

ORIENTALISM AND MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF IRAN IN THE USA

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to understand the phenomenon called Orientalism and reviews how Edward Said elucidates this subject. Its key argument is that certain forms of representation, including those through mass media, can and often do consist of efforts to represent reality in a subtle manner, which may distort the picture to the disadvantage of one group, or set of persons, or even states. The efforts at such representation succeed on account of an existing power differential as well as a body of texts having already established what "knowledge" is, what truth is about a subject, without any countervailing capacity or argument towards rebuttal available to the "other." At various times in history, this has been carried on by the strong against the weak and continues until this day.

The thesis proceeds to establish the fact that the ongoing political engagement between the United States and Iran is influenced by Orientalism. The wider mainstream US press affects and gets affected by the contours of American foreign policy. Evidence exists that the neoconservatives in the American press and policy community, particularly during the George W. Bush administration, enthusiastically carried forward the practices and agenda of Orientalism. An exploration of the mainstream US press, comprising of influential publications such as the *New York Times* (NYT), the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ), *Newsweek*, and *Time*, suggests that they have contributed towards the construction of negative images of Iran and produced

“knowledge” on it. There exists a paucity of media channels able to project the alternative side of events. However, *Alternative Press Centre*, *Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting* (FAIR), *Democracy Now*, and *The Real News* have attempted to present a balance in reporting within the US.

Technology-based tools to socially connect, such as citizen journalism, blogs, and social media networks as Youtube, Facebook, and Twitter reporting in real time, complement the alternative media and provide hope that (mis)representation through the dominant media discourse won't always go uncontested and will need to be moderated.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION - ORIENTALISM

For Edward Said, Orientalism is a practice employed since the 18th century by several western scholars to understand and describe the inhabitants belonging to the Middle East, India, and China. One might also say that *Orientalism* comes into play when attempts are made to understand the culture of the so-called "East" from the vantage point of the West. The colonial phase of dominance of the East by the West enabled the foreigners visiting such colonies to marvel at the sometimes advanced culture of the natives, which struck the visitors as exotic, rich in mysticism, and the arts. The visitors would be at times enthralled at the uniqueness and the richness of the local culture, while on other occasions it was held with deep suspicion and even outright derision.

A consequence of Orientalism is that when somebody thinks about the Orient, then he or she carries a preconceived notion about the place, its people, culture, even though one may never have visited the region before (Said, 1978).

A. L. Macfie has argued that Orientalism, when dealing with Islam, has been ascendant in the present century due to several political events in the Islamic countries and their attitude towards the West, especially after events such as the tragic occurrence of September 11 in New York City (*Orientalism*, 2002).

Not many appreciate or share this line of thought though. Ibn Warraq's retort to Said is apt,

Said attacks not only the entire discipline of Orientalism, which is devoted to the academic study of the Orient and which Said accuses of perpetuating negative racial stereotypes, anti-Arab and anti-Islamic prejudice, and the myth of an unchanging, essential “Orient,” but he also accuses Orientalists as being a group complicit with imperial power and holds them responsible for creating the distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority, which they achieve by suppressing the voice of the “Oriental” and by their anti-human tendency to make huge, but vague, generalizations about entire populations that in reality consist of millions of individuals (2007, p. 19)

Said alleges that the way in which such knowledge is produced is not an innocent or objective one, but the end result of a process that reflects certain interests, that it is motivated. Said argues that the manner in which the West, especially Europe and the United States, have represented the countries and citizens of the Middle East has actually caused distortion of the actual reality of those places and those peoples. Therefore, Said describes Orientalism as a framework used to understand the unfamiliar and strange, to make the people of the Middle East appear different and threatening. Thus, Orientalism is viewed as an exclusionary outlook or force that leads to the establishment of an otherness. According to Said, large numbers of writers accept this basic distinction between the East and the West. “These Orientalist authors stand accused of creating the ‘the Other’—the non-European, always characterized in a negative way, as for example, passive, weak, and in need of civilizing by the advanced West” (1978, P. 5). Said therefore argues forcefully for the recognition as well as reconciliation of the difference and the dissimilarities between societies and argues in favor of a democratic treatment of diversity. Thus,

In our wish to make ourselves heard, we tend very often to forget that the world is a crowded place, and that if everyone were to insist on the radical purity or priority of one's own voice, all we would have would be the awful din of unending strife, and a bloody mess, the true horror of which is beginning to be perceptible here and there in the re-emergence of racist politics in Europe, the cacophony of debates over political correctness and identity politics in the United States, and---to speak about my own part of the world---the intolerance of religious prejudice and illusionary promises of Bismarckian despotism, a la Saddam Hussein and his numerous Arab epigones and counterparts. (Said, 1993, p.xxi)

Therefore, Said's complains that due to its relative weakness, the East never receives its due in terms of its own perspective being represented, but only gets represented by a much stronger West. Thus,

If you were British or French in the 1860s you saw, and you felt, India and North Africa with a combination of familiarity and distance, but never with a sense of their separate sovereignty. In your narratives, histories, travel tales, and explorations your consciousness was represented as the principal authority, an active point of energy that made sense not just of colonizing activities but of exotic geographies and peoples. (Said, 1978, p.5)

According to Said, once we accept the above argument, then it follows that there would exist a very limited opportunity for any person desirous of studying the Orient to join in later and address the subject, just as one might like to think of it in a sort of free and creative way, since already a great deal of writing had gone before, and this writing, Said says, was well organized like an established science, a science based on regularities, and pattern maintenance, which he terms "Orientalism." Said has

therefore argued that the division of entire regions and societies into mutually exclusive groups by designating them either as Orient or Occident is not quite correct (1978).

Said draws attention to the writings of several 20th century western scholars about whom he realizes often wrote about the Orient, unconsciously repeating the language used earlier by others invoking their (mis)conceptions about the East. Said provides the example of a work on Syrians in 1920 where he is observed to be unmindfully representing an image of the Orient projected earlier by Edward William Lane in 1830s his work *Modern Egyptians*. (1978, p. 8). Thus, a subsequent piece of writing appears to be restrained by its antecedent one. Said therefore, accuses the West of always portraying the image of the Orient as static, unchanging, and lacking in modernity; something that stubbornly refuses to develop. He finds that there isn't any differentiation in representational quality, whether one studies India, Egypt, or Syria, and it is not a coincidence that these states are all located in the East. Their essence, Said says, always remains constant. Thus emerges the image of the Orient, a timeless, and unchanging Orient, which unlike the Occident refuses to develop and this is Said's problem with Orientalism: it "creates an image (of the East as) outside of history" (Said, 1978, p. 14).

Generally speaking, it is always hazardous to make factual statements about large societies and ought to be avoided since objective knowledge is in fact occasionally contradicted by historical evidence. For instance, during the Arab-Israeli war of 1973, the Egyptians, who were long regarded as cowardly and incapable of fighting, and regularly beaten since they supposedly weren't modern, surprised

everyone by crossing the Suez Canal, disproving in effect the image imposed upon them (Irwin, 2006, p. 281). Therefore, it might be prudent to avoid making such sweeping generalizations about a society and the state.

Said believes that the historical and the institutional context in which Orientalism developed has been the history of imperial conquest. Therefore, he says when Britain and France, which were both colonial powers in the 20th century, stepped out on their colonial mission, they were not just acquiring lands; they were additionally conquering the minds of the defeated societies as well. "The challenge they faced was to develop an understanding of the natives they encountered, so that as a follow up to their conquest they were enabled to subdue the vanquished with ease" (Said, 1978, p. 3). Said argues that this process of employing large and abstract categories to explain people who appear different, or whose skin color is different, has gone on since a very long period of time. Orientalism, according to him, should be considered a specific instance of this more general process. To illustrate, Said narrates the example of a French author called Flaubert, whose encounter with an Egyptian courtesan Kuchuk Hanem leads him to describe her as, "typically Oriental" (Said, 1978, p. 6). Making such a sweeping statement about a set of persons, different in multiple dimensions of ethnicity, and weak to resist such branding or representation, according to Said, is evidently an Orientalist mode of thought and practice, and he therefore suggests that the objective of the European in regard to the native is to generate "knowledge," which eventually may be deployed towards the furtherance of colonial expansion and imperialist subjugation.

Clarifying the definition of Orientalism, Said informs that in an era prior to the late 18th century, the tendency among scholars was to treat the Orient as a geographical term, and therefore, the authors who chose to write about it were considered Orientalists, and these in turn could be, “poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists and imperial administrators” (Said, 1978, p. 3). However, Said elaborates that since the late 18th century, Orientalism began to be treated as a starting point for discussion and analysis as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient, “dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said, 1978, p. 3).

Edward Said refers to Foucault’s notion of a “discourse,” outlined in two of his well-known works, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) and *Discipline and Punish* (1975), where it has been argued that the supposedly objective and natural structures in society, which privilege some and punish others for non-conformity, are in fact, “discourses of power.” Said contends that without applying that notion to the discipline of Orientalism, it would not be possible to account for the situation whereby the West was enabled to create a systematic order, which helped it in the management and production of the Orient in a "political, sociological, military, ideological, scientific and even imaginative way, particularly during the post-Enlightenment period" (Said, 1978, p. 3). Consequently, any author who later emerged and chose to write about the Orient felt totally circumscribed in his thinking and activity by a straightjacket of pre-existing, ‘authoritative’ views of the Orient. Thus, “it is the whole network of interests

inevitably brought to bear on (and therefore always involved in) any occasion when that peculiar entity ‘the Orient’ is in question” (Said, 1978, p. 3).

The 1798 conquest of Egypt by Napoleon was followed by a complete survey of Egypt by western cartographers, archaeologists, architects, and other scholars who studied Egypt for their home audiences and produced “knowledge” on Egypt, something ostensibly the Egyptians themselves never had been able to produce. Said questions why this is so that there doesn’t exist a single corresponding survey of France carried out by the Egyptians for the Egyptians with a similar objective of producing “knowledge”? Subsequently, he proceeds to answer this question himself by affirming that in order to produce knowledge, one first needs the power to be “there” and to see in expert ways, the things that the natives are not likely to see for themselves (1978, p.7).

For Said, Napoleon’s conquest of Egypt in 1798 is a new kind of imperial and colonial victory that inaugurated the process of Orientalism. He says,

As I shall be using the term, ‘imperialism’ means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory; ‘colonialism,’ which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory; thus at some very basic level, imperialism means thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you do not possess, that is distant, that is lived on and owned by others. Neither imperialism nor colonialism is in a linear progression through simple accumulation and acquisition. Both are supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people ‘require’ and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge

affiliated with domination; the vocabulary of classic nineteenth-century imperial culture is plentiful with words and concepts like ‘inferior,’ or ‘subject races,’ ‘subordinate peoples,’ ‘dependency,’ ‘expansion,’ and ‘authority’ (1993, p.9)

Since the beginning of 19th century until the end of the second World War, Britain had dominated the Orient and strengthened Orientalism, similarly since World War II the USA dominates the Orient and approaches it as France and Britain once did. This is evidenced by merely looking at the current US economic and security engagements in Asia Pacific. Said's concern is, “not with the correspondence between Orientalism and the Orient, but with the *internal consistency* (emphasis mine) of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient” (1978, p. 6). Said's concerns are limited to the systematic study of the unique phenomena of amazing harmony and compatibility that is noticeable between the various texts produced over time by a variety of western producers of knowledge.

Referring to the relative power between the Orient and the Occident Said states that, “ideas, cultures, and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configurations of power also being studied” (1978, p.5). This makes him recall the Indian scholar-diplomat K M. Panikkar’s famous treatise of the 1950s bearing the title *Asia and Western Dominance* (Panikkar, 1959).

According to Said, the scientist, the scholar, the missionary, the trader, or the soldier was in, or could think about it, with very little resistance on the Orient’s part.....under the general heading of the knowledge of the Orient, and within the umbrella of western hegemony over the Orient during the period from the late eighteenth century, there emerged a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy,

for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in the anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial, and historical theses about mankind and the universe (1978, p.7).

Said believes that in the case of Britain and France, the experience of Orientalism had been more direct. Britain in relation to South Asia (India) and France in the context of North Africa (Algeria) and South-East Asia (Indonesia) have had a fairly close and long standing relationship and a much deeper level of engagement with their colonies (1978, pp.3-4). In contrast, the United States doesn't enjoy a comparable experience between itself and Iran or the Gulf Arabs. Thus, in the Middle-East, US-Iran engagement according to Said is fairly indirect and abstract, but also much politicized due to the presence of Israel, for whom America remains the main ally. Thus, there is in effect a western, Jewish state in the midst of the Islamic Oriental world, and the sense is that there is a greater compatibility between it and the United States than that which exists between the American interest in Saudi Arabia or Iran, which remain important too, but probably only because of their oil and other energy reserves.

The presence of the "other" factor, which according to Said is very anti-Islamic, where Israel regards the entire Arab world as its enemy, gets imported into American Orientalism. Such ideas in the US press, as for example result in stories, that Hamas terrorists in Gaza Strip are simply interested in killing Jewish children, and conveniently ignore the fact that the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza is the longest (since 1967) standing military occupation in the world. Eventually, the Palestinian struggle for national self-determination is perceived in the West with great

hostility as upsetting the stability of the status quo and making it virtually impossible for any US citizen to not get prejudiced by watching news on *CNN* and *Fox News* and reading in books, or watching movies about the Middle East where the Arabs almost always play the role of terrorists, irrational, and violent people.

However, restoring the balance on the subject, the noted Iranian academic Hamid Dabashi contests the Orientalist representation of Iran and alleges that certain western authors such as Kenneth Pollack *The Persian Puzzle* (2004) or Azar Nafisi *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003) end up contributing to a very distorted history of Iran, “in order to belittle them and thus destroy their will to resist the regional domination of a predatory empire” (Dabashi, 2007, p.7).

Hollywood and the western journalists too appear to play a role in creating a picture of the Arabs as terrorists. The specific role played by the mass media in western democracies has been well documented by eminent academic Noam Chomsky in his works *Manufacturing Consent* (Chomsky, 2010) and *Necessary Illusions* (Chomsky, 1989). Said acknowledges that terror does exist in the Middle East as a consequence of the violent political situations there, yet he also argues that there is a lot more going on there that is either misunderstood or not seen by the people in the West. The western media’s exclusive focus on the negativity inherent in terrorism betrays a notion that all the peoples of the Islamic world may be understood in the same negative and paranoid way, which is to say, as a threat. Said therefore, argues that “understanding a vast, complex region like the Middle East in such a narrow way, takes away from the humanity and diversity of millions of ordinary people living decent and humane lives. Since the Iranian revolution of 1979, led by a charismatic

and popular Islamic clergyman, leading to the establishment of a theocratic state in Iran, Islam has been regularly covered in the western media in an Orientalist way" (Said, 1997, xvi).

Referring to the public discourse in America in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in the city of New York, prominent US academic Mahmood Mamdani reveals that he gets the "impression of a great power struck by amnesia." He sees that the discussion of this tragedy is being carried forward without any regard to its historical and political context. President George Bush spoke of "good Muslims" and "bad Muslims." The "bad Muslims" were responsible for terrorism, while the "good Muslims" were anxious to clear their names and consciences of this crime, and were to support "us" against "them." However, the discourse suggests that unless proved "good," each Muslim was to be presumed to be bad. Every Muslim now was required to prove their credentials as "good" by joining in a war against the "bad." Mamdani, however, cautions us that, "judgments of 'good' and 'bad' refer to Muslim political identities, not to cultural or religious ones" (Mamdani, 2004, p.15).

The prominent US media outlets in the 21st century, especially since the New York terror attacks in September 2001, while reporting on political Islam have become quite shrill and inflexible. A prime recipient of such rough treatment is Iran, an overwhelmingly Shia Islamic state, where the two sides are locked in a battle of wits, over the Iranian government's alleged support to regional Islamic terror groups, its hostility towards Israel and other western states, the United States in particular, and its not so recent quest to obtain nuclear weapons through the uranium enrichment program. The several western media reports have such threatening titles such as, "Iran

Pushed For Nuclear Answers" *BBC News*, (September 22, 2008), "EU Warns Iran Close to Nuclear Arms Capacity" *Associated Press*, (September 24, 2008).

The western press represents the uranium enrichment activity undertaken by Iran in defiance of the western opinion as a threat to international security. Rival and competing communication strategies are employed by the two sides where the West considers such enrichment activity as a threat to the security of the West whereas Iran affirms that it is well within its rights under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as a non-nuclear weapon state party. The fact is that NPT is a global arrangement negotiated in 1968 under United Nations auspices, whose objective was to ensure that the world security would not be jeopardized by the emergence of too many nuclear weapons states. It was stipulated in the accord that the states that had already acquired nuclear weapons must relinquish theirs in the interest of a safer world. The states that hadn't possessed such weapons, sometimes referred to as weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), were clearly entitled to obtain the technological benefits of application of nuclear energy. Iran asserts itself to be doing exactly that when trying to obtain nuclear reactors and uranium enrichment technology through a process of self-help in an era of technology denial by an industrially and technologically advanced West.

