simon, the Federal energy director, announced today the establishment of a stand-by gasoline-rationing system but he said he was ‘personally optimistic’ that rationing could be avoided ‘if the American public continues to cooperate.’ The System, outlined by Mr. Simon and his aides at a news conference this morning, could be in working order by March 1, he said. It would involve issuing gasoline coupons to the country’s 118 million licensed drivers over 18 years of age for a monthly fee of $1 per person. The coupons would be ‘freely transferable,’ meaning they could be brought and sold by anyone without restriction. As now estimated, the coupons would permit each driver, on the average, to buy 32 to 35 gallons of gasoline a month, of about eight

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gallons a week. Government deliberations had brought about a pending plan to ration gasoline if the crisis demanded it and the country braced for a shortage.

While the withholding of oil from the west would soon recede, the situation informed the people in power how important it was to keep oil flowing to market and to return to the status quo enjoyed before the October War. Administration officials clearly just wanted a return to abundant supply of oil enjoyed before the OPEC production cuts. The Nixon Doctrine was to be embraced for the rest of its existence as U.S. policymakers now realized how precious the commodity of oil was. The country simply did not want to embrace the idea of rationing ever again and for this reason it was important for the United States to have strong allies in the Persian Gulf to ensure enough oil reached the shores of North America.

The year 1973 is perhaps the most pivotal point in the history of Persian Gulf oil. Douglass Little writes, “American dependence on the Gulf had come not by the widely predicted 1985, but by 1973. Saudi Arabia had, at last, graduated to the position once held by Texas... The United States would no longer be able to increase production to supply its allies in the event of a crisis, and the United States itself was now, finally, vulnerable.” This vulnerability Little discusses was coupled with a new view of the United States that followed after the debacle in Vietnam. It was up to the White House to quell any fears the people had and so they looked to gulf

31 Douglass Little, American Orientalism, pg. 576
leaders and their vast oil reserves for help. The relationship between Richard Nixon and the Shah of Iran had been steadily growing since Nixon entered office yet it took a bit longer to incorporate Saudi Arabia into the arms sales program then it did Iran as the Saudis were not viewed as the protector of U.S. interests in the gulf to the extent that Iran was. The fast growing Saudi economy, though, would have to be in the future. Saudi Arabia saw its share of world exports grow exponentially, increasing from 13 percent in 1970 to 21 percent in 1973.\textsuperscript{32} The Nixon Doctrine began to incorporate Saudi Arabia into its arms sale program in 1972 with $80 million in arms sales, yet the Saudis would see this number increase to $352 million in just two years.\textsuperscript{33} The United States was starting to build on its relationship with the Saudis in order to keep Saudi oil flowing out of the Gulf, yet compared to the $2.2 Billion in arms sales to Iran that same year of 1974, the Saudis were still not viewed as being comparably capable in enforcing the region. Regardless, in the years that followed the price shock and supply crisis of 1973 it was important for the United States Government to take diplomatic action and the Nixon Doctrine became the vehicle that soon drove gulf diplomacy.

The Nixon Doctrine was not designed for the increased oil revenues that would come after 1973, as both Saudi Arabia and Iran both would see their oil revenues double between 1972 and 1973 and then more than quadruple the year after. With the public of the United States now consumed with energy concerns,\textsuperscript{32} Douglass Little, \textit{American Orientalism}, pg. 573 \textsuperscript{33} SIPRI Database
Richard Nixon would address the nation on November 7, 1973. “Let us set as our national goal,” he said, “In the Spirit of Apollo, with the determination of the Manhattan Project, that by the end of this decade we will have developed the potential to meet our own energy needs without depending on any foreign energy source.” Yet in this pivotal year of 1973 also came with it the Watergate Scandal that rocked the Nixon administration and would eventually see the President leaving office. White House advisor Roy Ash was quoted as saying, “perhaps nothing could win against Watergate.” It seemed to those around Nixon that the President was always searching for some political ‘Spectacular’ involving oil and the Middle East to try and divert the country away from its obsession with Watergate and each new revelation in the scandal. If that was his strategy, it failed. Perhaps because of such a distraction the Nixon Doctrine was not adjusted to account for the rapid alteration of Gulf oil revenue, yet regardless of this trend being overlooked, the address made by the President on November 7th would not have any effect on U.S. energy dependence.

On top of the egregious miscalculation made by the administration on the issue of future U.S. energy dependence, the staggering number of arms sales that were executed after Nixon left office are simply baffling. Based on the word of Richard Nixon, the now disgraced President of the United States, there was a precedent and the available method to sell Iran anything the Shah wanted short of

34 Yergin, The Prize, pg. 599
35 Yergin, The Prize, pg. 601
Nuclear Weapons. Documenting the exchange, Douglass Little writes, “To expedite delivery, ‘decisions on the acquisition of military equipment should be left primarily to the government of Iran’.” Iran now called the shots on future purchases and as Nixon left office the power vacuum that ensued ensured the maintenance of this policy. Gary Sick explains, “The President’s order was unequivocal and comprehensive. It afforded not the smallest loophole for those who questioned the wisdom of a blank check to the Shah. There were indeed rear-guard actions within the bureaucracy to attempt to moderate the effects of the decision, but they were largely futile. The order was implemented, with a vengeance.” The Nixon Doctrine became an unchecked snowball rolling down a mountain. The Americans, in return for the promise of stable oil and prices, gave the Iranian government anything they could imagine. Sick recounts, “American strategy in the oil-rich Persian Gulf was heavily reliant on Iranian support. Richard Nixon’s decision to rely exclusively on the Shah for the protection of U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf had been so thoroughly institutionalized in U.S. policy and practice that the United States now lay strategically naked beneath a thin blanket of Iranian security.” Something had to be done to check the problem, yet it never was.