What might be the key cause of western states' opposition and paranoia about the possible eventuality of Iranian government mastering the nuclear fuel cycle and subsequently arriving on the international scene as a nuclear weapon state? In such an event Iran would actually be defaulting on its solemn obligation towards the international community to maintain its non-nuclear status. However, bearing in mind

the foregoing discussion about Orientalism as outlined by Said, one suspects that there could be an element of Orientalism lurking beneath the writings appearing in the mainstream US press.

This research attempts to establish the fact that the neocons in the US establishment, those present in mass media, influence US press writings on Iran by portraying it as a rogue and evil state. They are superbly complemented by the right wing elements in the government of Islamic Republic of Iran, led by its supreme leader Ali Khamenei and its President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad. A further objective of this thesis is to review the rhetorical response of the radical right wing in the Iranian government, which in turn provides a rationale for vitriolic outpouring in the US media.

Such a project mandates a survey of the history of US-Iran diplomatic relations during the administration of the shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and a review of the US press publications since that period onwards. An evolving tale of missed political opportunities between the governments of the two states, US and Iran, during the post-revolution phase will also form part of the discussion.

It is worth mentioning that the representation of Iran in the mainstream US press is keenly contested today. In response to the prominent mainstream American newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* or the *Washington Post*, there exist in the United States alternative media such as *Democracy Now* promoted by Amy Goodman. These outlets may not be as resourceful as the mainstream US press but they still publish, broadcast, and telecast news, inviting to their studios such well-known political commentators from the academia as Noam

Chomsky, Edward Said, Hamid Dabashi, and Robert Fisk, Patrick Seale, and others from the news media. These alternative media outlets act as a bridge between the governments and the peoples of the two societies. The newer phenomenon of the use of new technologies such as the internet based social media and blogs have helped to lessen the communication gap between governments and societies through citizen journalism, and have meaningfully enhanced the impact of communication channels available today, and provide a much needed balance to the representation of news about the Middle East and Iran.

An analysis of the American press writings on Iran from 1951 through 1978 furnishes the historical background to the current politics between the US and Iran. One needs to recall that the US came to assume a pre-eminent political role in the Middle-East only after the British withdrawal after the second World War from the territories east of the Suez Canal. The discussion of Iran in the US press especially after 9/11/2001 has been affected by what is, to use the phrase of Hamid Dabashi, the "post-Orientalist" phase (Dabashi, 2009). He complains that despite over a half century Iranians are yet to be able to come to terms with the fact that in 1953 the American CIA toppled the democratically elected government of Mohammad Mossadeq, and installed a deposed monarch to serve the illegitimate interests of the United States more obediently, and now once more the United States is yet again up in arms against Iran (Dabashi, 2007). He challenges the views on Iran expressed by scholars such as Azar Nafisi and Fouad Ajami, which is that of a passive, corrupt, and malignant Iranian culture, which Dabashi argues is a thoroughly malicious representation that such authors have manufactured.

Dabashi is an academic of Iranian origin and teaches at Columbia University in New York City. He alleges, "The publication of Azar Nafisi's, *Reading Lolita in Tehran* achieved three objectives, (1) systematically and unfailingly denigrating an entire culture's revolutionary resistance to a history of savage colonialism; (2) blatantly advancing the cultural foregrounding of a predatory empire; and (3) catering to retrograde and reactionary forces within the United States, forces waging all out war against various immigrant communities seeking curricular recognition on university campuses" (Dabashi, 2007, p. 265). However, he delivers an evenhanded compliment in being equally critical of both the Pahlavi monarchy and the Islamic regime, yet he considers the story of modern Iran as a saga of protest against both domestic tyranny and globalized colonialism.

Orientalism appears to be the defining mode of engagement between the United States and Islam. Dabashi widens the issue to include several political events in the Middle East such as the Arab oil embargo, the Iranian revolution, the assassination of Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, the threatening pronouncements and acts of Libyan ruler Muammar Qaddafi, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Khomeini, American hostages in Lebanon, the Iran-Iraq war, the Salman Rushdie affair, and the Danish Cartoons upheaval. He says that it is clear that such events in the Muslim world have captured headlines and made the terms Islam and Muslim notable to many in the West. However, too often it has simply been the knowledge of stereotypes and distortions, the picture of a monolithic reality described as Islamic fundamentalism, which is a term often signifying militant radicalism and violence. The weak response from the Islamic intellectuals, he laments, appear hardly adequate to match the media power of

the dominant American newspapers such as the *New York Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. Thus, according to John L. Esposito, Islam, which is a rich and dynamic religious tradition of almost one billion people, the second largest world religion, has been buried under menacing headlines and slogans, images of hostage takers and gun toting mullahs (Esposito, 1998, p. 9). The violent upsurge among large sections of the Muslim populations over publication of cartoons in a Danish newspaper depicting the prophet Muhammad happens to be one of the latest and most significant ones.

However, on multiple occasions, the reality turns out to be different. Edward Said asserts that a certain demonization of Islam constantly occurs, which can be ascribed to irresponsible journalism motivated by commercial and political interests, through the process of stereotyping. To justify the argument, he recalls the example of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing in America, where immediately after the occurrence of the explosion, numerous western television commentators attributed the carnage to Islamic radicals, suggesting that it had all the hallmarks of Middle East terror. However, subsequently it turned out that the perpetrator of the carnage was an American veteran of the 1991 Gulf War, Timothy McVeigh. Said argues regretfully that in cases such as this one, not a single political commentator subsequently described this bombing as a manifestation of, "Christian fundamentalism."

Thus, Said affirms that a handy set of clichés are used to represent the Orient, (Middle-East) through the images that have that exotic magical quality - Aladdin, caravans, camels, sheikhs, harems, belly dancing, desert, scimitars, cruel punishments, and Muslims as fanatics. Invariably, Muslims are portrayed as villains, as those belonging to a lesser breed, the underlying assumption being that they understand the

language of force alone, and that it is impossible to talk reason with them. Thus, many American films end up with a large number of Arab dead bodies, for example many movies in which Arnold Schwarzenegger is in the lead role. Plenty of such movies though not always, depict guerillas going in to kill Muslims. Hence, an idea is generated that Islam is something that needs to be wiped out. Such films incorrectly portray Islam as a monolith, as being culturally the same all across the Muslim world, from Saudi Arabia to Indonesia. The truth is that there is hardly any commonality to be found between Saudi Arabia and Morocco, or Algeria and Egypt for instance, except Islam.

Orientalism can be "viewed in Foucauldian terms as a discourse; a manifestation of power/knowledge" (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia, 1999, p.68). This is because Foucault views discourse as being a severely bounded area of social knowledge or "heavily policed cognitive systems which control and delimit both the mode and the means of representation in a given society" (Gandhi, 1998, p.77). Referring once again to the theoretical dimensions of Orientalism, Said concludes that the discourse is a regular system of producing knowledge within certain constraints, where certain rules have to be observed. To think past it, to go beyond it, or not to use it, is virtually impossible.

Due to his adoption of the Foucauldian perspective, Said looks at several "Western" texts, originating from a multitude of disciplines in humanities and social sciences. Said considers works published under politics, media, history, linguistics, and literature, which give rise to a discourse. These works or texts are bound together in culture and ideology, which are intrinsic to the discursive practices through which they

produce "knowledge" about the Orient. These discursive "practices make it difficult for individuals to think outside them --- hence they are also seen as exercises of power and control" (Childs and Williams, 1997, p.101).

Edward Said's book *Orientalism* is considered the essential book of post-colonial theory. "As an academic, Said arouses great passion for or against himself. His negative critics tend to read his work contrapuntally, focusing on what is excluded and not directly articulated in this history of Orientalist discourse. The most positive readings tend to expand Said's tentative ideas to gospel truisms that serve as rallying cries for all sorts of writing back at the establishment" (Varisco, 2007, p. 7). It remains a fact that Said's critique of western Orientalism has received very limited attention in the real Orient. Said wrote as a self-proclaimed Oriental writing back—by representing back—for those he assumed had not been able to represent themselves. However, Varisco, a critic of Said, reports that a decade after the publication of *Orientalism*, Magdi Wahba found it strange, "how little response there is to be found in Arabic to the thesis set forth by Said," even though an Arabic translation has been available since 1980 (quoted in Varisco, 2007, p.17). But Varisco reports that somewhat disagreeing with Said, noted Pakistani anthropologist Akbar Ahmed has listed a number of "post-Orientalist" western scholars who allow the native voice to speak and who suggest little evidence of cultural superiority. Such scholars include Lois Beck, William Chittick, Hastings Donnan, Ross Dunn, John Esposito, Michael Fischer, Michael Gilseman, Barbara Metcalfe and several others (Ahmed, 1992). "Said's response to such an argument is that he does not need to catalogue every Orientalist who ever lived" (Varisco, 2007, p.44).

Robert Irwin is another prominent critic of Edward Said. In his book *Dangerous Knowledge* (2006), he refers to “Orientalism” and asks, “What does his book say? In a nutshell, it is this: Orientalism, the hegemonic discourse of Orientalism, is a discourse that constrains everything that can be written and thought in the West about the Orient and more particularly about Islam and the Arabs. It has legitimized western penetration of Arab lands and their appropriation and it underwrites the Zionist project” (Irwin, 2006, p.3).

Said rightly stands accused of having restricted his discussion in *Orientalism* to the heartland of Arabia and of not including other Islamic states and societies such as Iran or Turkey, or Arab North Africa. Regarding western representation of the Orient and its powerlessness in resisting such a production of knowledge, Irwin’s criticism is extremely pungent and acerbic but most profound, and is therefore reproduced at length,

Said’s presentation of the history of Orientalism as a canon of great but wicked books, almost all by dead white males, was that of a literary critic who wildly overvalued the importance of high literature in intellectual history. One of his favorite modes of procedure was to subject key texts to deconstructive readings...Said, who also overvalued the contestatory role of the intellectual, seems to have held the view that the political problems of the Middle East were ultimately textual ones that could be solved by critical reading skills. As he saw it, it was discourse and textual strategies that drove the imperial project and set up the rubber plantations, dug out the Suez Canal and established garrisons of legionnaires in the Sahara. Since Orientalism is by its nature a western sickness, the same must be true of imperialism. (2006)

Edward Said, in the estimation of his critics, stands exposed to having committed a major indiscretion in that he puts his weight on two stools. He frequently invokes the authority of Antonio Gramsci as well as that of Foucault. Hence, Robert Irwin faults Said yet again,

Foucault and Gramsci have different notions of discourse. Foucault's notion of discourse unlike that of Gramsci, is something that cannot be resisted. Although at times Said finds it convenient to work with this idea and to present Orientalism as discursive formation that cannot be escaped, at other times he wants to blame Orientalists for embracing the evil discourse, or even for actively engaging in fabricating that discourse. They are both victims and villains. (2006)

Irwin accuses Said of adopting the same approach to Gramsci. He avers that Foucault and Gramsci had rather different ideas about the relationship between power and knowledge. The first believed that 'Power is everywhere', whereas the second thought in terms of hegemony. 'Hegemony' was the term used by Gramsci to describe the imposition of a system of beliefs on the ruled. He, like Said after him, was inclined to believe in the primacy of ideology in history (rather than that of economic factors). Intellectuals have a central role both in maintaining the status quo and in undermining it. They are experts in the legitimization of power; they are crucial figures in society. Gramsci disliked 'common sense', which he deemed to be hegemonic, a device for the upper class to secure the assent of the lower class to their rule. Although he had nothing to say about Orientalists as such, in his *Prison Notebooks* he did touch upon the arbitrariness of the concept of an Orient. Gramsci accepts the argument that East and West are arbitrary and conventional; they are historical constructions, since outside

of real history, every point on earth is East and West at the same time....These terms have crystallized from the point of view of the European cultural classes who, as a result of their world-wide hegemony, have caused them to be accepted everywhere.

Once again, Irwin alleges that Said, having read Foucault and Gramsci, was unable to decide whether the discourse of Orientalism constrains Orientalists and makes them the victims of an archive from which they are powerless to escape, or if on the other hand, the Orientalists are the willing and conscious collaborators in the fabrication of a hegemonic discourse that they employ to subjugate others. Irwin suggests that when Said found it convenient to be a Foucauldian, he produced passages suggesting that it was therefore correct that every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric.

At another time he professes his belief in, “the determining print of individual authors.” But as Irwin comments, the whole point about Foucault’s use of the term ‘discursive formation’ is that discursive formations do not have individual authors. According to him, an archive in the Foucauldian sense is the law governing what can or cannot be said in certain situations. It is not some sort of a grab bag of loaded terminology that individual authors can have recourse to whenever it suits them (Irwin, 2006). Accordingly, Irwin finds fault with Said denouncing Dante, Renan, Lewis and the rest as if they were evil geniuses who actively fashioned a racist and imperialist discourse. However, at the same time, there seems to be no option for the Orientalist other than to be constrained by the discursive formation of Orientalism (2006, p. 290).

To summarize Said's critique, Orientalism is a western representation of the Orient, forced upon an Orient that could not or did not represent itself. It was

negatively represented and portrayed to be different, backward, and inferior.

Orientalism has existed in this form because of western ascendance since, after all, there is no consent involved from the Orient, and neither did the Orient capably form its own idea of itself. Orientalism, due to the peculiarly self-reinforcing relationship between knowledge and power, has created a spiral leading to greater western dominance over and colonization of the Orient.

Edward Said's enunciation of Orientalism has the merit of applying it to situations where the dominant discourse is loaded against a smaller, weaker, and probably defenseless entity. It appears to be capable of providing a tool to understand the interaction between the dominant group versus the underdog. The argument established by Said in the context of the western states in regard to the colonies they held and the manner in which the West arrogated exclusively the task of "knowledge" production to themselves regardless of the views and aspirations of the states they ruled, especially in the Middle East, led to deepening divisions in the respective outlook of the two sides, thereby making reconciliation extremely challenging. Moving on from the study of a western thinking on Islam, it is easy to extrapolate the situation to Iran, which not just lies near but virtually straddles the Middle East, and whose current problems with the West especially with the US, and their consequent playing out in the political arena and portrayal in the US mass media will be the task of further study. In the era of the US "War on Terror," it has become easier for the neo-cons in the US media to determine the terms of the debate on Iran. It appears that the neo-cons in the US press and policy circles are the current torch bearers of Orientalism.

CHAPTER TWO: IRAN AND THE USA – SHAH MOHAMMED REZA PAHLAVI

“Anyone acquainted with the work of the great Persian poets (Hafiz, Sa’adi, Ferdowsi), the traveling scholars writing in Arabic (Al-Beruni, Ibn Battuta, Ibn Khaldun), or the Mughal rulers (Babar, Jahangir, Shahjehan) will have discovered something of the richness and complexity of Islamic culture,” says Pakistani anthropologist Akbar Ahmed (Ahmed, 1999). The internationally acclaimed poet Jalaluddin Rumi who wrote his verses in Persian and was so very well appreciated, happened to be an Iranian too.

Immanuel Kant, the founding father of European Enlightenment, in speaking about Persia agrees with the assessment, “If the Arabs are, so to speak, the Spaniards of the Orient, similarly the Persians are the French of Asia. They are good poets, courteous, and of fairly fine taste. They are not such strict followers of Islam, and they permit to their pleasure-prone disposition a tolerably mild interpretation of the Koran” (Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, trans. John T. Goldthwait, qtd. in Dabashi, 2007, p.28).

Dabashi’s analysis of Kant’s statement is anything but charitable. He is a comrade and friend of Edward Said and a strong critic of the orientalist discourse. He complains that from a reading of Kant’s statement it follows as if the Iranians could not be modern simply by being Iranians; in order to become modern they indeed had to be less Islamic and more French to be able to lay claim, “on the feeling of the beautiful

and sublime,” that for Kant was not merely a matter of aesthetics but far more importantly a question of agency, moral, normative, and historical (2007, p.28).

Jalaluddin Rumi is probably the best known poet of Iran, besides several other classical poets such as Attar, Jami, Khayyam, and Nijami. There is a strong tradition of poetry in Iran. Hamid Dabashi informs, “Iranians take poetry quite seriously---a habit that tends to lend a certain poetic diction to our historical collections, the way we remember ourselves. If Jazz is the cadence of American culture, then Persian poetry is the pulse of Iranian culture, the rhyme and rhythm of its collective memory. It is said that what Muslims do is not memorize the Qur’an but Qur’anify their memory. If that is what Muslims do, then that must be what Iranians do too with their poetry, when they remember their past as the poetic resonance of their present—in fact, of their presence in history” (Dabashi, 2007, p. 13).