In the period after Nixon resigned from office it seemed as if no foreign policy decisions could be made, as the government appeared to be in a deadlock.

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36 Douglass Little, *American Orientalism*, pg. 145
37 Gary Sick, *All Fall Down*, pg. 22
38 Gary Sick, *All Fall Down*, pg. 21
Steven Bosworth, the former director of the State Department’s Office of Fuels and Energy remembers, “Congress was mesmerized by Watergate, the executive branch was mired in it, and the White House was circling the wagons. It was difficult to get a political decision on anything on an inter-agency basis. There was no real decision- making apparatus in Washington- other then Henry Kissinger.39” Henry Kissinger, the man who is credited with helping develop the Nixon Doctrine was now calling the Foreign Policy shots and surely he was not going to tread back on his own policy, even despite the rapidly changing scene in the Gulf. With the Shah’s newly filled treasury (Iran made over $17 Billion in oil revenue in 1974 compared to $2.7 Billion in 197240) he would embark on a spending spree for the ages, ordering $18 Billion dollars worth of arms between the years of 1974 and 197841. The United States in the years following Nixon leaving office wanted to keep the status quo, the country could simply not bare another 1973. “Once committed,” Gary Sick argues, “it was not easy to escape the inexorable logic of the situation. Each side was operating without a safety net. Even the prospect of failure was not to be admitted: it was too painful to contemplate.42” Keeping the Gulf powers happy meant a keeping a steady flow of oil to the open market, keeping both prices and supply relatively stable.

Another interesting dynamic that arose during the time of the Nixon Doctrine

39 Douglass Little, American Orientalism, pg. 601
40 Gregory Gause, International Relations of the Persian Gulf, chart pg. 28
41 SIPRI database
42 Gary Sick, All Fall Down, pg. 21
was the recovering of what are known as “petrodollars” meaning the revenue these oil producing countries made from oil sales to the west. Lee H. Hamilton of Indiana and the chairman of the subcommittee on the Near East and Asia for the House of Representatives would put forward one of the objectives of the July 30th-Aug. 12th 1974 hearings on the Persian Gulf, explaining:

“the subcommittee tried to examine more closely U.S. policies toward what uses we should encourage of excess oil revenues of the OPEC states in the Persian Gulf. The over $80 billion that flowed into the region last year simply cannot be entirely absorbed in the gulf. Development programs and imaginative technical assistance efforts will, defending on the size of populations, use much of these funds. Foreign aid might use part of the rest. But a surplus will remain. Many Americans are afraid of the impact, a large quantity of these funds might have should they be invested here. Yet, most of us realize that these funds must be circulated and used in ways that do not destabilize the United States or its European and Asian allies. Our Government’s ability to identify and follow petrodollars coming into the United States and our policies toward such investments in stocks, bonds, or real estate were matters of extreme interest to the subcommittee. It is clear that we need better information on investments here and we need to consider our policies concerning foreign investment.43"

The U.S. government was apparently rather afraid of the prospect of the oil producing Gulf States acquiring too much cash and therefore becoming too powerful. It was in the interest of the United States to see these petrodollars recycled back into the U.S. economy and therefore the money laid out for oil would return in the form of arms sales to these countries, thus returning the money U.S. consumers and oil distributors had sent to the Persian Gulf for oil. This held

especially true in the period after the embargo due to the exploding oil revenues experienced by the Gulf States. Alfred L. Atherton, the Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs provided his prepared statement on the United States stance on petrodollars recycling, explaining:

“We remain committed to support of indigenous regional cooperative efforts and the collective security and orderly economic process of the area. Encouragement of peaceful resolution of territorial and other disputes among states and widening channels of communication and consultation between them, expanding our diplomatic, cultural, technical, commercial, and financial presence and activities, and maintaining access to the area’s oil supplies at reasonable prices. There is now, however, an additional objective in light of the vast increase in oil revenues, and that is to assist and encourage the countries of the region to recycle their surplus revenues into the world economy in an orderly and non-disruptive manner.44"

The Nixon Doctrine provided the framework for the United State’s continued influence in the region while it also was a vehicle for the recycling of petrodollars. It appeared in 1974 as a win-win.

Coupled with the domestic clamor for cheap, accessible and an abundant supply of oil, the Cold War environment surrounding the 1970s found it was more important than ever to ensure that the United State’s allies, namely Europe, had access to oil to protect their industries that had been hit so hard during World War II and were now beginning to fully recover. French President Georges Pompidou once told Henry Kissinger, “You only rely on the Arabs for about a tenth of your consumption. We are entirely dependent on them.45” It was important to keep

45 Yergin, The Prize, pg. 609
Western Europe afloat and ensure that the Soviets were not in a position to cater to their energy needs. Pomipdou’s forwardness on the issue illustrates the tension existing in Europe over importing a sufficient amount of the commodity. The Nixon Doctrine was the vehicle in which the United States could protect the entire Western industrial machine by keeping the Shah happy. Gary Sick laments, “The Shah relied absolutely on access to U.S. technology and expert assistance to transform his ambitious military and economic visions into reality. The United States, in turn, was dependent on the Shah to protect U.S. interests in a region that was becoming increasingly important to the very survival of the Western industrial system.46” The “interests” discussed by Sick are none other than oil, the driving force of the industrialized world.

The Iranian Shah in 1973 commented on western oil dependence and his new job in the region by explaining to Newsweek, “European security is sheer mockery without stability and security in the Persian Gulf. Western Europe, the U.S. and Japan see the gulf as an integral part of their security, yet they are not in a position to ensure that security. That’s why we’re doing it for them.47” The Shah, perhaps a bit strong in his convictions, was only seeing his positioned being patronized by the various western powers in alignment with Japan. The Shah was no fool and in the years following this 1973 interview he would use his inflated

46 Gary Sick, All Fall Down, pg. 21
47 Shah Interview “Being Strong and Being Wise” Newsweek May 21, 1973
treasury to exponentially increase arms purchases, all in an effort to become a universally recognized world power.

The Shah was proud of the fact that he was responsible for the security of some of the largest players on the world stage and such pride would help fuel his rapid buildup of weapons in the years to come. He didn’t see the United States in any sort of patriarchal way and was clearly looking out for his own interests. Unfortunately for the United States, treading back on the Nixon Doctrine meant the possibility of oil being withheld from the West, and this consequence was simply unfathomable. It appeared as if the United States was stuck in this quagmire with its options more limited than ever. United States Air Force General F. Michael Rogers wrote in 1977 that ties developed by military sales, "provide a subtle leverage when one considers the long-term logistical support required for modern weapons," yet the United States could not afford to only hold such subtle leverage as here, in this region, so much was on the line. By the end of the 1970s, American policymakers could only wish and hope that the Persian Gulf was stable enough to preserve such an important status quo. The billions of dollars of arms sent into the region, though, would set off an arms race of rather historic proportions thus plaguing any hope of a stable gulf.

48 JSTOR Merip Report" Arms Sales and the Militarization of the Middle East" by Stork and Paul, page 8, Feb 1983
Impending Revolution

The realities that emerged from the Nixon Doctrine were hard to see in the mid to late 1970s from within the U.S. bureaucratic machine. Saudi Arabia, despite the assignation of King Faisal in 1975, remained a relatively stable ally. Notwithstanding the slight drop in arms sales in 1976 from the previous years level for the first time in five years, the program picked up again by 1977 with the United States allowing Saudi Arabia to double its purchases from the previous year. The United States saw its sales to Saudi Arabia increase from $353 Million in 1976 to $718 Million in 1977. While increasing arms sales were existent for both Saudi Arabia and Iran, the latter was a completely different matter altogether. The National Security Council’s Gary Sick who was first in the White House under Ford, writes plainly in his memoirs, “The administration had based its entire strategic concept for the Persian Gulf region on the strength and stability of the shah.” The United States had backed itself in a corner as now more than ever the country’s interests were increasingly intertwined with that of the Iranian Shah.

It is important to examine the construction of the American policy machine that was present throughout the time of the Nixon Doctrine. Gary Sick paints a picture of the evolving framework of the U.S. Government beginning in the 1950s, “In the 1950s and 1960s, there were many in the U.S. government who had

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49 SIPRI database
50 Sick, All Fall Down, pg. 23
vivid memories of the shah as a beleaguered young monarch, uncertain of his throne and indecisive in the face of stormy political events over which he had only limited control,\textsuperscript{51}.” Of course here Sick is referring to the months leading up to the 1953 Iranian coup, a coup orchestrated by the British MI6 in conjunction with U.S. government that removed rogue Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq from power and ensured the Shah’s supremacy in Iranian politics for nearly three decades to come. Mohommed Mossadeq was a political superstar in Iran as he nationalized the countries oil fields from the British imperialists while appearing to threaten the Shahs place at the top of the Iranian political spectrum. The Shah quickly fell out of favor with his people and nearly lost his grip on power. The British brought the Americans into Iran for the first time to ensure the Shah remained in power yet “By 1976,” Sick explains, “those observers had disappeared into retirement or into jobs in other areas. The U.S. government bureaucracy was populated from top of bottom with individuals whose experience with Iran and its monarch reflected the new reality of the 1970s: a ruler who knew his own mind and did not take kindly to gratuitous advice from anyone, firmly in command of a prosperous, modernizing nation whose most serious problem seemed to be the impulse to try and do too much too soon.\textsuperscript{52}” As time went on and the makeup of the American government changed, Sick argues that the people who occupied positions in government throughout the 50s and 60s had a far more balanced view of the Iranian Shah in

\textsuperscript{51} Sick, \textit{All Fall Down}, pg. 22-23
\textsuperscript{52} Sick, \textit{All Fall Down}, pg. 23
comparison to those who simply knew him as the strongest U.S. ally in the Middle East. The Government composition Sick describes was responsible for overlooking the rising anti-Shah sentiment in Iranian society, yet no one could have imagined how bad the Iranian situation would soon get.