However, events in the Muslim world and in the West continue to highlight the issue of an ‘Islamic threat’ and the role of revolutionary Islam in international affairs. The Islamic republic of Iran has been labeled a terror exporting state and declared a member of the axis of evil by the United States (Esposito, 1999, p. 16). Therefore, the questions being raised in recent times in the US press regarding Islam are getting more and more strident and Orientalist.

Some of the current questions that intrigue thoughtful individuals are, “Are Islam and the West on an inevitable collision course? Are Islamic fundamentalists medieval fanatics? Are Islam and democracy incompatible? Is Islamic fundamentalism a threat to stability in the Muslim world and to American interests in the region?” (Esposito, 1999, p. 16). “From Ayatollah Khomeini to Saddam Hussein and the

Taliban in Afghanistan, for almost two decades the vision of Islamic fundamentalism or militant Islam as a threat to the West has gripped the imaginations of western governments and the media. Khomeini's denunciation of America as the 'Great Satan', chants of 'Death to America', the condemnation of Salman Rushdie, and Saddam Hussein's call for a Jihad against foreign infidels reinforced images of Islam as a militant, expansionist religion, rabidly anti-American and intent upon war with the West" (Esposito, 1999, p. 17).

Interestingly, this is not the way things always existed between Iran and the West. The western traveler Thomas Herbert wrote and published his travelogue, *Travels in Persia 1627-29* (Thomas Herbert, 1940) wherein he talks of having visited the mausoleums of poet Sa'adi and Hafez. But "by the time that Herbert published his travelogue, Sa'adi had already been translated into Latin and published in Amsterdam by the Dutch Orientalist George Gentius. French and English translations of Sa'adi were also published by the 1630s, and soon after German translations appeared as well. From then on Sa'adi became integral to the European Enlightenment and Romanticism alike" (Dabashi, 2007, p.14). Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82) had a far more detailed and intimate knowledge of Sa'adi and his literary humanism (Dabashi, 2007). All this is reason enough to support the fact that Iran has been known to the outside world, especially in Europe, through its several eminent scholars and poets etc.

Iranian scholar David Barsamian is of the opinion that women in Iran are far better educated and professionally active than they are in any other state in the Middle East. Thus, on social parameter of development across gender, Iran is way ahead of any other state in the Middle East, which perhaps is a fact not sufficiently realized

outside its political borders. Iran straddles most of the energy rich region; its southern border lies along the eastern shores of the Persian Gulf, and its northern borders extend up to the energy rich Caspian Sea, co-shared with Russia and Turkmenistan. Since Shah Ismail of the Safavid dynasty established the Shia sect of Islam as the state religion of Iran in 1501 A.D., its overwhelming Shia population experienced intense historical, cultural, and religious links with the Shia majorities in the neighboring Arab states of Iraq and Lebanon where the principal Shia pilgrimage sites of Najaf and Karbala are located, dedicated to Shia religious figures Imam Ali and Imam Hussein respectively. The Shia Hezbollah (Army of God) fighters who regularly battle against Israel Defense Forces (IDF) are based in Lebanon.

Iran is in fact a multicultural state, a mosaic of practically all possible political beliefs. Being a repository of enormous hydrocarbon energy reserves, in great demand in much of the developing and the developed world, Iran has historically been at the core of great power rivalries. Czarist Russia in pre-World War I phase, and the Soviet Union subsequently, have competed with Great Britain for influence within Iran. Some other European powers such as France and Germany have at different times coveted Iran and competed against each other until World War II, after which the United States of America became the most important western power.

The general character of the post-World War period in Iran has been summed up by Nikkie Keddie, in her book, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (Keddie, 2003). According to Keddie, the United States, which maintained in the early postwar period an uneasy partnership with Britain in influencing Iran, (the British monopolized Iran's oil while the United States dominated in providing military and

governmental advice and support, became the dominant foreign powers in Iran. Due to the CIA sponsorship of the coup against the democratic government of prime minister Mohammed Mossadeq, and their covert support to the unpopular autocrat shah Muhammed Reza Pahlavi, no matter how very dictatorial he had become and irrespective of how many persons he jailed and tortured amongst Iranian publics, any expectation of American support towards establishment of a democratic government was a chimera (Keddie, 2003).

The United States has projected its military, diplomatic, and economic power on Iran and the Middle East since the end of World War II. The general feeling is that this region is very important to the United States, and therefore a US State Department document states that the area constitutes, “a stupendous source of strategic power, and one of the greatest material prizes in world history” (Chomsky and Barsamian, 2005, p.6).

Prime Minister Mossadeq held the belief that Iran’s oil wealth exclusively and as a matter of right belonged to Iran. Realizing that Iranian national economic future was at stake, he nationalized the southern Iran oil wells in 1951. The resultant economic suffering became intolerable for the British government, which consequently encouraged and abetted the United States to carry out a coup in 1953 to depose the elected government of Iran and restore Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi to power since they believed that Prime Minister Mossadeq was threatening the world oil cartel dominated by American and British companies. Western governments and corporations felt safer, “with a centralized government under a pro-West ruler who would not again allow into power a regime that might threaten economic and political

relations with the West” (Keddie, 2003). The tyrannical rule of the shah of Iran that followed the coup promptly set the stage for the political rise of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, an exiled Iranian religious figure and a most intractable foe of the shah.

The reason for reminiscing the Mossadeq episode is that it is a central event in the political history of Iran in the 20th century, where it is easy to conceptualize the political engagement between a stronger western country and a weaker Asian state in alignment with the discourse of Orientalism. For instance, if one were to ask any an American today about his knowledge of the 1953 coup against Mossadeq, then the chances are that he would gape at the questioner with a perplexed expression.

However, the coup against the Mossadeq government, codenamed ‘Ajax,’ was directed by Kermit Roosevelt and coordinated from within the U.S. embassy in Tehran. This might possibly explain the reason behind the subsequent takeover of the US embassy in Tehran in 1979 by students and Islamic radicals in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution, ostensibly to protest against the entry of the shah in the United States. Keddie reminds us, “In the widely read American press between 1953 and 1973, there is very little basic criticism of the shah or of the United States policy in Iran; the shah was overwhelmingly presented as a progressive, modernizing ruler whose problems lay in a backward population and some Iranian fanatics. Only after the shah pioneered in the OPEC oil-price rise in late 1973, did part of the American press and a few officials began to note some of his faults” (Keddie, 2003).

The hostage crisis in Iran, which lasted for a total of 444 days until President Jimmy Carter failed in his bid for a second term as the US President, defeated by Ronald Reagan, became an issue of momentous significance for the western world.

The power of the mainstream US media, with prime time newscasts devoted regularly to the crisis in Iran, reinforced the stereotypes about Iran and Islam in general. Mark Bowden's book *Guests of the Ayatollah* (2008), is a tome running into 680 pages. The book was well received in the West, receiving extensive media coverage and hitting the bestseller lists. However, a search for references to the western coup against Mossadeq in this book throws up just four of them.

In such a situation, it makes sense to say that Said would argue simply that this is what eventually matters; production of knowledge in an ongoing engagement between a stronger western power and a relatively weak state situated in the Orient eventually gets defined by their power relations. Ali Ansari also shares such a view; "The coup revealed America's influence and malevolent ambitions in Iran. The immense sense of betrayal that was felt-and cultivated for later generations - cannot be understood outside the context of a relationship that had been thought to be positive and benign" (Ansari, 2006).

Just like any multicultural society, Iran also has developed a composite national culture. Thus, "Iranians are Zoroastrians, Jewish, Catholic, Armenian, Muslim, Sunni, Shi'i, and Bahai, and there are also many blessed atheists among them. Iranians are Arabs, Azeris, Baluchis, Kurds, Persians, Turkmans. Iranians are socialist, nationalist, Islamist, nativist, internationalist, liberal, radical, and conservative, and a few of their top notch intellectuals have joined the Oriental regiment of the US neocons" (Dabashi, 2007, p.19).

Highlighting the relationship between knowledge and power within the Iranian state, Dabashi continues,

If Orientalism, as Edward Said has persuasively demonstrated in his magisterial work *Orientalism*, was a manner of knowledge production conducive to the European colonial domination over its ‘Oriental’ territories, the nationalist mode of knowledge production is equally instrumental in an illusively stabilized and historically fixated conception of a nation and its sealed boundaries. The forceful nationalization of a polyfocal culture is no less colonial in its epistemic disposition and racial in its analytics. Orientalism manufactured an “Orient” to authenticate the primacy of ‘the West’, precisely in the same manner that Iranian studies sub-nationalized Kurdish or Azeri cultures in order to corroborate the manufactured primacy of Iran. (2007, p.21)

All knowledge that is about human society, and not about the natural world, is historical knowledge, and therefore, rests upon judgment and interpretation. (Said, 1997). The failure of the press coverage of Iran in the western media for a quarter century since the 1953 coup is in that it was done without regard to the political actualities of the country. The West had probably assumed that the representation of the elite in Iran was all that mattered, while continuing to ignore the simmering anger of the Iranian population at the subterranean level against the shah of Iran.

Academic William Dorman from Berkeley and Mansour Farhang (1987), a former Iran's ambassador to the United Nations while supporting this view write, “This was an assumption shaped and reinforced by the foreign policy establishment and was given credence by highly West-centered preconceptions and an internalized Cold-War oriented ideology. Implicit in such an assumption were the beliefs that the Iranian people were incapable of politics, that they were incapable of self-rule, and that they were incapable of an authentic desire for freedom. Given these beliefs, which were held by policy makers and accepted uncritically by journalists the 1978 revolution

could only have come as a surprise to official Washington and the general public” (*The US Press and Iran*, 1987, p.13).

It implies therefore, that when the media uncritically begin trailing the foreign policy beliefs, then fatal outcomes can often result. Rather than exercise independent judgment in reporting the social, economic and political conditions under the shah, the mainstream US press abdicated its responsibility and reported what the foreign policy establishment inspired it to, consequently, the results turned out to be calamitous for both the countries.

A deferential press can hardly be successful in the watchdog role it is assumed it ought to occupy in a liberal democracy. It needs to invariably adopt an anti-establishment posture in case it has to attain its objective of compelling the rulers of the day to stay on the path of rectitude and deliver the goods to the governed. The branding of any opposition to the group in power as the activities of dissidents or of mavericks or those of misguided people or reactionaries or fanatics is something that has rarely delivered positive results in the long run. Developing empathy towards the socio-historical context of the country that the press covers is a vital ingredient of a fair and unbiased reporting that the discourse of Orientalism often hinders.

According to the noted communications professor Doris Graber (*Processing the News: How People Tame the Information Tide*, 1984), the press provides to the public the day-to-day, “sense of things.” The press sets the broad limits of our thinking about the “other.” It is not necessary for readers to master the discrete detail of a news event for learning to occur. Facts presented in the media can be converted “into politically significant feelings and attitudes,” even though the facts themselves are forgotten. Her

studies have shown that this happens on a routine basis. Professor Graber concludes by saying that “general impressions, formed from media stories and other information, are likely to have a more profound impact on political thinking than the specific facts that are remembered only vaguely” (1984, p.9).

During Britain-Iran negotiations in the aftermath of the nationalization crisis, the US press followed the line of the United States government and was supportive of the Iranian case. This probably may also have had something to do with the future gains they expected they could make at the expense of the British, which had hitherto monopolized the Iranian Oil trade. This led Prime Minister Mossadeq to believe that the US was an honest broker. However, after the nationalization of the oil wells, the US press altered its policy and within two years Mossadeq’s profile began to be represented from that of a quaint nationalist to that of a near lunatic to one finally of a Communist dupe. Historian Nikkie Keddie notes, “Mossadeq was pictured increasingly but inaccurately as a dangerous fanatic, likely to deliver Iran to the Soviets. In fact he was an anti-imperialist nationalist who intended to keep Iran from being controlled by any foreign country or company” (Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, 1981).

The nationalization of *Anglo Iranian Oil Company* (AIOC) was reported in the *New York Times* of 30th April, 1951 under the headline, “Recklessness in Iran.” Michael Clark reported this in a Sunday news analysis, “Moreover Iran has this in common with the rest of Asia: A wave of nationalism has swept over it. An articulate minority thirsts for a victim through which a blow might be struck at that greater enemy, western imperialism. Here the required victim was found readymade in the form of the (British) oil company. The process was greatly accelerated by fear derived

from the activities and the pronouncements of Muslim fanatics specializing in political assassination” (*New York Times*, June 3, 1951).

An appraisal of this article, produced in an influential, mainstream, national newspaper as the *New York Times*, would clearly show that there is a total absence of any reporting of even a solitary local grievance relating to lack of Iranian national control over the wealth produced on their territory. To the journalist, just the issue of nationalization of the *Anglo Iranian Oil Company* seems a matter of any importance, which has been highlighted as an issue that concerns none except a minority with which Mossadeq was identified.

The US newsmagazine *Time* subsequently wrote quite irreverentially, “Once upon a time in a mountainous land between Baghdad and the Sea of Caviar, there lived a nobleman. This nobleman, after a lifetime of carping at the way the kingdom was run, became chief minister of the realm. In a few months he had the whole world hanging on his words and deeds, his jokes, his tears, his tantrums. Behind his grotesque antics lay great issues of peace or war, progress or decline, which would affect many lands far beyond his mountains” (Man of the Year, *TIME*, January 7, 1952).

Yet another US newsmagazine, *Newsweek*, wrote about Iran’s prime minister under the title headlined, “Mellow Mossy” and carried the following description of him, “Premier Mohammad Mossadegh did not faint once. He shed no tears. He acted as a normal human being” (Mellow Mossy, *Newsweek*, January 12, 1953). Thus, the mainstream American media was full of stories on Iran during the Mossadeq administration, and its constant refrain would be to poke fun at this erudite, elderly statesman of Iran, often representing his flamboyant style, his penchant for dramatics

in his communication to impress and connect with his people, to connect with them, and portraying him in a manner that in *Time's* judgment was, "by western standards an appalling caricature of a statesman" (Man of the Year, *TIME*, January 7, 1952).

. It is quite surprising that the western media made no effort to empathize or to understand, or to place whatever "antics" Mossadeq displayed. These included his bouts of weeping and conducting press conferences with the international media in attendance while being informally dressed in robes deemed unprofessional for the event. Besides this, he betrayed his lack of self control, which was evidenced in his repeated bouts of temper that likely may have been compatible in the Iranian context where public display of emotion is quite common, as in the celebration of Imam Hussein's martyrdom during Moharram.

Professor Richard Cottam (1979) is of the view that through the adoption of histrionics, Prime Minister Mossadeq could bring an element of personal leadership to Iranian nationalism. Had the US press studied Iranian history in detail, they could have certainly arrived at a better assessment of the reason as to why the Iranian masses so much appreciated the posturing that Mossadeq did, which they definitely looked upon as the self assertion of Iran in confronting the foreign forces that for years had been perceived to be interfering in the internal affairs of their country. This self assertion by the Iranian elite apparently gets manifested in the current age in the rhetorical standoff between western demands and Iranian rejection led by its President, Mahmoud Ahmedinejad.

Offering a mild criticism of the British role in the then unfolding crisis, the *Time* magazine article continued, "The Anglo-Iranian Oil Co., most of whose stock is

owned by the British government, had been paying Iran much less than the British government took from the company in taxes. The US State Department had warned Britain that Iran might explode unless it got a better deal,” but Britain couldn’t care less. Eventually, Mossadeq nationalized the nation’s oil “much to the surprise of the British.” Therefore in consequence, in the estimation of the *Time* magazine, (1) the West lost access to Iran’s oil, (2) The Iranian government lost the oil payments, (3) this loss stopped all hope of economic progress for the country, and (4) in the ensuing chaos, the Tudeh party made great gains, (Laurence Radway, *Foreign Policy*, Fall 1980). Tudeh was the Soviet inspired communist party in Iran, and its political influence swayed largely over north Iran. However, the western governments went along with the Cold War strategy, enunciated by the US strategist George F. Kennan, of Soviet "containment," and a good case was prepared to reverse the consequences of the Mossadeq nationalization of oil wells.

Thus, *Time* magazine evolved a consensus on the above points amongst all US correspondents in the region; this consensus held even during the events of 1978 leading to the coup against Iran's Shah in February 1979. “If left to ‘work out their own destiny’ without help,” wrote *Time*, “the countries of the Middle East will disintegrate. The living standard will drop and political life become even more chaotic.” Next it adopted a very self-assured, paternalistic, and ominous tone and asserted, “Left to themselves, these countries will reach the point where they will welcome communism” (Man of the Year, *TIME*, January 7, 1952).