On July 30th, 1974 the United States Congress met to discuss the Persian Gulf and the United States close alliance to some of its residents, namely Iran and Saudi Arabia. As the subcommittee on Near East and South Asia of the larger Committee of Foreign Affairs took their seats, the subcommittee chairman, Lee H. Hamilton from Indiana briefed them on the purpose of the hearing:

“First, the subcommittee continued its close examination of U.S. arms sales to gulf states, principally Iran and Saudi Arabia. Those sales have increased dramatically in recent years... Our concern was both a better explanation of why such sales are in our national interest and in the interest of peace and stability in the Persian Gulf and an analysis of what governmental machinery and procedures exist to monitor arms sales, coordinate arms policy decisions and inspect item utilization of U.S.-sold equipment. The absorptive capacity of the states in the area for the volume of arms we are selling and the nature of U.S. policy on arms sales remain unclear. Is it our policy to sell just about everything they want? Who is involved in reviews of each prospective sale? And, how are such reviews made? The Departments of State, Defense, and Commerce are involved, in varying degrees, with the Government machinery dealing with the sale of arms, military equipment, and services.53”

The Subcommittee on the Near East and South Asia was to delve into the issue of arms sales to the Persian Gulf, hopefully providing an explanation to why the current policy was in place and what exactly the United States objectives were in the

region. Lee H. Hamilton gave his opening statement, arguing, “The figures of this enormous business speak for themselves. The U.S. MAAG Mission in Iran is one of the largest in the world. Persian Gulf states account for perhaps as much as $6 billion of the total U.S. arms sales overseas in fiscal year 1974 of the over $8 billion Secretary of Defense Schlesinger has said we sold. That worldwide figure compares with a fiscal year 1973 figure of between $3 and $4 billion of which over $2 billion went to Iran alone. While we may be unsure of the implications and significance of these sales, we are conscious that arms sales are playing a predominant role in the Persian Gulf policy that our Government has shaped in the last couple of years.54” Congress was now asking the questions they should have been all along, yet in 1974 so soon after the embargo it was at the top of everyone’s mind. When asked about the policy of arms sales directly, Richard R. Violette, Director for sales negotiations at the defense security assistance agency offered his view:

“I must stress the complex nature of the decision-making in the field of arms sales. In any decision to sell or not to sell a particular item of military equipment different variables must be taken into account. At a minimum, these include recognition of expressed desires of another sovereign state, an evaluation of the defense needs of that state, the economic impact of the purchase on that state, the overall relationship between the United States and the nation in question, and the anticipated reaction of other states. All of these factors and others must be combined in a judgment of what would best serve the long-term national interests of the United States. These factors-which are frequently contradictory cannot be reduced to a simple formula which will apply in every case or which will insure infallibility. On the contrary, differences of opinion are probably inevitable, and a

lively debate is more the rule than the exception. The point I would like to make here is that these decisions are not made by some routine process or conditioned response but are subject to continued evaluation and discussion. Hearings such as this obviously serve as useful parts of that ongoing process... The United States now has resident ambassadors in seven different independent nations in the Persian Gulf area. In most cases, only a small part of their activity is related to arms sales. Our relationship with the Persian Gulf nations range over a wide variety of issues and mutual concerns, from telecommunications to fishing and from commercial ventures to cultural exchanges. The security aspects of our relationship with these nations are obviously very important in certain cases, but cannot be divorced from the broader context of our political, economic, and commercial relationship. Our policy should not be judged on the basis of security policy alone.55"

Violette’s apparent ease about the issue was immediately rebutted by John W. Sipes, the Director at the Office of Munitions Control at the Department of State who argued, “Commercial transactions for fiscal 1974 are in the chart I submitted, exports authorized, we do not have the figures for 1974 of what has been exported, only authorized; for example, for Iran for fiscal year 1974. Commercial is $96,136,000. We do know from studying our figures that the commercial sales in this area Mr. Violette was just addressing is roughly only 10 percent of the program. The FMS is roughly 90 percent.” FMS here refers to Foreign Military Sales and despite Violette arguing that FMS is only a small part of the transactions taking place in the gulf, Sipes proves that it actually makes up a frightening and overwhelming percentage.

Almost all of the business done with Gulf States had been pertaining to military sales and while that policy is in line with the Nixon Doctrine, it spurred quite the

conversation in the subcommittee meeting. A very interesting back and forth took place that day between John H. Buchanan, a representative of Alabama, and John W. Sipes in which Mr. Buchanan began:

**Mr. Buchanan:** “I would like to go back a moment to an earlier question as to the national interests of the United States that may be involved in these sales. Gentlemen, I wonder if, in your judgment, the military security of a nation is a matter of vital interest to that nation; that is, in the eyes of its government whether or not you or I may agree it has an adequate defense establishment? Would you say that is a pretty vital interest as a general rule?

**Mr. Sipes:** I would agree.

**Mr. Buchanan:** Would you say, therefore, in supplying arms to these nations to meet what they consider to be a vital national interest of theirs that it might somehow strengthen our relationship with those countries?

**Mr. Sipes:** I think that is the motive of a number of our programs, to strengthen that defense relationship.

**Mr. Buchanan:** These countries are very important to us and except for Nigeria which has become No. 1 in oil importation in recent months. Iran, Saudi Arabia and to a lesser extent other countries in this group are important to us in terms of our reliance on them for importation of oil as a basic requirement of the economy of our country. Is that not correct?

**Mr. Sipes:** Yes, indeed.

**Mr. Buchanan:** All I am suggesting is that perhaps there is some value in developing a reciprocity of vital interest from a national interest point of view where you are relying on a country for something you need and must have. Perhaps it makes sense for you to be in a position to supply to them something they feel they need and is important to their national interest and security. I only suggest there may be some national interest involved, whether or not it is within your province and work to spell out national interest in the sales you handle. I do not think the record should be left bare of a rationale for such sales in what we greatly need from them in light of their apparent feeling they need these armaments for their own defense purposes.56

John Buchanan represented an interesting point of view on the issue of arms sales and one that was shared by Kissinger and Nixon when they first designed the policy.

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It was in the United State's national interest, they all believed, to create a sense of dependency on the part of the Gulf States in order to make sure their alliance stayed with the United States. The hearings in the Subcommittee on the Near East and East Asia did nothing but reaffirm faith in the Nixon Doctrine despite the nature of some of the more proactive questions asked. No change in policy was decided and, rather, it was decided that preserving the status quo through the continued creation of mutual interests in the region was the best policy for the United States.

As the Nixon Doctrine became further imbedded in U.S. foreign policy, praise for the Shah and his regime was constant from nearly all of the most key players in foreign policy decisions. Douglass Little observes, “By September 1970 the CIA was touting the Shah as ‘a confident powerful autocrat’ who seemed ‘determined to ensure for Iran a position of power and leadership in the Persian Gulf after the British withdrawal’.57” Henry Kissinger would assure Ford in the Oval office on the 13th of May, 1975 that “There is no doubt that the Shah, should he survive a sufficient number of years, will have a key, if not the controlling, role among the regional powers in helping to assure the stability in the Persian Gulf area. It has been a cardinal point in our policy over the past several years to encourage Iran to intensify its cooperation with other moderate anti-communist states in the Gulf region, particularly Saudi Arabia.58” Kissinger was defending the policy he helped create and believed it was in the best interest of the United States to

57 Little, *American Orientalism*, pg. 144
58 Little, *American Orientalism*, pg. 146
maintain the Nixon Doctrine. He also touted the Shah as a strong leader and one who drove politics in the Persian Gulf. The praise continued with a State Department transition briefing paper dated January 3, 1977 which pointed out that the Nixon Doctrine had been an overall success in the Persian Gulf and that “Iran has accepted this role— for it was consistent with the Shah’s view of Iran’s key position in the area— and has used its military power, its financial strength and its general influence to help resolve regional disputes.”

Taking office in 1977, The Carter administration, having read countless positive briefings on the policy in the Persian Gulf as well as being reassured by numerous foreign policy experts, was convinced that the status quo was working just fine. There was seemingly no reason to review and alter a policy that had helped the United States retain its preeminence in such a vital and volatile region.

Domestic problems that arose in Iran throughout the 1970s stemmed from the Shah’s determination to maintain power. In this pursuit he created the now infamous SAVAK secret police, an organization designed to covertly keep watch over the Iranian people. After witnessing Mossadegh’s meteoric rise to political power, the Iranian Shah was keen to prevent political enemies from gaining too much power. The SAVAK were the vehicle in which the Shah sought to maintain a stronghold on his beloved country by keeping his citizens voices quiet and his enemies at bay.

Iranian historian Ervand Abrahamian discusses the Shah’s secret police, “Known by

59 Little, American Orientalism, pg. 147
its Persian acronym, SAVAK eventually grew into some 5,000 operatives and an unknown number of part-time informers. Some claimed that one out of every 450 males was a SAVAK informer... SAVAK had the power to keep an eye on all Iranians-including high ranking officers- censor the media, screen applicants for government jobs, even university appointments and use all means available, including torture and summery executions, to deal with political dissidents. It soon created an Orwellian environment. This observation of the Iranian population clearly shows a high sense of paranoia on the part of the Shah, something U.S. policymakers should have noticed and taken into account. The SAVAK were becoming more and more known throughout Iranian society as they attempted to purge the dissidents of the Gulf state. Sick attempts to make sense of this phenomenon explaining, “This largely covert struggle coincided with a period in Iran’s relationship with the United States when the Shah had reason to believe that a crackdown on opposition elements would be welcome in Washington and that his methods would be regarded with a considerable measure of tolerance.” The tolerance expected by the Shah, though, was quite hard to find as the talk to torture found its way leaking into the public sphere.