The signs of Orientalism in the previous statement can be hardly missed. An Orientalist assertion is made here, especially motivated by a desire to “contain”

communism from getting established in Iran, which was a declared western objective led by the US throughout the Cold War era. Presumably, Iran was being portrayed as a country incapable of self-rule and being in desperate need of a guardian nation state outsourced in the West. Iran was also seen as a particularly vulnerable prey to the lurking communist menace, hence, beseeching western patronage to emancipate itself from its pitiable condition while ensuring that it did not fall prey to the "rogue" communists. And of course, it was the United States, although it would never have wanted to, that had to willy-nilly respond to its call of conscience and fill the "power vacuum" generated in the aftermath of the withdrawal of the British military forces from the territory east of the Suez after World War II.

Thus, it is clear from this assessment of the mainstream US press that it wished to picture Iran as a quite backward place that was under the malevolent influence of a demagogue prime minister who, despite his western education, became a thorn in the British flesh because of his Anglophobia. He was seen as someone who was hell bent upon taking certain wicked steps that were certain to lead to the ruination of his country, which the West ultimately had to come forward and save.

It is of crucial importance to pause and to decipher as to who is judging whom and with what intent, and the presence of an Orientalist discourse seems palpable. What may have been the cause of such negative disposition towards Iranians appeared to be a secondary subject for examination by the American press. In the five page write up on the "Man of the Year" story, the facts unpleasant to the West were suppressed. The role of the British in Iranian oil was covered in just a small paragraph. The fact of hatred towards Britain in the entire Middle East was acknowledged indeed as shown in

the assertion that “the British position in the whole area is hopeless.” The entire picture could have taken a different turn if the full facts were known and reported to the public: that the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company was paying to Iran royalties fixed to it under a 1933 agreement. The AIOC had been resisting and had refused to countenance any increase in this royalty despite Iranian entreaties to carry out an upward revision, more so in the light of the fact that the oil prices and the profits accruing to the AIOC had trebled since the signing of the accord. Not just this, the AIOC, despite bearing the title whose components were Anglo and Iranian, never considered including Iranians to have a say in the appointment of managers to the company or to allow them the right to look into the account books. To top it all, the “Iranian nation had to pay to the AIOC a rate without receiving any discount on the oil that was produced on its territory, for its domestic consumption” (Keddie, 1981, p.134). It was estimated that the AIOC from 1945 to 1950 posted a net profit of 250 million pounds, after high British taxes had been deducted, along with royalties and “exaggerated depreciation figures.” Royalties paid to Iran for the same period amounted to 90 million pounds, Keddie reports. It is extremely hard to find a press publication during this period that chose to highlight the British role and position in this battle of nerves getting played out between Iranian nationalism and Britain’s commercial interests. Thereafter, it began to be projected that the economic problems that Iran was facing were primarily connected to the nationalization of its oil. Due to this nationalization, the West had lost access to the oil of Iran, and by the same logic, Iran had lost its oil revenue. This argument is something that may be seen for what it was, an untruth being spread by western business interests, who had sabotaged any further sales of Iranian oil through its unofficial boycott in the

world market pursuant to a campaign run by the AIOC. However, Nikkie Keddie informs us that the truth is that there was an oil glut in the international market at the time, which when compounded with the boycott and enforcement via British gunboat diplomacy, ensured that the economy of Iran got stressed leading to political unrest within (Keddie, 1981). It is not hard to imagine that through such steps a weaker Iran was being made to see “reason,” and abide by the dictates of the strong and the dominant. Retaliating further, Britain restricted Iran’s trade in several areas and set unfavorable terms for converting Iranian bank deposits in England (Keddie, 1981). The United States also played its supporting role in exacerbating the crisis for the Mossadeq regime by renegeing on an earlier commitment to offer loan to the government of Iran, something that was implicitly promised earlier. (Keddie, 1981).

The US press depicted its government as an “honest broker” (*New York Times*, December 9, 1952), which treaded a very difficult political and economic situation caused by the nationalization decision, where Britain was being portrayed as the victim and Iran projected as an irrational state. The approach that the US press adopted was made clear in an editorial praising Secretary of State Dean Acheson’s appeal to Mossadeq and the Majles (Iranian Parliament) to accept a joint proposal, made by President Truman and Prime Minister Churchill, for the settlement of the dispute. Acheson’s, “unprecedented public appeal” was an “effort to save Iran from national suicide”. However, in contrast with this media inference is a view projected by the noted Iran scholar, Nikki Keddie, “The British and Americans involved were unwilling to allow Iranians really to control their own oil, while the Mossadeq government would not settle for less” (Keddie,1981, p.138).

To contend with the intransigence and the sustained fight for national independence in foreign policy decision making by Iran, the western press continued systematically to denigrate Mossadeq and his government and began attacks on his person by raising the issue of his ambition, the possibility of his becoming a dictator, and creating the myth of a communist takeover in the event of continuation of Mossadeq at the helm of government in Iran.

Another revealing editorial appeared in the *New York Times* concerning the oil dispute, which stated that, “having established himself as the nominal dictator of Iran, Premier Mossadeq has formally submitted to the British government another offer to negotiate a settlement of the oil dispute that brought him to power and his country to bankruptcy and mob rule,” and added this qualification to the nature of Mossadeq’s power, “First of all, he is a dictator only by proxy from a murderous mob” (*New York Times*, August 9, 1952).

In 1953, the events took a chaotic and violent turn within Iran. The right wing in Iranian polity was baying for Mossadeq’s blood, and the external economic and political forces were constantly indulging and encouraging any group that were inimical to premier Mossadeq and his government. In response to this, Mossadeq increasingly took recourse to authoritarian practices to somehow control the situation and not allow it to deteriorate. In the days preceding the coup, when shah Mohammed Reza fled Iran and Mossadeq appeared to have prevailed, the *New York Times* in its editorial opined, “In a confused and so far bloodless revolt, premier Mossadeq appears to have made himself the absolute dictator of Iran, who, in the Persian tradition, may be reaching for the throne itself” (*New York Times*, August 17, 1953).

Another alarmist view was expressed at this time by the *Washington Post*, “The shah has been thrown out by a strong man whose fanaticism has led him into the embrace of the communists. Precisely what will happen now no one can tell, but it is fairly certain that the only possible beneficiary of Dr Mossadeq’s grab of complete power will be the communist Tudeh Party and its mentor---Russia” (*Washington Post*, August 18, 1953). Likewise, an editorial in *Wall Street Journal* headlined, “Rise of a Dictator” while comparing Mossadeq’s career with the careers of Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, Peron, and Huey Long, stated, “dictators come in various sizes and shapes, but they all come the same way. They come like Mossadeq by emotional appeals to their countrymen and their designs are always the same: A search for complete power” (*Wall Street Journal*, August 19, 1953).

Nobody of course denies that in order to survive in power, Mossadeq did resort to extra constitutional steps. Scholar Richard Cottam says, “Mossadeq, who had been devoted to liberal democracy now accepted dictatorial leadership and even staged a typically totalitarian plebiscite in which over 99 percent of the people voted as he wished” (Cottam, 1979, p.224). As against this, William A. Dorman and Mansour Farhang have expressed disagreement over the use of the word "totalitarian" as employed by Professor Cottam, but acknowledge that at least, “Cottam makes his claim after carefully presenting the situation in which Mossadeq found himself and his country in the summer of 1953. This, the press utterly failed to do” (1987, p.43).

The American press ostensibly acted in an Orientalist way. Evaluating the behavior of Mossadeq in the aftermath of his letter to President Eisenhower, making a plea for economic aid in May 1953 (which eventually got rejected by the US

administration), William Dorman and Mansour Farhang pointedly remind us to notice “How his behavior itself was interpreted by the press. Aside from the plebiscite, his style of rule was far more democratic than anything that Iran had known. He did not suppress the press during his term, nor did he order the arrests of opponents. He organized no secret police, and his tenure did not give rise to torture. Yet the American press was quick to label him a ‘dictator,’ which it never did with the shah, whose regime for nearly a quarter of a century systematically engaged in all of the practices mentioned above” (1987, pp 43-44).

Therefore, it is plausible to surmise that what matters are not the facts, but how the facts are represented by the strong. Orientalism is practiced exactly in this fashion. It is therefore “no exaggeration to say that the *Times* demonstrated more concern for Iran’s constitutional system during the single month of August 1953, than it would during the following quarter of a century” (Dorman and Farhang, 1987). At the same time, the media was willing to follow the line of the US administration on the role of communism and the possibility of a Soviet takeover in Iran in line with the global policies of the Cold War.

The impact of the Cold War thinking seems very evident in guiding the creation of negative images of Iran during this time in the writings of the American press. *Newsweek* reported thus, “The situation is such that the West may at any instant face the choice of occupying south Iran or watching the entire country go communist by default. If Iran goes, then Pakistan-where the Reds have done a remarkable job of infiltration-would probably be next. This would isolate India, probably topple the rest of the Middle East within months, and would mean that the West would have to make

the terrible decision whether to begin fighting a war or accept the loss of the Cold War” (*Newsweek*, World’s Eyes on Tehran, March 9, 1953). Clifton Daniel stood steadfast in support of this position, “Standing in the shadows, watching the present struggle between the rival leaders of the Iranian nationalist movement, there is a sinister and enigmatic force, Iran’s Tudeh (Communist) party” (*New York Times*, January 22, 1953).

It is quite remarkable to study how the American press continued to build up the image of the shah, while contrastingly it denigrated Mossadeq and depicted him as the cause of his own downfall. However, the biased nature of such press reporting got exposed when Kermit Roosevelt, the author of the CIA sponsored coup, wrote a book published in 1979, where he admitted to the role that the CIA and he himself played in the ouster of Mossadeq (Kermit Roosevelt, *Countercoup: The Struggle for the Control of Iran*, 1979).

The mainstream American press coverage devoted to Iran affairs portrayed the coup against Mossadeq as a wholly internal matter brought about by widespread dissatisfaction with the ineptitude of Mossadeq. Not even the slightest hint of suspicion appeared in the media about any direct US involvement. *Newsweek* headlined its story, “Shah Returns in Triumph as Army Kicks out Mossadeq” (*Newsweek*, August 31, 1953). The *New York Times*, in a front page article headlined, “Shah Instituted Iranian Reforms,” and went on to inform its readers as to how the young monarch Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was so very different from his father Reza Shah, in that he had instituted wide ranging economic reforms much before the crisis had even begun (*New York Times*, August 21, 1953).

This narrative is in complete contrast to Nikkie Keddie's well-acknowledged scholarship on the subject. She writes, "Mossadeq's defense of Iran's independence, his defiance of AIOC, his charisma, and his overthrow with American and British support helped make him an enduring national hero. Oppositionists of the most varying views---Marxists, leftists, liberals, and rightists, both secular and religious---invoked his name and example, cherished his picture, and found appropriate quotations from him to support their views. These groups and Mossadeq were united in their continued desire to lessen foreign control and influence and increase Iran's independence" (Keddie, 2003).

This assessment from one of the most acknowledged authors on Iran shows that a biased nature of press reporting and a motivated representation of historical events in Iran (in the hope of denigrating that which was good), could still lead to unintended consequences. The mainstream American press wrote with much fondness for the shah, while simultaneously, spitefully depicting Iran's enduring nationalist hero, Mossadeq, but it still failed in boosting the image of the shah in the eyes of his compatriots, where it probably mattered the most.

Once the shah returned from abroad to rule Iran, he signed fresh agreements with the US, which in turn began to assist him towards modernization of Iran, and this prolonged exercise subsequently came to be called the "White Revolution." William A. Dorman and Mansour Farhang (1987) refer to this deal and write, "Whatever the merits of the oil agreement, there was little serious debate allowed within Iran about its ramification, which ought not to be surprising, given the new regime's vigorous campaign to crush the remnants of opposition. The campaign was carried out in the

name of anti-communism, but its scope was large enough to sweep away any and all opponents of the regime as well.

Going beyond this, the regime moved quickly to override the intent of the 1906-07 constitution "which provided for a freely elected Majles, a figurehead monarch, and significantly, freedom of speech and the press" (Dorman and Farhang, 1987). It seems quite amazing that contrasted with the previous Mossadeq regime, which was denied any economic aid for Iran by the US, now both the aid as well as favorable reporting in the US press became the norm. However, American scholar Douglas Little informs, "Nowhere in the Middle East did the United States push more consistently for reform and modernization after 1945 than in Iran, and nowhere did America fail more spectacularly" (Douglas Little, *American Orientalism*, 2002).

Nikkie Keddie informs us, "Beginning in the 1950s and increasingly in the next two decades, the shah showed a growing interest in modernizing Iran's economy and society and in making the country western in character and militarily strong. In this he followed his father's precedent, but whereas Reza Shah, with fewer economic resources and much lower oil income, had minimized economic dependence on the West in his modernization program, Mohammad Reza greatly increased it" (Keddie, 2003). Referring to the young shah's modernizing program she continues, "This was partly owing to an emphasis common in the Third World but here carried to extremes, on big showy projects, super sophisticated and expensive weapons, and fancy consumer goods, all of which put Iran in a position of long term dependence on western countries, especially the United States and were profitable to American companies" (Keddie, 2003). The obvious conclusion that could be drawn here is that

US business organizations and the western press, especially the American press, were on the same wavelength in so far as Iran-American political relations were concerned. There existed no issues of a certain "otherness", since the "other" was much aligned to the causes of the dominant power.

The US press persisted with creating assumptions about Iran that eventually got exposed only during the 1978 revolution in Iran. William H. Stringer, The Washington bureau chief of *Christian Science Monitor*, wrote about the Mossadeq saga, "The oil of Iran was snatched from Soviet hands, and Iran itself was snatched from bankruptcy and chaos, in the nick of time. The history of the oil settlement ended a titanic three year old dispute between Iran and the Anglo Iranian Oil Company in which were intermixed the gyrations of former premier Mohammed Mossadeq, the Communist Tudeh Party, and grim Soviet intrigue. It is now the estimate of responsible officials that premier Mossadeq's regime was so infiltrated with the communists at the time it was overthrown by Gen. Fazlullah Zahedi, that if it had lasted two weeks more the communists would have seized control of the Government of Iran. It was a close shave" (Stringer, *Christian Science Monitor*, August 5, 1954). It seems that right in the nick of time, Iran was saved for the Western interests in the proxy game being played out between the Cold War protagonists.

Thus, the shah was constantly depicted as an interested and concerned onlooker rather than the central actor on the political stage. "The dominant journalistic frame was of a principled ruler whose good intentions were to his dismay, too often being thwarted by venal underlings" (Dorman and Farhang, 1987). The manufactured myths about public reverence for the shah actually lasted until 1978, after which it got blown

apart. The feeling of the times is represented by the *New York Times*, “Iranians regarded the shah with a semi-religious veneration” (*New York Times*, July 28, 1954). The *New York Times* in 1956 carried a similar news analysis on Iran which stated, “Iran is the calmest country in the troubled Middle East today. Partly responsible for this is a highly successful campaign against subversive elements. The pro-Soviet Tudeh party was a real menace a few years ago, even after it had been officially banned and driven underground” (*New York Times*, December 2, 1956). By 1960, however, according to Amin Saikal, Iran had become one of the largest non-NATO recipients of American foreign aid, and some nine hundred American economic and technical experts were at work in Iran. Similarly, Iran by the early 1960s had become the largest non-NATO recipient of military aid, having received 535.4 million US Dollars from 1953 to 1963 (Amin Saikal, 1980, pp. 51-56). The close economic and political engagement between the two countries is fairly obvious in this phase of their relationship.

The first major domestic political challenge to his rule came for the shah in 1960 and redefined his relationship with the United States. The 1960 elections to the Majles were rigged and consequently led to nationwide protests. Nikkie Keddie writes, “Shah responded to the crisis and to popular discontent by introducing partial reforms which were far from meeting the demands raised by opposition groups and encouraged them to voice their demands more openly. The crisis of 1960-63 was less serious than that of 1977-79 however, and the shah was able to restore his autocratic power by beefing up his security forces, shooting demonstrators, arresting large numbers in the

religious and nationalist opposition, and putting forth a program of reform that for a time appeared to have substance (Keddie, 2003).

Reporting on the event, Dorman and Farhang write that the “Kennedy administration was concerned about continued strife, political instability, and economic difficulty in Iran, and had made it clear to the shah that Iran’s economic progress, not a continued military buildup, was what Washington considered most important” (Dorman and Farhang, 1987, p.75). As Amin Saikal says, “Kennedy was so worried about the need for socio-economic reform that he set up a special task force to deal with the problem” (Amin Saikal, 1980, pp.75-76). Worried and lamenting, *Time* magazine went on to report thus about the situation, “Should the shah lose his fight for his dynasty and his nation, the Soviets would at last be free to dominate the Middle East” (*Time*, September 12, 1960).