In a 1976 interview with 60 Minute’s Mike Wallace the Iranian Shah was asked about the subject of torture in his country. The interview shows a troubled Shah reluctant to admit to wrong on the part of his administration despite

60 Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, pg. 126
61 Sick, *All Fall Down*, pg. 26
Mike Wallace pressing him hard on the issue. Wallace began by asking the Shah of his questioning techniques:

Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi: There are intelligent ways of questioning now.
Mike Wallace: They talk of physiological and physical torture
Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi: Physical, I don’t believe, in the old days maybe.
Mike Wallace: I talked just today to a man, who I believe, was tortured
Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi: That he was tortured? How many years ago
Mike Wallace: I want to be very careful... not yesterday
Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi: Ahh, well maybe. I don’t know
Mike Wallace: But the word has gone out to stop it?
Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi: A long time ago

The report then shows an interview with someone who had recently been tortured by SAVAK in which he explains, “They would tie the hands and feet. And there was some sort of a hood that would be placed on their head, and whenever they would scream they would hear the echo in their head. They would whip you at the soles of your feet with these electrical cords.” The interview shows the concern for such torture of dissidents in Iran and the report marks the American peoples growing awareness towards the issue. The interview continues on to the subject of the Shah’s popularity among his people:

Mike Wallace: And of course there are some dissidents, very small in number here, who would like to kick you out. Twelve of them are in jail and three of them will be put to death?
Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi: And six more will be shot but because they are betraying their country, not because they are against me.
Mike Wallace: and they are betraying their country by?

62 60 Minutes, 10/24/1976
63 60 Minutes, 10/24/1976
Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi: Being Marxists and owing their allegiance to not their country.

Mike Wallace: You are a firm man sir.

Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi: It is still needed. I can forgive those who try to kill me and even attack me, my wife and my child... but not those who betray their country.

The Shah openly admits to killing political dissidents here and it appears to trouble Mike Wallace. Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi had become a cold dictator and his people were forced to live in fear of his regime, never knowing if they were next. What was done behind closed doors was leaking its way into the public sphere, troubling those Americans who once saw the Shah as a modern world leader and forcing American public officials to question the United States Government’s close ties with the administration in Tehran.

As the human rights issues facing the Shah’s regime were fast becoming front-page news in the United States, the 95th Congress of the United States met to discuss the issue. The public was beginning to mobilize against the Shah and his oppressive ways, and this appears to be common knowledge in Congress at the time. In the subcommittee hearing on the Near East and East Asian affairs, Stephen J. Solarz of New York and Lucy Wilson Benson, the Under Secretary for Security Assistance at the United State’s Department of State brought the issue of the Shah’s growing unpopularity and his human rights abuses to the floor:

Mr. Solarz: I was struck by the sentence on page 13 of your testimony where you said that our continued willingness to meet Iran’s legitimate defense needs would be a clear expression of our firm support for that key country in the overall stability of the regime. Certainly I recognize the political dilemma in which recent events in Iran have put us. But do you not think that to some extent the indications of fragility
on the part of the Shah’s regime in terms of its apparent lack of support from the Iranian people should lead us to consider the extent to which we want to hedge our bets in terms of the supply of additional sophisticated equipment to Iran? I recognize your point that, were we to terminate a military relationship now, from a political point of view it might very well undermine the Shah’s ability to survive the vicissitudes of the current situation in the country. But on the other hand, it now appears to be a very real possibility that he may not be around in perpetuity. Under those circumstances, do you think at all we should begin to hedge our bets? Does this have any impact on our willingness to provide arms or do we come to the conclusion that, precisely because his regime is in danger, we ought to give him more than he has been getting before or continue basically as we have?

Mrs. Benson: You have asked me a number of questions, No, obviously not. In any relationship we have with any country, whether a country has internal difficulties regardless of their sources or whether it does not, we constantly review priorities and review reasons for exporting, reasons for the whole direction in which we are going, in general as well as in specific terms. I do think I might like to comment just for a second on one comment you made, to the point of the Shah’s support. I think we should be very careful talking about how much support the Shah’s government has and how much support it does not. This is very difficult to estimate. The opposition is clearly coming in major part from those who oppose the reforms the Shah has put into effect, the economic reforms, agricultural reforms, religious reforms, and reforms having to do with women. In fact, it does seem to be that latter reform which is causing him the most trouble. In any case, it does not mean because he is in trouble we are going to pull back. Nor does it mean we are going to do more; it means we are going to do the same careful analysis both in general and specifically as we go along.64

The State Department was very cautious in making any conclusion about the Shah’s regime, despite the obvious unrest in his country. While the committee was eager to ask the right questions about the stability of the regime and the large number of weapons still being shipped to Iran, the State Department assured the members of Congress that the current system was working just fine and that it was important to support the Shah as he modernized his country. Also prevalent in these discussions

was the idea of “restraint” as it is mentioned over 50 times in the hearing.\textsuperscript{65} The United States government felt that it was limiting FMS to other countries through this new policy, yet this appears to be far from the case. That subcommittee also inquired on the number of arms currently in the pipeline to Iran and found that number to be in the ballpark of $12\text{ Billion}$. The billions of dollars of undelivered arms still set to be shipped to Iran disproved any measures of restraint the government believed itself to be taking. The Nixon Doctrine was still in full effect.