Dorman and Farhang record, “Evidence that became available in 1984 revealed that several prominent members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1961 had warned the administration in closed sessions that the shah was in far deeper trouble than was ever publicly acknowledged (Dorman and Farhang, 1987, p.80). Democratic Senator Frank Church of Idaho said of the shah, “All I know about history says he is not long for this world, nor his system. And when he goes down, boom, we go with him” (*Washington Post*, December 23, 1984). The American press largely ignored such prophetic remarks in its news coverage. To the peril of everybody concerned of course.

The shah of Iran inaugurated the White Revolution in 1963. Dorman and Farhang report, "At its core the White Revolution was an effort to blunt challenges to

the shah's move towards absolute power through a program of pseudo-development. The plan was intended to seduce at once the Iranian people, American policy makers, and world opinion; it proved exceedingly successful at its latter two tasks, if not the former one" (1987,p. 82)

Hamid Dabashi intervenes, "Carved on the collective memory of an entire nation, the Pahlavi monarchy was the summation of two words: fear and ecstasy---fear of the tyranny that ruled a people with systemic mendacity, and the ecstasy of dreaming what was possible beyond it" (2007, p.108).

The key aspects of this White Revolution were (a) land reforms that were actually begun since 1962 itself, (b) the sale of state owned factories to finance land reforms, (c) initiation of a plan under which workers were to be offered 20% of the net profits from the remaining government owned factories, (d) to prevent rigging, a revised electoral reform law was instituted, (e) nationalization of all forests, (f) a national service corps for education in the rural areas, and (g) women's suffrage. The mainstream American media was now ecstatic about all these reforms. The *New York Times* was most effusive in its praise and wrote, "The shah of Iran is rapidly altering his country's political and economic life with a reform program of revolutionary proportions," further stating that the revolution centered on the "distribution of nearly all Iranian farmlands and abolition of peasant-serf contracts," it would also include, "major political reforms," and a "sweeping" literacy campaign (*New York Times*, January 23, 1963). A *New York Times* editorial stated, "after years of criticism that reforms were at best superficial and at worst non-existent, the shah today is personally pushing through social and economic change as drastic as any attempted by a non-

revolutionary regime anywhere in Asia” (*New York Times*, February 7, 1963). The *Christian Science Monitor* upheld a similar view, “It is hard for people in an economically advanced country to comprehend the changes that are taking place in Iran. There probably is some bungling and some harshness in certain phases of the transformation that is going on under [the shah], but on the whole the effect is one of progress for most of the 21,000,000 people in the land that history knew as Persia,” and expressed the hope that the glories of a new Iran would be shared by all its people (*Christian Science Monitor*, March 4, 1963). It is hard to deny the congruence of political and economic interests between the ruling elite within the two countries, one western and the other eastern.

Not every member of the press fraternity was as optimistic or exuberant though, and one did occasionally come across a different viewpoint. In a radical departure from the pattern established by the mainstream US press, an editorial in the newspaper *Nation*, however, reported the situation differently by stating, “The truth is, that among all the dictatorial regimes shored up by the United States the shah’s is the most vicious. His public relations men project an image of the shah as a progressive, ‘Western’ monarch. His progressivism is shown by a typical Iranian budget which allows nearly 12 billion Rials for the armed forces, 1 billion for the ministry of health and 0.6 billion for the universities. As a clincher, the shah’s land reforms are cited. The fact is that after all the reforming, 60 per cent of the farmers own no land at all” (*Nation*, June 8, 1964).

However, one needs to also keep in mind as to how much a small left oriented newspaper with a limited public reach could really dent the massive flood of opinion

being created in the West as well as within Iran through the major newspapers and periodicals published in the US. On the issue of the national plebiscite, which the shah called just after he announced his reform plan to publicize and seek legitimacy for his modernization program, the US press in January 1963 again gave widespread approving coverage of the vote, with the *Associated Press* describing it as a "triumph for the shah and his revolution from the throne," suggesting further that the revolution was one in "which Iran's ruler has aligned himself directly with workers and peasants against conservatives and traditionalists" (*New York Times*, January 28, 1963).

Iran Scholar Richard W. Cottam, (1979) recommends to us to compare the coverage in the US press of the plebiscite conducted by the shah in 1963 to the US press coverage of a similar plebiscite undertaken ten years earlier by prime minister Mossadeq and notice the difference, if any, in the attitude of the US press towards each of the instances. Through this comparison one can estimate the manner in which knowledge on Iran was being produced in the mainstream American media, which allowed itself to be deployed in furthering the goals of the American foreign policy.

Cottam (1979) compares the remarks carried in the *New York Times* editorial after the Mossadeq plebiscite with the ones coming in the wake of the subsequent shah plebiscite. The *New York Times* (August 15, 1953) wrote, "We thought of (Dr Mossadeq) as a sincere, well meaning, patriotic Iranian who had a different point of view. We now know that he is a power-hungry, personally ambitious, ruthless demagogue who is trampling upon the liberties of this own people."

Exactly a decade later in an editorial, *New York Times* reported, (June 10, 1963) on the shah ordered plebiscite, "The great mass of the Iranian people are doubtless

behind the shah in his bold new reform efforts. The national plebiscite he called early this year gave emphatic evidence of this.” The media reports in the US in these two distinct political phases leave one in no doubt that there was something unusual in such reporting, something that appeared to be not entirely above board. The elections to the Majles were conducted soon after, and the US press continued to build up the shah’s image, highlighting the first ever elections with provision for adult suffrage for women but not bothering to report as to what it meant in a traditional Asian country where political consciousness and the literacy rate of the population was abysmally low, and even more so in the case of the Iranian women.

Yet the *Times* wrote, “The shah of Iran and his government have won an overwhelming and well deserved victory in the national elections for a Majles or parliament. This time the election was carefully prepared, and while it would not qualify as free and democratic by United States standards, it was doubtless the fairest and most representative election Iran has ever had” (*New York Times*, September 20, 1963). The exultation of the US media on the political exercise undertaken by the shah regime is clear in its endorsement.

In the opinion of Dorman and Farhang, “The journalistic distortion resulted in large part from the failure to understand that what the shah was engaged in was not progressive reform but instead an attempt to graft bits and pieces of advanced industrial capitalism onto a pre-industrial society, while at the same time preserving his royal dictatorship” (1987, p.94). There was hardly any evidence of an attempt at structural reformation at this time. The US press attempted its utmost to portray the shah as a modernizer, and helped to blunt some of the censure of his government for its

application of the most repressive measures against its political opponents. As Richard Cottam writes, “It was a clever ploy by the shah in that his liberal reform measures distracted the American press from the political repression” (1979, pp. 306-7).

Thus, by the summer of 1963, various elements of the Iranian society along with the elements of the clergy, doubtless with vested interests, moved against the shah. The reforms of the shah had a nationalist character, but simultaneously these were intended to be brought about by a repressive state that kept the progressive sections of the society from commending it. Now, the religious elements took the lead against the shah since the major secular and nationalist forces had been quite successfully suppressed by the shah regime and were incapable of mounting any organized protest. Ayatollah Khomeini was the most prominent cleric who was implacably opposed to the shah, and the shah organized a secret service called SAVAK to deal with the political opponents of his regime. Nikkie Keddie (2003) reports,

The religious opposition movement continued after June 1963. Khomeini was released from arrest in August 1963 and SAVAK issued a statement saying agreement had been reached with him and the other leading oppositional ayatollahs that they would stop interfering in politics. But Khomeini asked his followers to boycott the parliamentary elections of October 1963, and was again arrested and held until May 1964. In October 1964, the Majles passed, with an unusual number of negative votes and speeches, a bill to grant diplomatic immunity to American military personnel and advisers. Shortly afterwards, the Majles agreed to a 200 million dollar loan from the United States for purchase of military equipment. (2003)

What is vividly noticeable here is the obvious quid pro quo nature of engagement between the Iranian bestowal of diplomatic immunity upon the American personnel in Iran on the one hand and the pecuniary gains that the shah regime made ostensibly in the interest of Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini was immediately exiled to Turkey and then to Iraq after his trenchant criticism of the capitulatory nature of the bill and its apparent linkage to the loan received by the shah. While in exile in Iraq, Khomeini built up a movement against the shah through his speeches recorded in audio cassettes and circulated throughout Iran, until he was deported yet again from Iraq to France in 1978 (2003).

However, according to the assumptions it held about Iran, the US press yet again led by the *New York Times* began to present as though there were no options available to the shah except to commit brutality upon its citizens. Hence, it reported that “The shah appears to have surmounted another crisis in his drive to reform and develop the semi-feudal kingdom of Iran. Violent rioting and a plot to overthrow his government have been suppressed. Back of the new troubles are reactionary Moslem mullahs and landlords, angered at the prospective loss of their lands as a result of the shah’s new land redistribution program. The military forces however, have remained loyal to the shah and have effectively smashed outbreaks in Tehran, Shiraz and other cities.” This reflected a “new evidence” of the shah’s “courage and determination in personally directing the suppression of this latest upsurge of opposition,” and “he will have continuing need of these qualities,” it further added (*New York Times*, June 10, 1963).

The US press thus appeared to be either not capable of, or unwilling to follow the realities of the political culture of Iran. There existed a strong need for the press to have evolved a way to develop empathy and understanding of the political views of not just the Iranian elite, but also of the common masses of Iran who, in the absence of a secular political vehicle, had no option but to channelize their political views through religious groups. These religious formations in turn channelized the public anger against the shah's dictatorial regime, which routinely ignored these masses. The shah's government stayed unmindful of the fact that the nation's priorities actually were in educating its citizens and providing them with reasonable healthcare, choosing instead to squander its borrowed dollars on strengthening the royal army through acquisitions of the latest and most expensive gizmos available in the West.

Dorman and Farhang state, "The press tended to focus on the 'religious' dimension of the protest without explaining its context and tended to avoid mention of those groups whose motives were political rather than religious" (1987, p. 98). The role of the secular nationalist opposition within Iran, its university student body, as well as the overseas Iranian students' role was rarely taken into account in such reportage in the US media (1987).

Thus, the anti-tyranny protests came to be presented as synonymous with anti-modernity during the period of the 1960s. There was a constant refrain in the US press that the shah was a modernizer interested in carrying out land reforms, which the Iranian masses (unfortunately led by the Ulema and the Bazaris, the religious leaders and the mercantile classes respectively), fearful of losing their privileges in case modernization went through, tried to subvert it by exploiting the sentiments of the

gullible masses. In consequence, the shah of Iran appeared to be the force most deserving of western, especially American, support in the national politics of Iran.

However, it so turned out that owing to the Arab oil boycott in the wake of the Arab-Israel war of 1973, it was the shah himself who profited from it the most by leading the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) price hike by 70%. The shah reportedly also stated that the industrial world, “Will have to realize that the end of the era of their terrific progress and even more terrific income and wealth based on cheap oil is finished” (Amin Saikal, 1980, p.128).

A spurt in conspicuous consumption within Iran, accompanied with the arrogance of the shah, emerging on the back of the American consumers of outrageously high priced gulf oil, made the US public and the press begin to notice Iran in a rather unfavorable light. The "otherness" of Iran in relation to the West now began to be realized and emerged to the fore in US media representations. These quadrupled oil profits were utilized by the shah regime to buy highly sophisticated military hardware from the Nixon administration. Hence, booming oil revenues were utilized not to the advantage of the impoverished millions of Iran or to the development of the social sector, but to whet the appetite of the shah's military, which was its key backer within Iran. The military-industrial complex in the United States, worried after the slump in demand after the Vietnam war, was naturally pleased to sell advanced weapon systems to the shah to maintain profitability (*New York Times*, February 22, 1973). This commercial factor led the mainstream US press to suddenly portray the image of the shah as someone who was helping to bail out the American arms industry.

The fact exists that the situation was being constantly governed by the demands of the elite in both the countries, even as there was social unrest brewing underneath the surface resulting from the grossly unfulfilled aspirations of the masses in Iran. However, some change began to be noticed around this time in the popular American press. Drew Middleton noted in *New York Times*, “Iran’s development into the primary military power between Israel and India has reached a point at which there are misgivings in the United States and in Western European governments” (*New York Times*, July 22, 1973). These misgivings were that there could emerge an arms race between India and Iran. However, he tempered this view by upholding the claim of the shah that such an armament program by the Iranian regime was conducive and congruent to US interests in that it provided, “protection of oil shipments from the Persian Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz to Japan, Western Europe, and the United States; insurance against the dissolution of Pakistan; and the deployment of military forces strong enough to deter ‘Soviet inspired adventures in the Persian Gulf by Iraq’” (*New York Times*, July 22, 1973).

Another example of the fawning attitude of the US press towards the shah was evidenced in an editorial published in *New York Times*, where one learnt that the shah was an admirable ruler given, “the tradition from which he springs and the climate in which he operates,” and that his decade long White Revolution had “gone a long way toward transforming the feudal Iranian society and building a viable economy that will not remain dependent on oil revenues,” while cautioning that the shah’s “emerging ambitions for Iranian hegemony in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean areas might turn

out to be dangerous by diverting spending from domestic development and by heightening tension with apprehensive neighbors” (*New York Times*, July 24, 1973).

However, Dorman and Farhang report, “As concern increased among power elites outside the White House about the extent of the buildup, the tone of press coverage and editorial opinion changed” (Dorman and Farhang, 1987). Introduction of a bill in early 1975 in the House by Representative Les Aspin, blocking the sale of six destroyers to Iran in contrast to the then standard US policy of allowing the shah to have every military equipment he wanted, ran counter to the practice so far and got reported in the *New York Times* where it was stated that the action came at “a time of mounting criticism of the build up in the military sales to the Middle-East” (*New York Times*, February 10, 1975).

Apparently, the foreign policy priorities of the United States government changed after the delivery of the oil shock and the simultaneous increase in the shah’s arrogance. These priorities got reflected in the American press commentaries about Iran and its leadership. The *Washington Post* emerged as the leading American daily in making such fresh assertions and took the US administration to task over a “mindless sale of arms” in the Persian Gulf (*Washington Post*, January 25, 1975). After a year there appeared another editorial warning in the same newspaper about a “network of commitments that are becoming steadily more dangerous and onerous” and of a mindless American policy of supplying our most advanced military technology to Iran which is likely to get both countries into trouble” (*Washington Post*, February 13, 1976). Later that year the same newspaper criticized the administration of arming Iran

as “secretive” and conducting a “high handed and irresponsible statecraft” (*Washington Post*, August 5, 1976).

By the mid-1970s, there were unmistakable indications of an Iran that increasingly appeared to be having a mind of its own and declaring a certain independence in foreign policy, having developed economic muscle and military power, which now began to be realized by a worrisome American press. As Dorman and Farhang have argued, “While the shah and his arms purchases came in for journalistic criticism, by far the most attention was paid to the economic and developmental aspects of what by 1973 was being labeled the new Persian empire. It is obvious that the attitude change in the US press towards an assertive Iran under an arrogant shah was consequent to the exponential oil price rise. This increase in press interest was largely because of the effects of the oil price increase” (1987, p.135). Naturally, the economic impact of the OPEC oil price hike had begun to hurt the US government whose critical attitude towards the shah government began to be adopted by the mainstream US press. The *New York Times* now wrote, “Iran, where civilization flourished while Europe was barbarian, is today a country that cannot feed itself. The shah promises greatness, but 70 percent of the people are illiterate and 60 percent live at subsistence levels” (*New York Times*, June 3, 1974).

At this time, some prominent scholars too began to warn of the imminent catastrophe that was likely to visit Iran. Professor Marvin Zonis, of the University of Chicago in a testimony to a congressional hearing argued that the reports of material prosperity in Iran are terribly misleading. He stated that, “One can visit the Hilton, La Residence, the Key Club, the Darband, the Imperial Country Club, or one of the

staggeringly large number of boutiques in Tehran and not realize he is in one of the poorest nations in the world” (Barry Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran*, 1980).

Professor Richard Cottam, in his testimony, showed how social progress was blocked by bureaucratic red tape, corruption, and the shah’s unwillingness to share power. He stated before a congressional committee, “I know of no more successful public relations operation than the Iranian government’s,” yet he argued that a close look behind the scenes would reveal “scandals that would make Watergate look like nothing” (Rubin, 1980). This acknowledgement of fiscal profligacy and corruption by the Iranian government explicates the socio-political reality of Iran. It also presents a critique of the usual fawning attitude of the US press in deference to the shah that invariably ignored its brutality and high handed treatment of political dissent while criticizing it in other countries such as the Soviet Union and South Africa.

Thus, steps undertaken to bring about forced modernization within Iran by the shah while simultaneously denying avenues of participatory democracy ended up producing much less stability in the country. By rejecting the demands raised by the general public under the assumption that they lacked capability for worthwhile political activity, which clearly is an Orientalist assumption, negative outcomes couldn't be avoided. If the press persisted in its viewpoint and continued to believe that the elite alone in non-western societies had the capability to bring about socio-economic change, or that participatory politics were a characteristic that exclusively suited the West, then it was bound to arrive at the wrong conclusions. Unfortunately the press ignored the evidence found elsewhere that a country doesn't have to be rich and/or

modernizing in order to be stable. Or, to put it in another way, richness and modernity alone don't guarantee stability.

Therefore, a general formula of modernization which will invariably lead to stability doesn't exist in the past experience in Iran. It doesn't exist there even today during the rule of the Islamic regime, and the Iranians are actually struggling to find ways to ensure stability, both economic and political. However, the issue of stability becomes even more challenging when the modernization being attempted is economic in nature and is being raised within an existing feudal order. Professor Samuel Huntington, an ideological contestant to Edward Said, has argued that a key aspect of modernization is the demand raised by publics for their increased participation in politics. Huntington writes, "Revolution is thus an aspect of modernization. It is not something which can occur in any type of society at any period in its history. It is not a universal category but rather an historically limited phenomena. It will not occur in highly traditional societies with very low levels of social and economic complexity. Nor will it occur in highly modern societies which have experienced some social and economic development and where the processes of political modernization and political development have lagged behind the processes of social and economic change" (Samuel P. Huntington, "Revolution and Political Order" in *Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative, and Historical Studies*, Jack A. Goldstone, ed., New York, 1986, pp.39-40).

Therefore, it is apparent that no amount of foreign encouragement by itself can ever be effective in building up the image of a regime that does not address the roots of its national socio-economic development. The entire saga of Mossadeq and the shah of

Iran from the 1950s onwards, divergently mediated by the US press and administration, utterly failed to steer the course of events within Iran in a manner desired by the West. It brought avoidable disrepute to the imperial western power and harmed the interests of the governments and the publics involved. It also established the truth that any motivated and stereotypical representation of the weaker East by the stronger West in an Orientalist fashion must and most plausibly expect a determined resistance by those being represented. How and why this popular resistance to the Orientalist representation of Iran in the American press emerged, forms the subject of the subsequent chapter.

The Orientalist policy of ignoring the Shah's violation of human rights while disparaging Mossadeq on similar grounds a decade ago, or reporting the same occurrences with vehemence in the case of the USSR, or denigrating the adoption of a plebiscite to gain legitimacy by Mossadeq on the one hand and treating an identical situation being handled by the shah with kid gloves, leads one to notice the biased representation by a mainstream US press acting not as a watchdog but merely following the line of the US administration. Referring to Mossadeq as a dictator while ignoring the shah's worse misdeeds by always avoiding the use of the term dictator, the US press in no way had crowned itself with glory. It was Orientalism, practiced by a mightier state against a weaker one, by remaining engaged in the production of "knowledge" about the weak by stereotyping it, its personnel, and politics especially during the Mossadeq era.

CHAPTER THREE: THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION – AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI

The entire crisis episode in Iran during premier Mossadeq's rule and its resolution by the western governments by application of rules of political realism was observed by a silent and confused public within Iran. In this phase, the US mainstream press helped to build up a strong case in favor of the shah and extolled his virtues. It simultaneously denigrated the governance and the personal values of the prime minister. The situation on the ground was not hidden from the Iranian public for too long. Consequently, when the manufactured truth regarding the unceremonious ouster of the prime minister and the perfidy involved in bringing back the shah became well known, and subsequently when the shah, due to his unpopular actions and inaction became too unpopular, the common masses joined in protests and brought along a revolution to replace him. Having thrived on the support of a few foreign friends, a favorable foreign press, and a pampered Iranian military, the shah was quickly exposed and had to go into exile in the West.

Hamid Dabashi, an academic of Iranian origin in Columbia University and no friend of the shah, has succinctly summed up the political mood in Iran at the time of the Islamic revolution of 1979. According to Dabashi, the shah's government had been able to boost economic expansion within Iran between 1953 and 1973. Exponential increase in oil revenue after the OPEC oil price hike 1973 onwards led to income growth in urban areas for a select strata of Iranian society but was unaccompanied by

any participation in governance. Those citizens that could not reinvent themselves in the emergent economy based on urbanization and modernization ended up becoming deeply marginalized and impoverished, while the bulk of the riches were appropriated by the shah and his courtiers. Consequently, the apprehensive bazaris or traditional mercantile classes allied with the influential Iranian clergy to offset the challenges of the new economic system, which was getting increasingly hitched to the world economic arrangement, of which they had no proper experience. And last but not the least, the perennially anti-establishment, secular elite found itself marginalized due to the shrinking space for protests against the autocratic government (2007).

President Carter's Ambassador to Tehran, William Sullivan, was trying hard to put up a reformist coalition of forces that in fact envisioned a M. K. Gandhi-like role for Ayatollah Khomeini. This appeared plausible since Khomeini was at the head of the revolution, primarily as a symbol of resistance against the shah whose policies of being too close to the West allowed him to plunder the nation's oil wealth. Khomeini enjoyed the undivided support of nearly all the forces of the political spectrum, leftists, rightists, and centrists of secular as well as religious persuasion. Therefore, prior to the revolution, it was not at all evident that inevitably the religious right was going to triumph over the confederation of forces battling against the shah, who apparently was the glue that united the entire political opposition. Therefore, it would be incorrect to assume that the revolution was not a popular one or that it was brought about by some disgruntled right wing fanatics. In spite of all the mounds of available evidence, the US administration and press would not promote any such view that the shah of Iran was an unpopular monarch (2007, p.158).

“The President and his top advisors were far from concluding that the shah was doomed, and they wished to avoid at all costs the appearance or reality of abandoning a close ally,” hence they kept “directing all its efforts towards bolstering the shah and persuading him to act with more decisiveness” (Gary Sick, *All Fall Down*, 1985). Around the same period, George W. Ball, a Democrat Congressman who visited Iran right after Thanksgiving in 1978, recorded his assessment, “I reluctantly concluded that the shah was on way to a great fall, and that like Humpty Dumpty, his regime could not be put together again,” adding in his report to President Carter, “We made the shah what he has become. We nurtured his love for grandiose geopolitical schemes and we supplied him with the hardware to indulge his fancies. Once we had anointed him as protector of our nation’s interests in the Persian Gulf, we became dependent on him. Now that his regime is coming apart under the pressure of imported modernization, we have so committed ourselves as to have no ready alternative” (Ball, *The Past has Another Pattern: Memoirs*, 1982). Some prominent Americans had thus read the writing on the wall and were apprehensive regarding the outcome of the current round of disturbance within Iran.

When the shah departed Iran for exile in Egypt on January 16th 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini, his political tormentor extraordinaire, returned to Tehran in triumph and declared the United States to be the great Satan while simultaneously denouncing the shah as a vile traitor and the White Revolution as an affront to the Muslim tradition. In this manner, the background to the layout of an Islamic regime with the potential to pose a far greater threat to US interests than Mossadeq’s nationalist regime could have ever contemplated was set up. By late 1979, pro-revolution gunmen stormed the US

embassy in Tehran and took fifty two US diplomats hostage. This was a tense period during which a botched attempt was made by the Carter administration to free its diplomatic personnel in Tehran.

It is quite plausible to infer that by seizing the US embassy in Tehran, these students were in effect responding to an earlier perceived insult to their nation by the role played by the CIA in the Mossadeq affair in the early 1950s, not as much to the current issue of sanctuary that the US provided to the shah ostensibly on the humanitarian ground relating to medical treatment. Douglas Little, in his book *American Orientalism*, remarks that it was a terrible mistake for the US leadership to believe that a policy of assistance towards economic development and westernization of the recipient state would invariably create political stability in regimes loyal to the US (Little, 2004). As the National Security Council (NSC) staff member Gary Sick expressed in his memoirs, “The emergence in Iran of a coalition of non-communist, non-fanatic Islamic and pro-western moderates operating within a responsible constitutional framework was profoundly to be preferred to the virulently anti-western theocracy that ultimately assumed power” (Sick, 1985).

This destruction of mutual trust is what appears to have become the main source of rift and the consequent diplomatic row between the United States and Iran in contemporary times.

The revolution of 1979 helped to establish a hard-line Islamic regime in Iran, which was unfavorably disposed to the West and most deeply hostile to the USA. The concurrent propping up of the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein by the US administration also played a significant part in strengthening the Islamists in Iran. Emboldened by the

grant of US economic aid and transfers of dual capable technologies, Saddam Hussein invaded Iran, and to repulse that aggression, the Iranian regime went all out to crush its domestic political rivals, surmounted all internal dissent to its use of unbridled power, and over a period of time successfully entrenched itself in national governance during the subsequent eight year long war. Thus, Iranian politics was steered in a distinctly more religious, hard-line direction. It may therefore not be correct to say that the revolution was preordained to produce a theocratic Islamic state since its very beginning. Eventually, an Orientalist mode of understanding and representation by the US government led to the emergence of a complex, volatile situation in Iran and generated further challenges for the United States and its Middle Eastern allies such as Israel, as well as Saudi Arabia, particularly in the nuclear domain. Hamid Dabashi is unrelenting in his trenchant criticism,

The geopolitical circumstances of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the fall of a major US ally in the region, the spectacular success of an Islamic revolution, the global embarrassment of the US inability to rescue its diplomatic corps held hostage in Iran, the subsequent US manufacturing of two regional monsters (Saddam, and Osama bin Laden), in the larger regional context, in particular the continued Israeli occupation of Palestine-all came together to condition a major epistemic shift in the geopolitics of the region. (2007)

Dorman and Farhang conclude, “Perhaps, it is a metaphor for the twenty-five year relationship of the American press to Iran that the *New York Times* in early 1977 - just as political momentum was gaining serious momentum - closed its bureau in Tehran leaving not one American reporter stationed in the country despite the unprecedented economic and strategic relationship of the United States to Iran;”

however, “this kind of absentee journalism was hardly the only cause of the failure of the mainstream media in Iran” (1987, p.154). Edward Said agrees, “Iran continues to arouse seething passions in Americans, not only because of the deeply insulting and unlawful seizure of the Teheran embassy, which was occupied by Iranian students on November 4th 1979, but also as a result of the incredibly detailed, highly focused attention of the media to the event and Iran’s demonization for years after it” (*Covering Islam*, 1997, p.81).

In the mainstream US press, most feature writers and editorialists of this phase developed a consensus that the Iranians had committed an act of war against the United States embassy, although virtually no one simultaneously acknowledged that what the United States did to Iran by overthrowing Mossadeq in 1953 ought to have been understood as an act of war as well. Noted Iran scholar, Ali M. Ansari, writing in *Confronting Iran* says,

From the Iranian perspective, the seizure of the embassy was not an irrational act. It was justified by decades of oppression and underpinned by the mythology of 1953, and it served a particular political function. The emotive content that may have motivated the action was soon dissipated, and many Iranians simply could not relate to the profound anger the hostage crisis had caused in the United States. The Iranian perspective was that old scores had been settled and now we should all move on (2006, p.94)

Regarding the US opportunism in the wake of Iraqi invasion of Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Dabashi reports that the Iran-Iraq war provided a golden opportunity for the United States and its allies to create a buffer zone between

Iran and the rest of the Arab and Muslim world (2007, p.182). This enabled the West to ensure perpetual political dominance in the Orient. By supporting and arming Saddam Hussein while taking care to ensure that Iran also had enough arms to fight back, the doctrine of *Dual Containment* was operationalized whereby both the Iraqi dictatorship as well as the Islamic regime in Iran were kept under control. Thus, Iran was forced to stay focused on its western borders for eight long years during its war with Iraq. A similar opportunity soon arose after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979. From 1979 to 1989, the United States depended upon Saudi money to finance Afghan resistance to the Soviets and asked the Pakistan government for operational intelligence to assist them in furthering the creation of what became the Taliban, initially known as the Mojahedin, or as President Reagan referred to them on one occasion, *freedom fighters*. The staunch Sunni (Wahabi) disposition of the Afghan Taliban also made them a useful instrument for limiting the spread of the Shi'i based Iranian revolution of 1979 eastward into Muslim nations in Central Asia (2007, p.183). Therefore Dabashi says, "Thus, trapped on both its eastern and western borders, Iran saw the healthy and robust energy of its revolution turned inward and diverted to the furtherance of a repressive and corrupt theocracy. It is imperative to keep in mind that when the Iranian revolution began its momentous course it was not an Islamic revolution; it mutated into a radical Islamic movement through a long, repressive, brutal, and viciously calculated process, with the followers of Khomeini systematically destroying all their political rivals - both Islamic and secular" (2007, p.183).

The general application of cold war principles in dealing with the political systems of the third world states and the expedient recourse to realpolitik by the United

States in the post-shah Iran reduced any chance of a return to normal diplomatic relations between the two countries, besides strengthening the hardliners in what was otherwise a revolution preserving all shades of beliefs. "The systematic mutation, of a robust, cosmopolitan, effervescent, syncretic, and pluralistic revolutionary energy got channelized into the pathological Islamic republic very much mirroring what was taking place in a Jewish state to the west, the ever brewing Hindu fundamentalism to its east, and the emerging Christian empire that did everything in its power to support Arab potentates from Jordan to Morocco in their repression of any emerging revolution and their resistance to democratic changes" (Dabashi, 2007, p.183).

Therefore, in sum, it is clearly visible that through the application of cynical political stratagems by a stronger western state to arrive at positive political, and economic, outcomes merely upon the long held Orientalist assumption that the Orient can be handled or "managed" in a manner different from what is standard for western societies, with the willing co-operation and assistance of an elite from the weaker eastern state, entirely ignoring the aspirations of the masses for direct social, economic, and political, participation in the governance of their country is a recipe for outright failure. In the short term, gains may be expected, as was the case in Iran during the shah, but in the longer term, positive political outcomes are not obtainable by resorting to mere Orientalist assumptions and practices.

The mainstream US press played its part in depicting the Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini as a stern faced fanatic belonging to the medieval era and painted the shah as a modernizer in Iran, but as in the case of prime minister Mohammed Mossadeq, the popularity of Khomeini among the masses continued to

swell until his death a decade later after the revolution in 1989. Therefore, it may in all fairness be said that upholding and practicing the ideology of Orientalism may no longer be a recipe for success.

CHAPTER FOUR: POST REVOLUTIONARY IRAN – THE NEOCONS

An extensive analysis of the contribution of the mainstream US press towards the Orientalist discourse through an assessment of its reports during the Mossadeq-Shah era aided in understanding its complicity whether by accident or by design. Another useful assessment of a major political issue is the diplomatic landscape between the USA and Iran, that pivoted around the uranium enrichment conducted by the Islamic Republic of Iran and the US opposition to it. The West suspected and accused Iran, a Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) signatory and a declared non-nuclear weapon state, of harboring the intention of developing nuclear weapons and urged it and raised demands to suspend uranium enrichment, open up its facilities to international inspection, and permit application of full scope safeguards, legally mandated by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). However the Iranian government leadership has persistently refused to oblige the international community, claiming instead that the enrichment of uranium is part of its legal right to develop nuclear technology towards civilian purposes.

There also exists the politically disruptive issue of terrorism that has adversely affected US-Iran relations and that is based on certain political and historical reasons. There is also a separate set of diplomatic issues between the two states that constantly hurts their relationship. These include issues such as the stabilizing influence of Iran in the Middle East versus its destabilizing impact in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the long-held assumption in the United States regarding Iranian government support of Al Qaeda.

In the current study of the American media, the focus is on the polemical exchanges between the right wing leaderships in the two governments, which are reflected in the mainstream press reports in the United States on Iran. The heightened sensitivities on both sides are due in significant measure to the cultural differences between the two societies. It is therefore instructive to start a review of the US press coverage of Iran after the revolution. This event was concurrent with the neocon ascendancy in the United States that first began during Reagan administration and later particularly under the George W. Bush administration. According to Nikki Keddie, “We could all tick off a list of hardships they suffer from the images we receive in the West: forced veiling, harassment by extreme Islamists, unequal laws with physical punishments, and so on. But the reality of the past twenty five years is more complex, and perhaps more hopeful” (Keddie, *Time Online*, Feb 9, 2004).