The Unfortunate situation that arose in Iran in the late 1970s was one that included great disillusion on the part of the United States. Daniel Yergin in his “Prize” writes, “American intelligence on Iran was constrained. As the United States became more dependent on the Shah, there was less willingness to risk his ire by trying to find out what was happening among the opposition that he despised... ‘You couldn’t give away intelligence on Iran,’ was the comment of one frustrated intelligence analyst.\textsuperscript{66}” The United States was too heavily imbedded in the interdependent regional system that they were simply hoping for the best while never expecting the worst. In August 19th 1978, the anniversary of the 1953 coup, a cinema in Abadan, Iran was set on fire and burned to the ground. Ervand Abrahamian has the causalities of the Abadan fire at 400 woman and children,\textsuperscript{67} and

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\textsuperscript{65} Congressional Hearings, HRG-1978-HIR-0003, “U.S. Arms Sale Policy and Recent Sales to Europe and the Middle East” Hearings- Digital Collection, LexisNexus, October 5\textsuperscript{th}, 1978. Subcommittee on Near East and South Asia
\textsuperscript{66} Yergin, The Prize, pg. 659
\textsuperscript{67} Abrahamian, A History of Modern Iran, pg. 159
\end{flushright}
as the various factions in Iranian society began to blame each other it was uncertain who really was responsible for such a tragedy. Even modern scholarship has yet to say with certainty who was responsible for the great fire but the people of Iran were quick to blame the Shah’s regime and his secret police.\textsuperscript{68} The Shah would declare martial law in early September 1978 yet this would not prevent the events of September 8\textsuperscript{th}, Black Friday, from unfolding on the Streets of Tehran. Ervand Abrahamanian documents a European Journalists impression of the events of Black Friday, writing, “Jalah Square resembled a ‘firing squad’ and that the military left behind ‘carnage.’ Its main causality, however, was a feasible possibility of compromise.\textsuperscript{69}” The Shah was now the sworn enemy of his own people and surely his time had now come.

Despite the clearly apparent civil unrest in Iranian society, as late as September 28, 1978, “The defense Intelligence Agency’s prognosis was that the Shah ‘is expected to remain actively in power over the next ten years.\textsuperscript{70}’” In late 1979 Carter would ask the Shah about the human rights issues plaguing his country only to be greeted by a stony silence. The Shah answered, “There is nothing I can do, I must enforce the Iranian laws, which are designed to combat communism.” He continued to insist that they “were really just a tiny majority, and have no support

\textsuperscript{68} Abrahamian, \textit{A History of Modern Iran}, pg. 159
\textsuperscript{69} Abrahamian, \textit{A History of Modern Iran}, pg. 159
\textsuperscript{70} Yergin, \textit{The Prize}, pg. 659
among the cast majority of [the] Iranian people. Carter took the Shah on his word as his and the past two administrations had on questions of arms purchases. A News Years eve gala on December 31st, 1978 in Tehran saw Carter toast the Shah, remarking that his leadership has made Iran, “an island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world.” This was an egregious calculation on the part of Carter, as the Shah would flee Iran on January 16th, 1979 never to return home. His reign was over, the policy defeated and the United States was left scrambling.

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71 Little, *American Orientalism*, pg. 149
72 Little, *American Orientalism*, pg. 149
Conclusion and Aftermath

The death of the Nixon Doctrine with the introduction of the Carter Doctrine was not a tactical maneuver meant to strategically position the United States in a better position, rather it was done out of constriction and desperation. Without the Shah, the United States lost their chief ally in the region. Gary Sick laments, “Certainly the Carter administration was ill prepared for and repeatedly surprised by the rapid dissolution of the Iranian monarchy.” The Iranian revolutionaries captured the American embassy on November 4, 1979 with crowds gathering outside the embassy by mid-morning shouting anti-American slogans. By 1030 that morning as many as three thousand demonstrators scaled the wall of the embassy, capturing it and holding those inside hostage. The United States and Iran were now far removed from the days of their seemingly unshakable alliance, leaving many to ponder how it had ever gotten to this point. At the 1978 subcommittee hearing on the Near East and East Asia, Mrs. Benson of the State Department and Gerry Studds, a representative of Massachusetts, simplified the Iranian-U.S. relationship during the 1970s with one exchange:

Mrs. Benson: That is perfectly true. The reason we are in an arms relationship, a military relationship, with the Government of Iran is not because of the Shah's problems or lack of problems but because the Shah is sitting on an area of the world which we consider necessary for our own national security, and that is the reason. All of the decisions which we make in regard to arms to Iran or to any other country are made in terms of what we judge to the best of our ability to be in our national