Actually, compared and contrasted with the other Islamic societies in the Middle East, the social scene in Iran is very much unlike the dominant negative stereotypes prevalent about Islam and the Middle East. Keddie observes,

The Iranian revolution united many groups, including women, against the shah. Soon, Ayatollah Khomeini’s clerics took over, outlawed the opposition and reinstated the Islamic Sharia law simultaneously abrogating the reforms introduced by the shah through the 1967 Family Protection Law. The Islamic regime imposed veiling and sexual segregation, leading to many women losing their jobs and being subjected to humiliating treatment. The prominent Iranian woman judge Shirin Ebadi underwent similar experiences, but her fight to have such regressive practices overturned turned her into a national hero, and led

to the conferment upon her of the Nobel Peace prize in recognition of her work to promote civil rights within Iran. (2004)

The United States however cannot be absolved of at least partial blame for the triumph of the religious right within Iran politics after the revolution. The reference here is to the American support of the then Iraqi regime under Saddam Hussein. The American decision was undoubtedly based on the calculation that Iran would certainly try to export the Islamic revolution after its triumph in Iran. Only Saddam Hussein, a Sunni leader of the ruling secular Baath party in neighboring Iraq, could forestall the outcome of a radicalized Middle East. However, the heroic fight back to Islamic radicalization was produced less by the cynical political stratagems of the US government than by the liberal sections of the Iranian society, exemplified by the struggles of the irrepressible Iranian woman judge, Shirin Ebadi. However, such pointers towards the real situation within Iran at the time are rarely factored in by the US neocons in their assessment. Keddie's understanding enables her to present a balanced picture,

But this is what we don't often hear about. A lot of women, and opposition groups, fought back. For example, a few safeguards for women that the Family Protection Law put into marriage contracts were reinstated, though only with the consent of man and wife. University posts and most jobs were reopened to women, and a few female judges were also appointed. Some health and education programs also helped women. It is little known that Iran is now close to total literacy among school age girls - ahead of most of the Middle East. Thus, it becomes readily apparent that Iranian society is fairly progressive. (2004)

Keddie informs that while in most of the Muslim world, notably Pakistan, Egypt, Afghanistan and Iraq, there are powerful movements calling for the stricter enforcement of Muslim law including its attendant sex inequality, Iran begs to be different. Iran's recent experience of misgovernment under clerics and a reinstated Muslim law has caused the ironic outcome of an emerging democratic and anti-Islamist political opposition. Most of the students and educated classes in Iran, having experienced the reality of life under a conservative regime, today favor either its radical reform or the establishment of civil law and an essentially secular state. This is again a very positive sign for Iran. (2004)

On the issue of the status of women under Islamic rule, especially within Iran, the mainstream US press has usually found it hard to digest a picture contrary to all that they have believed so far. Therefore, whether it is the key role of large number women voluntarily participating in the revolution of 1978-79 to dethrone the shah or the spectacle of women taxi drivers in Tehran, all seem to become a cause of surprise and amusement to the West. There have been regular demonstrations by Iranian women towards their emancipation by denouncing the interference of the thought police and vigilante squads in the post-revolutionary phase.

The concerns expressed in the mainstream US media, however, continue to reflect the dominant stereotypes about Iran. A certain enemy image about Iran remains dominant, despite Iran's support to the United States-led military campaigns in the war against terror being fought in Afghanistan against the Taliban as well as on the critical issue of the suppression and elimination of trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. However, the US media appears to be largely unmindful of such

engagements of a positive nature between the two sides. One can easily spot articles about Iran that betray palpable alarm, appearing sometimes even in leading liberal American think tanks such as Washington D.C. based *Brookings Institution*, whose frame of reference is “How the Iraq War Has Empowered Iran?” (September 26th, 2008)

The US neoconservatives (neocons) are academics, scholars, and journalists and are also present in the administration. Their key quality seems to be to promote democracy where it doesn't exist. The *Bush Doctrine* enumerated in the year 2002 during President George W. Bush's first term, entailed fighting periodic preventive wars to eliminate terrorists with weapons of mass destruction; the US would work to democratize and promote human rights in the greater Middle East. The failure of the application of such a policy in Iraq and Afghanistan has led to a recent swing in favor of the US *realists* such as Henry Kissinger. President Woodrow Wilson's earlier failure to promote democracy globally has been cited as the reason to promote the *realist theory* argument, which calls for ceasing the practice of moralizing the world and instead promoting the national self interest of the US, defined in terms of power even if it required molycoddling dictators across the world as was practiced by the US during the Cold War.

Writing in *New York Times*, (February 19, 2006), Francis Fukuyama, a former neocon by his own admission, informs that in the 1930 and 1940s, a group of largely Jewish intellectuals living in New York and having attended the City College of New York, formed into a group that included Irving Kristol, Daniel Bell, Irving Howe, Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan. These were initially followers of Leon

Trotsky and abhorred the utter cynicism and brutality of Stalin's Russia. By the year 1965, these neocons including Irving Kristol, Nathan Glazer, and Daniel Bell had founded the neoconservative journal, *The Public Interest*, within whose pages they carried out domestic social policy critiques. Later on Glazer, Moynihan, and Glenn Loury began to argue that ambitious schemes to bring about social justice appeared deeply flawed since they required enormous amounts of state investment and also had the potential to disturb the already existing social relations.

Fukuyama reveals in the same article that in the year 1989, the Cold War ended, and several dictatorial regimes operating under Soviet tutelage (such as Romania under Nikolai Ceausescu) imploded, and that state witnessed the spectacle of enormous public enthusiasm and an eagerness to adopt democracy. Such a brilliant and positive outcome led neocons like William Kristol and Robert Kagan believe in the hollowness of such Cold War era dictatorships and encouraged them to imagine that these could be demolished by the extension of the moral power of the US to make democracy safe around the world. Thus, they became unabashed supporters of the Iraq war (*New York Times*, February 19, 2006). However, the experience of the spread of democracy around the Middle East has not been without its pitfalls because elections held in the Gaza Strip and Egypt have returned the Islamic radical groups like Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood to power respectively, both of whom follow an anti-Israel agenda.

It is hard to understand as to why a strong western country like the US must try to democratize any other state in the Orient at all. If the neocons were motivated by philanthropic motives, wasn't there any other way left open to them to work on the

minds and hearts of the common masses of Iraq so that they might have embraced democracy? Didn't the US neocons realize the war cost in terms of the treasure and precious lives lost on both sides of the warring parties? Has the fighting of this war led to the spread of democracy and promoted human rights in Iraq and the larger Middle East? It seems to be a strange case of the superior western power dominating and treating the weaker as if in *need of and beseeching such support in order to get reformed* by adopting democracy and western standards of human rights, and the superior power, supposedly mindful of its obligation, responding to the call of its conscience.

In fact, Francis Fukuyama is apparently doing Orientalism a great service by becoming an apologist for the Bush neocons who clamored for and promoted an indefensible act in the pursuance of the Iraq war. The comparison between the experience of Iran under shah Mohammed Reza on the one hand, with the experience of the Iraq war of 2003, is interesting in that in each case, it is the practice of the dominant western state (US) to engage exclusively with the elite in both instances and completely ignore any engagement with the common masses. It is an altogether different story that in Iran's case, the elite, represented by shah Mohammed Raza Pehlavi, was feted by the US administration and promoted by the mainstream US media, whereas in the case of Iraq, its elite, Saddam Hussein, was destined to go to the gallows.

Norman Podhoretz, Donald Rumsfeld, Jeane Kirkpatrick, and Michael Leeden are currently some of the better known neocons. To them, Israel has been a major political cause, and they believe that Israel's security can only be guaranteed by a

militarily strong and interventionist USA. Paul Wolfowitz, Douglas Feith, and Richard Perle in the US Defense Department or Pentagon are the better-known neocon activists who have usually tended to dominate the moderates in the US State Department such as Colin Powell, Richard Armitage, and Richard Haas. Experts on Iran, such as Gary Sick, have felt that utterances on Iran such as the *Axis of Evil* are tantamount to a triumph of the neocon agenda over the moderates that had engaged with Iran in Bonn on the Taliban issue in the context of "six plus two" talks, which created a thaw in US-Iran relations. In the mainstream US media, neocon writers such as Richard and Daniel Pipes and Michael Ledeen are well known regular contributors to US newspapers as the *Wall Street Journal*. Several others, such as William Safire in the *New York Times* and Charles Krauthammer in *The Washington Post*, are the other prominent and influential neocon figures.

In a stunning example of Orientalist practice, Gary Thomas of the *Voice of America*, writing in *globalsecurity.org* adopts a neocon position on the Middle East situation, where he rues the fact that the US- allied Middle East kingdoms and (especially Iran's neighbor Saudi Arabia), are unhappy at the strategic gains made by Iran in the regional balance of forces (Gary Thomas, February 23rd, 2007). Noteworthy here is the fact that issues such as the non-existence of democracy within Saudi Arabia or its practice and export of a very hard line form of Islam called the Wahabi Islam, (which has caused so much trouble in so many different parts of the world including the West) are completely inconsequential. After all Saudi Arabia can't be expected to uphold western standards of democracy.

A brief exploration of the western, especially US, concerns regarding Iran's political ambitions is worth trying. As distinguished academics, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, report, "Iran is seeking to master the full nuclear cycle, which would allow it to build nuclear weapons if it so chose. It is also developing missiles that could deliver nuclear warheads against its neighbors, including Israel. This is why Israelis often refer to Iran as an 'existential threat'" (*The Israel Lobby*, 2007, p 280). The authors add further, "Some Iranian leaders - and especially current President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad-have made deeply disturbing remarks questioning both the occurrence of the Holocaust and Israel's right to exist. Although Ahmedinejad's call for Israel to 'vanish from the page of time,' or to be 'erased from the pages of history,' is often mistranslated as a call for Israel's physical destruction, i.e., to 'wipe Israel off the map', it was still an outrageous assertion that was bound to be profoundly troubling to Israelis and many others" (2007, pp. 280-81).

However, the rhetoric from Iran is not the only piece of bad news. On January 29, 2002, in his State of the Union address, US President George W. Bush branded Iran and its "terrorist allies" as part of "an axis of evil" aiming to threaten the peace of the world. Subsequently, Bush's National Security Advisor (NSA), Condoleeza Rice, summed up the administration position on Iran saying that, "Iran's direct support of regional and global terrorism and its aggressive efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction, belie any good intentions it displayed in the days after the world's worst terrorist attacks in history" (*Frontline* www.pbs.org, "How Iran Entered the Axis"). Gary Sick reports, "Charges of terrorist activities have plagued Iran from the earliest days of the Islamic revolution to the present. More than any other factor, they have

interfered with Iran's ability to establish a responsible foreign policy image" (Gary Sick, *Iran: Confronting Terrorism*, *Washington Quarterly* 26.4, 2003)

In the process of charges and countercharges between the two antagonists, it is entirely forgotten which official or press pronouncement ought to be given importance and what must be ignored as worthy of no consequence. Another, more considerate view from the US administration is available on occasion; however, the determining view is extremely hard to discern in the foreign policy nuances. Naturally, multiple interests are at stake in either country, and therefore, the administrative pronouncements also reflect that. It appears that an internal debate within the inner circles of the Iranian government over whether and how to engage the US continues to mirror the debate in Washington over how to engage Iran and thus the unstable bilateral engagement has continued until date.

Writing in the April 2008 issue of the Policy Analysis Brief of *The Stanley Foundation* (www.stanleyfoundation.org), Anoush Ehteshami explains the complex factional politics within Iran. According to him, there are three distinct political factions that may be divided into conservatives, reformists and neoconservatives. The conservative group believes in a mixed economy where there is a role for the state along with market forces. The powerful clergy, led by the Supreme Leader Khamenei, supports this group, and this group detests any social or economic proximity to the West.

The reformists are represented by Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani and Mohammed Khatami, both former Presidents. Their agenda is to reform Iran's power structure by providing a more transparent government and by establishing

accountability, economic reforms, and develop normalized diplomatic relations within the region and with the West, including the United States.

The neoconservatives are best represented by Mahmoud Ahmedinejad, since his winning the Presidency in the year 2005, and have the strongest affiliation with the radical elements among the clerics. They enjoy the solid support of the elite National Revolutionary Guards as well as the heavily armed vigilante groups such as the Basij militia. They practice economic and political populism, are highly security conscious, and believe in the export of the fruits of the Islamic revolution. Religion plays a very important role in the lives of the Iranian neoconservatives, who support wealth redistribution, poverty removal programs, eradicating corruption, and above all protecting the Islamic character of Iran.

Barbara Slavin, a Middle East Reporter for *USA Today* has published a very important book that provides us with a rare glimpse into the structure of power within Iran's Islamic government, (Slavin, *Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies: Iran, the US and the Twisted Path to Confrontation*, 2007). She provides an overview on Iran's nuclear history, the story of the current hard line President, Mahmoud Ahmedinejad, whom she has interviewed, as well as the Revolutionary Guards, all three of primary concern to the West. Summing up her remarks in her book, Slavin informs us that Ahmedinejad is not the commander-in-chief and does not control the military, foreign, or nuclear affairs.

According to the author, the most powerful government functionary at the vortex of the political pyramid is the "Supreme Leader" called the *rahbar* who, as vice regent, is known as *Vali-e-faqih* . However, in his capacity as vice regent of Islamic

jurisprudence, he is known as *Velayat-e-faqih*. The present incumbent who succeeded Ayatollah Khomeini to this rank is Ali Khamenei. Thus, taking umbrage at the provocative pronouncements of President Ahmedinejad, are powerful members of the Iranian establishment, which include the powerful ex-President, Speaker, and now chief of the Expediency Council, Hojjatoleslam Ali Akbar Hashmi Rafsanjani, a pragmatic politician, a mullah, and bazari, whose current position is that of the key liaison person resolving the deadlocked bills in the parliament and the generally conservative Council of Elders. Besides this there is the former National Security Advisor and nuclear negotiator, Ali Larijani, who happens to be the current Speaker of the Majles. However, it is understood that even amongst the hardliners and conservatives there is a group that regularly challenges Mahmoud Ahmedinejad politically.

Thus, there does exist a serious possibility of engagement and debate with the Islamic regime, and while this regime may not be to the complete liking of the West due to being led by the Iranian radical right, but to contemplate steps such as regime change through military intervention, advocated by the US neocons, reflects a colonial mindset and Orientalist hubris. The issuing of threats by the US government eventually boosts the political strength of the Iranian hawks such as Mahmoud Ahmedinejad.

After the passing away of Ayatollah Khomeini, the Iranians elected a pragmatic and reform minded leader, Ali Akbar Hashmi Rafsanjani, as President. He continued to remain in the conservative mould and hence was unable to satisfy the Iranian people's aspirations for change. Therefore, the Iranian public elected a milder, liberal, and reformist politician, Seyyed Mohammed Ali Khatami, whose political position entailed

a stress on building bridges between civilizations and creating the spirit of a “dialogue between civilizations”. In contrast to this, the better known “clash of civilizations” thesis enunciated by Princeton Professor Bernard Lewis and subsequently popularized in 1993 by Harvard academic Samuel Huntington, was eagerly appropriated towards national political behavior by the US neocons. The simultaneous condemnation of such a political approach was launched by a different group of distinguished academics such as Edward Said, Noam Chomsky, Hamid Dabashi, and Mahmood Mamdani among others, who challenged it on the ground that the thesis of the "clash" appeared to be lacking in moral fiber.

President Khatami tried to promote liberty within his country and to simultaneously establish a dialogue with the United States. Ordering removal of strict curbs on the press freedoms was an act of his that delighted the liberals within and outside of Iran. Ali Ansari admits to past failures in communication between Iran and the rest of the world. He informs that President Khatami elaborated upon his celebrated idea of the "dialogue between civilizations" while speaking to an Iranian audience on 20th September 1998 in the United States, and forwarded his idea that the manner of initiating a dialogue between civilizations was to know oneself and one's identity. The second step of the process of this dialogue was to understand the civilization with which one wished to maintain that dialogue (Ansari, 2007, p.154).

However, this effort to reach out to the United States was rejected as mere window dressing and insubstantial. In an exclusive interview he gave to Christianne Amanpour of the *CNN* after his election regarding his view of US-Iran relations, Khatami not just categorically rejected terrorism but also expressed regret for the

embassy takeover in 1979. He also added that the burning of American flags was not something he either endorsed or encouraged but that such actions should be seen in the context of broader US-Iran relations in which Iran had been repeatedly humiliated by the US. In particular he drew attention to the fact that, “there is a bulky wall of mistrust between us and American administrations, a mistrust rooted in improper behavior by the American governments. As an example of this type of behavior, I should refer to admitted involvement of the American government in the 1953 coup d’état which toppled Mossaddeq’s national government, immediately followed by a forty five million dollar loan to strengthen the coup government. I should also refer to the capitulation law imposed by the American government on Iran” (*CNN* interview, January 8, 1998). However, President Khatami in line with his reputation for political tolerance was able to propose and successfully obtain a special resolution duly passed by the UN General Assembly declaring 2001 as the "Year of Dialogue between Civilizations".