73 Sick, All Fall Down, pg. 184
74 Sick, All Fall Down, pg. 228
interest and that of our friends and allies.

**Mr. STUDDS:** Does that boil down to oil?

**Mrs. BENSON:** It boils down to oil, it boils down to land, it boils down to the oceans.\(^{75}\)

While access to oil was a key player in driving the policy of arms sales in the Persian Gulf for almost a decade, the State department argued that the geographical location of Persian Gulf also played a key role. The failure of the U.S. government and U.S. intelligence to manage the sales and relationships, though, is where the policy truly failed. Coupled with the loss of such a key ally and the now pressing hostage crisis, the coinciding Soviet presence in Afghanistan meant the Carter administration was forced to take a harder line in its overall Middle- Eastern policy. Carter would do just that in his 1980 State of the Union address in which he called for military force in protecting the United State’s “vital interests\(^{76}\)” in the Persian Gulf. With this, Carter would lay the framework for future U.S. policy in the region. The single vital interest of the United States in the gulf is clearly oil, as no other factor has had the influence and longevity in impacting United State’s foreign policy in the Persian Gulf up to and through this point in history.

As the Shah fell, a string of events would ensue that connect this period in American gulf policy, the time when U.S. gulf policy was based around the Nixon


Doctrine, to more contemporary times. Saddam Hussein would invade Iran on
September 22nd, 1980, spurring the Iran-Iraq war and launching Hussein onto the
world stage as a major player. After the completion of that war, Saddam invaded
Kuwait where he would be driven back by American lead forces under President
George H.W. Bush. The aftermath of operation Desert Storm saw the United States
even further imbed themselves in the region as they began to set up several
permanent military bases throughout the gulf showing that they were there to stay.
The Americans set up military bases in Kuwait, naval bases in Bahrain, and an
airbase in Qatar. After Saddam was driven back from Kuwait and his army was
defeated, heavy sanctions were imposed on Hussein’s regime to prevent the dictator
from acquiring weapons of mass destruction. Saddam Hussein’s alleged violation
of these sanctions would be the excuse used by George W. Bush to invade Iraq in
2003, bringing us to into the modern day. The Carter Doctrine and its policy of
direct intervention in the Persian Gulf can certainly be attributed to the Persian Gulf
policy of both George H. W. Bush and his son in their military exploits in the region.
The United States’ increasingly active role in the gulf directly connects itself to the
Nixon Doctrine. The United States would no longer instill trust in proxies to protect
their interest, rather they, by any means necessary, would now be the ones
protecting such interests.

77 Gause, International Relations of the Persian Gulf, pg. 127
78 Tripp, A History of Iraq, pg. 259
79 Tripp, A History of Iraq, pg. 149
It is important here to note that the United States keeps close economic and political ties with Saudi Arabia to this day and continues its policy of arms sales to the country, having sold them about $14.2 billion in arms between 1990 and 2010\textsuperscript{80}. While that number is rather modest compared to Iran’s purchase of over $23 billion worth of arms between 1969 and 1979, the Obama administration informed Congress on October 20\textsuperscript{th}, 2010 that it intended to sell the Saudis a package of weapons valued at $60 billion\textsuperscript{81}. This deal, as it stands, is the largest in United States history and reflects the longevity and trust of the now developed United States-Saudi relationship. The move is intended to help boost the United States arms industry and to create jobs domestically, a rather high priority of the Obama administration. Despite this impending sale, it is clear that the United States has taken more complete control of their own Persian Gulf affairs, clearly hesitant to instill confidence in another country to look after their interests as they had with Iran between 1973 and early 1979. Whether this move represents a revival of the Nixon Doctrine to some degree remains to be seen, but a further militarized and more hostile Persian Gulf would only create more problems in an already troubled region.

The repeal of the Nixon Doctrine leaves us to ponder how the policy impacted both the Persian Gulf as well as the United States. If not for the Nixon Doctrine

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arming Iran, would the Soviets have ever armed the Iraqis the way they did, thus leading to Iraqi aggression in the gulf and therefore future U.S. intervention? If not for the Nixon Doctrine, would the Shah have ever been forced to flee his own country? If not for the Nixon Doctrine, would the United States have become more energy independent at an earlier point in history? The answer to all these questions is far more ambiguous than yes or no but it is clear that the Nixon Doctrine fueled the militarization of the Persian Gulf and increased hostilities across its land and waters. The United States government played an increasingly active role in Persian Gulf politics beginning with the Nixon Administration and continuing until present day. Without the policy of arming regional proxies, it is clear that the future of the region would have played out differently but it was retained as a policy because the Nixon Doctrine simply just met too many needs of a divided country all at once. It was the easiest way to exert influence on the gulf, keep oil flowing to market and help the U.S. economy, all at the same time. In this case, policymakers were all too keen to take the easy way out by backing the doctrine for the greater part of the 1970s. The consequences of the Nixon Doctrine were never fully considered, and over 30 years later the United States is still dealing with the corollary aftermath.
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