The rejection by the West of the conciliatory efforts made by President Khatami led to the shift of the pendulum of opinion within Iran to the opposite extreme. As Barbara Slavin puts it, “Iran’s neoconservatives triumphed to some extent because of the growing influence of their namesakes in the United States. Bush’s ‘axis of evil’ comment in his 2002 State of the Union address delighted US neoconservatives, but was enormously damaging to the reform movement in Iran. From the Iranian neoconservative point of view the Bush administration simply pocketed Iran’s assistance in overthrowing the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001 and therefore Bush’s remark was indicative of the fact that the United States would never accept Iran as a regional power or partner” (Slavin, 2007).

Slavin observes that the public opinion in Iran is very fickle and changes rapidly. Ahmedinejad's failure to fulfill his economic promises has created much resentment towards him. According to Slavin, public opinion and parliamentary opposition count for much more in Iran than they probably do in most other Middle Eastern countries, and some Iranians think there is a chance for the current system to evolve into a more democratic and egalitarian direction. The recent threats on the part of the US to bomb Iran and what Iranians see as the West's refusal to let Iran have an independent and peaceful nuclear development have in fact stoked Iranian nationalism, which has aided the hardliners led by President Ahmedinejad. Democratic evolution within Iran therefore, requires détente with the United States; that, however, calls for altering the currently prevalent dominant discourse of Orientalism in the US administration and press.

The tragedy of 11th September 2001 in New York City was the defining moment when President George Bush abandoned the strategy of *dual containment* in the Middle East. The United States had hitherto sought to politically contain both Iran and Iraq but now chose to target the project of regional transformation. The US military was now to be used to topple belligerent regimes in the Middle East. From Israel's perspective, Iran ought to have been struck first since it had a better chance of acquiring nuclear weapons. As Israeli Defense Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer remarked even one year before the Iraq war, "Iraq is a problem...But you should understand, if you ask me, today Iran is more dangerous than Iraq" (*Washington Post*, February 2, 2002).

A group of politically influential US neoconservatives such as the ones who had pushed for the Iraq invasion now started the chorus for invading Iran. A prominent neo-conservative William Kristol wrote in the *Weekly Standard* on May 12th that “the liberation of Iraq was the first great battle for the future of the Middle East...but the next great battle-not, we hope, a military battle-will be for Iran (Kristol, *Weekly Standard*, May 12, 2003). Michael Leeden, another prominent neocon voice on Iran, wrote in the *National Review Online*, March 8, 2001, “There is no more time for diplomatic ‘solutions.’ We will have to deal with the terror masters, here and now. Iran at least offers us the possibility of a memorable victory because the Iranian people openly loath the regime and will enthusiastically combat it if only the United States supports them in their just struggle.”

The presumption carried in this article is a clear example of a negative stereotyping by a strong and capable western author of a relatively weak and defenseless state in the Orient, which assumes that the Iranians are an exceedingly "thankless" lot who will ditch their own "decadent" regime and will follow the lead of a "superior" western political power offering them a better political system through a US military intervention. It is utterly preposterous to suggest such an argument, let alone carry that out.

Daniel Pipes and Patrick Clawson, *Jerusalem Post*, May 20, 2003 called upon the Bush administration to support the Mojahedin-e-Khalq, a group based in Iraq committed to the overthrow of the Islamic regime in Iran; however, the only hurdle for the US administration was that it was an entity designated as a terrorist organization! Then, on May 6th 2003, the *American Enterprise Institute* in the United States held a

conference on Iran where the main topic on the agenda was, "What steps can the United States take to promote democratization and regime change in Iran?" Prominent neoconservatives and Israel supporters such as Bernard Lewis and Senator Sam Brownback attended this event and spoke in favor of the US to do its utmost to replace the Islamic regime with a democratic state.

Once again, it was apparently inconsequential to the speakers that under what authority, and at whose behest, to benefit whom, was such a program of regime change supposed to be undertaken. What alone mattered was that it was determined by someone with the power to determine, and to represent, and to project such determination as knowledge, authentic, chaste, and pure, and based upon such knowledge, to take action, regardless of the consequences. The strengthening of the Orientalist discourse in current times, through such contributions as discussed above is very clear.

On its part, President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad has rarely shied away from warlike rhetoric or exploiting new opportunities. In just about a year Ahmedinejad placed Iran in the vanguard of a radical anti-American alliance that includes the Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, Cuban President Fidel Castro, etc. Often his rabid anti-Americanism has embarrassed and upset several senior clerics of the Iranian Islamic regime. Thus, Ahmedinejad characteristically plays to the gallery and uses his rhetoric to impress his domestic constituency, and, by invoking the name of Ayatollah Khomeini and through adoption of a belligerent anti-Israeli posture, he escapes censure from the leading clerics as well as from the public for his failure to turn the economy

around for the ordinary Iranian suffering the painful consequences of multiple UN sanctions.

During the shah of Iran's stewardship, Iran had signed an agreement for the purchase of up to eight nuclear reactors with the US, the declared intent of which was production of nuclear power (*New York Times*, March 5, 1975) . However, since the shah was dethroned in the Islamic revolution of February 1979, the US lost faith in Iran's intentions to produce enriched uranium for only peaceful applications. The United States harbors deep suspicions that Iran is developing or already has mastered the nuclear fuel cycle to produce nuclear warheads, capable of causing harm to some of the most prominent US allies in the region, including Israel. Former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger questioned rhetorically in the *Washington Post* in 2005, that for Iran, a state rich in hydrocarbons, was there really such a pressing need for developing nuclear energy? Now of course the issue of enrichment has become an issue of national will and national prestige in Iran and hence the political stalemate. The issue here is quite clearly one of a "superior" western power attempting to dictate national priorities and domestic policy to a "weaker" (and presumably in need of such guidance and dictation from the superior) Oriental state in the Middle East.

Ambassador Javad Zarif, a former permanent ambassador of Iran to the UN, reminds us that merely three decades earlier Henry Kissinger, then the US Secretary of State under the Ford administration had himself pointedly encouraged Iran to develop nuclear energy towards meeting its national development needs and advised it to export its oil reserves or convert them to petrochemicals. A response to this argument would be that the issue of proliferation hadn't arisen at the time since Iran under the

shah's rule was allied to the US. From 2004 onwards the US revised the benchmarks from stopping assistance to nuclear plants to asking Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment activity, thereby, further raising the stakes. The role and influence of the neocon lobby becomes quite apparent in the enhanced counter-proliferation objectives of the United States in respect of an Oriental Iran. It also reflects the dominance of a stronger power over the weaker one by unilaterally abrogating a legal international agreement in contravention of the international law.

The argument made was that it was good for Iran's economy to develop nuclear energy for civilian purposes and was endorsed by the US during the reign of the shah. The same argument abruptly was dropped later on when a new Iranian regime with an alternative ideology replaced it and came to power. The lackadaisical manner in which the issue was discussed in the US press and administration while handling an issue as sensitive as energy appears entirely in sync with Edward Said's thesis of Orientalism. What the neocons have done in the case of modern Iran is that they have furthered such an attitude and promoted similar policies.

CONCLUSION

The story of the US - Iran political confrontation has been for some time the subject of headlines in newspapers, newsmagazines, and the electronic media, and to these now has been added the social or online media, which is a technology-led innovation. In the US, however, another form of print and electronic media has evolved that is distinct from the mainstream media. Such media has usually struggled to make an impact when taking up causes and issues that are in its opinion not dealt with fairly and justly in the dominant discourse reflected in the mainstream US media. This is what the alternative media is about, and it has seen partial success despite having being often hamstrung by financial and other worries. *Democracy Now* constitutes as an example of the alternative media.

In the traditional news media such as newspapers, television or the radio, the audience is placed in a one way communication mode in which it merely receives whatever is dished out to it. In a newspaper, for instance, pursuant to news gathering, editing, proof reading and page setting, the newspaper reaches one's doorstep, and the reader gets involved in the interactive process with the sender by simply interpreting the message, and this in turn generates public opinion, which in democratic systems the government responds to by altering policy.

The information technology based social media tools allow the consumer of news to engage in a two way process of creation as well as reception of news instead of

being a passive recipient alone. The internet based social networking sites include Facebook, weblogs such as wordpress and blogspot etc, micro-websites such as Twitter, user generated and content-driven sites such as Youtube, mobile phones, broadband optic fibre cables, and WiFi technology. The application of these tools, especially the use of Twitter that is an open medium contrasted with email and Facebook etc. that are private channels of communication, during times of socio-political upheaval can help to create a better and more comprehensive understanding of reality. The fact remains that internet penetration in Asian societies is still quite low, and is much worse in African states since it is premised on literacy and other parameters of material well being. Thus, as yet it remains an urban phenomena and is still largely restricted to the West. However, in the case of Iran, the penetration of internet is fairly high since its literacy rate is quite high as well.

The participatory nature of the social media makes it a fairly democratic medium of communication and has gradually led to the establishment of a civil society which has acquired a capacity for collective action over public causes. This has the potential to lead to the empowerment of publics even in non-democratic societies since any mischievous efforts to misrepresent facts by the establishment can always be contested. In conflict situations such as the Green Movement protests in Iran after Mahmoud Ahmedinejad's victory in the 2009 presidential elections, (alleged to have been rigged by significant numbers of people, while citizen journalism contested the official result on the one hand), the government agencies supporting Ahmedinejad such as Iran's Revolutionary Guards and the Basij Militia, also used the same tools such as

Twitter to track down and then target the pro-democracy activists opposing the election result.

While recognizing the revolutionary role of the social media during conflict situations for example the Youtube video of the dying woman Neda Agha Soltan in a square in Tehran, shot by Basij Militia, or the shooting of the Japanese photo-journalist by a Myanmar's soldier during the pro-democracy protests by monks in Rangoon, exposing the truth, there exist impediments to their successful application as well. The flooding of cyberspace with tweets by both the government and the citizen activists causes, the authenticity or veracity of the news posted to remain as challenges.

The issue of the usefulness of the social media is well-settled. However, one may also suggest that when the Orient uses a communication technology tool developed by the West the discourse may still be strengthened where it could be imagined that it is the superior West that always does it over and over again and has once again created a tool that may now be used to further obtain democratic freedoms where they are not available.

Hence, it can be argued that Twitter did not start the Green Movement protests, neither did it make them possible. However, it is undeniable that it empowered the protesters and emboldened them to challenge the establishment in spite of the odds being stacked against them.

The other side of the story is that biased and prejudiced reporting by individuals can also enter the public domain, yet it may still be considered an advance on the previous state of affairs and hence a progress in the evolution of the media space by enlargement of the public sphere. This should offer hope in the information age about

successful resistance launched by the powerless against the powerful entrenched interests, against whom post-colonial theorists such as Edward Said fought relentlessly by claiming that knowledge production in the past had gone uncontested by the weak against the strong, but this state of affairs was blatantly iniquitous, unsustainable, and needed to be reversed.

Hamid Dabashi, in his book *Post-Orientalism*, has drawn attention to an editorial cartoon published in *The Columbus Post-Dispatch* of 4th September 2007, where in a reproduction of a map of the Middle East, Iran is shown clearly in the middle. What is noticeable about this map is that the region of Iran is shown as a sewer and all around this sewer and spewing forth out of it is a proliferation of cockroaches in the larger Middle East region. Such imagery is not merely a reflection of an irresponsible US media operating with an Orientalist bias, but also insensitive to the people inhabiting that region who are depicted as cockroaches. Obviously, such imagery clearly communicates to the viewer as to what the next step for the cockroaches is, which is their extermination (Dabashi, 2009). Thus, this representation belongs to the genre discussed earlier, that it is done with a prejudiced mindset, it is done since it had the possibility of being accomplished, of extermination of those that are unlike “us” and seen in the context of the “other.” It is also possible due to the relative power differential between the producer of "knowledge", and comes about because there has existed such creatively fertile imagination established beforehand. The US neocons certainly are the class of persons that upon the non-fulfillment of their objective of keeping Iran within their orbit of influence in the post-1979 period, are persistent in their denigration of the marginal societies of the Orient, which they

themselves imagined and created and now wish to keep it there. Edward Said is a humanist who asserts himself against such practices leading to a production of "knowledge" since such knowledge is rarely ideologically free and such negative representation of whole societies cannot be a solution to or an answer to the longings of a group of individuals that laments its loss, namely, the loss of Iran to the West.

The role of the Iranian government in the stabilization of the political situation in Afghanistan in the wake of the September 11 tragedy of 2001, in collaboration with the West, has been commendable. The response of the Iranian regime in the stabilization of Iraq through political acts such as instant diplomatic recognition of the Iraqi Governing Council set up after the removal of the Saddam Hussein government, besides close and willing participation with the US in counter narcotics operations in Afghanistan, have also been positive. The efforts by the Government of Iran, howsoever meager, to open up to the West to discuss the nuclear issue to allay western apprehensions, besides making an attempt to create conditions for a dialogue between civilizations are examples that portray the Islamic regime constituted of a group of people who possess the ability to discern and debate. To equate their entire lot with the fanatics devoted to destruction and death, is akin to falling into an identical trap into which an earlier US administration under President Eisenhower had fallen, having misread a nationalist situation in Iran and having attempted its resolution through a CIA induced coup, turning a whole nation bitter a half century ago.

As Dabashi alleges in his book *Post-Orientalism*, "The attempt to distort reality and public perception of an entire nation by a neocon inspired press is racist and part of a wider activity that accumulates unnoticed. But also probably more important is the

need to understand the normative authority that enables the representer to represent and the reader to accept such a cartoon” (*Post-Orientalism*, 2008). Obvious here is the issue of relative military strength between the two. Who gets to represent whom and by what authority? The will to resist such power has been discussed as the theme of Said's *Culture and Imperialism*, (1994), and needs further exploration in the present era of economic globalization and terrorism. What agency will be used by the dominated to fight back is something that will be in need of constant innovation, as an act of emancipation for the marginal, the underdog or the dominated, in the present era and beyond, and this seems like a situation where an evolving set of responses to an already established ideology of inequity and injustice will constantly have to be forged.

Therefore, to imagine that as in the case of the US-Iran relationship the metropolitan center has lost the periphery, as the neo-cons would seem to think, is an idea which is very regressive and depicts a colonial mindset where it is suggested that a western superpower has lost the regional state. There is undoubtedly a huge gap in an understanding of the past events in Iranian society through the mainstream media in the United States, which contributed to an outcome which was painful to both the sides. The US press will be seen as abdicating its role if it will give up on the fairness in its reporting and employ itself in the service of the foreign policy agenda of the US administration.

The rhetoric of Mahmoud Ahmedinejad, though offensive and unacceptable on several occasions, is in reality a call of the Iranian nation to the West to accept Iran as it is and not transform it through a regime change as the neo-cons would want it to be, a mirror image of the western democracies. In a meeting with students, faculty, and

intellectuals at Columbia University in 2008, Ahmedinejad again stepped up the rhetoric to speak about human rights of gays, saying that “They don’t exist in Iran”. This was not just a sarcastic remark about the fact that it was only the West which allowed gay freedoms, but an effort to portray oneself as civilizationally superior to the “other”, being sanitized from “abnormal” creatures. Such rhetorical flourishes have an inbuilt action-reaction framework and can only lead to greater harm and produce no good. This is a most regressive form of communication between two sparring parties, the neocons in the US on the one hand and the neoconservatives in Iran. This is an unsustainable state of international diplomatic engagement, and therefore, such communication needs to be reversed in a globalized, knowledge based society and economy.

Therefore, instead of the mainstream American press acting as a handmaiden of the US policy community, its job being to critique administrative policy for optimally best results for the entire humanity and to reject jingoism, the press everywhere needs to be policy neutral, and the sole policy it ought to pursue consistently is the policy of being above bureaucratic considerations. After all, politics does not exist in western liberal democratic contexts alone. While reporting about societies that possess uncommon political institutions and unorthodox procedures of governance, the western press ought to look for analogous and comparable institutions whose existence gives shape to the politics in that state, in their very own particularistic manner, rather than by thinking and acting in an ethno-centric fashion and confusing the absence in such countries of such liberal western institutions with which one is familiar, with the absence of politics altogether and then erroneously reporting it as just that. The global

reality in an increasingly interconnected, knowledge century simply can't ignore such a pressing need to adapt oneself. The will to participate is present in all states and therefore, reporting will need to be carried out sans any prejudice.

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